

# Golden Dragon and Purple Phoenix

The Chinese and Their Multi-Ethnic  
Descendants in Southeast Asia



Lee Khoon Choy

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Lee Khoon Choy

Former Ambassador of Singapore



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**GOLDEN DRAGON AND PURPLE PHOENIX**

**The Chinese and Their Multi-Ethnic Descendants in Southeast Asia**

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# Foreword

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The history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia is an oft-told and well-documented narrative. The migratory flows and the subsequent settlement of large numbers of Chinese people in different parts of the world (including Southeast Asia) are now spoken of as the Chinese Diaspora. The Diaspora not only brought people of Chinese descent (sometimes called Overseas Chinese) to move to and settle in different parts of the world, it became the principal vehicle by which Chinese culture, customs and traditions were spread far beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Southeast Asia, or *Nanyang*, was a popular destination for Chinese migrants, especially from southern China, who were compelled to leave their hometowns and villages in search of work and fortune. Their stories of hardships, survival, adaptability, resilience and enterprise have informed many scholarly and popular histories of the Diaspora. But the story of the Chinese Diaspora is not simply one of migration and settlement. In the course of these movements and adaptations, the Chinese migrants assimilated, with varying degrees, into their host environments by sinking deep roots into local society and becoming integral elements of the indigenous social landscape.

*Golden Dragon and Purple Phoenix* deals with the migration, intermingling, assimilation and integration of the Chinese with the local communities in Southeast Asia. Drawing on his personal insights, careful research and observations based on his extensive experience as a journalist, ambassador and politician, Mr Lee Khoo Choy, a second generation Chinese who was born and raised in Malaya and Singapore, has written an important book to add yet

another layer to the rich and complex story of the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

Many readers will find his narratives on Malaysia and Singapore familiar, but will also enjoy the equally fascinating though less well-known stories of the Thai, Burmese, Filipino, Indo-Chinese, Indonesian and Bruneian experiences. I congratulate Mr Lee Khoon Choy for providing this very useful account of the evolution of the Chinese communities that is set in the context of the respective host country's social and political history.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Tan', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam  
President of the Republic of Singapore

# Preface

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The Chinese had started a mass migration to Southeast Asia since the Song (宋) dynasty, when the Mongolians (元) invaded China. This flow of immigrants continued during the Ming (明) and Qing (清) dynasty. During the Ming dynasty, when Admiral Zheng He (郑和), and his 63 treasure ships ventured into Southeast Asia, many of his crew members stayed behind in the countries they harboured. After the collapse of the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国爆乱) many supporters of Hung Siew Chuan (洪秀全) escaped to the Borneo territories, Philippines and Indochina. But the largest exodus of Chinese immigrants to the region began after the Opium War when Chinese coolies went to replace African slaves with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814, which obliged Great Britain and the US to stop the slave trade. They had to look for a replacement and they cast their eyes on the teeming millions of Chinese in the mysterious Orient. Others migrated through their own efforts.

Today, there are more than 60 million Chinese who have settled down in countries all over the world. About 33 million have settled down in Southeast Asia. There is a saying that “wherever there is water, there are Chinese”. These Chinese who migrated to Southeast Asia brought with them their language, culture, customs and their lifestyles. Essentially, they were strong followers of Confucius (孔子) despite the fact that they were not well educated and were largely coolies. Some of them included scholars and teachers. They religiously followed the 2,000-year-old Confucian teachings of the creation of a heaven on earth instead of an unknown heaven; believing in filial piety, a sense of respect for the elders, a sense of hierarchy, work ethics

and the virtues of tolerance and perseverance. They worked very hard in order to make a living and were thrifty. Wherever they went, they brought with them their customs, religion and traditions, celebrations, culture and language. As the early Chinese immigrants did not bring their spouses, they married native women and produced mixed-blood offspring which in turn produced a new breed of people, part Chinese, part Southeast Asian. Many of them rose to become prominent members of their new land of birth, some rising through the ranks to become top political leaders.

This book is not about the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia but about the intermingling, assimilation and integration of the Chinese with local communities which shaped the socio-political landscape of Southeast Asia as we see it today. The book narrates the intricate history of intermarriages with natives, i.e. the intermingling of blood and the offspring from their union, the influence they yielded on the societies and the politics of nations they chose to live in. It is about how they rose to high positions and their contributions to their host societies. Some rose to become kings, king makers, others to become presidents, prime ministers, senior ministers and prominent business and religious leaders. Some openly declared their ancestry and are proud of their Chinese DNA, while others in their eagerness to prove their allegiance and loyalty to their country of birth have disassociated themselves from their heritage. In some countries like Singapore, mingling of blood is no longer widely prevalent, but the Chinese who came planted their roots and the *Babas* or assimilated citizens of Chinese heritage produced world-respected politicians and leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀), Dr. Goh Keng Swee (吴庆瑞) and Dr. Toh Chin Chye (杜进才). They have become more westernised but they have not forgotten their ancestral heritage. The same is true of Malaysia, to a lesser or greater extent.

I write this book as a journalist and therefore it is not meant to be a historical record nor an academic treatise. I have been a journalist, politician and diplomat, and I write as a political observer and political analyst. Hence my personal experiences and anecdotes have been weaved into the narrative of how Southeast Asian countries have evolved in the context of the assimilation and integration

process with their Chinese immigrants. Some have succeeded while others struggle to find a common ground with their assimilated Chinese compatriots as well as new immigrants. The processes have been different, contributing to different results. Generally speaking, I noticed that Buddhism-centred Southeast Asian countries have been more successful in assimilating the Chinese compared to all the others. Of all countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand has been the most successful because of historical reasons and because the Thais are liberal, tolerant and open-minded. Thai citizens treat others as equal, irrespective of their race. In the Philippines, where Catholicism was widely practiced, the assimilation could be regarded as fairly successful. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, where the influence of Islam was strong, assimilation of Chinese had been far less successful. The Chinese who migrated were mainly the Fujianese (福建人), Teochius (潮州人), Hakkas (客家人), Hainanese (海南人) and Cantonese (广东人) and a small number of Zhejiang Ren (浙江人), Shandong (山东人) and Hubei (湖北人). Most were from the coastal regions of China who migrated because of the following reasons:

1. Overpopulation in China drove them to look for new pastures.
2. Natural calamities caused frequently by drought, flood and earthquakes made life difficult.
3. The opium war drained off Chinese silver and upset the internal Chinese fiscal system.
4. Politically, there were many rebellions, e.g. The Taiping rebellion (太平爆乱). These rebellions disrupted economic activities, destroyed farms and drove many of the rural population to coastal cities, forcing those already there to look for new lands as life became difficult.
5. Various invasions by the Chinese minorities such as Mongols (蒙古人), the Manchus (满洲人) and later by the Japanese accelerated the flow of migration from China.
6. Guomintang (国民党) retreat to Taiwan after Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石) lost the war on the mainland forcing some to flee elsewhere.

7. Communist victory leading to the liquidation of capitalism and all pro-Guomindang elements, driving them away from their homeland.
8. The Chinese Cultural Revolution resulted in the purging of overseas Chinese, which lasted for 10 years. Those who wanted to return to China were no longer able to do so.

## Conflicts

In this book, I had analysed the conflict of interest between Chinese immigrants and locals during the various stages of political history. In Indonesia, for example, there were conflicts of interest between the *totoks* [new Chinese immigrants who were called 'singkheks' (新客) belong to this group] and the *peranakans* (土生) who were already assimilated into the Indonesian society. Similarly, conflict also took place between the Babas and the singkheks in Malaysia and the mestizos and the Chinese in the Philippines. The colonial masters favoured those who were locally born, giving their leaders special privileges and better economic benefits because they were familiar with the tongue of their colonial masters. More importantly they were trusted by the colonial rulers. This contributed to the differing lifestyles of the assimilated Chinese and the singkheks or new Chinese immigrants.

When Chinese nationalism spread to these countries, the singkheks looked down on the locals because they could not speak and understand the Chinese language. On the other hand, they envied the privileges enjoyed by their assimilated predecessors and were inclined to develop associations with them and, or arrange for marriage tie-ups for mutual benefit. Conversely, the assimilated community despised the singkheks and saw them as low class with uncouth behaviour because they brought along with them gambling, opium smoking and prostitution. They were suspicious of the anti-social, boorish conduct of new immigrants. There was also conflict between pro-China singkheks and the local born over the question of political loyalty, and the share of the economic pie.

## **Nationalism and Their Impact on Overseas Chinese**

The rise of nationalism in Southeast Asia has had a tremendous impact on the mentality of Chinese immigrants. Natives of host countries had suddenly become masters of the soil which required the migrant Chinese to necessarily adapt and take sides in the ongoing conflict, in order to survive. Some aligned with the colonial rulers, whilst others supported the revolution against colonial rule. Some remained pro-China and refused to be associated with the rising nationalism.

## **Emotional Attachment to Land of Ancestry**

Although most of the Southeast Asian leaders with Chinese blood have forgotten their mother tongue and culture and have been assimilated into native societies, some retain emotional attachments to their land of ancestry. Many have gone back to pay homage. They may have become leaders in Southeast Asian countries but they are not ashamed or shy to admit that they have Chinese blood, yet at the same time declare their loyalty to the country of their birth where they live and lead. Having Chinese blood is not necessarily an advantage for them. In many cases, their own kind who rose to become leaders became antagonistic and took measures against them. The tide and turn of fortune for the immigrants from China changed from generation to generation, centuries to centuries but wherever history brought them, they proved to be a resilient stock. Rising from the ashes of destruction, a new generation would take over to face the challenges head on. For this reason, the Chinese and their assimilated influence will prevail in Southeast Asia, in any part of the world, as long as their spirit of preservation and adaptation remains.

I first trace the historical links between China and the countries of Southeast Asia, giving a glimpse of the history behind the Chinese migration, followed by the beginning of the intermarriage between the Chinese immigrants and their host countries, the impact of such mingling of blood in their societies, a biographical sketch of the important leaders of these places, their ancestral heritage and in some



cases, my acquaintance with them. Wherever possible, cultural characteristics of the various races against the background of the political history of these countries has been related to the process of how the migrant Chinese has been absorbed into their host cultures. The assimilation as described in this title describes the symbiotic influence of the Chinese language, culture and civilisation with the host countries, culture and lifestyle.

## Summary

This book describes the impact of Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asian countries. The immediate impact was the intermarriage between the Chinese immigrants and the women in Southeast Asian countries. As there were no Chinese schools in the earlier days in Southeast Asia, their offspring gradually lost touch with their mother tongue (Chinese language) and culture. They became a new breed of mixed-blood Chinese who was accorded different names in the countries where they were born. For example, those born in Thailand were called *lokjins* and those in Malaysia *baba*. They speak Thai or Malay and can no more speak Mandarin or even their own dialects. They dress like *pribumi* and behave more like the indigenous people rather than Chinese, although in many cases they still celebrate Chinese New Year and other Chinese festivals. In other words, they are generally assimilated into local societies.

The assimilation process differs from country to country. Generally speaking, the Chinese immigrants in Buddhist countries such as Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos were easily assimilated compared to those in Malaysia and Brunei where the state religion was Islam. In the Philippines, where Christianity became dominant, the process was comparatively easier.

I was interested in this mixed-blood phenomenon when I was a journalist travelling to Southeast Asian countries. I discovered that the mixed-blood did not speak Mandarin and did not behave like the Chinese. Then, when I became Ambassador to Indonesia, I made an effort to study the Chinese *peranakans* in the country and discovered that 500 years ago, most of them were converted into Islam and this

had something to do with the arrival of Admiral Zheng He. It was then that I learnt about the nine *Wali Sogo*, eight of whom were Chinese and had helped to overthrow the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit.

This book traces the history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and the impact the Chinese have made on indigenous cultures, language, clothings and festivals. It also dealt with prominent Southeast Asian leaders who have mixed blood. To westerners, I have learnt that it is difficult for them to distinguish between a Chinese from China and Chinese with mixed blood in Southeast Asia. This book may shed light to those who want to understand the impact of the mixed-blood assimilation in Southeast Asia.

Many books have been written about Chinese in Southeast Asia. This book is different because it deals with the mixed-blood Chinese whose ancestry is from China. The title of the book captures the spirit of the sons of the Golden Dragon who migrated (a term that the Chinese emperors were often known by). The phoenix is a majestic bird that flies south and the legendary character of the phoenix is that, after being burnt to death, it will rise again from the ashes to become a new phoenix, stronger than before. The Chinese descendants of these southern countries have, through the centuries been subjected to persecution and destruction but despite these challenges, they have always been able to defy annihilation and triumphed. Purple is not a primary colour but a mixture of red and blue and allude to the mixed-blood Chinese in the various South East Asian countries. Today, they are the descendents of the Golden Dragon who have become the resilient Purple Phoenixes who will endure thousands of years hereafter.

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# Acknowledgements

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I would first of all like to thank Dr. Tony Tan, President of the Republic of Singapore for his kind words in his foreword for my book. Secondly, I would like to thank the National Library Board and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies for allowing me to have access to their libraries as well as providing me with an office to do my research.

I would like to thank two of my friends who are no more with us for their help in providing information for this book. First, Professor Siamet Muljana, an expert on Muslim affairs in Java, who was attached to the Ministry of Culture as advisor on Indonesian affairs when I was Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry. He was the one who introduced me to the world of Wali Sogo, the most respected nine-Muslim saints in Java, who were instrumental in assimilating Chinese in Java into Islam and Javanised Chinese. The second is a schoolmate of mine — Umpon Phanachet (刘安鹏), who was an authority on Chinese affairs in Thailand. He was working for the ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok. For Indonesia, I would like to thank Professor Leo Suryadinata (廖建裕), Director of the Chinese Heritage Centre, for his insights into the Indonesian society as well as providing me with some valuable photographs. For Cambodia and Vietnam, I would like to thank Chin Kah Chong (陈家昌) an old journalist friend of mine for his input on Cambodia and Vietnam. He was stationed in Cambodia and Vietnam for many years as a reporter and managed his own news agency called Pan Asia News Agency. He was well-versed in Cambodian and Vietnamese Chinese affairs and had provided me with some valuable photos on Cambodia.

I would like to specially thank Paul Johnson, for spending so much of his time making the book ready for publication. I would like also to thank all those who had helped me one way or other in writing this book.

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Former Deputy Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Madam Kuei Xian, presenting Life Achievement Award to the author Lee Khoon Choy as one of the 100 World Outstanding Chinese. The Ceremony was held in November 2011 in Shangrila Hotel, Hong Kong.



Former King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia and the Author Mr Lee Khoon Choy.

## *Chapter One*

# **The *Lokjins* in Thailand**

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Siam (the former name of Thailand) was, in my opinion, highly successful in assimilating the overseas Chinese community into their society. Chinese migrants have lived in this region as early as during the Northern Sung dynasty (960–1127). H. H. Hallertt, an English traveller who visited Bangkok, observed that the Chinese facilitated trade links between Thailand and China. It was only after the establishment of Ayuthaya (also known as Ayudhya), as the capital of Siam, in 1350 that the regular succession of sovereigns was registered with reasonable accuracy. According to a book penned by A. H. Leonowens, the population of Siam was nearly 8 million then, comprising 4 million Siamese, 1.5 million Chinese, 1 million Laotians, 1 million Malays and Indians, 350,000 Cambodians, 50,000 Peguans and the same number of mountain tribes.

As early as the 15th century, the celebrated German traveller, Mandelslohe, visited Ayuthaya and called it ‘Venice of the East’, attributed to the Bangkok of today. Leonowens also described Ayuthaya as the ‘Venice of the East’ as intricate networks of water-roads intersected with bridges, giving the place a distinctive feel of mysticism. A large proportion of its inhabitants lived in houses floating on water, which lined the banks of the Meinam, tier upon tier, extending for miles below the walls. Ancient annals document that Chinese junks ascended the river as far as Swangkalok, nearly 120 leagues from its mouth from the 15th century right through to the 17th century.

In the 13th century, the Thai Monarch modelled his institutions after the Chinese. Chinese tin miners were well established in the



south of Siam when the first Westerners settled in the area in the 16th century. A Fujianese by the name of Lin Daoqian (林导谦) fled from Fujian to the southern town of Pattani, Thailand, and built a small Chinese settlement. By the time the Portuguese came to Thailand, the Chinese were their main competitors, given that they had already settled down in the towns of Ayudhya. When the French reached Ayudhya, there was a Chinese population numbering 3,000 to 4,000 and by the late 17th century, the number had increased to 10,000, a little less than 1% of the total population as at that time.

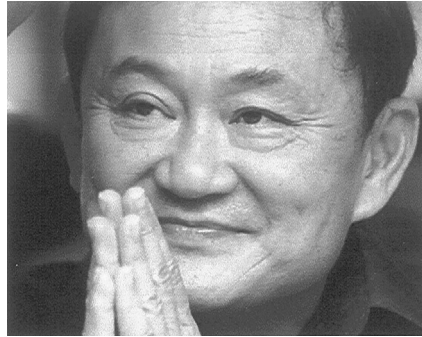
The pockets of Chinese community there had a monopoly on the profitable trade in rice, hides, tin, pepper, ebony and rosewood. Many of them contracted the habit of smoking opium. They spoke Chinese with Thai accent as they were already assimilated into the Thai society. China and Japan had closed their ports to foreigners, and Thailand became the perfect place for transshipment of goods traded by Europeans to be sold in Thailand and delivered inland by Chinese junks.

In 1722, during the reign of Emperor Kang Sze, Thailand sent large quantities of Thai rice to China at the request of the Chinese emperor. The rice was despatched to Canton (广东), Fujian (福建), and Ningbo (宁波) because of the shortage of rice in those areas.

There were accounts of matrimonial alliances between the Princes of Siam and the imperial family of China. The fact that majority of the Chinese immigrants were Buddhists, as were the Thais, accelerated the assimilation process. But another contributing factor for rapid assimilation was the broad-mindedness of Thai rulers who accepted overseas Chinese as Thai citizens, sharing equal rights with other Thai citizens.

## **Lokjins (洛真) in Thailand**

The offspring of an intermarriage between Chinese men and Thai women were often referred to as *lokjins* (洛真). A large number of Thai prime ministers were *lokjins* such as Prime Minister Phibun Songkram (銓披汶), Nai Pridi Phanomyong (陈家乐), Kukrit Pramoj (克立·巴莫), Chatichai Choonhavan (察猜·春哈旺), Banham Sioparcha and Chuan Leepai (川·立派 或 吕基文) and the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinwatra (达新 或 丘拓新). Their ancestors



Thaksin Shinwatra

came from different provinces of China. For instance, Songkram's forefathers came from Hainan (海南), Pridi's came from Kwangtung (广东), Kukrit Promoz Chatchai and Banham from Teochiu (潮州), Chuan Leepai from Fujian (福建) and Thaksin from Meixian, a Hakka (客家). As *lokjins*, they owe their loyalty to Thailand. Except for a few like Nai Pridi, Chatchai, Chuan Leepai and Thaksin, most of the other *lokjin* prime ministers did not speak Chinese. They had been completely assimilated. Many prominent business leaders in Thailand were also *lokjins*. The Chinese constituted 14% of the total Thai population of about 64 million.

### **Taksin — The First Sino-Siamese King**

Taksin (达新) was the first Sino-Thai to become King Somdet (郑昭王). Phrachao Taksin Majara was known in Chinese as Zheng Zhao (郑昭) (April 17, 1734–April 7, 1782). He was the earliest prominent *lokjin* in Siam. He was greatly revered by the Thais for his leadership in liberating the country from Burmese occupation after the second fall of Ayuthaya in 1767. Siam finally unified after a short era of warlords rule. The city of Thonburi became the new capital. Ayuthaya, the former city, was almost completely destroyed by the invaders.

There were palatial intrigues that led to the further weakening of the Ayuthaya kingdom. In 1766, Burma attacked the ancient capital of Ayuthaya when the Thai royal army was weak and inadequate. The

Burmese occupied Ayuthaya for two years and the new masters proved to be cruel to the people under their rule. When they occupied the city of Ayuthaya, the remnants of the Thai Army struggled down to Chantaburi on the southeast coast of the Gulf of Siam.

The remaining troops were led by a Sino-Thai General named Zheng Zhao, pronounced as Tay Chow in Teochiu dialect (郑昭). His father was Teochiu and mother Thai. Taksin's father Zheng Hai Feng (Tay Hai Hong in Teochiu 郑海峰) had migrated from the Teochiu (潮州) town of Chenghai (澄海) to Thailand because life was too difficult back home. He first went to Champa and later settled down in Ayuthaya. Hai Feng was a tax collector who got along with Thai officials. He married a Thai woman named Nok-llang and gave birth to Taksin. Both father and son were well-liked by the Thai royal family.

When Taksin was a boy, he was introduced to Chao Phraya Chakri, who was the Prime Minister during King Boromakot's reign. Chao Phraya Chakri liked the boy so much, he adopted him and gave him a Thai name called Sin, meaning money and prosperity. When Taksin was seven years old, he was assigned to a monk named Tongdee who taught him Thai, Chinese, Annames and Indian languages as well as Buddhist philosophy in a monastery called Wat Kosawas. Legend has it that Sin and his friend Tong Duang met a Chinese fortune teller in early days of their monkhood. The seer identified lucky lines in their palms and predicted that they would become kings. Neither took it seriously. Incidentally, the prediction came true for Taksin. Taksin grew up in Ayuthaya. He joined the army when he finished his education and became a soldier. He got on well with his fellow soldiers and became popular because he was smart, and alert with a fighting spirit. He completely assimilated as a Thai citizen and, on account of his talent, was rapidly promoted, attracting the attention of the Thai king, who appointed him as Head of the Royal Imperial Guard. When the Burmese attacked the city, no capable generals could be found to defend the invasion. The Burmese appointed a Burmese General Sukyi as Governor of Ayuthaya, who turned out to be cruel and suppressive. Ayuthaya faced the full brunt of the

Burmese siege. After the destruction of Ayuthaya and the death of the Thai King, the country was split into six different parts.

When the Thai army surrendered to the aggressors, Taksin fled to Chantaburi with his followers and vowed to get rid of the aggressors. He trained his soldiers, comprising both Chinese and Thais, many of whom knew kungfu (功夫) the Chinese art of self-defence. Taksin trained his men near a deserted fort a couple of miles south of Chantaburi. Here, he assembled the fleet of warships and with them he drove away the Burmese, recapturing the devastated capital. The heroic role that Taksin, together with the Chinese and Thai soldiers, played in the battle against the Burmese did not go unnoticed. His victory in saving Siam from the invaders made him the first Chinese king of Siam, with the support of the Thais.

Taksin controlled the east coast. Together with Tong Duang, who became General Chao Phraya Chakri, he set to work on uniting the country after driving away the Burmese. Providence was in favour of Taksin when he wrestled power back from the Burmese. His confrontation with the Burmese coincided with a warning made by the Qing Emperor Qian Long (乾隆皇帝) to Burma that they should not interfere with her neighbour. China in fact sent troops to punish Burma. The Burmese withdrew their troops, leaving Thailand in the hands of Taksin.

On December 28, 1768, Taksin was enthroned as King of Siam. The ceremony took place at Wang Derm Palace in Thonburi. This was the birthplace and capital of the Thonburi Kingdom. He assumed the official name of Boromraja IV, but is known in Thai history as King Taksin. He reigned till 1782, struggling to unite a disintegrated country. In 1769, Taksin launched an expedition against Cambodia, which was harbouring a Thai prince who was hoping to establish a government-in-exile opposed to him. The following year, he launched another campaign to subdue Nakhon Si Thammarat, took Phitsanulok and Chao Phrya Faang. Within three years, he had re-occupied the former territory of the kingdom of Ayuthaya.

The strains of the ceaseless campaigning began to show and slowly, but surely, Taksin transformed into a religious fanatic. In

1781, telltale signs of disillusionment were obvious. He deluded himself of having attained Buddhahood and as a future Buddha he considered his blood white rather than red. As he started practicing meditation, he even gave lectures to the monks. He ordered the flogging of monks who refused to worship him. He started his reign as a just and able ruler but with success and power, he became a cruel tyrant, suspicious of the generals close to him, systematically torturing them to death and even becoming suspicious of his own wife and children. Economic tension caused by the numerous wars caused further concerns. As a famine spread, looting and crimes became widespread. Corrupt officials were reportedly abundant and Taksin himself executed several officials, leading to discontent among officials. In 1782, a revolt broke out, the first of many in 200 years of Siamese history. King Taksin fled to the safety of a monastery, leaving his seat vacant for Phya Chakri. He lived until 1825 in an obscure palace located in the mountains of Nakhon Si Thammarat. A substitute was beaten to death in his place.

Another popular account of his death involved a Thai general who executed him after seizing power on April 6, 1782. He had just returned from a successful campaign in Laos and established a new dynasty. Taksin's successor declared himself King Rama I. Fearing the threat to the kingdom's stability, Cao Phraya, King Rama I, executed Taksin in a manner befitting a king. He did not allow Taksin's blood to touch the ground. After a performance of sacred dance and music that had sanctified the scene, Taksin was wrapped in a black velvet sack and his neck broken with a club of scented sandalwood. That ended the reign of the first Sino-Siamese king in Thailand. When Taksin became king, hundreds of thousands of Teochius migrated to Thailand. It was the first time that Thailand had seen so many new Chinese immigrants who wore pigtails. They came during the era of the Manchus who compelled every Chinese to grow a pigtail and forced them to shave their hair above their forehead. But Taksin, as a *lokjin*, had an ordinary haircut although he was born to a Chinese father.



King Rama I

When Taksin made himself king, he also installed all his Teochiu cronies as nobles and advisers and moved the capital downriver to Thonburi, closer to the sea. All 3,000 Chinese merchants from Ayutthaya followed him and settled down in a snake-infested swamp called Sam Peng (三平) or the Three Banks, meaning an oxbow in the river. This was on the opposite bank of the Chao Phraya River. Since 1955, the Thai Government had fixed 28 December, the day when Taksin ascended the throne, as a day of remembrance called the Tay King festival, and erected a memorial, venerating a Thai hero who saved Thailand from Burmese invaders and commemorating Taksin's contribution to the survival of the Thai kingdom. In the Chenghai town of Swatow, a memorial hall was built to commemorate Taksin as well.

### **Zheng He's (鄭和) Expedition to Thailand (1371–1433)**

There existed close diplomatic relations between Thailand and China during the Ming dynasty. During the Ayutthaya period, the Ming

emperor sent special envoys to Thailand 19 times and Thailand paid tribute to the Ming Court 112 times, almost once in two years.

When Zhu Yuan Zhang (朱元璋), the founder of the Ming dynasty, overthrew the Mongolian rulers, he was too busy putting his own house in order and tackling internal problems to worry about foreign affairs. But, in 1279, the last year of the war against the Song rulers, the Mongol Court ordered the building of ships meant for long sea voyages, but unfortunately, many of these vessels were not large enough or sufficiently seaworthy. As a result, the Mongolians had to withdraw their fleet when strong headwinds obstructed their attack on Japan. Zhu Yuan Zhang's son, Yong Le (永乐) usurped the throne that rightfully belonged to his 16-year-old nephew who disappeared when the palace in the capital city of Nanking was set on fire. His search for his nephew, whom he believed, survived the fire, became one of the key motivations for his seaborne expeditions.

During Yung Lo's reign, he corrected the fallacies of his predecessors by building better ships. One of the greatest Ming innovations was the construction of huge ships known as treasure fleet. They could each carry 500 men and cargo weighing 500 tons. After Yung Lo moved his capital to Beijing, he instructed his Chief Eunuch, Zheng He, a Muslim and a distinguished admiral who had tremendous experience in navigation, to lead an expedition to Southeast Asia and the Middle East with his 62 treasure ships. This was intended in part to project to the world that China had changed and partly to suss out the potential for international trade. It certainly had the hidden agenda of searching for his missing nephew.

Admiral Zheng He carried valuable imperial gifts such as porcelain, state umbrellas, embroideries, tea, silk and golden seals to present to the rulers of Southeast Asia. In return, he brought back timber from tropical lands, drugs, hides and other articles which were not produced in China. It was a strikingly different type of trade from that of the European seaborne expeditions which were more extractive and expansionist.

Zheng He's trade was exclusively official; his expeditions did not include private traders and eunuchs who were in command of the

fleets. It was characteristic of China from ancient times to confine international trade as a state monopoly. The Chinese purposed to establish an imperial-directed and imperial-styled profit-making trade in exchange for gifts and tributes. Another purpose was to keep the Navy in active service, engaged in long voyages which developed the skill of its personnel and increased the knowledge of navigation and of Southeast Asian cultures.

Thailand became one of Zheng He's favourite destinations because it produced plenty of rice which China needed, especially in times of flood and famine. Zheng He's mission brought Sino-Thai relations to new heights. He was an extraordinary Muslim leader who impressed the Thais as well as the countries he had visited. He brought along a translator named Ma Huan, who meticulously recorded events and conversations that transpired during the expedition. He later wrote a book about the expedition. In his second expedition, when Zheng He arrived in Thailand, Ma Huan (马欢) wrote about the people and the Chinese who lived there.

Ma Huan found that the Thai language was very similar to Cantonese and in part, similar to Teochius because many Teochius had settled down in Thailand and had been subsequently assimilated. It was difficult for Ma Huan to distinguish between a Thai and a non-Thai, as the Chinese became tanned toiling under the hot sun. Hence they looked more like the indigenous Thais, especially when they married local Thai women. Their children became completely assimilated into Thai culture. He made mention of circumcision, but could have been referring to the Muslim minority, as circumcision was not widely practiced among the Thais.

Culturally, Ma Huan found that Thai women shared different values from that of his own countrywomen. He learnt that a Thai married woman was intimate with one of the members of the Zheng He's crew. She had apparently invited him to have wine and food at her home and later shared the same bed. In studying the way of life of Buddhist monks and nuns, Ma Huan found little difference between them and their counterparts in China. He also studied wedding ceremonies and funeral rites officiated by the Buddhist monks. His observations of funeral rites revealed different treatment of the



rich and the poor. It is recorded that the Thais practiced ‘bird burial’ for the commoners, which resembled the Zoroastrian and Tibetan traditions. The practice entailed leaving the corpse to the wilds by the seaside. Golden birds devour them completely while the mourners wept over the bones which remain and cast them away in the water.

Ma Huan documented that Zheng He was so enamoured with Thailand that he frequented the country seven times. Although Zheng He was a Muslim, he was given a Buddhist name by the Emperor and he was greatly welcomed by the Thais, who built a temple that included his footprints. Zheng He’s expeditions, with its 62 ‘treasure ships’ have been celebrated in Thai history. Many of the crew members of Zheng He’s expedition stayed behind in Thailand. When the expeditions arrived in Bangkok, the Chinese had long hair tied with a knot above their heads while the pig-tailed Chinese was a later phenomenon imposed by Manchu rulers.

Members of the Zheng He expedition were brought to view the Wat Yai Chai Mongkol, the oldest building in Ayuthaya which was built in 1357 to celebrate the return of some monks from Ceylon who had brought with them the teachings of Hinayana Buddhism, an animistic form of the religion. They also visited Wat Phanan Choeng, which was situated on the river, south of the island. The place dates back to 1324, just before the founding of the capital. It was patronised by the Chinese who brought with them red and gold lanterns and paper banners with black Chinese characters.

## Chinese and the Thai Language

Although the Thai language was completely different from the Chinese language, there were many Thai words that incorporated the Teochiu dialect by virtue of Teochiu immigration and assimilation. The Thais address their father as *tia* (爹); grandfather, *kong* (公); sister, *cee* (姐); sister-in-law, *so* (嫂); Aunt, *sim* (婶); and younger brother, *tii* (弟). There were also words relating to food such as dumpling, *kiau* (饺子); rice noodles, *kunai tiau* (米粉); bun, *saa laa pau* (包子); stuffed sausages, *kunchiang* (灌肠); milk tofu, *tau huu yu* (豆腐乳); lin, *ci* (a kind of fruit) 荔枝; pear, *saa li* (沙梨); and radish,

*chau thau* (菜头). Also articles were named, such as table, *to* (桌) cabinet, *to* (橱), bridge, *kiau* (桥). The Thai word for horse was *bee* (马); fish, *haee* (鱼); shop, *tiiam* (店); brand name, *yu ho* (字号); profession, *hung* (行); and shares, *hun* (股份). The Thais refer to Taoism, as *tan* (道教); contribution as *kong teek* (功德); and Goddess of Mercy as *kuang sii lim* (观世音).

For personal pronouns, the Thais refer to 'I' as *lau* (我) and you as *luee* (您). In descriptive language, the Thais refer to 'big' as *tuua* (大), disaster as *chii cham* (凄惨), cool as *Liang* (凉), almost ready as *chii chii pae pae* (七七八八), good as *ho* (好). As for numerals, the Thais use *saa* (三) for the number three and *chap* (十) for ten, the same pronunciation as the Teochius. There were at least 300 Teochiu words of the 1,000 in the Thai vocabulary.

## Opium Smoking and the Pigtailed (辮子) Chinese

The natives of Thailand learnt to smoke opium long before the Opium war in 1841. In fact, since the Ayuthaya period, the Siamese had been addicted to opium. This created serious social, moral and economic problems, which affected the *phrai* (the common people) working and fighting ability. The Chinese immigrants brought in by the Sino-Thai King Taksin became addicted to opium. Since 1360, during the reign of King Ramathibodhi of Ayuthaya, opium was prohibited. The King issued a provision stating that those 'who smoke, consume, or sell opium' could face punitive action, including the confiscation of all their property, imprisonment and public parade both on land and in the sea. They would be released on parole guaranteed by their kin if they give up their addiction.

Despite the warning, the Siamese and Chinese continued with their opium use as the law was ineffective in controlling and eradicating the problem, especially in the countryside. The problem became even more complicated when a large number of new Chinese immigrants with pigtails flocked to Bangkok. More and more Siamese, including those with *moon nai* status, started to smoke opium. Kings

Rama I, II and III imposed strict measures to curb opium smuggling and smoking, but all of them failed to stop the tide. The Chakri regime's ban on opium had backfired because opium smuggling led to the emergence of *ang yi* (洪义), the secret society which protected opium smugglers and smokers.

King Rama IV decided to legalise opium smoking but imposed a tax on opium smokers. It was the first time in Thailand's history that opium was legalised. King IV, Chaophraya Chakri issued an order stating that other than the Chinese, no one else in Thailand, including other minorities, were allowed to smoke opium because they would be recruited as soldiers to fight in the battlefield. Since opium smoking became legalised, many businessmen, especially the Chinese, applied for licenses to run opium dens. There were some 1,200 licensed opium dens and retail shops selling opium in Bangkok. As a consequence, a greater number of Thais and non-Chinese started smoking opium. The new immigrants with pigtailed frequented opium dens, and the secret societies offered protection.

In order to identify the Thais who smoked opium, the government insisted that the Thais and non-Chinese who smoked opium keep a pigtail like the Chinese, register with a local official, wear an official wrist tag, and pay a special, higher rate of tax. They were called *jin plaeng*, meaning a Thai wearing a pigtail, or a wig resembling a pigtail. Violation of this order was subjected to punishment with a tattoo on their face. They also had to cut grass to feed elephants for the rest of their lives. These measures introduced by the authorities were aimed at easier identification of the *jin plaeng*.

The *jin plaeng* were again divided into two categories — those who had been assimilated into the *phrai* system and those were not. In the case of the Thais who had received the title of *moon nai*, their ranks would be confiscated. The *jin phrai* who had registered and tattooed on their wrist would have to remain under the control of their respective *moon nai*, performed hard labour and paid a triennial head tax of 60.75 baht.

Why did King Rama IV use the pigtail as a symbol to enable the Thais and non-Chinese to identify opium smokers? Was the pigtail a symbol of something disgraceful as it was associated with opium

smoking or did it purely serve an administrative and identification purpose? It would seem that the pigtail helped to identify opium addicts rather a distinctive identification for the Chinese *en masse*. The famous Thai expert, Skinner, alluded to the ‘Chineseness’ of pigtails but overlooked the *phrai* system that was introduced by the early Chakri kings to differentiate Chinese who were completely assimilated, yet retained their pigtail because of special tax obligations and opium addiction. As such, he overlooked the political and economic context of this cultural practice. It was hence difficult even for the Thais, let alone a foreigner, to distinguish between the Chinese and the non-Chinese, especially when both wore pigtails if they happened to be opium addicts as well.

During the reign of Kings Rama IV and Rama V, the *jin phrai* and *Jin khun* nanga were accepted as Thais despite their distinctive pigtails. The two kings saw *phrai*-ness in these two categories of Chinese. King Rama V was thought to have had stated both publicly and privately that he regarded the Chinese not as foreigners but as ‘our men’ and a part of his kingdom and that his government should rule them well. The *Dictionary of the Siamese Language*, the first standard Thai dictionary originally compiled by Dan Beach Bradley in consultation with Ajaan Tad in 1873, had defined *jek* and *jin* (人) as the names of the people who came from China with a pigtail, shirt and pair of trousers.

## **The Chakri Kings and the Pigtail Immigrants**

When Rama I (1782–1809) came into power, the first thing he did was to move his court across the river to the site of modern Bangkok and set about to recreate the glory of the former capital destroyed by the Burmese. For that, he needed manpower and he found the hard-working Chinese population an indispensable force who could help him realise his dreams. Through the contacts of his predecessor King Taksin, he recruited large numbers of Teochius from Guangdong, who were only too eager to come to Thailand because life was difficult in China as they refused to be ruled by the Manchu minority.

By this time, most of the Chinese immigrant workers in Bangkok began to wear pigtails as they came from the era of the Manchu

(Qing) rulers, who had made pigtails customary for the male population all over the country. This was in place of the traditional Ming practice of long hair gathered in a topknot. The political purpose of this arbitrary imperial decree was to exact a manifested, symbolic submission to the new dynasty rule from every male subject. Those who refused to wear a pigtail were beheaded publicly as a warning to other Chinese. There was a saying: 'Keep your hair and lose your head, or keep your head and cut your hair'.<sup>1</sup>

A majority of the Chinese consequently wore pigtails and shaved their foreheads clean. The only way a Chinese could avoid wearing a pigtail was to become a monk. During the reign of King Rama I, the new Chinese immigrants who arrived in Bangkok wore pigtails with shaven foreheads. Hundreds of thousands of pigtailed Chinese were shipped to Europe, America and Southeast Asia, including Thailand, by European companies that needed cheap labour (coolies). Many of them boarded the steamers of the Bangkok Passenger Steamer Company, the Nord-Deutscher Lloyd Company, the Nippon Yusen Company, the Chino-Siam Steam Navigation Company, and landed in Bangkok, wearing their trademark pigtails.

When King Rama I discovered that the site of his proposed Grand Palace was already occupied by the Teochiu merchant community, he persuaded them to leave their homes and settle down the river, near the Palace. The king transported what was left of the buildings in Ayuthaya to Bangkok and laid out the new city as a replica of the old. Bangkok was built on a rather wiggly grid. The heart of the city was its western end, nestling in the wide curve of the river, centred on the Grand Palace area. He made use of the pigtailed Chinese immigrants to build a commercial centre in the south, which became the present-day Chinatown.

He got the workers to dig klongs all over the city. Klong Saensaep, which was dug in the early 19th century, carried water boats all the way from the original walled city to the Gold of Siam and beyond. The river ran east to west through the middle of the city. He also had small canals dug as part of a network of water courses.

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<sup>1</sup>Green Hair. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://grnhair.blogspot.com/>.

The earliest and best preserved *klong* was created on an island where the Grand Palace sat in splendid isolation. King Rama I's architects also instructed the Chinese coolies to build government buildings and Buddhist temples.

One of the migrants to Bangkok was a Cantonese from Soon Teck (顺德) called Wong Lao Ern (黄劳恩). He was fluent in Chinese and Thai languages. He became an interpreter in the court of King Rama I and he accompanied the King when the latter visited China.

## **Thai Kings and the Chinese Influence**

As a result of the strong Chinese cultural influence, the Siamese monarchs' interest in the Chinese and China was understandably strong. In his reign of 27 years, King Rama I paid tribute to China 22 times. King Rama II visited Beijing (北京) 16 times during his 13-year rule. From the middle of the 18th century, trade between China and Thailand expanded tremendously. Each year, at least 50 merchant steamships left China for Thailand. According to historical records, in 1830, there were 89 big and small vessels from Thailand visiting the Chinese ports of Shanghai (上海), Suzhou (苏州), and Ningbo (宁波). In 1932, 80 vessels arrived in Bangkok from China. Many of these ships brought the pigtail immigrants to Bangkok, bringing along with them know-how in agriculture and industries as well as large volumes of Chinese literature.

During King Rama I's visit to China, he was highly impressed with the Chinese architecture, particularly the style of the Chinese palaces. Although King Rama I's grand palace adopted the Thai style of architecture, the four gates at the entrance to the palace were installed with huge Chinese stone lions, and at the corners of the roofing were specially carved Chinese dragons and phoenixes. During his reign, a large number of beautifully carved Chinese stone sculptures were brought to Thailand.

King Rama II was known as a great poet, responsible for the building and repairing of numerous Bangkok monasteries and he was interested in Chinese and Western cultures. King Rama III, who ruled from 1824 to 1851, continued to open Siam's doors to foreigners.

He was particularly interested in Chinese porcelain and was responsible for decorating many temples, including Wat Arun with ceramic fragments.

The Siamese monarchs, from Rama I to Rama V were great admirers of Chinese opera, literature and medicine. Several Siamese monarchs married Chinese wives. Apart from the mixing of the genes, the early Chakri monarchs also adopted Chinese names to facilitate their contacts with the Qing emperors. King Rama I was known as Taw Hua (道华), King Rama II as Tae Hok (道福), King Rama III as Tae Hudi (道禪), King Rama IV as Tae Meng (道明) and King Rama V as Tae Chia (道谢).

From 1802, King Rama I (1782–1809) instructed his government officials in charge of trade and foreign affairs to translate the famous Chinese novel *San Guozhi* (三国演义 — Romance of the Three Kingdoms) into the Thai language. This was followed by Thai translation of other novels such as *Shui Hu Zhuan* (水浒传) All Men were Brothers, *Hong Lou Meng* (红楼梦) The Dream of the Red Chambers, *Xi You Ji* (西游记) Journey to the West and other Chinese literature connected with Chinese history from the Tang (唐) dynasty to the Ming (明) dynasty. These became textbooks in all Thai schools, and Thai school children became familiar with heroes in the classics of Guan Gong (关公), Liu Bei (刘备), Zhang Fei (张飞), Zhu Ge Liang (诸葛亮) and Cao Cao (曹操) from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. It was interesting to note that these names in the Thai language sounded very similar to the Fujian dialect. The Fujian scholars became advisors to the Thai Royal Family.

After some years, the Thai authors created their own novel based on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, which became very popular among the local Thai population. They therefore acquired a better understanding of the Chinese compared to the indigenous Thais, who had difficulty comprehending the novel. The novel had a tremendous impact on the Thai worldview.

It was the Fujianese scholars who helped translate the famous Chinese Classics into Thai languages. The Fujianese made a significant impact on Thailand when they went to Thailand in the 15th

century before the arrival of the Teochius. Thailand was the only country in Asia that remain uncolonised by the Europeans. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries which were colonised by Western powers, the Thai Kings had also accepted the Chinese migrants as one of their own. The flexible and diplomatic Thai monarchy created special names for Chinese who had been assimilated whilst permitting them to retain their ethnic identity and customs. This meant that they were able to uphold two identities simultaneously without any conflict. Today, most of the ethnic Chinese have been assimilated completely and regarded themselves as Thais first and Chinese second.

## **Southeast Asian Cultural Festival**

I have visited Bangkok several times during my younger days, but my first official visit to the city was in 1963, when I led a mission to invite artistes of Southeast Asian countries to attend the S.E. Asian Cultural festival organised in Singapore. We were received by the Director General of the Fine Arts Department, Kukrit Pramoj, who later became Prime Minister of Thailand. Kukrit was an accomplished journalist and dancer. I remember Kukrit as a tall, dark well-built man and a sharp pair of eyes. He was very enthusiastic about Rajaratnam's idea of reviving traditional Asian culture and promised to send a 58-member team to Singapore.

He organised a special performance of Thai dancers for our team when we were in Bangkok. Later in August, 1963, he personally led a Thai cultural delegation to attend our festival. The Thai delegation performed traditional Thai dancing, some of which were based on the Thai version of the Ramayana. He had a charming and humorous personality and was well-versed in Thai music, art and dancing. I remembered at the end of the festival, Kukrit was seriously considering holding the next festival in Bangkok and the National Trust Board agreed to the idea. Unfortunately, due to changes in the political climate, he could not fulfil his dream. The S.E. Asia Cultural Festival held in Singapore was the first and last festival ever held.



## **King Mongkut (孟库) — Rama IV, an Open-Minded King**

King Rama IV (1851–1868) attained fame worldwide through a Hollywood film called ‘The King and I’. The actors Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr wore magnificent Thai costumes. King Mongkut was the first Siamese king to break old traditions. It was on record that in one of his judgements, he allowed a girl to marry a man of her choice instead of one chosen by her parents. He had also allowed his wives and concubines to leave the palace if they wished. After his long years serving as a monk at the monastery, he soon made up for his lost time by fathering no less than 83 children from 35 wives, many of whom he inherited from the former ruler and were largely Chinese. His decision to allow them to leave the palace was completely genuine as proven by the departure of 12 of them. According to the book entitled *Chronicle of the House of Chakri*, which served as the official history of the dynasty, the first five kings of the dynasty fathered a total of 325 children and each had an average of 35 wives, though the names of wives who had no children had merited no mention. The result of such energetic polygamy resulted in the introduction of the most intricate system of hierarchical status and title in the world.

Mongkut was a practical king who was pragmatic in his approach to Western influence in Siam. He saw around him examples of Western penetration in Burma, Indochina and China and realised the futility of standing against the tide. He was not hoodwinked by the Chinese propaganda that she was invincible to Western pressure. He witnessed the suffering of the Chinese following the Opium War when China suffered defeat by the British. The cessation of Hong Kong to Britain in 1842 was humiliating. He also realised how easy it was for a powerful nation to find an excuse for attacks which Siam would be unable to resist. He opened the doors of Siam to all nations and tried to avoid the dominance of any one nation. He gained their respect through a policy of modernisation. He granted favourable trade treaties, for example, to Britain in 1855 and later to France and the United States.

## **Chulalongkorn (朱拉隆宮) — Rama V, the Enlightened King**

King Chulalongkorn, (1868–1910) son of King Mongkut, Rama IV, ascended the throne when he was only 15 years old, but he ruled Thailand longer than any Thai king except the present King Bhumibol, who had been on the throne for over half a century.

Rama V was an unusually enlightened king with a broad vision. He was also the monarch who helped modernise Thailand. He had taken his first two wives when he was 15. He was neither willing nor in a position to abolish polygamy. He had 92 wives and from 52 of them, he had 77 children. Several of his wives were Chinese, one of them introduced by a Chinese in Singapore. King Chulalongkorn called for the implementation of a more civilised, progressive political reform by setting up a Parliament. Although he admired British education, he was not in favour of ‘slavish imitation’ of these foreign institutions in Siam. There was hardly an aspect of Thai life in which he was not deeply interested. He was quite an elephantologist and wrote a book about them.

## **The Elephant Statue in Singapore**

In front of the Singapore Old Parliament House, there was an elephant statue made of bronze. This monument was presented to the British ruler of Singapore on 25th June, 1872 by King Chulalongkorn when he visited the colony. The statue stands at the doorsteps of the Victoria Memorial Hall, where it was erected to mark the first visit by a Thai monarch. In 1919, the Sir Stamford Raffles statue was put in its place for Singapore’s Centenary Celebrations and the bronze elephant was moved to its new site. The Elephant Statue was cast in bronze in Bangkok and was mounted on a high pedestal. The pedestal bears an inscription which read:

‘His Majesty Somdetch Paramindr Maha Chulalongkorn, the Supreme King of Siam, landed at Singapore, the first foreign land visited by a Siamese Monarch, on 16th March, 1871’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Elephant statue | Infopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP\\_30\\_2004-12-13.html](http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_30_2004-12-13.html).

On March 16, 1871, King Chulalongkorn, known as Phra Piya Maharaj or the most beloved king, arrived in his yacht — the Regent. He was accompanied by convoy of 66 followers in two other ships. The British accorded him the highest honors as he was greeted with a gun-salute by a fleet of ships. Colonel A. E. H. Anson (in the absence of Governor Sir Harry St. George Ord) received him along with military and naval officers and foreign chancery. King Chulalongkorn resided at the Government House with his two brothers, his private secretary and his officials. He made a historic stop at the Eastern Telegraphy office, where a cable transmission to Queen Victoria was made, signalling the start of cordial friendship and close ties between Thailand and Singapore, which both countries still enjoy today. Chulalongkorn made a second visit to Singapore on May 30, 1890.

### **Chulalongkorn's Policy Towards the Chinese**

King Chulalongkorn had a liberal policy towards the overseas Chinese. He accepted the *Jin phrai* and *Jin khun nang* (坤南人) as Thais. To him, the Chinese were just one ethnic group among the multi-ethnic subjects of their kingdom. Their Chinese culture made no difference in terms of their access to royal protection. King Chulalongkorn's reign coincided with the tail end of the Qing dynasty, when there were widespread corruption and chaos in China resulting from Western interference and the Taiping rebellion (太平爆乱). Large numbers of immigrants poured into Thailand. They were mostly Teochius and Cantonese, followed by the Hainanese, who were mainly fishermen and peasants.

The Hainanese settled in the more remote areas of Thailand and worked as timber traders, collectors of forest products or owners of small food shops. In the 19th century, when steamboats replaced junks for the journey, the Hainanese left Haikou for Thailand and settled down in Sukhothai, Pichit, Prae, Nan and Nakhon Sawan.

In 1907, when Chulalongkorn's reign was coming to an end, Dr. Sun Yat Sen (孙中山) visited Bangkok and officiated the opening of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The Chinese led the various

trade and industries and had set up their own Chamber of Commerce, and many prominent Chinese businessmen like Seow Fu Zhen (萧佛成) became members of Dr. Sun's Dongmen Hui (同盟会), an organisation started by Dr. Sun in Tokyo with the purpose of overthrowing the Manchus. During Dr. Sun's visit to Bangkok, he was accompanied by his righthand man Hu Han Min (胡汉民). It was a grand occasion for the Chinese in Bangkok. Even the Thai Royal Palace sent a representative to attend the function. During Dr. Sun's revolution, many Chinese in Thailand went back to China and sacrificed their lives for their motherland. Of the 72 monuments erected to honour martyrs in Canton, the victims of a massacre by the Qing rulers, one of them was a Thai Chinese by the name of Zhou Hua (周华). When the armed revolution erupted in Wuhan (武汉) on October 10, 1911, the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce sent 300 volunteers to join in the fight. The revolt overthrew the Qing dynasty.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce also set up the first Chinese school in Bangkok called Hua Ee (华裔). Various Chinese schools followed suit, with the various clans teaching in different dialects. King Chulalongkorn even helped to suppress rioting between rival Chinese secret societies in Bangkok. King Chulalongkorn died in 1910, a year before Dr. Sun Yat Sen's revolution succeeded and ended the Qing dynasty. The end of the Chulalongkorn era coincided with the death of Queen Victoria of England.

## **King Rama VI — The Anti-Chinese Thai King**

Rama VI or King Vajiravudh (瓦奇拉乌) (1910–1925), the successor of King Chulalongkorn, ascended the throne at a time when Dr. Sun Yat Sen was about to overthrow the Qing dynasty. He had seen with his own eyes as Prince, the rising tide of Chinese nationalism in Thailand. He was concerned about the overwhelming support by the Chinese in Bangkok for Dr. Sun Yat Sen. During his visit, the Thai Chinese pledged sacrifice and support for the Chinese revolution.

At the beginning of King Vajiravudh's reign, the Chinese population which accounted for approximately 10% of Thailand's estimated

8.3 million inhabitants, were emerging as a distinct ethnic community with open loyalty towards China. In response to the nationalist struggle in China, the Chinese in Siam had set up newspapers propagating Dr. Sun's revolution and Chinese schools in line with those in their motherland, supporting clandestine political associations such as Dong Meng Hui (同盟会) to support Dr. Sun's efforts to overthrow the Qing monarchy.

In King Vajiravudh's perception, the Chinese were the dominant force in the Siamese economy and their growing sense of identity and community towards China became a threat to the state. He was even more convinced of the threat when in mid-1910, the Chinese in Bangkok launched a series of strikes against changes in the government's tax policy, throwing the Thai capital into turmoil. These strikes were to leave an indelible impression on King Vajiravudh's mind and when he ascended the throne in 1910, he started to devote a lot of his time to address the Chinese problem. Thus in 1913, he issued a decree called Thai Nationality Law which stipulated that any child born to a Thai parent, either in Siam or abroad, was a Thai subject according to Thai law. This was to counter provisions of the Chinese Nationality Act issued by the Qing Emperor in 1909 before its downfall, stating that all overseas Chinese were automatically Chinese under the Qing dynasty. This had caused a threat to Siam and led to tensions between the Thais and the Chinese.

King Vajiravudh produced a series of polemical texts outlining his fears regarding the Chinese toward his countrymen. Writing under the pseudo-name Asavabahu, King Vajiravudh wrote several books, among them was one entitled *The Jews of the Orient*, and *Wake up Siam*, warning the Thais that the wave of Chinese immigrants was a serious threat to Siam. He said that the Chinese came to Siam to become rich before returning to China and that the Chinese were willing to tolerate all pain to achieve their goals. He also insinuated that Chinese coolies ate food given to stray dogs and stayed in slums.

King Vajiravudh exposed an 'uncovered conspiracy' at the beginning of 1912, of a group of junior military officers who were Siamese subjects of Chinese descent who had conspired to topple the Thai

king in an attempt to emulate the nationalist revolution of Dr. Sun Yat Sen. The plotters were supported by more than 3,000 individuals, ‘comprising many men in responsible positions’. He was afraid that the position of the absolute monarchy was becoming increasingly vulnerable. Because of his perception and fear of the Chinese, he branded the Chinese as ‘inassimilable, opportunistic, and two-faced, devoid of civic virtues, treacherous, secretive, rebellious, Mammon worshippers, economic parasites and Jews of the Orient. He repeatedly warned that the Chinese constituted a grave potential threat for which Siamese rulers should be on the constant lookout.

King Rama VI became acutely worried when the Chinese in Siam started cutting off their pigtails in the wake of Dr. Sun’s successful revolution in 1911. A prominent Thai poet, Nai Busya, lamented in a poem *Niras Sampheng*, a travelogue in a verse about a well-known Chinese commercial district in Bangkok:

*Small road is crowded by Jek and Thai,  
Unavoidably mingling, clashing with one another.  
Jek mix with Thai beyond recognition,  
Who is who, one can’t help but wonder.  
Modern times deviantly mess up the place.  
Jim cut off their pigtails and become Thai undetectably.  
What an unconventional abnormality,  
People surprisingly reserve their ethnicity.*

*Jek* means the Chinese. This poem illustrates a mixed understanding of the people who had pigtails. King Vajiravudh felt that the Chinese represented an alien minority within the recently conceived Thai nation. His perception automatically disqualified the Chinese for a share in the state as it were. The Chinese found themselves ineligible for membership in the Thai-monopolised pluralised state.

However, King Vajiravudh’s criticism of the Chinese was more rhetorical than real. This is because he only criticised the lower classes, but did not ruffle the feathers of the otherwise volatile, troublesome elements in the elite Chinese community who played a fundamental role in Siam’s economic development. They were in control of the rice mills, sawmills, rubber plantations, tin mines and other mainstays of

the country's economy and required an uninterrupted supply of cheap labour readily available from China. He did not design and implement policies against the upper classes of the Chinese community.

By the time King Vajiravudh came into power, the Chinese all over China and throughout the world, including Siam, started to cut off their pigtails. The new generation considered the pigtail degrading and an insult to the Han race. The cutting off of pigtails in Thailand confused the *phrai* system of identifying the Chinese. In 1916, King Vajiravudh's first move was to pass an edict commanding his subjects to adopt surnames. In the absence of a clan or caste system, genealogy was virtually absent in Thailand. The law generated much initial bewilderment, especially in rural areas, and the King himself coined patronymics for hundreds of families.

The Chinese also set up various associations, clubs and hospitals throughout the country. They were pro-China and their activities reflected what went on in China. The political conflict in China, where the Guomindang and the Communist Party competed for political dominance, was mirrored among the Chinese in Thailand. Both sides set up local branches. But as all foreign political activities were banned, a prohibition that remained in force until 1946, they had to operate underground. During the 1920s, the local branch of the Guomindang was led by a Thai Chinese, Seow Fu Zhen (萧佛成) and his supporters. They developed vigorous anti-British and anti-Japanese movements in response to developments in China. During this period, Japan was beginning to show its ambition by invading Manchuria.

## **Prajadhipok (布拉查希博) Rama VII — The Last King with Power**

King Prajadhipok (1925–1935) was forced to ascend the throne due to the early demise of his brother. He had preferred to carry on with his career in the military. He was hard working and conscientious and was concerned with the welfare of his people. But he felt that Thailand was not ready for democracy. In 1927, he publicly commented that the people must be taught political consciousness before democracy could effectively be introduced. The world economic crisis of 1931

affected Siam's rice export. By the time King Prajadhipok dropped the gold standard, linking the Thai baht to the pound sterling, it was too late to stem the financial crisis. He took drastic steps to cut civil service salaries and retrenched army officials. Discontent brewed among army officials and the bureaucracy, especially when they had expected a promotion instead.

He presided over the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Chakri dynasty in 1932 amidst rumours that there would be a *coup d'état*. He was the last regal representative of traditional Thai kingship to preside over the grand pageantry, which featured a royal barge procession for the celebrations. The hope that King Prajadhipok would relinquish his supra-legal status and grant his subjects a constitution, was considered an illusion. The lack of reform became a growing preoccupation for the Paris-based student lawyer Pridi Phanomyong, who discussed matters with young military officers, including Phibun Songkhram, and decided to form the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party), whose stated aim was to replace the absolute monarchy with a more representative political regime.

Meanwhile, many peasants became seriously indebted and were extradicted from their lands. As early as May 1930, farmers pleaded for government assistance, and the following year, a growing number of petitions were sent to the King asking for waiver and reduction in land and capitation taxes. Urban dwellers equally suffered with the economic downturn with unemployment rising and bureaucrats retrenched.

Public dissatisfaction and frustration were reflected in the newspapers. It was argued that while wage earners suffered serious disadvantage, the royal class, upper levels of mobility and the Chinese businessmen who lavished on fat incomes from rentals, company dividends and money-lending escaped largely unscathed. Two months after the 150th celebration of the Chakri dynasty, a *coup d'état* took place, ending the absolute rule of the Thai monarchy. The coup was masterminded by a combination of military and civilian groups led by Pridi Panomyong on the civilian side and Capt. Luang Phibun Songkhram on the military side. They had gained the support of important army colonels. With only a few tanks, the 70 conspirators sparked off their 'revolution' by occupying strategic areas and holding



the senior princes hostage, while other army officers who were not committed to the coup stood by and the people acted as mere spectators.

The People's Party, which was in control of the country's most sophisticated weaponry, moved in against the throne and seized power on June 24, 1932. On June 26, 1932, a constitution drafted by Pridi was presented to King Prajadhipok for his approval. Under the provisions of this constitution, the king was to be made the official head of state and thereby provide the government with political legitimacy. During the coup, King Prajadhipok was in a beach resort of Hua Hin (华兴). To avoid bloodshed, he accepted a provisional constitution where he 'ceased to rule but continued to reign'.

The royalists, however, would not give up. According to diplomatic reports, a movement led by the former Police Commissioner Athikon Prakat had been patronised by Prince Purachat and the exiled Prince Boriphat to foment discontent. These funds were used to pay various Chinese groups, including Bangkok's rickshaw riders, who attempted to test the resolve of the administration through strikes and disturbances in the capital. It was claimed that if the strikes failed, fires would be set up around the city and pro-royal forces would seize control.

However, King Prajadhipok was worried about Pridi's intentions to establish a Socialist Republic. He once said that Pridi's policy 'was to test the lazy Siamese intellectuals who want to break the monopoly of the Chinese and other foreign commercial enterprises. They were too lazy and incapable of doing it themselves and appeal to the State to do it for them. The Pridi faction had a well organised propaganda. They spread scabrous and scandalous stories about the Royal Family on sexual matters and hope by those means to bring the royal family into disrepute. Unless there was some organised counter-action, they will succeed'. The King branded Pridi and his supporters as 'enemies of the people, intent on establishing a communist dictatorship'.

During the second week of October 1933, the royalists staged the Bowaradej Rebellion, financed by King Prajadhipok, led by Prince Bowaredej, a long-time favourite of the king. The rebellions called upon the newly established government to resign or be removed

immediately by force. Phibun Songkham's artillery forces, supported in a non-combat capacity by Boy Scouts, students and labourers, were particularly effective, inflicting 'heavy casualties' on rebel troops at Bangkhen on the fringe of the capital, leaving them to retreat along the northern eastern railway line. The royalists lost out and the king had to retreat to the seaside resort of Hua Hin and later fled to Songkla near the Malayan border. Members of the royal family escaped to the Malay states to avoid imprisonment. Prince Bowaradej, who led the rebellion, fled to French Cambodia by aeroplane. Hundreds of other members of the rebellion were rounded up by the government forces.

The king moved to England in 1934 after the Boraradej rebellion and abdicated in 1935. In a farewell message, he said that he had wished to grant power to the entire people and not to any individual or any group that would become autocratic. His words were often quoted on occasions when Thailand had experienced coups, aborted coups and bloodbaths. Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) a 10-year-old half-nephew of King Prajadhipok agreed to ascend the throne, but he remained in Switzerland to complete his education. Unfortunately, the young king was shot to death, during a brief home visit, on June 9, 1946. His younger brother, Bhumibol Adulyadej, succeeded him as the next king. Since the coup, the Thai constitutional monarchy had become a desired institution, symbolising continuity and stability. While civilian and military governments have all too frequently come and gone, the present Thai King Bhumibol, who ascended the throne in 1946, continue to command respect from the kingdom as King Rama IX.

### **King Bhumibol Adulyadej — The Present King**

On Monday, December 5, 1927, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, King Bhumibol Adulyadej was born. He was the third and youngest child of Prince and Princess Mahidol of Songkhia, who is of Chinese ancestry and in the direct lineage of King Chulalongkorn or Rama V. The latter was known for great reforms in the modernisation of Thailand *vis-à-vis* the Western world. His father, Prince Mahidol was dedicated to the development of modern medicine and public health

initiatives. He was known as the Father of Thailand's modern medical profession. Unfortunately he died in 1929. When he passed away, the future monarch was then just two years old. In 1946, the Law of Succession mandated the mantle on him with the death of King Ananda Mahidol. He was appointed King and His youth accorded him time to continue his education, this time in the field of political science and law in preparation for his role as the next monarch of Thailand.

The name Bhumibol meant Strength of the Land, an apt name for the present monarch of Thailand, as his reign had undergone several critical and challenging moments in post-World War II Thailand. In his role as ultimate monarch, his people had often turned to him for unity and strength. The King, the supreme symbol of the Thai nation, was also deemed to be the repository of the Nation's sacred trust as matters of administration were done in the name of the King and laws were submitted to the King before promulgation. The King's immense influence in politics was demonstrated in the subtle way in which Prime Minister Thaksin was relieved of his position. The King could not see eye-to-eye with the Prime Minister, who showed little regard for the monarch and exhibited an overbearing and arrogant demeanour of the billionaire businessman-turned-politician. When told of a military coup to topple the Thaksin's government, the monarch raised no objection.

Highly talented in music, painting, photography as well as composing, the king plays jazz as well. As a painter, he was well known for the strong strokes and bold colours in his work. When the King's 94-year-old mother Sangwal Talapad, believed to have Chinese blood, passed away, a royal funeral was organised for her. She was orphaned at the age of eight, and was the daughter of a poor goldsmith, a commoner. She was wedded to the royal prince at the age of 20 and bore two sons. The citizens of Thailand know her as Somdeth Ya. The Royal Grandmother, as she was known, bore representation of the honourable Royal Family, demonstrating compassion for the less fortunate.

At the Grand Palace in Bangkok, people stood in line day and night, offered prayers and paid respects to her when she died. The

prayer chants of 10 Buddhist monks across the palace grounds, throughout the day and night, could also be heard. A few miles away was a fleet of 200-year-old wooden chariots, the largest of which carried the body of the King's mother. The procession led to a newly constructed royal crematorium. The Chinese refer to this special ceremony as *gung te* (公德) and it was performed in Chinese style. Thailand's largest Chinese population also paid tribute to Thailand's 'great grandmother'. On the site of the burial, a huge shrine was constructed. This was usually only reserved for the Emperor. King Bhumibol led the entire royal family into the throne hall for the event and despite his poor health, performed prayer rituals.

## **Prominent *Lukjin* Thai Political Leaders**

In contemporary history, apart from Phibun Songkhram and Nai Pridi (陈家乐), there were many *lukjins* who were elected as Prime Ministers of Thailand. Most of them could not speak Chinese. They had been completely assimilated and behaved like Thais and owed their loyalty to Thailand.

### ***Pridi Banomyong* (陈家乐)**

Pridi Banomyong (1900–1983) was one of the most significant figures in the modern history of Thailand. He was also known to the Chinese world as (陈嘉祥 or 陈璋茂). Pridi was born in the province of Ayuthaya and was the second child in the family. His paternal ancestor, Heng, was born in Etang village in Denghai, Teochiu (澄海) and migrated to Thonburi in 1814 and, according to records, 'had to depend on the mercy of the king'. During the reign of King Boromaracha V, Heng migrated to Siam. He left his wife behind, who was then pregnant with their son Seng. Heng was later recruited to fight against the Burmese invaders. His grandmother was the aunt of King Taksin. His uncle too had participated in the revolution led by Taksin to drive away the Burmese during the reign of Suriyamarin (1758–1767), the last king of Ayuthaya. After Heng died in the war,

his son Seng chose to remain in China. It was Seng's son, Kok Sae who later migrated to Siam.

Kok Sae was an agriculturist, who knew how to make flour from fermented rice, Chinese style-sweets, bean curd and fermented soy-bean. With his diligence and intelligence, he progressed from being a small businessman to a reasonably successful businessman. He was a devoted Buddhist and set free many of his slaves. This method of liberating slaves was passed down to the sons and grandsons.

Pridi's father was Chen Siang (陈祥), who was born in 1866. He studied Thai and Pali and became a civil servant. He married a Thai woman and had six children with her. Pridi received a government scholarship to study law and political economy at Collège de Sorbonne. He had arrived in Paris in 1920 when the Russian revolution was still struggling for consolidation. He was fascinated with the western European models of constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy and social welfare. It was the legal philosophy and legal underpinning of these structures which he carried back to Siam and taught at the law school in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

He returned to Thailand in 1927 when the first Soviet five-year plan was launched. He worked for the Ministry of Justice on his return where he rose in rank rapidly and was granted the honorary title of Luang Pradimanutham. It was during this time that Pridi gradually and secretly built up a group of supporters consisting of 50 civil servants. He wanted to put an end to the absolute monarchy and institute constitutional monarchy in Thailand. The People's Party's manifesto with a skeletal economic plan and the provisional constitution was conceived from the lectures he gave and in the political documents he authored in the early 1930s.

He took a leading role in the overthrow of Siam's absolute monarchy and the installation of the republican constitution. His drastic aspirations coincided with Dr. Sun Yat Sen's revolution. As he understood Chinese, he learnt and was later influenced by the Guomindang's ideals of the Chinese revolution, which were later publicised in Thailand. His activities were carried out in several places, particularly in rented rooms in the Hua Ro (华乐市场) market where he distributed alarming pictures of the fight between Dr. Sun's supporters and

the Qing soldiers. Progressive Thai teachers predicted the inevitable demise of the Manchus as the latter soldiers were conceding to the Guomindang fighters. One teacher informed Pridi that absolute monarchies had collapsed in China, leaving only Russia and Thailand as the remaining vestiges of monarchies in the world. This seeded the idea of a revolution in the mind of young Pridi.

On June 24, 1932, a speedy *coup d'état* abruptly ended the 150 years of absolute monarchy. Pridi, the leader of the civilian faction of the People's Party, known as Khana Rasado executed the task bravely. After the overthrow of the Thai monarchy in 1932, Pridi's People's Party formed the majority in the National Assembly, and he planned for the Assembly to approve his economic scheme including an estate duty which would have had impacted the royal family and the royalists. For this, he was branded as a Communist. Praya Manopakon (Mano) Nitithada, the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals, who was also President of the all-powerful People's Committee close to the King, prorogued the National Assembly, suspended the constitution and promulgated a formal and anti-Communist Act with the king's approval. Pridi denied that he was a Communist and had expressed his willingness to modify his plan for the sake of political unity. However, he was removed from the State Council together with his four associates. The move by Praya Manopakon with the King's support decimated the influence of Pridi's People's Party while strengthening the political position of the members from the older order. As a result, the People's Party completely disintegrated.

Pridi belonged to the same political generation as Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Soekarno of Indonesia, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam and Aung San of Burma. They all emerged in the same political and intellectual context and shared the same ideas on law, constitution, parliament, education, and the potential of the nation state. Unfortunately, Pridi went into exile in 1933, when the others consolidated themselves at the dawn of the fall of colonialism. He went into voluntary exile when his economic plans were rejected as radical, extreme and allegedly communist. He called for the nationalisation of land and labour. In 1934, he returned to launch Thammasat University as an open university. He had subsequently assumed the

posts of Minister of the Interior and later, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1937 and Minister of Finance in 1938.

Although he had been friends with Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram during the days of the People's Party, the two fell out subsequently. Pridi was violently anti-Japanese as well as a socialist and opposed to many of Phibun's militaristic policies. Pridi wanted to elbow Phibun aside and the post-war situation offered him an opportunity to do so. Thailand's alignment with the Axis powers would serve Pridi's advantage and strengthen his dictatorship later. Even the Japanese knew about Pridi's orientation.

In 1941, Japan invaded Southeast Asia, and by January 1942, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram issued a declaration of war against Britain and the United States, which Pridi refused to sign. Phibun sidelined Pridi as the Regent for the young King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The latter was then studying in Switzerland. Phibun was awarded the title of Senior Statesman, Ratthaburut Awuso for his role as regent. In this capacity, he built up the anti-Japanese underground Free Thai Movement (Seri Thai) in Thailand, throughout World War II. His underground Seri Thai movement resisted the occupation. When the war ended, he and others used the Seri Thai experience to persuade the Allies not to treat Thailand as a defeated ally of the Japanese.

After World War II, Pridi took over the premiership from Khuang Aphaiwong but his term was shortlived. History repeated itself when General Phibun Songkhram, the man he cooperated with during his days in Paris launched a military coup, took control and sealed Pridi's fate by convening an inquiry that implicated him in the death of the 20-year-old King Ananda Mahidol in Bangkok's Grand Palace. A commission of enquiry was later established to investigate the king's death. It was Phibun Songkhram who engineered the setting up of the Commission to get rid of his political rival Pridi. They discarded Pridi's constitution, and killed several of his political allies. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the present Thai King, was alleged to have said that he did not believe Pridi was involved in his brother's death. However, Pridi's vision of decimating the king's political power had offended many pro-royalists including Kukrit Pramoj and his brother who played significant roles in the royalist grouping which founded

the Progressive Party in 1945. This party later merged to become the Democrat Party in 1946. From the late 1940s, royalists and generals conspired to block the liberal direction of Pridi's politics, which dragged Thailand towards dictatorship.

Pridi opposed them, first in election and debate and then in the street battles which supplanted parliamentary politics from 1947. Pridi tried to clip the wings of the military but lost out because he could not match the onslaught of the military's retaliation. On August 6, 1949, he escaped from Bangkok on a fishing boat and never returned to Thailand since. The American and the European Allies wanted a man like Phibun Songkhram to tackle and stem the spread of communism which was taking place in S.E. Asia after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party. After his exile, Pridi's first destination was Singapore. He escaped with the help of a British naval attaché on December 20, 1947. The Commander in Chief of the Thai army secretly informed him that Phibun Songkhram had staged a coup and would have him arrested. He fled to Singapore, taking refuge in St. John Islands.

I heard of his arrival and took a boat to St. John's island to interview him. I remembered he was wearing an Australian soldiers' cap and looked haggard. I was then a reporter for Sin Chew Jit Poh. He looked more like a scholar than a politician. He denied that he had anything to do with the demise of King Rama VIII. When asked what he would do next, he said he needed a good rest and his next destination was China. He had made many friends from the days of the underground movement against the Japanese and joined hands with the Chinese underground guerrillas. He knew most of the Chinese leaders, including Zhou Enlai. The Chinese Communist Party had just returned to power and he wanted to see how a Communist-run society would look like. It was not the right time for him to talk too much as his whereabouts were still unknown.

By May 1970, Pridi left Guangdong and moved to the suburbs of Paris. He became accessible to a new generation of students and intellectuals who were already leveraging on the deep fault lines in Thailand's military dictatorship to force a crash on October 1973. The



new generation took interest in Pridi as someone who opposed military dictatorship and with significant leftwing credentials. Journalists and academics travelled to Paris to interview him, just as articles about him circulated in the Bangkok press.

Thai students in Europe invited him to speak. His manuscript on the 'Impermanence of Society', 1970, described his philosophy, giving an account of his experience in China. In his publications, he drew links between his own political experience, his view of world history and the politics of Thailand as well as the 1973 student revolt.

Ironically, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the prospect of Pridi returning to power as a new revolutionary figure had stirred up a spirit of the past that provoked a second round of demonisation. Pro-royalists, such as the Pramroj brothers, came out in the forefront of politics. Kukrit's Siam Rath carried many articles, criticising Pridi and vehemently opposing any attempts to rehabilitate his memory. Kukrit even instigated others to spread a rumour that Pridi was planning to return to Thailand and set himself up as the President. The charges against Pridi remained the same: regicide and communism. He was portrayed as a tool of China to dominate Thailand. Later in 1979, Pridi successfully sued Kukrit and Siam Rath, the historian Rong Sayamanon and the Education Ministry over publications which associated his name with the regicide.

Pridi died in Paris, on May 2, 1983. His ashes were brought back to Thailand. But the reconciliation was muted compared to that of other exiles and the political response less than enthusiastic for past premiers. However, his supporters started a Pridi Banomyong Foundation to host academic and cultural events. Thammasat University erected a statue on July 3, 1984, and designated the most prominent building in the campus as a museum in his memory. Pridi's concise autobiography was published, while his novel, *'The King of the White Elephant'*, written during the war, was republished. There were two Pridi Banomyong memorials, one in Pridi's hometown in Ayuthaya province and the other on the campus of Thammasat University which he founded.

### ***The rise of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram (銓披汶)***

Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram (July 14, 1897–June 11, 1964) became Prime Minister of Thailand from 1938 to 1944 and 1948 to 1957. He led Thailand in military dictatorship. He was born to parents who were farmers. After his graduation from the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, he was admitted to the Artillery Corps in 1914. He studied at several Wat schools. Phibun was of Sino-Thai origin. It was said that his ancestors came from Hainan, an island south of China. His mother was Thai.

Following his studies in France, the honorary title of Luang Phibulsongkhram was bestowed on him by King Prajadhipok in 1928. On October 8, 1947, in a bloodless military coup, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram aided by the British and American naval attaches overthrew the Pridi regime. Songkhram appointed Khuang Aphaiwong as the new Prime Minister and he himself became the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces ruling from behind the scenes. The new government promised to solve the mystery behind the death of King Rama VIII. To this end, a court official and two royal pages were charged with aiding the assassination of the King. They were executed by a firing squad nine years later, following a series of trials and appeals, although none was convicted of actually committing the murder.

Khuang's regime did not last long. He was forced to resign by Songkhram in April 1948, who took over as Prime Minister. Songkhram returned to the political limelight because of the prevailing international political situation. Rama IX, Bhumibol Adulyadej, the younger brother of King Rama VIII, ascended the throne after completing his law programme but did not take up active duties as monarch until the 1950s. Songkhram's rise to power coincided with the Communist victory in mainland China, followed by the Korean War. Many of the leaders of the small, outlawed Communist Party of Thailand were Sino-Thais. Songkhram's anti-Communist and anti-Chinese credentials helped win both economic and military aid from the United States.

Songkhram became a professional soldier after graduating from the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in Bangkok in

1915. He studied at the French artillery school in Fontainebleau from 1920–1927 and became involved in Thai politics. After the successful coup in 1932, he held a series of command and cabinet positions.

By early 1934, Songkhram's government was faced with problems from sections of the Chinese working class. Between February and April, a number of strikes by Chinese coolies brought rice export to a standstill, who demanded more better pay and working conditions. The workers in the Siamese State Railways also went on strike, which disrupted transport services. Another problem facing the Songkhram government was the growth of Chinese nationalism. The Government closed most of the Chinese schools and imposed strict regulations on their administrations. As a result of these drastic measures, the extreme nationalists urged their compatriots in China to place an embargo on the import of Thai rice. According to Chinese accounts, this called for a 15% reduction in the amount of Thai rice entering China in 1935.

Sometime in February 1935, the first attempt was made to assassinate Songkhram. He was shot and wounded by a gunman at the scene of a football match. Pridi claimed that the ex-king's father-in-law, Prince Sawat, who was living in exile in Penang, was responsible. Later in 1937 and 1938, more attempts were made to assassinate not only Songkhram but also Pridi. These extensive conspiracies to kill both of them were aimed at setting up a new administration with either Prajadhipok or Prince Boriphat as King. According to reports, the ex-king and the prince had provided funds for the plot.

With the outbreak of a full-scale war between China and Japan in 1937, the Guomindang and Communist activities in Thailand, fuelled by strong anti-Japanese feeling within the local Chinese community, took on a new urgency. The Guomindang set up organisations such as the Association of Siam Chinese for National Resistance and Salvation, the Siam Chapter of Association Encouraging Bond Subscriptions and the youth group of the Three Principles of the People. These movements were led by a leading Bangkok merchant, Tan Siew Meng (陈修明). He had connections with Chiang Kai-shek and was associated with the Teochiu Assembly Hall under Hia Kwang

Im (连光炎). Hia and his followers had ties with Seow Hu Zhen (萧胡正) and the Xinan (济南) faction. The Communist Party of Siam (CPS) under the leadership of Liu Shu-Shi (刘书实), Qiu Ji (邱吉), and Li Hua (李华) set up the anti-Japanese National Salvation Alliance of Siam (泰国华侨抗日救国运动). Another organisation was Kang Lian (抗联), a federation of people from various walks of life, comprising intellectuals, merchants, labourers, students and women.

Since the early 1930s, most of the CPS members were Chinese, who conducted vigorous propaganda campaigns calling for a revolutionary government in Thailand. The party also organised a Communist Youth Group, an anti-Imperialist League, and a General Labour Union. Following a change of policy by the Comintern in 1935, from that of peaceful infiltration to using violence, the CPS shifted the focus of their activities from promoting revolution in China to fighting the Japanese.

All these groups helped to mobilise the Chinese community in Thailand against the Japanese by collecting money and selling bonds to help finance the war in China. Apart from sending rice and clothing back to China, they also dispatched volunteers for military and medical services. The Chinese community boycotted Japanese goods and Chinese merchants who sold Japanese goods were punished, some of whom had their ears cut off. The Japanese were terrorised by secret societies which were supporting the anti-Japanese campaigns.

Songkhram was concerned about anti-Japanese activities for various reasons. He contemplated an alliance with the Japanese and by cooperating with the Wang Jingwei (汪精卫) regime — a puppet government with headquarters in Nanking — to propagate Japan's Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (东亚共荣圈). Songkhram's shrewd diplomacy *vis-à-vis* Japan was largely to avoid self-infliction in case Japan marched its troops down south. More importantly, it offered an opportunity to regain lost territories previously occupied by Burma, Cambodia and Laos. He was anxious to gain whatever advantage he could by secretly agreeing to provide Japan whatever assistance required to kick out the French in Indochina and the British in Malaya. That would have allowed Thailand to spread her influence in Southeast Asia and spare herself from the pain of war.

Another major problem the Songkhram government confronted was the prevalent anti-Japanese sentiment. As at that time, Japan had shown its aggressive ambitions towards China and in fact invaded China in 1937 following the Marco Polo incident. Overseas Chinese all over Southeast Asia started a boycott of Japanese goods and this spread to Bangkok. Japan had begun to take a far more significant political and economic role in Siam following the overthrow of the monarchy.

Songkhram launched an all-out attempt to eliminate anti-Japanese activities. He implemented a 'containment' policy as Chinese schools, printing presses, newspaper offices and Chinese associations were searched, pamphlets and documents seized and several hundred Chinese leaders were arrested. He considered the actions of the Chinese as non-Thai and not inspired or propagated by the state. The People's Party Government enacted legislation banning fund raising that would affect Thai foreign relations. The government deported thousands of Thai Chinese and accused Chinese merchants of terrorism. Towards the end of 1938, when Songkhram became prime minister, repression against the Chinese grew more severe. His government closed 250 Chinese schools, 10 newspapers and harassed Chinese clan associations. All newspapers, except one, *Tong Guan Pao* (同管报) was allowed to exist because it was pro-Songkhram.

Songkhram was seen as a dictator. He admired the rigid regimes of Germany, Italy and Japan and he sought to create a similar type of chauvinistic order in Siam. During the initial years, he concentrated on dealing with the Chinese and foreign business community. He tried to get rid of the Chinese monopoly and organised Thai enterprises to replace them. In 1933–1938, new commercial regulations were introduced. The state invested in capital enterprises such as sugar mills in Chonburi and Lampang, a paper mill in Kanachanaburi and a silk factory in Nakhon Ratchasima. A Government slaughter house was constructed in Bangkok, while the Ministry of Defence opened a cloth factory and with Japanese assistance, set up an oil refinery. In addition, there were plans to limit coastal shipping to Thai vessels manned by Thai nationals.

A nationality regulation was also imposed on rice mills. The regulation mandated rice mills to employ 50% Thai workers. As a result of such measures, there was an exodus of European and Chinese businessmen. When Pridi was Finance Minister, he introduced a scheme of wholesale and rapid innovations that only allowed Thais to deal with the production and distribution of petroleum products, tobacco manufacture, the sale of salt and birds' nest, the butchering of livestock and driving taxis. The Thai Nivom Company was given the monopoly of all import and export transactions in connection with state enterprises. To some extent, such policies opened up opportunities for the Thais. However, during Songkhram's era, even though an economic policy of nationalistic capitalism was upheld to do away with foreign and Chinese investments, this effort was in vain. Chinese businessmen, who had migrated much earlier, became tax farmers and nobles and established close connections with Thai government officials. When joint investments were considered 'Thai' investments, there was no getting rid of the Chinese merchants who had been deeply entrenched in the economic system of the country.

In 1939, Songkhram changed the name of Siam to Thailand. He was anxious to develop a heightened 'Thai' consciousness among the people, and this meant economic independence and freedom from the exploitation of foreigners and the Chinese. A pre-eminent intellectual figure and a mentor of Songkhram, Luang Wichit Wathakan (also a *lokjin*) said over radio broadcast that the change from Siam to Thailand was based on the concept of Rathaniyom to 'mark the recent signing of treaties with the foreign powers'. The change symbolised a new era of independence for the country. Wichi said that the Europeans had followed the Chinese practice of calling the kingdom Siam and Siam meant 'black' or 'dark', a term which was inappropriate for the Thais since they were a yellow-skinned race.

Songkhram made every effort to transform Siam into a more civilised, goal-oriented and progressive society. Wichi, in his role as head of the Department of Fine Arts, produced a historical musical drama, *Nan Chao* (南昭), a Chinese kingdom in Yunnan, which the Thais claimed as a Thai kingdom. It was meant to give added justification

to the programme of 'Thai-ification'. The play, set in Nan Chao, a purported Thai kingdom in Southern China, was essentially the story of Chinese expansionism during the 9th and 10th century AD, which forced the natives to abandon their original territory and move south towards present-day Thailand.

The Education Ministry introduced a new system of Thai spelling designed to facilitate learning. Songkhram went one step further in trying to copy Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement (新生活运动) by indoctrinating a new spirit into the Thais. He paid special attention to the clothes worn by his people and emphasised the necessity of keeping the clothes neat. Western-styled attire was most suitable. He encouraged the wearing of traditional clothes, including the custom of wearing long trousers, which according to Wichit Wathakan, were developed by the Thais during the Nan Chao (南昭) period. The style of the day was for Thai men to wear hats, shoes and socks, jackets and long trousers, and for women to wear hats, skirts, blouses covering the shoulders, gloves and high-heeled shoes. The colours of their clothing were even specified: grey, indigo, khaki and beige for outdoor wear while navy blue was deemed suitable for work connected with machinery.

Songkhram banned the chewing of *sireh* (the leaves of a plant which was bitter), a custom developed by Thai women which made the mouth red. Chewers of *sireh* also had the habit of spitting the chewed leaves on the floor, leaving stains all over. Songkhram found this habit distasteful. He also ordered all men and women to wear top hats when they leave the house. The hats he recommended were similar to the fashionable hats of 16th century Paris. Songkhram was a fashion trend setter. He popularised female fashion with dress regulations and promoted Thai material for women's wear. Women's fashion competitions were also introduced and organised during the Thai New Year.

Songkhram's popularity rose after he successfully reclaimed two enclaves opposite Luang Prabang and Pakse in Laos; the rich rice-growing province of Battambang; a large area of Siemreap and one-third of Kampong Thom from Cambodia. This was done through negotiations with the French. For this, Songkhram was promoted

by the state with elaborate celebrations featuring military displays mounted throughout the country at the end of April 1941. The outcome of the war was a great personal triumph for Songkhram, who was elevated to the rank of the country's first Field Marshall since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. One of the reclaimed territories, the province of Siemreap, was renamed Phibunsongkhram in his honour.

Wichit, his advisor, wrote a special anthem for the new province which portrayed Songkhram in quasi Buddhist terms as *phun mi bun* in Thai cultural historical context, as one possessing magical power and the political right to rule. This anthem was quoted in a book entitled '*Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*':

Phibunsongkhram was the name we have bestowed on our new territory. Let us give the highest honour to a hero whom heaven had sent to regain Thai glory. We are so grateful for the return of our land that we have called it Phibunsongkhram, Phibunsongkhram. Please, let it prosper so one and all will be content and joyful.

Songkhram was embarrassed by the degree of adulation expressed in the hand-written draft which Wichit presented to him. He instructed his loyal subordinate to replace the words 'a hero whom heaven has sent' with 'one who was born on 14 July'.

When he became Prime Minister for the second time, the first thing he did was to launch a drive to convert the Chinese into Thais. He discovered that the Chinese had become increasingly divorced from the Thai society. Majority of the Chinese, influenced by their Chinese education, were loyal to China and were concerned only with Chinese politics and events in China. The Chinese newspapers in Bangkok were more concerned with Chinese political issues and gave these greater coverage. Almost daily, there was news about events in China. Many Chinese had gone back to take sides, some for Chiang Kai-shek, while others were pro-Mao. The Chinese were told to adopt Thai names. The number of Chinese schools was controlled and immigration from China was drastically reduced. Songkhram felt strongly that the Sino-Thais should owe their loyalty and allegiance



first to Thailand. In the 1950s, together with his powerful police chief General Phao Sriyanonda, he crippled the political clout of the Chinese Triads in Bangkok's huge Chinese business community.

Songkhram introduced strict rules to check the activities of foreigners, especially Chinese capitalists. Although Chinese capitalists were not expelled from Thailand, they were forced to choose whether they wanted to be Thai or Chinese. The strategy was to give economic freedom but not political freedom to the Chinese capitalists. Pragmatism ruled the day. The Chinese forsook their ethnic identity and became Thais out of economic interest.

In order to expand their business and wealth, Chinese businessmen, especially the old tycoon families, had to find ways to tie up with top government leaders or military generals and they paid heavily for that purpose. One clear example of such a tie-up was the relationship between a Teochiu multi-millionaire Chin Sophonphanich (陈璧臣) and General Phao Chin, the boss of the Bangkok Bank, who gave contributions to General Phao's political party, the Seri Manungkasila Party. In return, Chin obtained special concessions in the insurance business and the export of agricultural products. Songkhram also used other methods to force the Chinese to change their identity. The government increased the alien fee, restricted the Chinese to residential areas and enacted laws to reserve land and buildings in the vicinity of the railway stations for Thais, thus encouraging the Chinese to become Thais.

Under Songkhram, Thailand became an active member of the US-controlled Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) with Bangkok as its centre to fight the Vietnam War. Thailand became an important military base for the United States against communist Vietnam and a conduit for supplies going to the Guomindang in Burma. The Thai police and army officers were closely connected with the Guomindang network and the CIA. Thailand's cooperation in the secret war against Communist China was crucial, but both the United States and Taiwan felt that Songkhram could not be relied upon because of his extreme nationalist views.

By September 1957, Songkhram began to lose the grip of power. His Defence Minister and Head of the Army, Sarit Thanarat, with the help of the Americans, led a bloodless coup and seized

power. Martial law was subsequently imposed. A large public rally was held in Bangkok to support the demand by Sarit that Songkhram resign. Songkhram attempted to gain the support of the High Court to arrest Sarit but was refused. When Songkhram lost power, he came to Singapore and the Consul-General of Thailand threw a buffet dinner on his behalf in the Thai Embassy near Katong. It was there where I first met Songkhram. He was short and stout, with a square face resembling the good looks of a Hainanese. He was quite relaxed despite his political problems. It was also difficult for anyone to imagine that he was once a dictator who had cooperated with the Japanese and who later ditched the latter. Most incomprehensible for me was his anti-Chinese stance as there were many Chinese businessmen from Singapore who attended the event and he was friendly with them. He did not talk about Thai politics and was en-route to Paris. He was forced into exile in Japan and died there in 1964.

***Prasit Khanchanawat* — 巴实·干乍那越 (许敦茂)**

Prasit was born in Northern Thailand in a village called Khana (卡纳村). Although he received Chinese education when he was young, he was well assimilated as a Thai citizen. His father, the Headman of the village, was Koh Teck Xeng (许得胜), the owner of a rice mill, a wealthy Teochiu businessman whose ancestors came from Deng Hai (澄海). His mother was Thai.

Prasit alias Koh Tun Mau (许敦茂), got a scholarship and went to China for further education. He graduated from the Shanghai Qinan Teachers College (上海暨南师范大学), spent three months travelling to Nanjing (南京), Beijing (北京) and Qingdao (青岛) to survey the education system and returned to Thailand to assume the appointment as President of the Wang Huen School (黄魂学校). When the school was closed down, he worked at the Commerce and Industry Ministry. In 1947, he went to Paris and obtained a degree in law and together with a lawyer friend formed the Manukit Law firm. For a while, he took care of his father's rice mill.

In 1950, he became editor of *Political Weekly* and in 1952 plunged into politics and was elected as a Member of Parliament. In 1954, he became General Manager of a Chinese newspaper, *Shi Jie Ri Bao* (世界日报). Prasit joined the Democratic Party (自由党) and National Social Party (国家社会党). In 1958, he was appointed Deputy Minister for Ministry of Agricultural Cooperative and a Senator in 1968. In 1970, he was Deputy Minister for Economic Development. Two years later, he was appointed Minister for Commerce. In 1975, he became Speaker of the House in the Thai Parliament.

Prasit worked extensively to promote relations between China and Thailand. Before the 1950s, he travelled to China many times and met high officials of the Chinese Government. After the establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations, he went to China three times, the first time in the capacity as leader of a Ping Pong team, the second as Minister of Commerce and the third time as Speaker of Parliament to establish diplomatic relations. He could be considered the ‘Kissinger’ of Thailand in promoting relations with China. In appreciation for his effort in promoting Sino-Thai relations, the Thai King bestowed on him the highest honour of the title of ‘White Elephant’. Prasit married a Thai lady called Siliping (诗丽平) and had a *lokjin* daughter named Nantika.

### **Thanat Khoman (他纳·柯曼)**

Thanat Khoman served as Thailand’s foreign minister between 1959 and 1971. He was one of the early founders of ASEAN and had worked closely with Singapore’s Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam. I met him when I was Minister of State for Foreign Affairs during the various meetings we had in ASEAN cities. He had a gentle disposition and was a poised, quiet personality who was persuasive when he talked. He was a true diplomat, always trying to please others with his good temper and demeanour. He was always in good humour during those years when we met. He and Rajaratnam seemed to have a good understanding and got on well.



Thanat Khoman

Thanat contributed a great deal in promoting regional reconciliation and cooperation and was very enthusiastic about the formation of ASEAN in its early stages. He spent a lot of time discussing details of the organisation with Rajaratnam when they sat down to deliberate on the constitution and shared perspectives. He was instrumental in making Bangkok the birthplace of ASEAN in August 1967 following extensive mediation between Indonesia and Malaysia in the mid-1960s. Minister Thanat served as an Ambassador to United States before he joined politics and became a Minister.

***Kukrit Pramoj (克立·巴莫) (1911–1995)***

On February 15, 1975, the first elected civilian Prime Minister Seni Pramoj, leader of the Democratic Party was sworn in, replacing Sanya Dhamasakti. He was Prime Minister between February 1975 and March 1976 during the democratic interlude after the student-inspired removal of the military regime in 1973. He led a minority

government as head of the progressive Social Action Party (社会行动党, Kit Sangkhom). In January 1976, he dissolved the Parliament and general elections were held. He lost his seat because his constituency had a high proportion of military voters. The Social Action Party was formed in alliance with two other parties. However, a month later, his younger brother Kukrit Pramoj was appointed as Prime Minister at the head of a fragile coalition of no less than 17 parties. As he had royal blood, he took an active part against the ex-Prime Minister Pridi.

Kukrit Pramoj was born in Bangkok on April 20, 1911, into a major branch of the Thai royal family. His ancestors came from China and after a few generations became a *lukjin*. He completed his higher education in England at the Queen's College, Oxford, and on his return to Thailand, worked with the Ministry of Finance. After World War II, he became active in the Democrat Party before launching into journalism. Kukrit was a prominent, witty journalist who often contributed a column to the *Siam Rath* newspapers. He was well known in the arts circle as a versatile person, well capable of performing Thai dance when called upon.

In 1975, as Prime Minister, Kukrit visited Singapore. I was assigned the job of Minister in attendance. I accompanied Kukrit to various places as well as banquets at the Istana. He was still interested to know what happened to fellow artists who had attended the S.E. Asian cultural festivals (东南亚文化节). He expressed a pity that the festival had died after 1963. Kukrit told me that his ancestors were Chinese who had migrated to Thailand. He regretted that he could not speak a single Chinese dialect, except for a few words of Teochiu. He also told the Chinese in China that he had Chinese ancestry. I asked him about his feeling as a Chinese descendant and as a loyal Thai leader. This was what he said:

Our ancestors came to Thailand because life in China was difficult. When they settled there, they found the Thai way of life acceptable to them. They accepted a monarchy because China too had been ruled by monarchs for 3,000 years. As a descendant of the Chinese, we are proud of our rich cultural heritage. But we are Sino-Thais and we learned to love Thailand as the Thais gave us respect and

a comfortable life. We now regard ourselves first as Thais, loyal to Thailand, although we are proud of our Chinese ancestry. I see no contradiction between being loyal to Thailand and being proud of one's own cultural heritage.

Kukrit was a man who spoke his mind. Because of his frankness, he would not hesitate to pick a quarrel with anyone whom he considered disloyal to Thailand or the Thai monarchy. Once the Commander-in-chief of the Thai Army, Chavalit Yonchaiyuth, proclaimed sympathy for the poor farmers and expressed a desire that Thailand should become an agricultural rather than an industrial power — a change of policy he described with the inflammatory term 'revolution'. Kukrit referred to Chavalit as a 'communist' and questioned his loyalty to the King. The next day an enraged mob of 300 elite Army Rangers besieged the elder statesman's house in Bangkok. It was an ugly scene, but without violence. While the soldiers were protesting outside his house, Kukrit was enjoying a substantial meal of fried chicken and Thai noodles inside. At another occasion, Kukrit spurned his former prodigy Prem, who became Prime Minister:

*Prem, what is Prem? He was nothing until I created him, and then I got tired of him, and threw the puppet away.*

Kukrit resigned in January 1976 when his multi-party coalition split into various factions and fought one another resulting in the call for new elections. The campaign for the elections proved to be the most violent since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1932. Boonsanong Punyodyana, the secretary general of the Socialist Party, was shot dead in Bangkok.

The last time I saw Kukrit was at the ASEAN summit in Bali in 1976 during the gathering of the Heads of Government of the five nations, President Suharto (苏哈多) of Indonesia, President Marcos (马可斯) of the Philippines, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀) of Singapore and Prime Minister Hussein Onn (胡先翁) of Malaysia. It was his last appearance as Prime Minister and I could see that he was rather upset. In the April elections that year, he was among those who lost his seat.

Kukrit died in December 1995 at the age of 84. There was a change of prime ministers after the downfall of Kukrit. The seat was taken by his elder brother Seni Pramoj for a short period until he was ousted by a student demonstration.

### ***Chatichai Choonhavan (察猜·春哈旺) (1930–1998)***

In July 1988, the Chart Thai party won the general elections. Chatichai Choonhavan, who was the party leader, became the first civilian Prime Minister after 12 years of martial law. He was a flamboyant politician and was removed from office through a military coup in February 1991. He was the only son of the powerful military leader Marshal Phin Choonhavan. Prime Minister Chatichai was not ashamed to admit that his ancestor was a Teochiu. Like Kukrit, Chatichai too, was proud of his Chinese cultural heritage, but was loyal to Thailand and thought of himself first as a Thai than a Chinese.

I came to know Chatichai when he was Foreign Minister of Thailand, under the Kriangsak regime, and we had opportunities to meet while we were both involved in the foreign affairs of our respective countries. We met at the ASEAN conference in Bangkok, Bali, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. He made an immediate impact on foreign policy by softening his country's stance towards Cambodia and Vietnam and was well known for articulating the idea of transforming Indochina from a 'battlefield into a marketplace'. In domestic politics, he departed from the old cautious technocratic culture of his predecessors and applied a more direct and business-like approach to solving problems. Unfortunately, corruption in his administration ultimately led to his downfall.

Chatichai Choonhavan was born in Bangkok on April 5, 1930 and died on May 6, 1998. He was educated at the Chulalongkorn University and had served with Thai military units in Burma and southern China during World War II. He was educated at the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in Bangkok and served in China as part of the Thai contingent. He also had a taste of the Korean War which he participated. His father Phin Choonhavan was

defeated by Sarit Thanarat. Sarit replaced General Phin and sent him to serve as Ambassador to Austria, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Latin America and the Vatican.

A military *coup d'état* led by General Sunthorn Kongsompong and Suchinda Kraprayoon on February 23, 1991, removed Chatichai from office. Following the coup, a special committee set up by the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) declared that Chatichai, his aide and eight ministers had become unusually wealthy during their time in office.

The economic boom of the late 1980s provided opportunities for political corruption. The Chatichai Cabinet had the power to decide on large infrastructure projects without recourse to debate in the parliament. Individual ministers also had the power to decide on large projects in each ministry without reference to cabinet or parliament, granting licenses and financial firms, concessions for logging or forestation. Large government projects involving billions of baht were approved during the Chatichai period and were widely believed to be the source of corruption money for leading politicians. After the fall of Chatichai, a civilian and well-known diplomat named Anand Panyarachun was appointed Prime Minister for a short period. He died of liver cancer in 1998.

### **Chuan Leekpai (吕基文)**

As the leader of the Democratic Party (民主党), Chuan Leekpai came into power following General Suchida Kraprayoon's abortive coup of May 1992. He became Prime Minister of Thailand in September 1992, the first Premier who was not from an aristocratic or military background. An election was held during that month in the wake of a bloody confrontation on the streets of Bangkok, a civilian demonstration that challenged the right of former army commander-in-chief General Suchinta Krapayoon's appointment as prime minister without an election. The elections resulted in the Democratic Party winning the largest number of parliamentary seats, making Chuan Leekpai, little known outside Thailand, as the prime minister.



Chuan Leekpai was born on July 29, 1938, in Trang Province. His ancestor was from the Fujian Province who settled down in the Tongli village, Trang province in Southern Thailand. Today, the Fujianese influence has become stronger in Southern Thailand. They were pushed to the south when the Teochius arrived in large droves after Teochiu Taksin became the first Thai king.

Chuan received a legal education at Thammasat University in Bangkok and went into parliamentary politics at the age of 31 when Thailand was still under military rule. He had been a Parliamentary member since and first held office as Deputy Minister of Justice in 1975. He became Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1986–1988 as well as Deputy Prime Minister for a brief period between 1989 and 1990. In 1984, he led a Thai educational delegation to China. While in China, he acknowledged that his ancestors were Chinese. As Prime Minister, Chuan was committed to a policy of rural development and liberal market economics. He demonstrated firmness in the face of military objections to visit the border with Burma in 1993 by eight Nobel Peace Prize winners, campaigning for the release from detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.

However, Chuan was unable to overcome the structural tension in Thai politics between civilian and military interests. In foreign policy, he was embarrassed by the military through its continuing support for the Khmer Rouge despite the stated policy of the government to promote good relations with its counterpart in Phnom Penh. Chuan was well-known in Thai politics for his clean image and incorruptibility. His old mother was still selling vegetables in his hometown and he lived frugally in a humble house made of planks near Bangkok. In 1993, Chuan visited Indonesia and had talks with President Suharto. He announced in Jakarta that Thailand would apply for membership of the non-aligned movement. He tried to take a neutral stand in his foreign policy and refused to permit the United States government to station military supply ships in the Gulf of Thailand.

At home, he succeeded in securing legislative approval for a series of constitutional amendments. These included lowering the voting age of voters from 20 to 18 and reducing the appointed

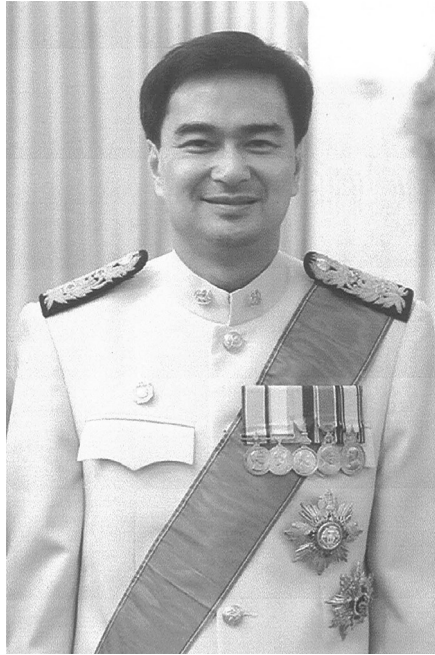
Senate to two-thirds the size of the lower house. Because of his policy of a clean government, opposition parties filed a series of no-confidence motion with the intention of toppling him. In the July 1995 general elections, his Democratic Party lost to the Chart Thai party led by Banharn Silparcha, who became the next prime minister. In the controversial election of November 1996, marked by violence and rampant vote, Banharn's party lost to the New Aspiration Party led by General Chavalit Yongchaiyut, who was appointed Prime Minister. Chavalit was a superstitious Thai who believed in Chinese geomancy. The first thing he did was to order an extensive renovation of the Prime Minister's residence because the Chinese geomancer had said that the premier's room was inauspiciously located. In 1998, Chuan defeated Chavalit in the general elections and returned to power.

### **Abhisit Vejjajiva (阿披实) Hakka**

Abhisit Vejjajiva was a *lukjin*, whose ancestor was a Hakka. He was Thailand's youngest Prime Minister. Born to an elite family from Bangkok in 1964 and in Newcastle, his parents were both medical professors. His father was a Hakka Sino-Thai and mother Thai. His father was in government and was once the Deputy Minister of Public Health. He has a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. In Oxford University, he pursued a Master's Degree in Economics. He had briefly taught at the Chulachumklao Royal Military Academy. He had also lectured in the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University of Thailand. His political career started in 1992, when he stood as a candidate for the Democrat party at the Bangkok constituency. He was re-elected in 1995 and 1996. He had served in several portfolios. Amongst others, he was Democratic Party spokesman, Deputy Secretary to the Prime Minister for Political Affairs, Government spokesman. Under Prime Minister Chuan Lee Pai, he was Chairman of the House Education Affairs Committee and Minister to the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Profile: Thailand's 27th Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva ... (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/15/content\\_10507556.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/15/content_10507556.htm).



Abhisit Vejjajiva

In 2005, he replaced Banyat Bantadtan as the party leader. The former had resigned when the party was defeated by the Thai Rak Thai party led by Thaksin Shinawatra in the 2005 general election. The Democratic Party joined with other opposition parties to boycott the April 2006 snap election. The party, however, failed to reap political gains from the coup that ousted Dr. Thaksin on September 19, 2006. The disbanded Thai Rak Thai party reincarnated as the People Power Party, led by Samak Sundaravej, who won the post-coup general election on December 23, 2007, through a six-party coalition. The Democratic Party was the lone opposition thereafter. When the Constitutional Court disapproved Samak's appointment as Prime Minister in early September, Abhisit lost to Samak's successor, Somchai Wongsawat in the September 2008 parliamentary elections.

Abhisit was a new-generation politician, young, well-educated and representing an urban elite class. As Democratic leader, he garnered the support of the urban population in Bangkok and the middle-class in southern Thailand. He worked hard to win over the lower income. He led the country at a time when Thailand faced great difficulties with Dr. Thaksin's supporters demonstrating almost every day and the country's economy facing a downturn. The United Front against Dictatorship (UDD) championed by the red shirts, a major anti-government force in Thailand mounted pressure on Abhisit to step down.

He faced a thorny problem with Cambodia over the Thaksin as Advisor issue and relations between Thailand and Cambodia became very strained. Abhisit worked closely with former Prime Minister Prem and was favoured by the Thai monarchy. He was knighted as Knight Grand Cordon of the Most Noble Order of the Crown in 1999 and later the Knight Grand Cordon (Special class) Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant, which represents the highest award in Thailand.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Chinese Jao Pho (召保) Millionaires in Thailand**

Since Taksin became the first Chinese king in Siam in 1766 and established his Thonburi kingdom, the Chinese have had an upper hand in business dealings in the country. By the time Rama V, King Chulalongkorn came into power, the Chinese monopolised almost all aspects of trade and industry given the king's liberal policy towards the Chinese and in their acceptance of the Chinese as *jin phrai* and *jin khun nang* (Chinese with pigtails). Thais gave them equal status with that of the indigenous people.

There were already some prominent Chinese millionaires during the Chakri dynasty. The economic conditions that prevailed after World War II benefitted the Chinese as well and created the seed

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<sup>4</sup>Sukhumabhinanda — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhumabhinanda>.

capital for some of the present day Thai-Chinese business mughuls. A chain of events opened up opportunities for the Chinese, namely the retreat of the Western powers before the Japanese advance, the slowing down of European imports and the decline of the great European trading houses, the demand for goods stimulated by the Korean War and eventually the war in Vietnam.

When the generals took over power, more Chinese became rich with the former's support. The new entrepreneurs of the 1940s grew quickly into the Jao Pho (God father) and became the merchant lords of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the most distinguished multi-millionaire in the days of Prime Minister Sarit was Chin Sophonpanich, a Teochiu whose Chinese name was Tan Piak Chin. He had the support and protection of General Phao.

Another Jao Pho who became rich and notorious in the town of Chomburi was Somchai Kunpleum or Po Kam Nan (宝甘南), who made his fortune by smuggling opium along the Cambodian border. He became so influential that his son was elected as an MP. He helped several other aspiring political leaders who were also elected as MPs. He dominated the affairs of Chomburi and forced all his rivals out of business. It was rumoured that he murdered some of his opponents and the police authorities gave him a free hand to do whatever he wanted. When his chief rival lost his life, Somchai denied that he was responsible for the murder, but was said to have added, 'In Chamburi, bad guys must die'.

Many prominent Chinese *lokjins* entrepreneurs in the past and right up to the present day have been completely assimilated. Today, it would not be as easy to differentiate between an indigenous Thai and a *lokjin*.

## **Chinese Schools and Associations in Siam**

During the early period of the reign of King Vajiravudh, there were already 20 Chinese schools run by various Chinese clans. The Teochius call their schools *Chin Koon* (振坤) the Cantonese *Koon Teck* (坤德) and the Hakkas *Ee Teck* (义德). These were originally schools for girls, but they were later changed to allow enrollment for

both girls and boys. Each school accommodated between 200 to 300 students. The founders of the school recruited teachers from China. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, many Chinese intellectuals were eager to migrate to a country where it was easier to earn a living as a struggle followed between the Guomindang (国民党) and the Chinese Communist Party (共产党) in China.

The Chinese schools in Thailand were left alone until 1918, when King Vajiravudh instructed the Thai Government to control the Chinese schools. New regulations were imposed, insisting that all Chinese schools must employ a Thai principal and study the Thai language, geography and history. The regulation also stipulated that all teachers in Chinese schools must be able to read and write the Thai language and their employment must be approved by the Ministry of Education. The Board of Directors of all Chinese schools must make annual reports to the Government of their activities and were subjected to periodic inspection by Thai officials. If they contravene the regulations, they would be suspended.

As mentioned, the rising tide of Chinese nationalism in Thailand worried King Vajiravudh. The tide coincided with the rising wave of Thai nationalism as political awareness was increasing. King Vajiravudh turned to the new-fangled ideology of Thai nationalism to boost support for the monarchy. In the absence of credible external threats, the Chinese became a ready target. King Vajiravudh's most significant political contribution was to promote the concept of Thai nationalism as against Chinese nationalism. As a prolific writer, he used literature and drama to foster nationalism by glorifying Thai legends and historical heroes in plays.

King Vajiravudh joined the Allies in 1917 and sent a small expeditionary force to fight in France at the wake of World War I. In doing so he secured Siam's admittance to the League of Nations. He had used the national flag of Thailand — a white elephant against a red background in Versailles, but the white elephant was mistaken for a small domestic animal. The incident greatly embarrassed the King, who changed the national flag to red, white and blue stripes to represent the nation, religion and monarchy.

King Vajiravudh was dictatorial in his style of administration and was criticised for lack of democracy. He was also a spendthrift who emptied the treasury built up by his father. By the time of his death, there was a deficit in his personal expenses. As he married late in life, he had only one daughter, born a day before his death in 1925. He was succeeded by his younger brother, King Prajadhipok, who bore the consequences of this controversial reign.

## *Chapter Two*

# **The Mestizos of the Philippines (混血儿米斯蒂佐)**

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In order to understand the history of the Philippines fully, it would be important to know the history of the mestizos. The term refers to the intermarriage between Chinese and the Indios (Filipino/Filipinas). The Chinese mestizos played a significant part in the Philippines society in the 19th century. There were already intermarriages between the Chinese and the native Filipinas before the arrival of the Spaniards, as Chinese immigrants had taken native Filipina wives in the Sulu (苏禄) Islands during the Sung dynasty. Many migrant Chinese also married native Filipinas in Manila. During the first half of the 20th century, several prominent political figures were mestizos; Jose Rizal, Emilio Aguinaldo, Jose Laurel, Elido Quirino, Sergio Osmena, Ramon Magsaysay, Ferdinand Marcos, Mrs. Aquino and Carlos Romulo. Prominent mestizo business leaders included Yangco (杨可) and Limjap (林叶) (father and son) and Mariano and Lucio Tan (陈永栽). Mestizo religious leaders were Father Lorenzo Ruiz (candidate for sainthood), and Jaime Cardinal Sin (辛) the famous Catholic father whose support still carried weight in Philippines politics. Among the women, the most outstanding mestizo was Mother Ignacia de Espiritu Santo, founder of the first Filipino congregation of Filipino women.

### **Early Intermarriage and the Sulu (苏禄) Royal Family**

The earliest contact point for the Chinese migrants was Sulu and that was during the period of the Sung dynasty. Historian Cesar Majul



mentioned that some of the Arab missionaries were the ones who brought the Islamic faith to Sulu. In 1380, an Arab judge by the name of Maidin arrived in Sulu to preach Islam. He was accompanied by some Chinese Muslim preachers, one of them was Mohadun Amin-Allah alias Sayyid Annikab, a Muslim leader who later became a judge in Sulu, well respected by the Sulu people because of his sense of fairness. Later the Chinese Muslims arrived in Chinese junks and settled down in Sulu. There were the Sina Hoi Hoi (支那回回; Hoi means Muslims).

There was a legend which told of a Chinese princess who arrived in Sulu with her father. Lured by the beauty of the island, she landed and met a Muslim man. They fell in love and got married and produced mestizo offsprings. Early accounts of Sulu were found in Chinese records in the Yuan dynasty, when trade between China and Southeast Asia was beginning to take shape. According to the Ming (明) dynasty record, in 1417, Sultan Paduka Batara, the Sultan of Sulu, together with other sultans, visited China with a retinue of 340 wives, ministers and entertainers. They reached Beijing and were presented to the Ming Emperor Yong Le (永乐). The Sultan presented a memorial inscribed in gold and other tributes including pearls, precious stones and tortoise shells. That was 104 years before the arrival of the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan. On the eve of their departure, the Ming Emperor presented them with gifts to cover their expenses for the trip. Unfortunately, on their way home through the Grand Canal, the Sultan fell ill and died on October 23, 1417. The Ming Emperor ordered an imperial burial for the Sultan. The Emperor also gave blessings to the Sultan's eldest son Dumahan (杜马汗) to succeed the throne. Because of the dictum of ancestor worship, the Sultan's wife and her children stayed back to observe the three-year mourning rites. The Emperor also ordered that while in Shandong, the Sultan's family was to be given 238 mu (亩) (15.9 hectares) of farmland, tax exempt, as well as a monthly supply of food and clothes. The three Muslim families of Xia (夏), Ma (马) and Zheng (郑) in Shandong were ordered to move to the agricultural county of Dezhou (德州) to serve the Sultan's family as personal servants. Thus, the Sultan's descendants lived like royalty in Dezhou

for centuries. The area surrounding the Sultan's tomb became a thriving community called the Bei Ying (北营村) village. When the Sultan's wife and son died, they were buried near the Sultan's tomb. With the fall of the Ming dynasty, the fortunes of the Sultan changed for the worst. All subsidies for the royal family was withdrawn, food supply cut off and the descendants had to work on the farm. When the Qing (清) dynasty was overthrown, all the 238 mu of land was confiscated. The An (安) and Wen (文) family dispersed to neighbouring provinces and worked as common labourers. The ravages of weather and wars left the royal tomb and its surroundings in ruins. It was only in early 1975, when diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China was re-established, that attention was drawn to the location of the tomb. It was repaired and became a historical monument. By 2001, 20 million remimbi was spent on renovating the tomb, extending the site to 1,000 mu (亩). On June 6, 2005, on the 30th anniversary of the Philippines-China diplomatic relations, the 17th generation of the Andulu, An Jin Tuan (安仁端), the second son of Sultan Paduka Batara who stayed behind, visited the royal tomb in China with his family after 588 years. They were treated like royalty during their week-long stay and was also received as honoured guests at the Malacanang Palace in Manila by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (马加巴卡尔) on their return. They were conferred in Manila the status of *Padukas*, an affirmation of their direct descent from the Sulu Sultanate.

## **The Evolution of the Chinese Mestizo (米斯蒂佐)**

The word '*mestizo*' was coined by the Portuguese to refer to the mingling of blood between Chinese immigrants and the Filipinos. During the early colonial period, the term '*mestizo*' referred only to those of mixed Filipino and Spanish or Mexican ancestry. However, the term soon became generic and synonymous for 'mixed race'. It also referred to Chinese who intermarried the natives. In terms of numbers, the Chinese far out-numbered the Spaniards and Mexicans. The term *mestizo* had since been freely used to refer to all Filipinos and Filipinas of mixed ancestry, irrespective of ethnicity, as long as one of them was

a native. Modern categories of Filipino mestizo included the Spanish mestizo, Chinese mestizo, Japanese mestizo and American mestizo.

Locally, the term was a synonym for 'beauty'. At the beginning of the 19th century, the mestizos accounted for about 5% of the total population and around 2.5 million. They were concentrated in most developed provinces of Central Luzon and in Manila and its environment. A much smaller number lived in the more important towns of Visayan Islands, such as Cebu and Iloilo, and on Mindanao. Converts to Catholicism did not speak Chinese but Filipino languages or Spanish. They were treated as subjects of Spain. Historian Edgar Vickberg was of the view that unlike the mixed-Chinese of other Southeast Asian countries, they were not 'a special kind of local Chinese' but 'a special kind of Filipino'.

There were basically two types of mestizos, identified in colonial Philippines, the Spanish mestizo and the Chinese mestizo. The latter proved to be a more significant element in Philippines society for three reasons: First, the Chinese mestizos were more numerous as there was a greater infusion of Chinese blood than any other blood among mestizos in the Philippines. In the mid-19th century, there were 240,000 Chinese mestizos, but only 7,000 to 10,000 Spanish mestizos. Second, the Chinese mestizos were readily assimilated into the fabric of the native society. Third, more than the Spanish mestizos, the Chinese mestizos assumed more important roles in the economic, social and political life of the nation. The Spaniards used religious policies to convert the Chinese with three objectives in mind: First, they converted the Chinese to the Catholic faith. They believe that an open acceptance of the Catholic faith would represent a declaration of fealty to God's chosen agent, the King of Spain. The purpose of converting the Chinese was to eliminate any cultural alternatives that might pollute the native population. Extension of the faith involved not only the catholicisation of the Philippines but also the ultimate goal of expanding the missionary enterprise to conquer China. Second, they created socio-economic incentives for Chinese as a way to induce them to marry Indios. Third, they used the tax system as an expedient and inexpensive way to encourage the Chinese to marry local women. For the Chinese, conversion to Catholicism had tangible

benefits. It was a pre-requisite for marriage into Indio families and therefore had both personal and social rewards. Conversion was a shrewd economic strategy. Marriage into an Indio family changed the convert's tax status, that of Chino to legally distinct mestizo category. From the Spaniard's point of view, economic benefit was the key factor in trying to convert the Chinese. They needed the industrious Chinese as traders and suppliers of goods they required.

## **The Emergence of the Mestizos**

The emergence of the Chinese mestizo as a legally distinct class began with the Spanish colonial regime. When the Spanish first landed in the Philippines in 1571, they found the Chinese population useful as they provided traders, artisans and domestic servants and other labourers they required. But later, they discovered that the increasing presence of Chinese was a threat to their rule. Throughout the colonial rule, they feared that the Chinese, an ethnic group with roots in China, would be far less loyal to them than the natives whom they called Indios. To remedy this problem, they encouraged intermarriage between the Chinese and the Catholic Chinese as well as the Catholic Indios. This provided the rationale behind the creation of a special place called the '*parian*' to accommodate the offsprings of this intermarriage called mestizo.

Intermarriages between Chinese and the Indios before the arrival of the Spaniards was mainly because Chinese women were not in the Philippines yet, so the immigrant Chinese had to marry the Indios (i.e. the native Filipinas). Hence, there were a sizeable Sino-Tagalog population regardless of the prevailing Spanish policy. However, if the marriages were between Chinese and Indios and both sides were Catholics, they were legally recognised and encouraged, resulting in the creation of a special community of mestizos. In the wake of the Chinese massacre in Manila in 1603, many Chinese fled to Pampanga, settled there and married local women. In subsequent massacres in the *parians*, more Chinese fled to nearby towns, which resulted in further intermarriage between them and the indigenous Indios. By the early 18th century, the *parian* of Cebu, for instance, was predominantly a Chinese mestizo community.

In Northern Luzon, intermarriage between Chinese and Indios had existed before the arrival of the infamous Limahong, who attempted the capture of Manila. This expedition was referred to as the Limahong expedition. After his failed attempt, he fled to Pangasinan and established a settlement. Limahong left a legacy of more intermarriages with the local women. Some of the Chinese intermarried the Igorots and Tinggians women, resulting in lighter-complexioned and differently built offsprings as a result of Chinese mixed-blood. As early as 1687, the Chinese, together with the mestizos, formed the Gremio de Chino de Bindo, a religious organisation called Gremio de Mestizos. The Rianggime also formed an organisation called Gremio De Chino Cristianos to administer Chinese and Mestizo affairs. Any person born of a Chinese father and an Indio mother was classified a Chinese mestizo. It was interesting to note that Lingayen, a town in Pangasinan where Limahong had founded a short-lived kingdom, was where visitors would find the most Chinese mestizos. In 1787, they numbered 2,793, out of a native population of 6,490, accounting for about a third of the population. The continued intermarriage of many Chinese with Indio women resulted in an increasing number of Chinese mestizos.

By 1810, there were 121,621 Chinese mestizos in a population of 2,395,676. In 1850, the Chinese mestizo population more than doubled. The Chinese mestizos made up one-third or more of the population in half a dozen provinces. The mingling of Chinese blood and native blood was evident in all the towns. By the end of the 19th century, there were about half a million Chinese mestizos with some 46,000 living in Manila.

The Spanish had established a caste-based social structure which the people of mestizo ancestry immediately chanced on in the immediate aftermath of Spanish and Mexican withdrawal. This naturally granted them governing influence over commerce and industry, thereby providing access to a disproportionate share of wealth. The Chinese mestizos emerged as a strong entrepreneurial, middle class from the 1750s to 1850s. Inheriting the economic dynamism of their Chinese ancestors, they were described by John Bowring, the British officer who signed the Bowring Treaty with Thailand, as 'more active

and enterprising, more prudent and pioneering, more oriented to trade and commerce than the Indios'. Bowring visited the Philippines during the 1850s. He observed that in the towns around Manila, 'almost every pueblo had some dwellings larger and better than the rest, occupied by native authorities or the mixed races of Chinese descent'. Bowring cited the mestizos as being the most industrious, persevering and economic minded among the Philippines population. He further noted that the mestizos of Molo and Jaro, who traded with Manila, in many cases, owned ships and invested in the trade. The commercial skills of the mestizos were said by some observers to have been 'inherited' from their Chinese fathers.

As they grew richer, they became more independent and ceased to be compliant subjects of the Spaniards. The Chinese mestizo gradually began to exert their influence and participated in the Filipino revolution and in the creation of a Filipino nationality.

### **Three Massacres Under Spanish Rule**

One of the reasons why Chinese immigrants were willing to become mestizo was that the Chinese authorities both under the Ming and Qing administration did not take any measures to protect them when they were massacred. In 1603, the Chinese emperor Wan Li (万里) received a petition from a Fujianese gold miner Yen Ing Loong (閩应龙) that there was a great deal of gold in a hill in Luxon and that it could fetch a profit of 300,000 taels of silver each year. The Emperor immediately sent three mandarins to the Philippines to investigate the 'hill of gold and silver' and moved through Manila as though it were Chinese territory. The Spanish governor, suspicious of Chinese intent, instructed all Chinese to be registered. The Chinese felt that a Spanish attack was imminent and sounded the war gongs and attacked Quiapo and Tondo, leaving the pueblos ablaze and large numbers of Spanish killed. The Spanish burst into the *parian* and started to attack the Chinese, who then killed a Spanish envoy in retaliation. This led to an appalling massacre, when 23,000 Fujians were slaughtered, and the Spanish soldiers looted Chinese property. A Spanish writer, Maulcar, wrote in his book entitled '*Sucesos de las Islas Philipippines*' that the massacre was unnecessary.

There was no record in Chinese history that China had intended to invade the Philippines, and Spanish governor's response was clearly an over-reaction. In 1639, two Chinese ships loaded with goods sailed towards the Philippines. On the way, they were sunk by the Spanish. When the ship owners complained to the Spanish authorities, they claimed that it was a shipwreck. For some time, the Spanish rulers' treatment of the Chinese was very cruel and they conscripted the Chinese residents to forced labour in Calamba. The Chinese decided to revolt and formed volunteers to fight the Spanish. They occupied 22 towns and burnt down many churches. In 1604, the Spanish carried out another massacre, killing 24,000 people and destroying Chinese property worth 700,000 pesos. The Chinese in several other cities, including Manila, were also massacred. The third massacre took place in 1662, when they supported the Filipino revolution against Spanish rule. Subsequently in 1686, 1762 and 1820, the Spanish carried out another three massacres of Chinese. Despite such terrifying events, emigration of the Chinese continued. By 1850, there was no restriction on the outflow of Chinese from China to the Philippines. In 1839, there were only 10,000 Chinese, but by 1896 the number increased to 100,000. There could be more than 1.5 million Chinese in the Philippines today. During the time when the mestizo population was undergoing the pervasive influence of Spanish culture, China under the Ming and Qing administration treated all overseas Chinese with hostility and calling them deserters (逃难者), criminals (罪犯), pirates (海盜) and other disparaging names. They did not come to their rescue when the overseas Chinese were massacred in the Philippines, five times since 1603. The loss in faith in their motherland was what broke the camel's back. Many Chinese and Chinese mestizos lost faith in China. They chose assimilation into the Spanish culture since protection was not forthcoming.

## **Treatment of the Mestizos**

The Spaniards ruled the Philippines for 333 years, from 1565–1898. The colonial master transplanted their social, economic and political institutions halfway across the world to the Philippines archipelago.

They demanded that the native Filipinos swear allegiance to the Spanish monarch, instead of the village chieftains, called *datu*s.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Filipinos and the mestizos worshipped a whole pantheon of supernatural deities and divinities, but under the rule of the Spaniards, they were converted to worship only one God and were baptised as Roman Catholics as the scepter of the cross held sway over the archipelago. The Spanish friars wanted the Filipino inhabitants to become the 'arsenal of the faith' in Asia. The Roman Catholic faith was imposed on the mestizo population, influencing their culture significantly. The Spanish Catholic missionaries had in fact remodelled Filipino society akin to Hispanic norms of social etiquette, customs and language. The aggressive conversion effort which involved regular summon to morning mass by the clergy and religious indoctrination translated into culture. This was evident in the way they count, '*uno, dos tres*'. Family names such as De Cruz, Reyes, Santos and others reflected the depth of influence. The Church was an integral part of society as the former was engaged in every aspect of human existence, from cradle to grave.

The most interesting part of mestizo family life was the continuing struggle of the conflicting symbols of identity. The Filipino symbols continue to be espoused by the mother, while the Chinese symbols were largely dictated by the father. Chinese mothers were loved, while the fathers were respected. In the Filipino families, the mothers were not submissive. Discipline might have had been shared by both parents, but the major responsibility of child rearing would fall on the mother, and rather than the father, she usually commands greater obedience from the children. The house was always regarded as her domain and again her voice, not the father's, would predominate in the home. The father might have played a complementary but diminished role. Outside the home, the husband had few restraints. He was able to keep concubines or have a second home or even a life completely apart from the family, giving the impression of an unfettered husband with a subjugated Filipino wife. But at home, she reigned supreme and therefore the offsprings learnt from the mother to speak the Filipino language and behaved like Filipinos as the father conducted himself outside.



The influence of Spain was permanently embedded in Filipino culture. The Filipino people themselves had internationalised them, and this had catapulted the Filipino into the world of Spanish culture and civilisation today. However, the Filipinos accepted only the aspects of Spanish culture that fitted their temperament, like the fiestas that had become one of the most endearing aspects of life in the Philippines. Blended with Filipino indigenous lifestyle, it had become a Filipino cultural heritage. During the early days, the mestizos constructed their dwellings with lime and stone, covering the roof with tiles. The pillars, needed to support the upper storeys, were of bricks or of trunks and molawin. When the house was built, a crucifix blessed by a priest, placed on the finial completed the job. For clothings, the mestizo wore the Barong Tagalog, a Filipino costume for men, also worn by statesmen, tycoons and artists in all events of importance. Barong Tagalog had become the official wear of the President of the Philippines.

The well-assimilated Chinese mestizos spoke only Spanish and the Filipino language but not a word of Chinese. By the third generation, many had forgotten where their ancestors came from, having lost touch with their mother culture. However, even though there was clearly a weakening of the traditional Chinese culture in a Chinese family, many continued to be raised as Chinese, attending Chinese schools and also encouraged to participate in Chinese associations. As often happens, a good number chose a spouse of Chinese descent and thereby were reclaimed by the Chinese community.

However, because of their Filipino mothers, these Chinese mestizos remained more open to Filipino society than the average pure Chinese and all things being equal, the Chinese mestizos assimilation was seamless. Culturally very few identified with the Filipino community. Chinese mestizos would be accepted by the Chinese when they become culturally Chinese, i.e., when they learn to speak the Chinese language and followed Chinese customs. In the eyes of the Chinese community, they might have less standing than pure Chinese but were considered superior to the native Filipinos. Contrary to what might be expected, the Chinese mestizos do not constitute a cultural and social link between the Chinese community and Filipino society.

While 'filipinised', the Chinese mestizos often maintain business connections with Chinese businessmen and relatives but very few associate freely with both ethnic groups. While identifying with one or the other, they were also prejudiced about each other. Paradoxically, Chinese mestizos politicians in particular, were frequently more anti-Chinese than the native Filipinos. They wanted to demonstrate their loyalty to their Filipino brothers and to show that they had forgotten their Chinese origins lest they be considered less Filipino. Many Chinese mestizos who had become famous, such as Jose Rizal, Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmena Sr., were good examples of Chinese mestizos who took anti-Chinese measures when they came into power. The first time I was in Manila, I visited a 54-hectare, 100-year-old cemetery.

On my subsequent visits, I went there again, just to see if things had changed. It was still being managed by the Chinese Charitable Association, a veritable memorial to the local Chinese history, housing many of the communities most historic personages. I saw the tomb of Dee Ching Chuan (李清泉; also known as Dee C. C. Chuan), who founded the first Chinese bank in Philippines, the China Banking Corporation, in 1920. He was a key force in the repealing of the 1921 Bookkeeping Act introduced by the Americans when they took power from the Spaniards, which required the Chinese community to submit their books of ledgers in only three languages, English, Spanish and a native language. Dee took the law to court and declared it unconstitutional and won, winning accolades within the community. There was also the tomb of a person called List See Tong (烈士堂), built in the early 1950s in honour of the Chinese community leaders who were executed by the Japanese during World War II. Another was of Dy Hock Khe, which housed the leader of the committee campaigning for a boycott of Japanese trade in the Philippines; Yu Yi Tung, editor of the *Chinese Commercial News* and Carlos Palanca Chen Qianshan. There, the Chinese also honoured one of the leading Filipino heroes, General Jose Ignacio Paua (刘亨赍将军), who migrated to the Philippines from China. The tomb of Mah Mon Luk (马蒙禄) the self-professed 'Mani King', whose proverbial rags-to-riches story easily made him one of the most colourful Chinese

characters back in 1950s was also there, besides other reminders of Chinese participation during World War II. Numerous memorials were built to commemorate the anti-Japanese guerrillas who pledged allegiance to either the Guomindang or the Communist factions. By far, the greatest among them was that of General Young Kwangson, the Chinese Consul General of Manila. He refused to collaborate with the Japanese government, which resulted in his execution, along with his loyal staff who stayed with him till the end, suffering the same fate he did. The Chinese cemetery had become a constant talking point for Filipino politicians, especially during elections, when they would criticise the Chinese for exploiting the Filipinos.

However, after the election, they would approach the Chinese for political funding. During the *Cheng Beng* season (a period when Chinese pray to their ancestors) mass visits were conducted. The tombs, built by rich Fujinaneese businessmen, looked like a housing estate with magnificently built houses for the dearly departed. The building of beautiful tombs to accommodate dead ancestors, some big enough to accommodate several dozens of families has continued. Some even installed air-conditioning and special room to play *mah-jong* (麻将; a popular, noisy game of chance, played with small rectangular tiles) rendering them subjects of ridicule by critics. Competition among the Chinese to build grander 'tombs' for their dead, to show off their wealth, had become a bone of contention and an insult to the man-in-the-street, trying to eke out a meager living. What was the impetus for the building of these luxurious tombs (公墓) of the Chinese? History has it that during the second half of the 19th century, there was a serious plague in Manila and thousands of Chinese died. Unfortunately, they were not allowed to be buried in the Christian cemetery as non-Christians. Regarded as foreigners, their dead had no resting place. In 1870, a Chinese capitan named Lin Wang (林旺) took pity on his compatriots and purchased a piece of land, turning it into a graveyard from the Chinese. Later in 1878, another Chinese capitan Yang Zun (杨尊) bought more land and constructed the tomb and established the Chong Fu Tang (崇福堂) memorial. The earlier tombs were not lavish but as the Chinese grew in wealth, so too did the burial grounds. Then in the 1970s, the

Chinese associations in charge of the tomb bought another piece of land of 125 hectares and the place became a world attraction and tourist centre.

## **The Spanish and American Heritages**

My impressions during my first visit to the Chinese cemetery was the strong influence of the Spanish on the Chinese-Filipinos. Spanish lavishness was no secret. As an example in the earlier section on Chinese cemetery, manifestation of wealth through the display of magnificent tombs for the dead abound. Such excesses had become part of the culture and in that sense, the Chinese mestizos had overtaken their Spanish colonisers in their opulence.

The mid-19th century elegance witnessed a change and was replaced by comfort in the houses of the rich. The new middle-class followed the model of Hispanic-Spanish culture as they were firmly entrenched in the many *pueblos* or towns that sprung up to meet the needs for accommodation. From the graceful structure of the delicately carved furniture of the interior, the homes of the mestizo revealed a flavour of the Spanish culture.

Bowring, the British officer on a visit to Southeast Asia to look after British interests, had this to say on his visit to Manila, 'almost every pueblo has some dwellings larger and better than the rest, occupied mainly by a mixed race of Chinese mestizos'.

The mestizos acquired wealth and spent them lavishly, making themselves arbiter of fashion, customs and style of living. The Chinese mestizos tended to dominate not only the economic and social but also the political leadership. By the turn of the 19th century, the frequent occurrences of names of Chinese mestizos in the cabeza of gobernadorcillo lists for the provinces reflected considerable assimilation of the elite by the Chinese mestizos. Through American colonialism, the Chinese and mestizos began to embrace democratic liberalism and learned to verbalise their feelings through arguments and debates, speaking their minds. From the Americans, they were seduced by the notion of freedom of speech, i.e. the right to speak, write and publish their beliefs. They became more aware of their legal rights and in

some ways, surpassed their American colonisers in the way they expressed and made themselves heard.

After centuries of Spanish domination and American colonisation, the Filipino-Chinese and Chinese mestizos began to lose contact with Asian culture, especially Chinese culture and civilisation and only those who made the extra effort, would have some semblance of Chinese-ness left in them. In many ways, the Filipino-Chinese population had become the least 'Asian' in mannerism and demeanour. Compared to other 'mixed-blood' Chinese in Southeast Asia, where the influence of Confucianism could still be found, in the Chinese mestizos, this influence was almost non-existent today. Critics had described them as 'bananas', yellow on the outside (skin colour), white inside (mentality). The Americans, in colonising the Philippines, became beholden to the wealthy Chinese and Chinese mestizos, who funded the development of the lumber, sugar and tobacco industries that made the Philippines one of the richest in Southeast Asia during their era.

### **Cultural Delegation of 1963**

In 1963, I led a cultural delegation to Manila to invite them to take part in a Southeast Asia Cultural Festival in Singapore. Manila was then a thriving metropolitan hub of one million people. I had observed that there was not much of a city planning, which was largely because the Spanish built a set of communities surrounding the walled city of Manila called Intramuros, one of the largest and oldest walled cities in the Far East. Following the Spanish era, there was some semblance of city planning south of the Pasig River done by the Americans. I saw numerous old churches, some dating back 300 years. We went to the Museum which displayed sunken treasure from one of the Manila galleons dating back to 1600 and visited Rizal Park, as a mark of respect to Jose Rizal, the country's national hero. When the sun was about to set, we went to Manila's famous Baywalk, where we experienced one of the most breathtaking sunsets of the world.

Long-distance public transport included buses, usually packed, and the jeepneys. Tricycles, pedicabs and pedicabs with side cars

attached, pedalled by humans, were used for short distances. Manila had a large Chinatown, located north of the Pasig River and comprised parts of Binondo and Santa Cruz. Chinatown had three Chinese-style friendship arches. Under the Chinese calligraphy of the signs hanging above its narrow streets, there was a lively area of small apartments and typical Chinese tea shops and restaurants, herbalists and apothecaries, gold and jewelry stores. The thing that captured my attention were passengers on *kalesas* (horse-drawn carriages), which were still in use, clip-clopping along the streets.

During the festival, Singaporeans had a glimpse of Filipino dances performed at the National Theatre situated on the River Valley Road. Filipino ethnic dances were ancient in origin, contemporaneous as it was performed by a variety of ethnic groups throughout the 7,100 islands in the Philippines. Filipino dances were gracefully performed and one could see the strong Spanish influence in the costumes. The Singapore audiences were thrilled by the ‘tinkling’ bird dodging bamboo traps performed by beautiful Filipino girls. I remembered watching the performance of the bamboo dance when one girl had her foot struck by the bamboo. She went on, despite the pain, and after the performance, I immediately instructed my staff to drive her to the hospital. The festival was an excellent opportunity for Southeast Asians to have an exchange of culture during such festivals.

## **Mestizo Names**

The Mestizos retained the name of their Chinese fathers, making transliterated names from the Chinese ideograph as Co (哥; meaning elder brother) for example, from such surnames as Tan (陈), Lim (林), Yap (叶) and Ong (王) combining them to become Tanco, Limco, Yapco and so on to form their Filipino surnames. Another way was to create a Filipino name by combining parts of the full name of the Chinese father. For example, taking the full name of a Chinese father, Tee Han Kee (郑汉淇), the mestizo son might decide to create a new name Teehankee. The same applies to the proliferation of names with Chinese and later romanised into forms like Yuzon, Limkao, Limcuaco and Leongson. This explains the presence of numerous Filipino names

that end in combinations and computations, such as Sychanagco, Angangco, Tantoco, Tanchanco, Tantuico, Tanlayoo, Ongsiako, Soliongco, Yupgnaco, Tanco, Yangco and so on. Chinese mestizos who embraced the Catholic religion were likely to acquire Spanish names upon baptism; for example, Fr. Jesus Merinco. It was not unusual for the mestizo descendant to drop the Chinese part of the name and use only the Spanish part as time went on. The descendant of Jose Castro Ongchengco might possibly be simplified to Castro. An example was Antonio Osorio, father of Francisco Osorio, one of the 13 martyrs of Cavite. His origin name was Tan Kim Ko (陈金哥). The naming of the baptised Chinese mestizos after their godparents was also common during the Spanish regime. Among the first to assume the name was Chen Qianshan, who was the *gobernadorcillo* of the Gremio de Chino in the last quarter of the 19th century.

The well-known surnames in the Philippines were: Ke (柯), Hung (洪), Kung (龚), Chiang (江), Fang (方), Wang (汪), Weng (翁), Tung (董), Yang (杨), Tien (田), Ch'en (陈), Yao (姚) Hu (胡), Yu (虞), Kung (宫), Lai (赖), Liu (刘), Tu (杜), Hsu (许), Lu (吕), Kao (高), Chi (纪), Lin (林), Hsiao (萧), Yeh (叶), Shen (沈), Yu (尤), Chang (章), Chang (张), Yen (颜), Ting (丁), Bai (白), Kuo (郭), Ma (马) and Chin (金).

There was a general feeling of kinship associated with flesh and blood among members of the same clan and they consider themselves *tung Tsung* (同宗) or belonging to the same ancestry.

## **Intermingling of Culture Between Chinese and Filipinos**

The Filipino social environment had given birth to a new generation of Chinese-Filipinos who had confidently accepted their identity as Filipinos, yet remain proud of their Chinese heritage. The Chinese community maintained 15 Buddhist temples in Manila and their popular deities of their home villages were worshipped in most homes and associations. Those most frequently mentioned in Manila were Guan Gong (关公 — the god of war and patron deity of Chinese secret societies), Guan Yin (观音 — goddess of mercy), Tu Ti Kung

(土地公 — traditionally, village tutelary god and keeper of the records and in the Philippines, the protector of merchants), Ma Tsu Niang (妈祖娘 — goddess of fishing and seafaring). Ancestor worship and their rituals were still widespread. One gets the impression that the Chinese no longer take much stock in these practices and beliefs, yet they would not take chances by abandoning them for fear of the evils that might befall them, a sign of the deeply entrenched Chinese superstitious beliefs in their psyche that was still very much a part of them.

Although they take pride in their roots and ancestry, their bonds had been transferred to their country of birth and their future was with the Filipino nation. The blending of their customs and traditions shows how different cultures and religions coexist harmoniously. This was demonstrated clearly in a striking and uniquely Chinese-Filipino practice of displaying the religious images from the different faiths side by side. In many temples, the image of the Virgin Mary takes on the name of Guan Yin (观音) — the Goddess of Mercy. In some temples, the image of the Daoist god was placed in the centre of an altar with the figure of Buddha placed on the left and the image of the crucified Christ, on the right. There were many Chinese-Filipinos Catholics, yet they retain their faith in the many Chinese gods of Daoism and Buddhism. Many Chinese-Filipino Christians lined the graves of their dearly departed with colourful paper money on the tombs, burned incense and gold paper money as well as offered food to the dead. At home, pictures of dead grandparents or parents were placed atop the family altar, between a Santo Nino or a Virgin Mary statue and a Buddha figure. Religious tolerance in the practice of Catholic faith in the Philippines had allowed it to absorb elements from other cultures. Catholicism had become localised and indigenised and in some cases sinocised, especially with Chinese folk traditions. The different gods or saints, to the Chinese mind, coexist peacefully and harmoniously in the Philippines.

## **Religious Syncretism Among the Chinese**

The Chinese, the Filipinos and the mestizos have great ingenuity and imagination in syncretising their religious beliefs. One unique evidence



of religious syncretism was the worship of the Virgin of Caysasay as the Chinese goddess Ma Tsu (妈祖), regarded by Chinese seamen as the Goddess of the Sea in China and worshipped throughout the Chinese world. The image of the Virgin of Caysasay was garbed in traditional costume but placed in a Chinese temple at a traditional Chinese altar, with incense, divination tablets, joss sticks and food offerings. On the birthday of Ma Tsu or other ceremonial days, a traditional Catholic procession was held after high mass, officiated by a Catholic priest. The manner and customs observed in revering an image representing two distinctly different religions was seldom seen in other parts of the world. One cannot imagine this happening in Indonesia or Malaysia either.

One example of this phenomenon was found in the city of Batangas, about 120 km south of Manila. The Virgin of Caysasay, a manifestation of the Catholic Virgin Mary, was displayed in the centre of a Chinese temple, but prayed as the Chinese goddess Ma Tsu. This temple was built completely in Chinese traditional style with dragon motifs and carved stone pillars and arches with a Ma Tsu signboard.

Since the end of the war, thousands of Chinese residents of Batangas towns like Lipa, Tanawan and Rosario, where the community were in relatively large numbers, had gone to this temple to pray to Ma Tsu on November 28, her birthday. Devotees would put up Chinese opera performances and organise banquets, burn paper money and offer fruits and food to their beloved Goddess.

What makes the annual celebration of Ma Tsu fascinating was that the organisers invite a Catholic priest to say a special mass in front of the temple. The priest would speak in both English and Tagalog. The Chinese devotees, holding candles, march along with the Catholic float for a roughly two-hour procession.

In Manila, it was a usual sight to see Filipinos going to a Chinese chapel instead of a Catholic church to worship. There was a Chinese temple in the Chinese cemetery called Zong Fu (宗付) which displays symbols from different religions. In the Tondo district in Manila, there was a temple called the Temple of a Thousand Buddhas, built by a Chinese seer, So Chiao-yee (苏石园), who preaches universal

religion — Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, Hindu — all enshrined among his thousand Buddhas. According to So, all gods were the same under heaven. This temple, which started as a small chapel called the Santo Seng Kong (三多神宫) church was popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Even former President Marcos frequently consulted So for his ‘divine advice’.

Another interesting and unique evidence of religious syncretism was the worship of a strict Catholic image, Jesus of Nazareth, in the traditional Chinese manner. An image of a black Nazarene was found in the town of Capalonga in southern Camarines Sur. This image was worshipped by non-Christian Chinese from all over the country. The Chinese gave it a Chinese name, Po-Ong-Sian-Si (保皇山寺) which was a Fujian word, meaning, The Lord Angel. Filipinos Catholics too, worship this image, in the hope that their prayers would be answered faster.

## The Culture of Food

Filipino dishes had found their way to the Chinese tables in restaurants and at home. The use of chopsticks was fast vanishing in Chinese restaurants. In the past, Chinese restaurants would automatically place chopsticks on the table and one had to request for fork and spoon. Today, the reverse was true because even Chinese, especially Chinese mestizos, find chopsticks cumbersome and difficult to use.

In a dress and observations of customs, it was easier to distinguish between a Chinese and a Filipino. But in rituals such as birth, marriage and death, the Filipino customs prevail. Even when it comes to food, the Chinese technique of cooking food had caused a fusion of Chinese-Filipino taste. The variety of *pancit-miki* (面奇), *misua* (面线), *mami* (肉面), *bihon* (米粉), *Lomi* (焗面), *sotanghon* (山东粉) and processed foods from soy beans — *tokwa* (豆干), *taoho* (豆腐), dried condiments like shrimps or *hebi* (虾米), banana flowers or *kimchamchay* (金尖花), and favourites during Filipino feasts like *siapao* (烧包), *siomai* (烧卖), *goto* (牛肚), *batsoy* (肉汤) and *lumpia* (润饼) gave rise to a fusion of Sino-Filipinos taste.

## Sino-Filipino Vocabulary

Other than the words mentioned above, there were many Filipino words which derive from the Fujian dialect. The word *am* was spoken exactly the same as the Fujianese word, meaning rice broth. Other Tagalog words for foods were *bihon* (rice noodle), *bimpo* (face towel), *guya* (young cow), *heko* (dark sauce from salted shrimp), *hibe* (虾米; dried shrimps), *petsay* (白菜; Chinese cabbage), *tito* (猪肚; pigs' tripe); family members were addressed as *inkong* (我公; grandfather); *inso* (我嫂; sister-in-law) and other miscellaneous words like *lawin* (hawk), *lithaw* (plow), *puthaw* (斧头; small axe) *susi* (key) as well as words describing measurements such as *kilo* (kilometres) and *losin* (dozen). Other Tagalog words include *sabun* (soap), *lobu* (ballon), *isyo* (stamp), *goma* (rubber), *ipoh* (towel).

The Filipinos had also used words originating from Chinese words such as *Sangley* to describe Chinese, *tinghoy* (灯火), *bakyak* (木屐), *Tsa* (茶), *Ginto* (镀金), *Tanso* (铜), *Diko* (二哥), *Sangko* (三哥) and *kuya* (姑爷). There were 381 Tagalog words traced to Chinese.

The Chinese had also taken up Filipino words such as *baka* (might be), *maski* (even though), *masta* (just so), *pelo* (but), *sige* (okay), *dalaga* (unmarried woman), *boksing* (boxing), *opi-sin* (office), *pasko* (Christmas), *sil-yo* (stamp), *ta-ma-ko* (tobacco), *li-sensiya* (license) and *pian-sa* bail). Through centuries of interchange and interaction, each strand of these influences had been snugly interwoven into the native culture that it was no longer distinguishable as Chinese but had become part and parcel of what constitute Filipino today.

## Conflict Between Mestizos and Chinese

In the history of the Philippines, the relationship of the Chinese mestizos *vis-à-vis* the pure Chinese as well as the Filipinos was not always pleasant and harmonious. In fact, there were times when such relations were characterised by varying degrees of discrimination, friction and antagonism. It was difficult and almost impossible to find out when the earliest Chinese mestizos were born, what their attitude was

to the Chinese and Filipinos, as well as their influence in relation to Chinese-Filipinos during the early years of assimilation. But one thing was clear, converting to Christianity made it easier for Chinese to marry Filipino girls.

In the Philippines, the Chinese acted as wholesalers and retailers of imported European, American and Asian goods, distributing them in the provinces. Besides this, they acquired their position as governors of urban areas. Some Chinese became processors of Philippines agricultural produce. Others replaced the mestizos in coastal wide trading. The Chinese had a monopoly in construction work and the employment of coolie labour. They asserted themselves in retail trading while some others established import and export firms like those of the Northern Europe and Northern America in Manila.

During the 19th century, due to the strong economic competition and pressure coming from the Chinese, the most anti-Chinese were the Chinese mestizos. Several prominent Philippines historians had pointed out that although mestizo landholdings proved very lucrative, retail competition engendered animosity between the Chinese and the mestizos. Competition over control of agricultural exports and the growing importance of Chinese for the Spanish coffer exacerbated this animosity.

The important factor that marks the great difference between the Chinese and the mestizos was their sense of patriotism towards the Philippines as nationalism grew in the country. The mestizos viewed the Chinese with suspicion, with the eyes of a nationalist and increasingly, the voices of Filipino nationalism saw the Chinese as 'parasitic aliens and colonial collaborators'.

In the late 19th century as the mestizos got richer, they had the opportunity to further their education in Europe and America, exposing them to the doctrines of nationalism as well as anti-colonialism. Filipino nationalism was engendered in part by economic competition between the Chinese and the mestizos. An example of this antagonism toward the Chinese was the ironic story about the Philippines national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, someone with Chinese blood himself. When Rizal was exiled to the town of Capitan in Mindanao, he reportedly quarrelled with a Chinese and in his letter to his mother

said that he would rather forgo his daily necessities than buy supplies from the local Chinese store. His family had to send his supplies all the way from Manila.

The reason for the pro-Philippines mestizo and their anti-Chinese sentiments lie in the combined influence of Catholicism, Spanish culture and their Filipino mothers. The mestizos were brought up mainly by their Filipino mothers. Their Chinese fathers who left Chinese families in China, had to make periodic visits to their homeland, leaving their mestizo children behind. This situation was further aggravated when the Spanish authorities carried out the mass expulsion of the Chinese from the Philippines. There was also the problem of language and cultural barrier between the Chinese and their mestizo offsprings which did not endear the children to their Chinese fathers.

The 18th-century expulsion edicts gave the Chinese mestizos the opportunity to enter retailing and the skilled occupations formerly dominated by the Chinese. The removal of legal restrictions on Chinese economic activity and the competition of new Chinese immigrants, however, drove a large number of mestizos out of the commercial sector in the mid-18th century. As a result, many Chinese mestizos invested in land, particularly in Central Luzon. The estates of the religious orders were concentrated in this region, and mestizos became lessees of these lands, subletting them to cultivators. A portion of the rent was then given by the *inquilino* (tenant) to the friary estate. Like the Chinese, the mestizos became moneylenders and acquired land when debtors defaulted. By the 19th century, anti-Chinese movement had developed once again, this time it was an expression not of Spanish fears but of economic concerns on the part of the mestizos and the Filipinas. After 1850, the growth in size, distribution and economic power of the Chinese brought about a competitive situation *vis-à-vis* the mestizo and Filipino enterprises which had been developing since 1750. The anti-Chinese sentiments also included certain cultural bias on the part of the mestizos. There was an attempt to break the power of the Chinese in the retail trade, and they wanted to replace the Chinese coolies with the native urban working class which was growing in Manila. The anti-Chinese movement became nationwide for the first time.

At this juncture, the Chinese began to turn to China for protection and asked for a Chinese consulate, but the Spanish authorities refused to support the move. In a sense, the anti-Chinese movement in the 1950s and 1960s could be traced to an earlier period of anti-Chinese movement, that of the period of 1850–1898. By the late 19th century, prominent mestizo families formed a significant pillar of the Filipino elite, often competing with the Chinese. The landed gentry in particular swore allegiance to their Spanish ancestry. The ‘*Ilustrado*’, as they were known, managed to obtain higher education from abroad and entered into the law and medical professions as the economy expanded. They were particularly receptive to liberal and democratic ideas. In the Philippines, the mestizos could be divided into three categories. The ‘*First Chinese*’, whose descendants were mostly either the Chinese mestizos or have integrated into the local population formed the first category. The largest group of Chinese Filipinos in the Philippines belonged to the ‘*Second Chinese*’ category, descendants of migrants in the first half of the 20th century, those who came between the Manchu revolution in China and the Chinese civil war. This group accounts for most of the ‘full-blooded’ Chinese. The ‘*Third Chinese*’ were the most entrepreneurial and had not totally lost their Chinese cultural heritage in its purest form and therefore were the most paradoxically misunderstood or feared by the ‘*Second Chinese*’ and the ‘*First Chinese*’ groups, most of whom had lost their entrepreneurial drive and had adapted much of the laid-back culture of the Filipino society.

By 1880, there were around 120,000 mestizos out of the total Philippine population of over two million. Many became landowners, especially after the Chinese began to return in greater numbers after the 1850s and re-established their dominance in the retail trade.

## **The Katipunan Revolt (卡蒂布南政变)**

Unlike the Chinese in Malaysia, who were disinterested in local politics and who regarded themselves as aliens, the Chinese, and especially the mestizos, took an active part in Filipino politics and were involved in the Filipino revolution. Besides Jose Rizal, the founder of

the Filipino nation, several Chinese and mestizos became famous because they participated in the Katipunan revolution. One of the prominent figures was Jose Ignacio Pua. Two forces converged in the late Spanish Philippines: agrarian unrest and nascent nationalism. While the rebellion of 1896 was essentially a peasant revolt led by petty agrarian elites, it resembled a war of national liberation under the nominal leadership of the nationalist Katipunan Society, a society formed by a segment of wealthy and foreign-educated Indios and mestizos who were advocating reform in the Spanish administration. This movement started after the arrest, exile and execution of Jose Rizal, the hero of the Filipino national revolution. The Katipunan society secretly owned arms and ammunitions and conspired to overthrow the Spanish regime. When war was declared in August 1896, reinforcement arrived from Spain and Cuba and brutal measures were taken to suppress the katipuneros. One of the members of the Katipunan who was persecuted by the Spanish was a Chinese tycoon, Francisco Osorio, whose Chinese name was Queh Sok Liew. He was shot dead at St. Philip by a firing squad. There were several prominent Chinese businessmen who had supported the Katipunan revolution such as Mariano Limjap and Teiesforo Chiuidian.

### **The Spanish *Cabercilla* System for Ruling the Chinese**

During the Spanish rule of the Philippines, they introduced the *cabercilla* system for the Chinese. The system provided a matrix of personal and professional linkages for the Chinese and was the foundation of community cohesion. It consisted of a vertical network of patronage relationship that manifested many similarities with networking strategies of Chinese in the mainland. A *cabercilla* (*towkay*) was usually a Chinese wholesaler of imports and exports established at Manila or other ports where he dealt with foreign business houses. He usually had several agents scattered about the provinces, who ran stores as retail outlets for the imported goods that he had acquired and advanced to them on credit. At the same time, the agents bought up crops for the *cabercilla* for wholesale to foreign houses. This kind

of organisation offered a number of advantages over previous systems of purchasing and marketing in the provinces. Before 1850, the collecting of goods for export was handled in a decentralised fashion by mestizos from the provinces. The mestizos did not have a proper system of distribution, and the Chinese therefore went to the source of production; thus began the clash between the Chinese and the mestizos. There was a rice dealers' guild among the Chinese as early as the 1720s. But after 1750, the mestizos had taken over rice wholesaling and it was the mestizos who, on the basis of crop loans, acquired rice-producing lands in central Luzon. The *cabercilla* system consisted of a small number of wealthy merchants and manufacturers whose wealth and social connections defined them as *cabercillas* (or little headman). Under these wealthy patrons were a much larger number of Chinese who were tightly bound to the *cabercillas* by kinship, loyalty and obligation. For the *cabercilla*, an extensive network of clients and connections enhanced his own prestige, emphasised his superiority status and expanded his business opportunities. The Chinese *cabercilla* in the Philippines was comparable to the *cabang* in Indonesia and the *towkay* in Malaysia. They were at the apex of society. Essentially, they were the collaborators of the colonial masters, serving as tax farmers and government contractors closely linked to the Spanish colonial government and the Chinese government. The system facilitated the later-Spanish economic reforms as the 'wholesaler of imported goods and exporters of Philippines products.

The main Philippines export products were abaca, tobacco, lumber and a variety of tropical fruits and the imports, Chinese tea, silk, porcelain, lacquer and most important of all coolie or labourers. The *cabercilla* was primary guarantor and financier for a network of merchants, agents and apprentices and by these means control nearly all the retail trade in the islands and also monopolise key export sectors. Through these two roles, the *cabercilla* had the largest impact on the Philippines economy. In addition to the two roles, the *cabercilla* were also the pivot of Chinese immigration networks in the Philippines. The *cabercilla*-agent system provided a ready-made structure for the Chinese commercial expansion in the late 19th century. American firms had hired Chinese *cabercillas* to act as the middlemen so as to



avoid certain discrimination policies of the Spanish government and to take advantage of the *cabercillas*' networks. The Spaniards had almost exclusively depended on the *cabercillas* to supply Chinese labour for public works projects. The *cabercillas* were able to control the coolies through the agency of the secret societies and thereby dominate the majority of the Chinese collie force. Besides allowing the *cabercillas* to deal with import, export as well as supplying labour, the Spanish also gave them revenue farming contracts, allowing them to collect municipal and provincial taxation, weights and measures, livestock slaughtering, opium and indulge in cockfight entertainment. Such facilities were granted by the Spaniards because they were trying to gain the favour of the *cabercillas* because the Manchu rulers in the Qing dynasty were also bestowing medals and Mandarin titles for them to gain back their loyalty. The Spaniards feared that if the *cabercillas* became too China-oriented, it might undermine the colonial enterprise. Thus, till the end of the rule, the Malacarang resisted Beijing's attempts to establish a Chinese consulate in Manila. On the part of the *cabercillas*, they played both sides by cultivating relations with both sets of political power. Supported by the Spaniards, the *cabercillas* had a virtual monopoly on the financial and social capital within the community.

The presence of the *cabercillas* made life a little difficult for the mestizos. In the Philippines, the mestizos were physically, economically and socially isolated from the new arrivals of Chinese immigrants. They expanded their business into land holding, which were once almost in the monopoly of the mestizos, driving the mestizos in the countryside and away from the major port cities where the *cabercillas* reigned supreme. Because of the competition from the *cabercillas*, the mestizos had to diversify into agriculture which took them decades to consolidate. This competition from the *cabercillas* compelled the mestizos to strengthen their bonds with the Indios especially after the Spanish had abolished the legal distinction between mestizo and Indios in 1880. The *cabercillas* lifestyle was also different from the mestizos. They distinguished themselves by wearing Chinese Mandarin costumes and indulged in opium smoking, gambling and womanising, giving a poor impression of themselves to the mestizos.

Chinese *cabercillas* were one manifestation of a type of Chinese elite that appeared throughout the colonial period of Spanish rule. They dominated all the Chinese huiguans (Guilds) which the Spaniards called gremiode Chinos.

### **The *Gobernadorcilla* — The Capitan (甲必丹)**

The Spanish also introduced a system similar to the Capitan system introduced in Java by the Dutch. It was termed *Gobernadorcilla*, a sort of leader for the Chinese, giving an additional stake in the colonial system. They allowed all the *cabercillas* to elect their own *gobernadorcilla* and the criteria for the post was wealth. Only Catholic, Spanish-speaking Chinese *cabercillas* who paid at least 60 pesos in taxes could legally run for this position. There was slightly more than 1% of the Chinese community eligible for this post. The *gobernadorcilla* was assisted in his duties by a first lieutenant, a comptroller and a chief constable, all of whom were drawn from the pool of Chinese *cabercillas*. Since it was under the complete control of the Chinese elite, the office of *gobernadorcilla* could better serve elite interests in maintaining a cohesive and hierarchical Chinese community. Controlling the Tribunal which was the small claims court made the *gobernadorcilla* supreme jurist in the economics of the Chinese community. Given the administration, taxation, juridical and law enforcement jobs of the *gobernadorcilla de los Sangleyes*, the office replicated many of the functions of a county magistrate back in China. The officers wear Mandarin dress and adopted the Chinese bureaucratic style in their official correspondence as a clear indicator that this parallel was not lost on them. Finding that the mestizos were getting nationalistic especially some of those who returned from Europe with anti-Spanish ideas, they tried to make use of the Chinese *cabercillas* and *gobernadorcilla* to counter-balance their hold on power. As the *cabercillas* and *gobernadorcillas* were only interested in currying favour with their Spanish masters for the purpose of making money and not interested in politics, they began to arouse the animosity of the mestizos.

## **The Chinese Consulate (中国领事馆)**

During the Spanish colonial days, the Spaniards refused to allow the establishment of a Chinese consulate to represent the Chinese. They claimed that most Chinese had been assimilated into mestizos and their interest were looked after by their own Capitans. In 1864, China signed a Trade Treaty with Spain and in 1877, Spain signed a diplomatic agreement with Cuba allowing Chinese immigrants to enter Cuba. But Spain refused to sign a similar agreement with China to allow China to establish a Consulate in the Philippines. In the same year, after Britain allowed China to set up a consulate in Singapore, the Chinese in the Philippines presented a mass petition to Madrid, asking the Spanish rulers to allow the setting up of a Chinese consulate. But it was turned down. It was not until the American occupation of the Philippines that the first Chinese consulate was established in 1899. The Americans realised the contributions which the Chinese could make with their commercial enterprise. This American acknowledgement of Chinese commercial eminence was echoed in an equalisation of tax laws affecting business. However, during the American rule, the Philippines Congress passed a legislation limiting Chinese activities in the commercial sector. The first effort was the Book-keeping Act, passed by the Congress in 1821. This act required business records to be kept in one of three languages English, Spanish or one of the Philippines dialects. It was clearly directed at Chinese merchants, whose records could not be examined by revenue collectors. The Book-keeping Act was contested in the U.S. Supreme Court (which was then the highest court of appeals for Philippines cases) and declared null and void. Thereafter, several bills directed at limiting Chinese economic influence were initiated in Congress: none could garner a majority. As the livelihood would be affected, they would either be nullified by the courts, circumvented by the American Congress jurisdiction, or vetoed by the Filipino President.

The Qing government for the first time provided consular protection against excessive and inequitable taxations, insecurity of property and the extortionate policies of Spanish officials. In 1900, the Qing administration set up a Chinese Consulate in Manila and dispatched

an envoy named Lai Yong Yau (黎荣耀) as Consul General. This opened the floodgates to Chinese government involvement and intervention in the affairs of the Filipino-Chinese. The Consulate sets up the Overseas Chinese Charitable Association (华侨善举公会) — Gremiio de Chinos — to look after the Chinese hospital and the cemetery, which were the two welfare organisations in Manila. Under the auspices of the Chinese Consulate, the Manila Chinese Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1904 to represent Chinese interests. Since then, the pattern had been established for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to occupy the leading economic and political role in the Chinese community.

The years of American administration were years of great economic opportunity and success for the Philippines, especially the mestizos. For people who had schooled themselves to survive under so many forms of oppression, the American method of rule by law and the creation of relatively honest and efficient administration afforded equal rights to do business and to own property were a real boon. The Chinese, especially the mestizos, capitalised on such opportunities.

## **Chinese Education in the Philippines**

The education of Chinese children in the Philippines was largely neglected during the Spanish colonial era. It was not until the 20th century when the Americans took over control that Chinese education was allowed under the more liberal approach to education. The first Chinese school, the Anglo-Chinese School (now Tiong Se Academy) was established in 1898, followed by the Hoilo Chinese Commercial School (now Hoilo Commercial High School) in 1912. The second Chinese school was set up in Manila through the dominant association within the Manila Chinese community, the Shan-Chu-Kung-So (相助公所) The Chinese Charitable Association. This body had also been responsible for the Chinese cemetery and later for the Chinese hospital in Manila. Its directors founded the Chung-his Hsueh-hsial (中英学校) Chinese School. The school offered a standard Chinese curriculum and soon placed added emphasis on English

instruction and book-keeping. The school was a direct response to the American administration's lenient attitude towards private education. The first Chinese High School, Philippine Chinese (now Philippine Cultural High School) was established in 1923. In 1914, the Philippine Chinese Educational Association was formed to raise funds for the support of these Chinese schools. This Association subsequently played an important role in the administration and management of the schools. By 1940, there were at least 45 Chinese schools in the Philippines, half of them situated in the Manila area. Because of the growing number of Chinese school students who could not return to the mainland for their study, many of these schools added an English curriculum and sought recognition by the Philippines government under the Commonwealth Act. This enabled students to matriculate at the Philippines universities. By 1973, when the Philippines Constitution was adopted, there were 153 Chinese schools all over the country. To implement what was in the constitution, the authorities 'filipinised' all Chinese schools. President Marcos issued a Presidential Decree 176 to prevent Chinese schools from becoming vehicles to propagate a foreign ideology and to inculcate patriotism, loyalty and a true spirit of citizenship among aliens residing in the country.

The Chinese Schools Association spearheaded by the President of Chiang Kai-shek College, Dr. Pao Shih-tien (包思田博士) led a quiet protest against the 'filipinisation' moves. Since 1976, when the 'filipinisation' policy was implemented, all Chinese schools had changed the names of their schools, dropping the word 'Chinese' and stopped referring to the Chinese as '*huagiao*' (华侨). The study of Chinese was limited to 40 minutes a day, and all curricula had to be approved by the Ministry of Education. The standard of Chinese began to decline because of this policy, and Chinese schools gradually disappeared. The existence of the Chinese school however did not make much impact on the Filipino-Chinese, especially those who had become mestizos. The setting up of Chinese schools was originally meant to remind the mestizos that they were Chinese and must follow the Chinese tradition of speaking Mandarin, and behaving like

Chinese. But, after 300 years of Spanish indoctrination followed by American influence, it was not easy to change the tide.

Many Chinese found great difficulties in reading and writing Chinese. Very few read the Chinese newspapers, the Chinese language periodicals and publications other than those prescribed texts in school. Only a handful of the Chinese high school graduates was interested in pursuing further studies in colleges and universities in Taiwan, or in mainland China. Those who found their way to Mandarin-speaking campuses in Taiwan had a hard time adjusting. On the whole, Chinese language education seemed destined to disappear in the Philippines as the interest of the younger generation in Chinese continues to wane. An increasing number of Chinese born in the Philippines were inclined to be 'more Filipino than many Filipinos'. This has been the trend with the early Chinese-Filipino mestizo who preferred to identify himself as a *Visayan*. He spoke very little Chinese and might not even had a Chinese friend. In contrast, the 'pure' Chinese followed Chinese tradition religiously. The typical Chinese youth in the Philippines would have little knowledge of folklores of his ancestral origins and would think of the Philippines as his true home. With this perception of the Philippines as a land rich with opportunities for self-advancement, he would not for a moment think of returning to his ancestral home in China. Yet, today, 90% of the Chinese-Filipinos were Filipino citizens, while very few Filipinos had good knowledge of Chinese. The standard of Chinese education had gradually deteriorated. Graduates of Chinese schools in the 1950s might still manage to read and write Chinese, but from the 1960s onwards, the language skills gradually became poorer. In the past two decades, as the standard of Chinese education turned from bad to worse, many Chinese tried to look for ways to fund projects to improve Chinese language education. Seminars on Chinese language and culture were organised and teachers sent to Taiwan and China for skill improvement. But little progress was made. The stumbling block of trying to promote Chinese education was the refusal to re-orient the curriculum of Chinese schools to become more accommodating *vis-à-vis* the filipinisation of educational content and the promotion of Chinese consciousness among students. They must realise by now

that Chinese language instructions must be relevant in the Filipino environment and the students must be taught to accept the unique identity of being Filipinos of Chinese descent. With the present increase in importance of China as an economic world power, the Philippines government was trying to salvage the quality of the Chinese language schools.

Teachers were imported from mainland China and Taiwan to revive the standard of Chinese in Chinese schools. Summer educational trips to China and Taiwan were also being organised yearly to expose the Chinese-Filipino children to a Chinese environment. They were paving the way to set up Chinese studies in universities and colleges in the belief that knowledge of Chinese among the Chinese in the Philippines would be a deciding edge in dealing with the world's new economic power. Historically, the process of becoming an accepted Filipino citizen was fraught with obstacles, especially with the negative perception of the Spanish masters as well as the native Filipino towards the Chinese. There were also discriminative measures against the Chinese of the Filipino government. Under the Filipino laws, the Chinese were disadvantaged with regard to trading and business in general. Even professions were nationalised. Chinese citizens were not allowed to take the bar examination nor audit accounts as certified public accountants. Neither were they able to become civil engineers. Medical schools had limited quotas when it came to Chinese citizens. Such discriminatory measures had helped to make the pragmatic Chinese choose filipinisation over remaining as 'pure' Chinese.

### **Clan Associations (宗亲社团)**

The pattern of leadership and organisation of the Chinese community remains somewhat obscure during the Spanish colonial period. For a long time, Spanish controls made it very difficult for the Chinese to openly organise and maintain any kind of association. Except for the Cantonese Association (广东会馆), which dated back about 100 years, very little was known about how the Chinese associations started and how they functioned. The Cantonese Association founded

in the 19th century to rally the Cantonese people of Manila served as a coordinating agency to handle the affairs of the Cantonese. It also acted as a court of appeal for the mediation of difficult cases when agreement could not be reached at the lower level. The Association was less elaborate, more stable and enduring because they were an integrated part of the clan. Today, the role of the Cantonese Association appears to be weakening because of the many duplications of functions with other associations and because of factionalism. An earlier Fujianese counterpart, the Fujianese Commercial Guild (闽商会馆), also disappeared without leaving a trace. The Cantonese come from seven *hsien* or counties, immediately west and near the estuary of the Pearl River. They were Taishan (台山), Kaiping (开平), Xinhui (新会), Enping (恩平), Zhongshan (中山), Nanhai (南海) and Fanyu (番禺). The Fujianese were predominantly from Nanan (南安), Huian (惠安), Dongan (东安), Anxi (安溪) and Yungchoon (永春). They were mainly from Quanzhou (泉州). There were also Fujians from Quemoy (金门) and Gulangyu (鼓浪屿). The clan associations were known as Tsung Ching Hui (宗亲会) or Chia Tsu Hui, translated literally, it means family association. Two societies, the Long Chun Hui or the Gentlemen's Society, and the Chang He She (长和社) or Society of Lasting Harmony, dated back to the first quarter of the 19th century. They appeared to be mutual-aid societies. The famous Triad Society, which spread throughout Southeast Asia also made its appearance in Manila. The first Chinese guild formed in Manila was the Kong Fu Zi (孔夫子), associated with the teaching of Confucius or a guild to follow the spirit of dedication to Guan Gong (关公).

Then, the early migrants started the Hua Hiao Chi Kung Suao (华侨致公所) or Overseas Chinese Benevolent Society, the predecessor of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Schools Association. It was started in 1870 and was known as the Gremior de Chinos or Chinese Guild. It was started by a privileged group of Christian Chinese who were granted a piece of land for charitable purpose. Intimately connected with this organisation was a China-born Chinese, Chen Chien Shan (陈遵贤) who was later awarded the Grand Cross of Isabel and known to the Spanish as Don Carlos



Palanca. Some associations had secondary shrines dedicated to more distinguished ancestors. The Su (苏) association, representing those with the surnames of Su, maintained a shrine in its hall to honour a female ancestor known as Sufujenku (苏夫人姑), who died unmarried in Jinjiang (晋江) at the time of Emperor Wanli (万厘) of the Ming dynasty. She was known as the guardian of the clan's home territory, enemy soldiers and bandits having been 'known' to have restrained by a white banner carrying her name. Her festival falls on the first day of the 12th moon. Some clans put up the Guomindang flag and a picture of Dr. Sun Yat-sen as well as Chiang Kai-shek. The Li clan gave out 100 scholarships a year to needy students amounting to more than P10,000.

The clan associations constitute a potentially strong factor of conservatism and of Chinese identification in the Chinese community. But generally, clan associations had little appeal for younger Chinese, who preferred the more active programs of athletic associations and social clubs. Immigrants had joined the clan association because of sentimental and practical reasons. Isolation from the Chinese mainland had served to strengthen the clan associations which had become, as it were, a substitute home for homesick Chinese.

### **The Chinese Press (华人报社)**

Under the Spanish rule, the press was an instrument which the Spaniards would not allow non-governmental bodies to handle. Thus, it was completely controlled exclusively by the government and the Church. There was never any regular Chinese publication in the islands. Although the first two Chinese papers in the Philippines, *Hua Pao* (华报) and *Min Pao* (民报) appeared during the Spanish regime, both lasted only a year. But when the Americans took over, a string of Chinese newspapers made their presence. The American principle of freedom of the press and public opinion enabled diversified activities of a free press, which contributed to the development of education, including Chinese education. Historically speaking, the emergence of the early Chinese newspapers coincided with the tide of rising Chinese nationalism and the Filipino struggle for independence. The Chinese newspapers helped to

awaken the feeling of Chinese nationalism just as the Filipino newspapers helped to arouse the sentiments for independence. The Chinese case was seen clearly in the Yek Yeu Sin Po (益友新报) of 1899 and the Bin Yek Po (民益报) of 1900, both resulting from the propaganda of the reformists in China during the late Qing dynasty. The Chinese newspapers concentrated on reporting events in China and in promoting reforms and supporting the revolution to overthrow the Manchus. For example, the Kong Li Po (公理报), a party organ of the Guomindang established in 1912, published materials supporting Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution and condemned the decadent Manchu leaders. By the 1920s, 23 Chinese newspapers, 18 Chinese weekly and bi-weekly magazines appeared in various parts of the Philippines such as Cebu, Lloilo and Davao. However, most of them were short-lived because of lack of readership and trained editors. Most of the Chinese had become mestizos and could not read Chinese. Before the outbreak of World War II, only three Chinese newspapers survived, the Kong Li Po (功立报), the Chinese Commercial News and the Fukien Times.

## **The Japanese Occupation**

Unlike Thailand, where Thai leaders like Phibun Songkhram collaborated with the Japanese and joined hands with the Japanese to suppress the Chinese, in the Philippines, the Chinese, the mestizos and the Americans cooperated to fight a concerted war against the Japanese aggressors. During the Japanese occupation, Philippine also had a Filipino 'collaborator', Jose Laurel, who was a mestizo, but he took the post not so much out of free will, but 'to safeguard the interest and safety of his countrymen'. As the Japanese were invading an American colony, the Americans naturally fought back and they were assisted by not only the local Chinese community, but also the mestizos and Chinese guerrillas from mainland China. In this respect, China and America were fighting on the same front against the common enemy.

In the anti-Japanese struggle, both the Guomindang as well as Communist guerrillas cooperated with the Americans. The Guomindang had a branch in the Philippines but the Communist did not. The

outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 was the turning point in the Chinese left-wing activities in the Philippines. After setting up a united front between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist party in China, the leftist movement in the Philippines became more open and enjoyed greater freedom with the consent of the American rulers. The Chinese left-wing movement was also linked with the Filipino and international Communist movements backed up by the Soviet Union.

The first group of the anti-Japanese guerrillas in the Philippine were formed in Luzon in 1942 with the name of Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon, usually known as the Hukbalahap or simply Huk (抗反同盟). From August, 1942, the Fuks also organised among the youths an organisation of daredevils referred to in Chinese as 血干团. Among the most prominent underground guerrilla groups were the Chinese Overseas Wartime Hsuehkan Militia (华侨战时血团), the Philippine Chinese Youth Wartime Special Services Corps (菲律宾华侨青年战时特别工作总队), the Chinese Volunteers in the Philippine (CVP; 菲律宾华侨义勇军), The United States Chinese Volunteers in the Philippines (US-CVP; 美国-菲律宾华侨义勇军), the Pek-Pek 399 Squadron (迫击团 399 部队), The Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Force (Wha Chi; 菲律宾华侨抗日支队), the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese and Anti-Puppets League (菲律宾抗日反奸大同盟) and the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Volunteers Corps (菲律宾抗日锄奸义勇队). The first five were of Guomindang political persuasion, while the rest were leftist. Like their Filipino counterparts, the Chinese guerilla conducted liquidation missions, sabotage, gathered military intelligence and helped prisoners escape. They published several propaganda materials on the war efforts, gave information on the war and on the actual war situation and exploited news on Japanese atrocities to promote patriotism. They earned the respect and gratitude of the Filipinos when they showed their readiness to sacrifice their lives to fight the Japanese. From the beginning of 1943 onwards, the Japanese soldiers started military campaigns of larger scale in central Luzon to exterminate the guerrilla resistance. In March, 10,000 Japanese soldiers and Filipino constabulary surrounded the Cabio-Arayat-Candaba region, which was the guerrilla area of the Huks. Battles of larger scale were fought

from September 1944 onwards involving 2,000 Huks. Then the landing of the American troops at Lingayen, Pangasinan in January 1945 further inspired the resistance spirit in the Philippines. The Huks operated as an independent unit most of the time, although it cooperated with the other Filipino guerrilla units in many of its operations. The Huks also cooperated with the American guerrilla outfits in attacking the enemy. However, after the war, the actions of Chinese guerrillas especially the Huks began to arouse much concern among the Philippine authorities. In 1945, they began to carry out a series of assassinations against those who collaborated with the Japanese. It was estimated that they had liquidated more than 200 “traitors”.

The most notable incident was the assassination of Lim Tian-teng (林天登), who was a Guomindang member, the contributor to the Chiang Kaishek war chest before the war. These assassination movements also involved secret societies active in the Philippines. In 1946, President Roxas launched his ‘iron fist policy’ to suppress the revolt in 60 days. He used heavy artillery, armored cars, tanks and airplanes but without success. Then in 1950 when President Magsaysay was Defence Secretary, he effectively crushed the Huks, whom he thought were presenting a threat to the security of the country. The Philippine government was aware that the Chinese resistance movement in the Philippine was mainly inspired by a patriotic feeling towards China rather than empathy with the Filipinos. At the end of the Japanese occupation period, many Chinese guerrilla forces made it clear that their ultimate aim was to fight back to China and help the liberation of their motherland. Moreover, the Chinese guerrilla teams had expressed an unwillingness to join the Philippine army when the war was almost over. The commanders of the Huk had also voiced opposition against joining the Philippine army. There was also report that the Russians participated in the Huk movement during the fight against the Japanese. Under such circumstances, Filipino leaders had no alternative but to take action against them. When President Magsaysay became president, he successfully wiped out the Huks.

## **Post-Independence Stringent Measures Against Chinese**

Like the Thai Prime Minister Phubun Songkhram, several of the Filipino presidents starting from Elido Quirino, followed by Magsaysay and Gracia took drastic economic measures against Chinese merchants and industrialists during the period of 1949–1961. They nationalised most of the businesses owned by Chinese. The Parliament held meetings 100 times a year and at each meeting passed laws to filipinised Chinese enterprises such as sawmills, poultry farming and even vegetable growing, making life difficult for the Chinese. By 1954, during the Magsaysay regime, even retail businesses dealing with consumer goods were filipinised. Just like in Thailand though, the Chinese found a way out by becoming as Filipino citizens, or using the names of their wives or children who were citizens to do business. It was not until 1965, when President Macapagal came into power, that the filipinisation programme came to a halt because they realise that the policy did not produce the desired results. Then when Ferdinand Marcos came into power, he carried out a campaign to facilitate the naturalisation of Chinese as Filipino citizens. This enabled more than 600,000 Chinese to become Filipino citizens. They were no longer considered the minority in the Philippines but became part and parcel of the country. This was the first time they acquired the same rank as the mestizos. Marcos' broad-minded policy encouraged a large proportion of the Chinese to become Filipino citizens. In 1972, when President Marcos declared martial law and carried out a pro-business policy, it enabled Chinese enterprises to grow even faster and it saw an expansion. Marcos also visited Beijing and established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

## **Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (菲华商联合总会)**

Historically speaking, the Spanish authorities had set up various bodies such as Gremio de Chino in the 18th century and then the Comunidad de Chino to oversee the Chinese immigrants with an

aim to control them. In the 19th century, the Philippine Chinese appealed to the Qing government for the first time for consular protection against excessive and inequitable taxation, insecurity of property and the extortionate policies of Spanish officials. When the Chinese Consulate was set up in Manila, it opened the floodgates to the Chinese government's involvement and intervention in the affairs of the Filipino-Chinese. Under the auspices of the Chinese Consulate, the Manila Chinese Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1904 to represent Chinese interests. Since then, the pattern had been established for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to occupy the leading economic and political role in the Chinese community. Under such circumstances, the Chinese businessmen had to pull their resources together and form an umbrella organisation called the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (the Federation; 菲律宾华商联合总会) to protest their own interest. Since 1954, the Federation boasted a membership of 55 Chambers of Commerce and 85 chapters spread throughout the islands of Northeast Luzon to Southwest Mindanao. The Federation presented an image of cohesiveness, homogeneity and resistance to discrimination and assimilation. It provided an arena for the playing out of political and personal rivalry among the Chinese.

The immediate postwar years saw the intensification of intra-community politics in Manila. Such intro-community politics which were submerged during the Japanese occupation resurfaced when patriotic, anti-Japanese Chinese fought out with those who had collaborated with the Japanese. Assassinations were rife in Manila's Chinatown where 'collaborators' were executed by death squads. Some of these assassinations were just a pretext to get rid of political rivals. On a different level, there was also a contest for power between pro-Guomindang Chinese and the traditionalists within the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The Guomindang wanted to grab power and extend its influence and control over the Chamber. Between 1945 and 1953, they became bolder in wanting to wrestle power from the traditionalists such as Dee Ching Chuan and Sycip Albino. The warring situation culminated in the formation of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 1954,

which effectively replaced the General Chamber as the leading Philippine Chinese organisation. The decline in the dominance of the General Chamber of Commerce and the rise of the Federation occurred in the context of mounting pressures from the Philippines political environment. In a postwar situation, the Chinese were confronting two concurrent political movements, first, the movement for nationalisation and second, the anti-Communist campaign. The first movement was supported by national politicians, most of whom were mestizos, and second, spearheaded by the right-wing military forces, determined to quell the Huk Rebellion led by the Communist Party of Philippines. One of the key issues was related to nationalisation involving the Retail Trade Nationalization Act of 1954. The Federation came into existence when Macapagal became President. He was known for having summoned leaders of the Federation to help curb price increases in commodities. Federation members still remember Macapagal's 'legend of the pie' in September 1962. The President had said, 'There are two ways of increasing a person's consumption of a pie. One was to grab somebody else's share of the same pie. The trouble with this method was that it makes someone's gain somebody else's loss. The other method was to make a bigger pie and give everyone a chance to gain and where one's gain need not mean somebody else's loss'. Having said that, the President was in favour of the second method. He was talking about his economic program to create a better living for all people, both the Filipinos as well as the Chinese.

### **Anti-Chinese Sentiments**

Most native Filipinos resented the Chinese and saw them as exploiters, abusive employers, shrewd businessmen and tax evaders. The prevalent belief was that the Chinese controlled the economy. It was popularly known that the Ilocano-speaking regions of Luzon were the most anti-Chinese, whereas the Muslim Filipino of Mindanao were considered in the main as very tolerant. The people of the central Philippines, generally considered easy-going, harbour less anti-Chinese animosity and expressed it less than the Tagalog speakers of

Manila. It remains to be seen if these popular perceptions were a social reality. In the past few years, especially during election times, some candidates or interest groups would deliberately fan anti-Chinese prejudices by campaigning against candidates with 'short' surnames. In 1996, campaign posters such as '*sa Intsik na nga ang ekonomiya, pati ba naman ang politika?*', meaning 'the economy already belongs to the Chinese, even politics too?' This was led by Jun Ducat, a businessman who purportedly heads *Kalipi Kadugong liping politipino* or Filipinos of the same blood and race. The irony was that this anti-Chinese campaign was targeted at candidates who had been Filipinos for three generations and who nobody would acknowledge as ethnic Chinese — like the Manila Major Alfredo Lim or the Congressman of Tarlac and uncle of President Corazon Aquino, representative Jose Yap.

## **The Pagkakaisa (协进会) and Integration**

By 1970, a group of young Chinese college graduates deeply concerned about national and cultural identity formed the Pagkakaisa, whose primary objective was to convince the Philippine Chinese that integration was the only solution to solving the 'Chinese problem'. These young ethnic Chinese had undergone college education in mainstream Philippines universities and were in the process of shedding the communal outlook that Chinatown had bred. They were convinced that the Philippine Chinese had to break away from the ghetto mentality and actively worked for acceptance by the larger host community through greater involvement in social and political life of the Philippines. The Pagkakaisa called for the granting of citizenship to the Philippine Chinese on the basis of *jus soli* and focussed its efforts on lobbying the 1971/72 Constitutional Convention, to make the necessary constitutional provisions. The organisation recommended that the government should supervise the Chinese schools more closely through the Department of Education and Culture.

They were very much against the filipinisation of Chinese schools. Between 1972 and 1975, the Pagkakaisa circulated newsletters and



participated in community projects designed to involve Philippine Chinese youth in the problems of the Filipino majority. The granting of mass naturalisation by presidential decree in 1975, to a large extent, resolved the issue of citizenship, removing the core problem around which the Pagkakaisa had been organised. The Kaisa's ideal appeared to receive more support in the provinces, where the villagers were more integrated and acculturated than those in the Chinatown. But, unlike the Capitan style of leadership that characterises the Federation and the Chamber, the Kaisa's leadership was neither based on wealth nor on personal connections with the power centres. It therefore does not enjoy the prestige or political power that derives from those qualities. Nevertheless, its successful articulation of communal sentiments on the kidnapping issues had brought it into the limelight and was seen to be playing a leading role in society. It could be considered as a 'third force' in moulding public opinion in the Philippines society.

### **Kidnapping — The Tsinoys Make a Stand**

One major problem facing the Chinese in the Philippines was that they had been targets of kidnapping. The Filipino gangsters found an easy way to get rich by kidnapping wealthy Chinese merchants. Since 1992, there has been 100 kidnapping cases of Chinese businessmen. The rich had to employ bodyguards for their children when they go to school. For the first 18 months from January to June 1991, there were about 90% of abductions but for the three months from June to September, there were 46 kidnapping cases reported. At one point, abductions were occurring almost every day. On September 17, 1992, two 19-year-old Chinese men (Kenneth Go and Myron Romos Uy) were tortured and murdered even after the ransom demanded were paid. The Chinese community had been badly traumatised by the menace of kidnappers. The 'kidnap-for-ransom' gangs had not spared even women and children, and contrary to what was popularly believed, many of the victims came from the middle-class families. The present criminals seem to deliberately avoid really prominent families like country's top tycoons as they usually go out with bodyguards and take more elaborate security precautions.

The criminals had learnt a lesson that it would be more risky to kidnap rich people. They do not even abide by the gentleman's rule of releasing the victims once the ransom was paid. They seemed to concentrate on Chinatown for their targets. It became worse whenever there was an election. Recently, kidnapping had become a nightmare for most Chinese. As a result of such insecurity, hundreds of Chinese businessmen had migrated to other countries. In Manila, the business sector had become quite restive. The Philippine National Police admitted that the kidnapping incidents had increased by 55%. Kidnapping had become an almost everyday occurrence. The problem of kidnapping had become a great leveler that affected not just the Tsinoy (Chinese mestizo) community but even the Filipinos as well. There had been talks about taking more drastic actions like in Cotabato — closing down schools and businesses even for a day. Two days in 1993 marked a milestone in the ethnic Chinese community *vis-à-vis* kidnapping. On January 13, for the first time in history, business in Binondo, a Chinatown district, and in Banane, Quezon City, Chinatown shut down for half a day because 25,000 Tsinoyes attended a funeral protest march to commemorate a 15-year-old victim, Charlene Sy. This was followed by a public indignation rally jointly participated by Filipinos on February 16, 1993, where placards, slogans and streamers were used to denounce the futile campaign to fight kidnapping. It was a breakthrough with the Tsinoyes, who dared to come out in the open, with streamers identifying their groups and taking a blatantly political action to call attention to the problem of criminality. It was also a significant milestone in that the public rally was jointly organised and executed with the Filipinos. More than a hundred Filipino and Chinese groups (including the traditionally conservative ones) joined the demonstration. The rally succeeded in forcing the government to look into the problems of law enforcement *vis-à-vis* kidnapping. President Fidel V. Ramos, for the first time called for a massive revamp of the Philippine National Police with four generals relieved of their positions. Lately, the Tsinoyes continued to call attention to the festering problem of criminality through the media, local and foreign and through dialogues and conferences with the government for reforming and strengthening the entire criminal

justice system. It had demonstrated clearly the degree of politicisation of the younger generation of Chinese, compared with more than a thousand traditional organisations who came from the older generation.

### **Agapito Conchu**

A prominent member of the 13 Katipunans was Agapito Conchu, the son of Saturrino Conchu. He was part Chinese. His grandfather, Apolonio Conchu, was reportedly a Bionodo *gobernadorrcilla* for Chinese mestizos. He learnt music when he was young and played the violin as well as the organ and piano at the Binondo Church. He first worked in the printing shop of Salvador Chofre and later set up a photographic studio in Cavite. He loved music and the fine arts and composed songs. During the Exposition-Reginal de Cavite in 1892, he received a silver medal and a diploma of honour for his pictures and paintings. In September 1896, Alfonso de Ocampo, a member of the Katipunan, was arrested by the Spanish authorities and Conchu was named as one of the *cabercillas* of the local revolutionary group. He was arrested and found guilty of rebellion. Together with the other 12 Katipunans, he was executed by the musket. After confessing, each one was blindfolded and ordered to kneel with his back to the firing squad and shot. This was on September 12, 1896. His remains were now interred with those of the rest of the Cavite martyrs under the monument erected to their memory.

### **Carlos Palanca Chen Qianshan (陈谦善)**

Carlos Palanca was an elite from Fujian who was the first and leading *cabercilla*, later elected as *gobernadorocilla* representing the Chinese community in the Philippines. He was known as Chen Qianshan in the Chinese community. The Chinese community had, for some time, appealed to Beijing to set up a consulate in Manila to protect their welfare and interest, but their petitions had fallen on deaf ears, while the Spanish government would not support such a move. Carlos Palanca was the central figure in the campaign to establish a Qing

consulate in Manila. He was a skilled merchant with the gift of diplomacy. His motive for taking an active role in this campaign and the methods he employed had a profound impact on the early history of China's first consulate in the Philippines. He had used this campaign to enhance his prestige as a dominant *cabercilla* and further the interests of the Fujianese who were in the majority in Manila. He realised that a Chinese consulate in Manila would have jurisdiction over Chinese migration to and from China, and the *cabercilla* in charge would be able to issue official papers like visas and passports that were critical to the success of migration networks. These would be the cornerstone of a *cabercilla's* wealth and power. He was the archetype of a late-19th century Chinese *cabercilla*, able to play his cards well to please both the Spaniards as well as the Qing rulers. Born on June 6, 1844 in Tongan (东安) County near the border of Zhangzhou (漳州) and Quanzhou (泉州) prefectures in Fujian, Chen migrated to Manila at age 12, and worked as an apprentice in a relative's drapery shop. Within a few years of hard work and frugal living, Chen established his own business. By 1870s, in his early 20s, he prospered and became a *cabercilla*. He was initially involved in the textile business, but later diversified into agricultural brokerage, money lending and running cockfighting and opium monopolies, operating retail import and export business. The most lucrative business, was of course dealing with opium. In all his business, he depended on numerous migration networks to supply him with talents and goods. Chen was considered the wealthiest *cabercilla* in Manila.

It was estimated that he was easily worth one million pesos, a huge sum in those days. With wealth, he contributed a lot of money to Chinese charitable organisations and hospital and became known as a philanthropist. He also supported the funding of a Chinese newspaper and Chinese schools. He became a Catholic in the 1860s to enhance his influence with the Spanish. He was converted under the auspices of his godfather, a powerful padino, Colonel Carlos Palanca Gutierrez, whose name he adopted. Through his godfather, he gained access to a network of vertical and horizontal connections, which helped him expand his trade and social contacts and made him eligible to become a naturalised Spanish subject. Chen became a subject of

the Crown and received honours from both Madrid and Malacanang in recognition of his years of meritorious service to the Spanish colonial enterprise.

By 1870s, he was poised to become one of the most powerful and influential Chinese in the Philippines. In 1875, at age 31, he was elected *Gobernadorcilla de los Sangleyes*. He converted his business and religious connection into political capital when he was elected *Gobernadorcilla de los Sangleyes*. When Chen supported the Spaniards against the Filipino revolution, he was awarded a Medal of Civil Merit and the Grand Cross of Isabel the Catholic. Although he had also served the Americans, they were not as generous with their medals. In fact, Chen ran afoul of General Elwell S. Otis, commander of the American ground forces, by refusing to let the army billet troops in the Zhangzhou and Quanzhou Huiguan. Chen's decision to take the side of the Spaniards against the Filipino revolution was one of the reasons why the Filipinos hated Chinese. Chen even offered Aguinaldo's revolutionary government material assistance in exchange for rights to the opium monopoly. His wealth, social and political connections gained him respect, but at the same time, also made many fear and criticise him. One of the critics was Jose Rizal, who later became the father of the Philippines nation. In the novel *El Filibusterismo*, Rizal described the character of Quiroga, the Chinaman, based on his observation of Chen — 'a tacky and duplicitous opportunist'. Rizal was trying to convey the general Indio and mestizo antipathy toward the Chinese, men like Chen. He was a force to be reckoned with, and Rizal's portrayal of Quiroga was designed to incite an awareness of Chinese who were alien to Filipino nationalistic feeling.

It was in his role as the recognised leader of the Chinese community that Chen wanted to convince Beijing to establish a consulate in the Philippines. As early as the 1880, Chen and his fellow *cabercillas* had petitioned Beijing and approached the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, Zhang Yinhuan to establish a consulate in Manila. Although the attempts had failed because of Spanish resistance and lack of consistent support from the Qing authorities, the Chinese elite continued to explore the option and kept petitioning Beijing. Despite

some initial hesitation, the Spanish government finally relented and in July 1898, gave Beijing permission to establish a consulate temporarily in Manila. Ironically Manila, although nominally in Spanish hands, was under siege from the sea by Dewey's fleet and on land by Filipino troops under Emilio Aguinaldo, who had declared Philippines independence in early June. The Spanish Court was so disheartened by the humiliating series of defeats that they had neglected the Chinese request. On July 28, 1898, Beijing advised the Spanish governor-general that they had selected Chen Gang (陈刚) son of Chen Qianshan to serve as China's first consul general in the Philippines. When Don Carlos Chen died in September 1901, community leadership passed to another *cabercilla*. Streets were named in Chen's honour and his statue still graces the entrance to the Chinese cemetery he founded during the late-century epidemic. His daughter, Alejandra Palanca, married Emiliano Boncan, scion of another powerful Fujian merchant family, who in turn married a member of the leading mestizo family, the Limjaps. A change in the colonial regime did not mean a dramatic change in their elite status. His son Chen Gang, after a brief diplomatic redeployment, returned to Manila in 1900 to serve as interim consul and continued to be prominent in the Chinese community in Manila. He was given a subsequent post as a collector of funds for famine relief in China. In 1904–1905, he and other Chinese Zhang Zhongwei (张忠威), led the Xiamen boycott of American goods in protest against US Chinese exclusion policy.

### **Jose Ignacio Paua (伊格纳西奥·宝华 — 刘亨贲将军)**

Everyone who studied the history of the Chinese in the Philippines would have heard of a General by the name of Jose Ignacio Paua. Although the Chinese *cabercillas* and China-oriented, money-minded Chinese create a poor impression on the Filipinos and mestizos, there were many Chinese who volunteered and sacrificed their lives for the Filipino revolution. One such Chinese who became well-known in Philippines history was Jose Ignacio Paua, who was born in village of Lao Aun (南安) in Fujian on April 29, 1872. Pau's Chinese name was Liu Heng Bo (刘亨贲) alias Fu Xi (扶西). The



Jose Ignacio Paua

word 亨 translated into Spanish means Ignacio and 賻 is the exact translation of Paua. He had an uncle named Liu Yuan Zi (刘元系) who owned a steel mill during the Qing dynasty. He started working for his uncle at 18 and learnt a great deal about smelting. He married a girl in Nan Aun and after his marriage, his uncle moved to Manila. His father persuaded him to join his uncle in Manila at the age of 16, in 1972 — the year of the execution of Father Gomez, Burgos and Zamora. With three silver pesos in his pocket, the money given to him by the kind captain of the sampan, he roamed the streets of the Walled city, eventually crossing the Puente, finally reaching Tondo. There was indication that he did not enter Manila through the well-established migration network. Within a few years, he had become a blacksmith and trader. He soon became respected as a Chinese community leader though not a *cabercilla*. In Manila, Paua continued his association with the China secret society called the Tiandihui (天地会) which he had joined when he was in Fujian. By the late 1880s, he was already the leader of the tiandihui in Manila. He got in touch with some of the leading members of the Filipino revolutionaries. One of them was Emilion Aguinaldo (阿奎纳多) and cousin Antonia Jamir. When the revolution began, Paua joined and provided useful services helping them set up an

ammunition factory. He also recruited 3,000 Chinese troops from among the Andihui membership. They became useful to the revolution. He fought under the Filipino flag, first against the Spanish and later against the Americans. He was also able to provide a significant amount of cash and material that proved that he had the support of the Chinese community for a Filipino cause. By 1897, Paua was promoted to the rank of colonel.

He proved his worth to Aguinaldo by helping the general eliminate two of his main rivals in the movement, Andres and Procopio Bonifacio, leaders of the 1896 uprising. The two brothers were subsequently executed the following month. After the surrender of Aguinaldo to the Spanish authorities and the signing of the treaty of Biak-na-Bato, Aguinaldo was exiled to Hong Kong. Paua continued to embark on a fundraising campaign among the Chinese for the revolution. He successfully collected 800,000 pesos for the new Philippines Government after it came into power. In 1898, when relations between the United States and the Philippines went sour, Aguinaldo launched another insurgency and Paua was promoted as Brigadier General. However, the Filipino revolutionary forces were no match for the more powerful American troops and they were fighting a losing battle. Disillusioned and disheartened, Paua resigned from his commission in the rebel army and surrendered at Legazpu in 1900. After the amnesty of 1900, he returned to his new family and devoted himself to the peacetime profession of farming and business. Later, he dabbled in politics and was elected municipal president (now Mayor) of Manito, Albay. He lived a tranquil and happy life of a retired general. Paua said to his wife and children:

I want to live long enough to see the independence of our beloved country (the Philippines) and to behold the Filipino flag fly proudly and alone in our skies.

His wish was unfortunately not realised. He died of cancer in Manila in 1922, long before the establishment of the Republic of the Philippines.



## General Manuel Tinio

During the revolution against the Spanish, the youngest general was a Chinese named Manuel Tinio y Bundoc. He was born in Aliaga, Nueva Ecija, on June 17, 1877, and died in 1924. The Tinio family in the province of Nueva Ecija was the largest land gentry in Central Luzon if not the entire Philippines. It was a prominent and wealthy family which faded into insignificance immediately after the declaration of Martial Law. Tinio, like the Rizals, had Chinese heritage. Domingo Tinio was baptised and christened Chino Cristiano according to an archival document from San Fernando, Pampanga dated 1745. Juan Tinio had twin sons who were baptised in Gapan. Apparently, in 1750, he was described as a native Filipino. It appeared to suggest that his grandfather or an earlier ancestor was a Chinese from China. In April 1896, at the age of 18, he joined the Katipunan, and by August, he had mobilised his friends, relatives and tenants as guerrillas. He conducted raids, plundering Spanish detachments and patrols in Nueva Ecija.

In 1897, he was exiled to Hong Kong. In 1898, he sailed for Cavite on board the 60-ton contraband boat, Kwan Hoi, together with other revolutionaries, to join their Filipino leader. He was later appointed a General. In August 1898, the Spaniards surrendered.

He was credited with capturing the largest number of Spanish prisoners during the revolution, over 1,000 of them. He exercised both firmness and compassion in dealing with prisoners. In October 1898, he was appointed as the Commanding General of all Filipino forces in Northern Luzon and as Military Governor of the Ilocos provinces. Representing one of four regional commanders in the Republican Army, his private army became an armed unit of the Republic.

It is often said that Tinio had miraculously never suffered any even injury as he stood up to artillery fire. He had always attributed this to an amulet, '*anting-anting*' that he adorned only during confrontations and which otherwise is kept safe. Everyone respected him because he was fair to his subordinates and treated everyone equally, rich or poor. In politics, he had ardently supported Sergio Osmena,

the leader of the Nationalist Party throughout his political career. In later years, he went into business, founded a soft drink company and established a cattle ranch. He died at the age of 47, leaving a widow and 12 children as well as 2,200 heads of cattle.

### **Roman T. Ongpin (王彬)**

Another mestizo remembered in the Philippines was Roman T. Ongpin, son of a Chinese businessman. He was born in Nueva Street, Binondo Manila on March 1, 1882. He founded his store at Rosario street, naming it 'El.82' after the fateful year of 1882 when a cholera epidemic and a destructive typhoon swept through the islands. He started as an importer of paints on a small scale and became the biggest importer of paints, oil, art supplies and other accessories. His customers were famous artists and local painters who had trust in the quality of his products.

Ongpin was the first merchant to initiate the idea of 'fixed prices' and not overcharging his customers. He was appointed *Teniente I De Mestizos* (representative of mestizos) for Binondo for a term of two years. Although Spanish soldiers were entertained and supplied with food in his establishment, he secretly collaborated with the insurgents. He supplied them with funds and foodstuff, and his store became an outlet for propaganda materials. When the store was burnt, he received an indemnity and he paid 90% of the money as a contribution to help General Aguinaldo. During the revolution against the Americans, his activities were discovered and he was imprisoned in Fort Bonifacio in December 1900. He was later transferred to the headquarters of the American military and released in March 1901. His imprisonment by the Americans embittered him towards his captors. He never sold any item to them and he urged his children not to do business with them. On his deathbed, he requested that he be dressed in *Barong Tagalog*, the Filipino costume he loved. He died in 1912 of heart failure. His tombstone was sculptured with a Filipino motif of *sampagita* and *ilang-ilang* by Emilio Alvero.

In memory of Ongpin, the Philippines authorities renamed the Calle Sacrista Street as Ongpin street on September 17, 1915, and a monument was erected for him at Plaza de Binondo. Many present-day mestizos had become tycoons and many more Chinese mestizos had become famous, but it was not possible to cover them all in this book.

## **Leading Political Mestizo Chinese**

Filipinos had occupied important positions in the highest levels of the Filipino government, as we had seen so far. Many contributed a great deal towards the development of the nation. They were important in the Philippines society in the 19th century and played a big role in the 1898 revolution, and in the agitation for reform and the creation of the Filipino nation. One of the earliest and greatest of all was Jose Rizal, considered the founder of the Philippines nation. Carlos Romulo, one of Philippines's prominent Foreign Minister once said publicly, 'Many prominent Filipino leaders have declared that they have Chinese blood. I too have Chinese blood and I feel proud about it'. Romulo confirmed this when we met privately at ASEAN foreign ministers conferences in various cities. He estimated that at least 75% of the Philippines parliamentarians had Chinese blood and at least 20% of the Philippines population had Chinese ancestry.

## **Jose Rizal (何塞·黎隆尔) — Father of the Filipino Nation**

In the Philippines, the founder of the nation was a Chinese mestizo, Jose Rizal, considered the most distinguished and hero-worshipped by every Filipino. Rizal's great, great, grandfather was a true blue Chinese named Lam Co (柯仪南), whose parents were Siong-co and Zun-nio. Lam-co was a native of Siong-que, in the Jinchiang, QuanZhou district of Fujian. He left his ancestral home in the mid-17th century and came to Manila, possibly as an economic or a political refugee.



Jose Rizal

Lam-Co changed his surname to the Spanish 'Mercado' (market), reflecting his Chinese mercantile roots. This was an attempt to allay fears and animosity of the Chinese against the Spanish authorities. In 1849, Jose's father Francisco adopted the surname Rizal, suggested to him by the provincial governor, a friend of his family when Governor-General Narcisco Claveria issued an ordinance to force Filipino families to choose new surnames from a list of Spanish family names. Later, he converted to Roman Catholicism and was baptised at the age of 25 in the Parian church of San Gabriel in 1897. Following the custom of the other converts, he changed his name to Domingo Lam Co. Rizal's mother, Teodora Mercado (1927-1913) was a mixed-blood Filipino, an intelligent, well-read, courteous, business-minded woman who was also religious. She had studied in Manila at the girls' college the Colegio de Santa Rosa. She died in Manila in 1913.

Between 1872 and 1892, Filipinos who were settled in Europe began to experience national consciousness. Students attending the

European universities, together with the exiled *émigrés* liberals, formed the Propaganda Movement in 1872. The movement was organised for the purpose of awakening the sleeping intellect of the Spaniards. An outstanding Filipino physician, Jose Rizal, who was a scholar, scientist and writer, led this movement.

As a typical Filipino, Rizal has a mixed ancestry, with Malay, Chinese, Japanese and Spanish blood. Born in 1861 with a rather delicate health and a weak physique, he grew up into sturdy manhood through constant exercises. One of his favourite exercise was walking and horse riding. During his boyhood, he used to walk along the sandy shores of Laguna de Bay during summer twilights with his dog Usman. In later years, he became physically fit and was an expert *yoyo* artist, a good boxer, a judo expert, a hardy wrestler, a skilled swordsman, a sharpshooter and a splendid gymnast. His mother was his teacher who taught him the alphabet, Christian prayers and how to conduct himself. At the age of 18, Rizal started his studies at the University of Santo Tomas at Manila. Besides medicine, he was also interested in the Fine Arts and Literature. Later, he went to Europe for further studies, finished his studies in Madrid and specialised as an oculist at the famous University of Heidelberg at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Whilst studying in Spain in 1880, he helped stoke the smouldering fire of nationalism. Finding the group of brilliant young Indio and mestizo students still groping and lacking in effective leadership, he was able to transform their 'unformed sentiment' into the 'nationalist fervour of the years to come'. In 1891, he arrived in Hong Kong, where he lived and practised medicine. As a successful ophthalmology surgeon, he won many friends, including Chinese, British and Portuguese. One of them was a Portuguese physician Dr. Lorenzo P. Marques, who was a professor of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Shortly after Christmas of 1891, his parents, brother, sisters and brother-in-law, who had lost their lands and homes in Calamba, arrived in Hong Kong and lived with him. In Hong Kong, Rizal planned to establish a Filipino colony in North Borneo (Sabah). He visited Sandakan in 1892 and looked over the vast land which the British North Borneo Company was willing to lease to the Filipino settlers. Unfortunately,

General Eulogio Despujol, the Spanish governor general of the Philippines refused to allow Filipinos to migrate to North Borneo.

Thus, Rizal's dream of founding a 'New Calamba' in Sabah was not realised. Despite the failure of his colonisation project in Borneo, Rizal resumed his active participation in the propaganda movement. He led the reform crusade in the Philippines, knowing well that he was risking his life in doing so. In July 1892, he founded the Liga Filipina, a patriotic association of Filipinos with the aim of unifying the country against colonialism. His first article in the *Diariong Tagalog*, entitled *El Amor Patria* (Love of Country), he called upon his compatriots who had been disappointed with the Philippines state of affairs to love their country and sacrifice their time and spirit to save the country. Rizal's two novels completed in the 1880s, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, drew a profoundly touching potrait of the oppression and suffering experienced by his countrymen, but they were more than an indictment of the existing colonial system. *Noli Me Tangaere* was a proclamation of the creed of Filipino nationalism. *El Filibusterismo*, on the other hand, was a clarion call to awaken the people's sense of nationhood. His essay '*Indolence of the Filipinos*' stripped away the myth propagated by the Spanish writers that the Filipinos were by nature, lazy, without individual initiative and wanting in civilisation.

In 1892, returning to the Philippines, Rizal founded the Liga Filipina in the house of a Chinese mestizo Doroteo Ongjungco (王宗戈). The League was a movement aimed at forging a united Philippines into one compact and homogenous body Rizal wanted to create. Because of his anti-Spanish activities in Europe, he was arrested on his return to Manila at the age of 35, on board the ship that brought him from Barcelona, since Rizal had voluntarily enrolled himself as a military physician of the Spanish Army in the Cuba war. He was put in a cell where he had been imprisoned during the lawsuit against him. He was banished and put on board the steamer *Cebu*, which reached Dapitan and was exiled there until 1896, a period of four years. Whilst in exile in Dapitan, he offered his services as a volunteer physician to work in Cuba, where a revolution and a yellow fever epidemic were raging, and the Spanish Government accepted his offer. When he returned to Manila on board

the steamer *Espana*, he was immediately transferred to the Spanish warship *Castilla* to wait for a regular steamer to take him to Spain. In September 1896, while the Philippines revolution was raging, he was arrested. The news of his captivity spread to the Filipino patriots in Spain, England and Singapore. They tried to save him by seeking his release in Singapore on a writ of *habeas corpus* but the court refused the application on the grounds that the ship, *Colon*, in which he was detained, was carrying troops from Spain to Manila and was a warship belonging to a foreign country. On arrival in Manila, he was immediately imprisoned at Fort Santiago, where he spent his last and saddest Christmas. The following day, he was tried by a military court, accused of the crimes of rebellion and organising illicit societies.

The trial was a mockery. Despite lack of positive evidence, he was sentenced to death. Two days later, he was shot by a firing squad on the morning of December 30, 1896 in Bagumbayan. An hour before the execution, Rizal wrote a letter to his father and mother, begging their forgiveness and bidding them farewell. The execution was carried out by a military trumpet sounding the death march. He was dressed in a black suit and a black bowler hat, armed tied behind at the elbows. He was heavily guarded by soldiers with drawn bayonets and escorted by two Jesuits. There was a large crowd who witnessed the tragic event and when his body was riddled with bullets, they shouted: *Viva Espana* (Long Live Spain. It was a cry of Black Spain, the cry that sounded the downfall of the Spanish empire in Asia. Today, Rizal was regarded as a national hero by most Filipinos and there is a Rizal Day on 30 December as well as a Rizal Monument in the Rizal Park in Manila. There was a big flag in the Rizal Park, which symbolises Philippines's liberty and freedom. I paid my respect to Rizal Park when I visited Manila in 1963. Rizal was unique among the galaxy of world heroes. He was a remarkable blend of superb intelligence, noble character and versatile talent. No other national hero of any country possessed his God-given talents in arts and sciences. He was nationalist, a physician, poet, novelist, an essayist, dramatist, historian, painter, sculptor, humourist, folklorist, grammarian, educator, farmer, merchant, economist, surveyor, engineer, geographer, anthropologist, inventor and a sportsman. Rizal was a strong

advocate of nationalism. He was ahead of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who founded the Republic of China; Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) of India, Mustafa Kemal (1880–1938) of Turkey and other Asian leaders. He deserves the name of ‘Father of Asian Nationalism’.

## Jose Rizal’s Visit to Singapore

According to a book entitled, *The Life and Writings of Dr. Jose Rizal*, written by Robert L. Yoder, who traced Jose Rizal’s footsteps using his travel diary of 1882, Jose had visited Singapore on a steamship, when he was 21 years old, whilst studying medicine in Madrid, where he earned a degree. It was his first trip abroad, and Rizal had left secretly without bidding farewell to his parents. When he arrived in Singapore, he took a tour and drove all around Singapore. The book talks about his first impressions: English was the *lingua franca* and there were lots of shops everywhere. Rizal noticed the deformed feet of Chinese women. Rizal had met with the Maharajah of Lahore and described him as ‘an old stout man, respectable-looking and garbed in European style but wearing a sort of apron’.<sup>1</sup> He also saw the small bronze elephant in front of the old Parliament House, which was presented by the Thai King Chulalongkorn who visited Singapore in 1871.

## General Emilio Aguinaldo (阿奎纳多)

One of the towering figures of the Philippines Revolution was General Emilio Aguinaldo (1869–1964), a dashing freedom fighter who was the undisputed leader of an embattled nation, and with the support of the people, became the President of the First Republic of the Philippines, Asia’s first democratic republic. Emilio Aguinaldo was born in Kawit on Holy Monday, March 22, 1869, the seventh of the eight children of *kapitan* Crispulo Aguinaldo and *kapitan* Trinidad Famy (Chinese mestizo from Noveleta). At the age of three, he

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<sup>1</sup>The Life and Writings of Dr. José Rizal. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://joserizal.info/Reflections/singapore.htm>.



contracted smallpox and almost died. But he miraculously survived. Young Emilio, nicknamed Miong (蒙), learned the alphabet from his great-aunt and attended the public elementary school of his town. In 1878, his father *kapitan* Carlos died when he was nine years old. As the family was busy with managing the family farm, they sent him to Manila, where he studied at the College of San Juan de Letran. He quit school because he yearned for the loving care of an affectionate mother. He returned to Kawit and helped in the farm. At 17, his mother had him appointed as *cabeza de barangay* to evade military conscription. During the Spanish colonial days, youths were subjected to conscription to fight Spanish wars in Mindanao and Sulu, Marianas, Formosa and other places. To help his mother support the family, Miong made trading voyages to Mindoro, and the Sivayan Islands where he bartered manufactured goods with deer, cows and other livestock that he could sell in Manila. He found that he could make more money as a trader than a farmer. During this period, there was growing agitation against the Spanish government and the propaganda movement was in full swing. Jose Rizal was urging the government to grant reforms that would remedy the evils of Spanish rule.

Miong gave up trading and participated actively in the nationalist movement. In 1896, he fought in the revolution and scored decisive victory against the Spanish army. His victory at Imus enhanced his fame as a combat commander. Patriots came to see him as ‘general’ instead of ‘*kapitan*’. His most brilliant victory was won in the Battle of Binakayan in November 1896, when he repulsed a powerful Spanish offensive under the personal direction of Governor-General Ramon Blanco. He issued a manifesto urging his people to fight for independence. He became an undisputed leader of the Revolution. However, his initial feat of victory was overpowered by the stronger Spanish replenishment and he lost out. Hostilities ceased because of the conclusion of the ‘Pact of Bial-no-Bato’, and the Spanish government promised to grant amnesty and reforms and to pay a war indemnity of P1,700,000 and General Aguinaldo in return agreed to go on voluntary exile to Hong Kong. This pact proved to be a short truce. Aguinaldo and his colleagues accepted the Spanish gold and lived in exile in Hong Kong, but they had no intention of stopping the

revolution permanently. The Spanish authorities likewise were insincere, for they did not keep their promise to grant reforms and a general amnesty. Moreover, only 600,000 pesos of the promised 1,700,000 pesos were actually paid to the revolutionists. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 gave General Aguinaldo the opportunity to return home. On May 19, 1898, he landed in Cavite and promptly proclaimed the renewal of the revolution. He helped the Americans fight the Spaniards because he was led to believe that the Americans came as 'redeemers' and that the United States would recognise the independence of the Philippines.

On June 12, 1898, General Aguinaldo proclaimed the independence of the Philippines in Kawit. This historic event was highlighted by the reading of the 'Declaration of Philippines Independence' by its author, Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista and the hoisting of the Filipino flag. On June 28, 1898, General Aguinaldo established the Revolutionary Government and set up the capital in Bacoor. Filipinos and the Americans at first fought together as allies against the Spaniards, but later Filipino-American relations soured because the Americans had no more need for Aguinaldo's military aid and began to show their true colours as imperialists. By virtue of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, the Americans insisted on imposing her rule over the Philippines. In defiance of the Treaty, the First Philippines Republic was inaugurated in Malolos with General Emilio Aguinaldo as President. This first democratic republic in Asia was based on a well-written constitution. On February 4, 1899, the American sentry fired and killed a Filipino soldier who was crossing the bridge linking San Huan and Manila. This shot ignited the Filipino-American war, which started in 1899 and ended in 1902. The Americans pursued President Aguinaldo, who was accompanied by his staff and escorted by a brigade of riflemen. Eventually, President Aguinaldo reached the lonely town of Palanan in Isabela Province, where he established the last capital of the First Philippines Republic. From there, he issued secret directives to the guerrilla commanders in the different provinces by means of trusted courtiers. He was finally captured in 1901 and that led to the fall of the Philippines Republic. As prisoner of war, Aguinaldo was brought to the Malacanan Palace, where he was

courteously received by American Military Governor General Authur MacArthur (father of General Douglas MacArthur). In April 1901, he swore allegiance to the United States and the following day, retired to private life. For many years after the war, he lived as a country gentleman in Kawit, supervising his lands and attending to the affairs of the association. In 1935, he came back to politics and ran as the official candidate of the National Socialist Party against Senate President Manuel L. Quezon of the Coalition Party. He lost the election and since then shunned ‘dirty politics’. It was Aguinaldo’s wish to live to age 113. But fate foiled this hope and as he got older, he became sickly and was almost blind. Due to his lingering illness, he was unable to complete his revolutionary memoirs. He died in 1964 at the age of 95. A large crowd was present to pay their last homage to him, including high-ranking government officials, religious dignitaries, militarists, diplomats, civic leaders, business tycoons and his surviving comrades in arms.

### **Ramon Magsaysay (拉曼·麦塞塞)**

Ramon Magsaysay (1907–1957) was president of the Philippines from January 1953 until his premature death in an air crash on March 16, 1957, on the Island of Cebu. He was instrumental in crushing the Hukbalahap (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon), i.e. the military arm of the Communist Party, namely the communist insurgency, and became a national hero and then a martyr. Ramon Magsaysay was famous in the world for the Magsaysay award granted to people with distinguished careers. Magsaysay was born on August 31, 1907, in the Zimbales Province, to Exequiel Magsaysay, a blacksmith of Chinese descent. He was a former trade school teacher who later became a blacksmith. His mother was a sari store owner. When Ramon was 10 years old, his family moved to Castillejos, a town about 30 km south of Iba. During his boyhood, he had a Chinese nickname Monching (梦清; meaning ‘a clear dream’ in Chinese). He helped his father at the shop and finished his elementary education at the public school. He continued his secondary education at the Zambales Academy at the nearby town of San Narciso and finished as

valedictorian of his class. While still a high school student, he bought a cheap and the old second-hand car, repairing and tinkering it many times until he learned its intricate mechanism and thus became an expert in mechanics. He drove the car, loaded with fish and vegetables to other towns to earn extra income. After obtaining his high school diploma, he went to Manila and enrolled at the U.P. College of Engineering. After a year, he dropped out and transferred to the Jose Rizal College, where he obtained his degree of Bachelor of Science in Commerce in 1932.

He was employed as shop superintendent of the transportation firm Try-Tran owned by Yangco. Magsaysay had many qualities that set him apart from his peers. Standing at five feet eleven, 170 pounds, he was taller than the average Filipino. He had a nervous energy that kept him on the move. Whether he was sitting or standing, his hands and feet would be in motion. He slept only five or six hours on average and would bound from bed immediately upon waking. Contrary to the usual Filipino liking for gaiety, he disliked parties. He did not drink and smoked very little. The latter habit was picked up during the hectic days of campaigning. He appeared to be absolutely fearless when World War II broke out, all transportation units of the Try Tran were commandeered by the USAFFE (United States Armed Forces in the Far East) to transport the Filipino-American troops to the Bataan front. Magsaysay lost his job and helped the Americans organise 'Zambale Guerrilas', which harassed the Japanese conquerors and engaged them in several bloody skirmishes. Because of his bravery, Magsaysay was promoted from the rank of captain to major. After the liberation of the Philippines on July 4, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur appointed Mayor Magsaysay as Military Governor of Zambales.

In 1946, Magsaysay ran as an independent candidate for a seat in the House of Representative. He won by a great majority of votes, confirming his popularity in Zambales. As a Member of the Congress, he sponsored bills which became laws, including granting pensions to widows and children of war veterans and of disabled veterans. He also established the Bureau of Agricultural Extension and appropriations of funds for the construction of irrigation systems in the provinces.

During the Quirino administration (1948–1953), the Communist Hukbalahap movement grew stronger, posing a serious threat to the Republic of the Philippines. In desperation, President Quirino appointed Congressman Magsaysay, whose exploits as a guerrilla leader impressed him as Secretary of National Defense. As Defense Secretary, Magsaysay attracted national attention through his vigorous campaign against the Huks. He reformed the armed forces, curbing their abuses and atrocious acts that antagonised the people. He fired inefficient and corrupt officers and substituted them with honest and upright replacements. He went out to the fields daily, visiting troops in the battlefield and conversing with people to find out their complaints and even accompanying the government forces in their skirmishes against the enemy.

Because of his soaring popularity among the masses, the Nacionalista Party drafted him as its presidential candidate in the presidential election in November 1953 by Carlos Garcia as his running mate. He won the election and became President and, on assuming office at Malacanang Palace, addressed the nation as follows: ‘This historic and beautiful building belongs to the people, not to any President’. He called it the People’s Palace. As President, he maintained a simple lifestyle. He was the first President to wear the Barong Tagalog at the inaugural ceremony and made it the official attire for men of all social and official functions. He also insisted that he should be addressed simply as Mr. President — instead of ‘Your Excellency’. Magsaysay’s administration was one of the best in the annals of Philippines history. It was a sincere commitment to democracy and it worked for the welfare of the masses. Among the achievements of President Magsaysay were: the assurance of democracy in the Philippines and the restoration of the people’s faith and confidence in their government; the suppression of the Huk rebellion and the surrender on May 17, 1954, of Luis Taruc, the Huk Supremo; the founding of the SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) in Manila in September 1954 and the signing of the Philippine-Japan Reparations Agreement in Manila on May 6, 1956.

At the height of his popularity and power, President Magsaysay died tragically in a plane crash at Mt. Manunggal, Cebu, on March

17, 1957 at the age of 50. The greatness of Ramon Magsaysay was his passionate, genuine love for the people. That love was reciprocated by the Filipino nation and until today, Magsaysay lives on in the memory of his people as the type of president they liked the most. An estimated five million people attended his funeral on March 22, 1957. He was and still was known as President of the Masses.

## **Ferdinand Marcos**

The grandfather of Marcos came from the Fujian province along with hundreds of thousands of Chinos to the shores of the Philippines. These Chinos were well-placed to occupy crucial middlemen or ‘compradore’ roles as local merchants and moneylenders in a colony under Spanish rule in the mid-19th century. His grandfather brought up Marcos as a mestizo, destined to hold important positions in society one day.



Ferdinand Marcos

On September 11, 1927, Sarrat Ilocos Norte, Marcos was born. He was the eldest son of Mariano Marcos, a mestizo, and Josefa Edralin, both of whom were teachers. As his parents travelled widely and moved where they had assignments, he had to study in several elementary schools. In 1934, he was admitted to the University of the Philippines. No sooner was he commissioned as third lieutenant with the rank of cadet major in the Philippine Constabulary Reserve. He later took up law at the University.

In 1935, Marcos was charged for conspiracy to murder an Assemblyman Julio Nalundasan, who was presumably a political rival of his father. Julio Nalundasan was shot dead. Marcos was tried in court and later found guilty. He appealed to the High Court for early release as he would have been class valedictorian and would have received the *magna cum laude* had not imprisonment prevented him from attending several weeks of classes. While he was in jail, he bailed himself out in order to take his examination, where he emerged top. His luck was good as Jose Laurel, then the Supreme Court Justice accepted his argument and passed judgement that he was wrongly convicted and was released. After his release, he joined the Upsilon Sigma Phi Fraternity. In 1939, he graduated with the degree of bachelor of law.

He had an historic claim to survival during World War II as he escaped the Death March from Bataan to Capas, Tarlac after he was captured while serving in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. His subsequent involvement with the Filipino guerrilla resistance movement contributed significantly to his political career later in life. Marcos served as a technical assistant to President Manuel Roxas (1946–1947). The latter was a member of the House of Representatives (1949–1959) and the Senate (1959–1965). He was also a prominent member of the Liberal Party (LP) founded by Roxas. He, however, broke away in 1965, as he failed to secure the party's nomination for the Presidential election. Challenging LP's candidate, re-electionist President Diosdado Macapagal, Marcos ran as the Nacionalista Party candidate for President.

Marcos won the elections and was installed as President in December 1965. In 1969, he was re-elected for a second term, the



first in Philippines. He demonstrated significant progress in agriculture, industry and education during his first term. His administration was bedevilled by violent urban guerrilla activities and student demonstrations. In September 1972, Marcos imposed martial law. He jailed opposition politicians and made the armed forces an arm of his regime. Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr. was a case in point. The latter was held in detention for almost eight years. Marcos met some early opposition from church leaders and others. He had opposition from the provinces as well. The New People's Army and Muslim separatists staged guerrilla activities hoping to bring down his regime. Marcos was politically astute. In 1973, he promulgated a new constitution that instituted a parliamentary government with him as Prime Minister. When announced in January 1981, some believed that this was the end of martial law. In April, however, he instituted various constitutional changes through a plebiscite, resulting in the reversion of the Presidential system. Marcos won the Presidential election and began a new six-term. He declared Martial Law again and it was well received at first. This was given the social unrest the Philippines was experiencing. It baffled the rest of the world as the Filipinos had accepted Marcos's self-imposed dictatorship. Soon after Marcos declared martial law, one American official described the Philippines as a country composed 'of 40 million cowards and one son of a bitch'. He was the president who first established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and launched a massive campaign to get most of the Chinese residents naturalised as Filipino citizens. I remembered that Imelda Marcos even went to Beijing and met Chairman Mao Zedong and had pictures taken together with him. Marcos was the longest reigning president in the history of the Philippines.

In 1983, Marcos's health took a downturn and opposition increased. Senator Aquino of the New People's Army decided to stand against Marcos in the upcoming elections. He was in exile in Boston for three years and returned to Manila on August 21, 1983. He was shot dead as he descended on the steps of the plane. Marcos appointed an independent commission, the Agrava Fact-Finding Board, to investigate the murder. They concluded in 1984 that



high-ranking military officials were guilty of the crime. Marcos called for a ‘snap’ presidential election in February 1986 to re-assert his mandate. Unfortunately for him, a formidable political opponent soon emerged in Aquino’s widow, Maria Sumulong Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, who became the presidential candidate of the United Opposition. It was widely believed that Marcos’s victory over Aquino in the elections of February 7, 1986, was fraudulent.

Marcos held fast to his presidency even while the international community doubted his victory. The military was split. A historic four-day ‘People’s Power’ revolution emerged to support Aquino’s legitimate right to the presidency. The significant fact was that, during the political turbulence on the heels of the 1986 snap presidential elections, many young ethnic Chinese-Filipinos took part in street demonstrations. They were part of the EDSA Revolution which toppled the Marcos regime. The 1986 elections brought to the fore sharp distinctions in political preferences between the younger and older generations of Chinese. While the older generation cast their votes for Marcos, the younger ones opted for political change. This demonstrated the growing political differentiation among different generations of ethnic Chinese which, in the long run, could be expected to undermine the monopoly of the Federation as community spokesman. There were signs that many of the younger generations of the Philippine Chinese, especially those born locally after World War II, were less pliant towards the Guomindang control despite the latter’s efforts at political socialisation and re-sinification in Chinese Chamber communal interest and to be gravitating towards identification with non-communal organisations.

### **Maria Corazon Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino (阿基诺)**

Maria Corazon ‘Cory’ Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino (1933–2009) was the first woman to hold the office of a President. She was hailed as the first female to be democratically elected as president and head of state in Asia. The world remembers her for the momentous 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, which toppled the authoritarian regime of strongman Marcos. *Time* magazine named her the ‘Saint of



Maria Corazon Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino

Democracy' as she had restored democracy in the Philippines. She was well known for her spiritual life and strong adherence to non-violence and peaceful democracy. She was born on January 25, 1933 into an extremely wealthy family landowning Cojuangco family from Tarlac Province. Her maiden name reflects her mestizo ancestry. Aquino's great grandfather had migrated to the Philippines from the village of Tung-an in the Fujian province. He brought along his six-year-old Koh Giok Kuan (许玉关), who was later baptized by the Spaniards and named Jose I. The father, known to the Spaniards as Martin Koh, was a child himself when he first set foot on Luzon. Settled in Manila, Jose I became a carpenter. He dealt in sugar and rice. When Mrs. Aquino became president, among those who came to congratulate her was the World Koh Clan Association, (世界许氏总会) whose family members could be found all over Southeast Asia and North America. Aquino did not seek power nor anticipate that she would helm the nation.

She led a privileged but simple life, spending most of her time abroad at the Ravenhill Academy in New York, and Mount St. Vincent College for her education. She studied mathematics and graduated with a degree in French in 1953. Returning to the Philippines to study law, she soon married Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino, Jr. He was the restless rich scion of another prominent Tarlac family. Benigno Aquino became a mayor, the governor and a flamboyant senator. He would have been elected as president in 1973 if not for the suspension of elections. Benigno was arrested on the same night when martial law was decreed in 1972. He was incarcerated for 7 years and soon after was exiled in the United States. Aquino ventured back to Manila in 1983 as he thought that Marcos was ailing and it would present him with an opportunity. Sadly, he was gunned down seconds after being escorted from the airplane. The widowed Corazon rose to the challenge and agreed to run against the incumbent Marcos. Both sides claimed victory though vote rigging was prevalent. The challenge arose against the administration and a show of people power witnessed by the whole world on television. This marked the end of Marcos's 20-year rule of terror.

The Aquino administration attempted to establish new foundations by restoring democracy and building investor confidence in the economy through legal and constitutional reforms. Despite these achievements, the new president was saddled with economic and political problems inherited from the Marcos era. She also had the added burden of dealing with troubles from members of her cabinet, which formed splinter groups in the military establishment destabilising the country with six attempts at a *coup d'état*, threats from both right-wing military elements and extreme left wing communist rebels. There was a growing appetite from several quarters to end the US military bases agreement. During her tenure the United States withdrew their military bases and terminated their presence in the country.

Her last two years in office suffered administrative difficulties in having to deal with natural disasters and calamities. The administration had to manage the 1990 Luzon earthquake, leaving 1,600

people dead. A second was the 1991 volcanic eruption of the dormant Mount Pinatubo. It killed around 300 people, severely devastating agriculture in Central Luzon. It is known to be the second largest terrestrial eruption of the 20th century. Added to this was the November 1991 Tropical Storm Thelma, which took many lives and caused massive flooding in Ormoc City. It left 6,000 dead in what was considered the deadliest typhoon in Philippine history. The natural calamities and disasters which struck the country one after the other resulted in severe power shortages and massively disrupted business operations in the Philippines.

Thus, the public euphoria over Aquino's victory over Marcos did not last long. These problems and disasters wore out her energy. She stepped down in June 1992 to make way for a new administration led by her former defence Secretary Fidel Valdez Ramos. In 1987, President Aquino went to Fujian to pay respect to her ancestors. She went to the Hung Chien Tsun (鸿渐村), a village about of 2,400 people, an hour and a half from Amoy. Her uncle Koh Guan Hing (许源兴), a 67-year-old man brought out a book of writings on Tung-an's (东安) local history and showed her the chapter on the Kohs. I went to visit the Hung Tsun village arranged by a lady professor of the Amoy University when I attended a seminar connected with the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's birthday. The village, it was believed to contain a shrine founded by Zheng He (郑和) but no concrete evidence was available to prove its existence.

As a result, there was heated debate during the seminar when Chinese scholars themselves fought a war of words over the existence of this shrine. In 2005, on my arrival at the village, I was surprised to find a grand and noisy welcome was organised for us. It was quite impressive. I was told that when President Aquino came, the welcome party was even bigger. Aquino died of colon cancer at age of 76 on August 5, 2009 in Manila. She was so popular that around 200,000 Filipinos and Chinese braved the rain to attend her funeral. The people remembered her as the one who restored democracy to the Philippines after the dark years of Marcos dictatorship. The Aquinos

had rejected an offer of a state funeral, but the cathedral was packed with local officials and diplomats. The huge crowds reminded older Filipinos of the 1983 funeral of her husband Benigno Aquino, who was assassinated. Mrs. Aquino was revered as a near-saintly figure by many Catholics. Carlos Romulo (罗慕洛) (1899–1985) was small in stature but cast a giant shadow in the Philippines and world history. He was a gifted journalist, orator, educator, diplomat, patriot, soldier and statesman. He held the office of foreign minister continuously for 16 years. In 1941, he joined the US army and became press officer of General Douglas MacArthur, who evacuated him from the Philippines after the Japanese invasion. In exile, Romulo was appointed secretary of information in the Cabinet of President Manuel Quezon, with the rank of Brigadier-General and took part in the liberation of the Philippines.

In October 1944, he landed on the island of Leyte with MacArthur. He later served as Commissioner of the Philippines to the US and led his country's delegation to San Francisco Conference. He signed the United Nations Charter on behalf of his country. After a series of diplomatic and ministerial positions, as well as becoming President of the University of the Philippines, he assumed the post of Foreign Minister in 1968 under President Marcos. I came to know Romulo when I attended the Asean Foreign Ministers' meeting as Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in various capitals in Manila, Bali, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. He was short and stout and had a round face. He always smiled when we met and he was always full of jokes. I saw him speak on several occasions, and he was not only a fluent speaker but a good orator, most of the time telling jokes in his speech. I remembered on one occasion he said, 'It was necessary that your speech not be too long because it will be boring and not short like a lady exposing the sensitive part of the body'. With Romulo as a guest, fun was a given. Romulo had publicly said that he was part Chinese. Once he said, 'Most Filipino leaders have Chinese blood. I myself have Chinese blood. It was a fact and there was nothing wrong with that'. He had told me that many Filipino political leaders were also mestizos. I

regretted that I had not taken the opportunity to ask him about his Chinese ancestry.

Romulo was born on January 4, 1899, in Camiling, Tarlac. His middle-class parents, both belonging to the town *Illustrados* were Gregorio Romulo (former provincial governor of Tarlac) and Maria Pena. He was a reporter at 16, a newspaper editor at 20 and a publisher at 32. He was the founder of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines. After obtaining his B.A. degree from the University of the Philippines in 1918, he went to the US, where he later finished his MA, majoring in comparative literature. He has been interested in journalism since his student days and became editor of the students' newspaper, *The Varsity News*. As school editor, he led the first massive student demonstration consisting of thousands of students from Manila colleges and universities against an anti-Filipino editorial in *The Manila Times* (then owned by Americans), which questioned the capability of Don Ignacio Villamor as the first Filipino president of the state university. Romulo denounced this malicious editorial as an insult to Filipino intelligence and integrity. The sensational demonstration was successful in compelling the editor L. J. Thibault to publish a public apology. In 1942, Romulo achieved the great distinction of being the first and only Asian journalist to win the prestigious Pulitzer Prize Award in journalism. His prize-winning work consisted of a series of articles in *The Philippine Herald* entitled 'The Changing tides in the Far East', warning the world of the Japanese aggression.

He later took up teaching as a career and taught English as Associate Professor and acting head of the English Department at the University of the Philippines from 1924 to 1928. In 1928, he was named professional lecturer in American literature. He toured the US, engaging the debaters at American universities on the issue of Philippines independence and won all the contests. During World War II, Romulo served as aide-de-camp to General Douglas MacArthur, who promoted him to Brigadier General. When MacArthur kept his promise and returned to the Philippines, Romulo met him at Red Beach, near Palo Leyte, on October 20, 1944 when he landed. For his wartime services, Romulo received six military

decorations, including the Philippine Congressional Medal of Honour. For more than half a century, he served well under eight Filipino presidents — from Quezon to Marcos — in various capacities such as Secretary of Information and Public Relations in Washington DC, Philippine Ambassador to the US, Head of the Philippine mission to the United Nations, Secretary of Education and Secretary of Foreign Affairs. He shone best in the realm of diplomacy. He was highly respected in Asean circles. I remember vividly how he spoke bluntly and effectively at the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung in 1955, when I was a journalist covering the conference. He was the first dynamic speaker attacking the People's Republic of China as the 'new imperialist' and criticising China for using overseas Chinese as fifth columnists to subvert independent countries in Southeast Asia. He had traveled around to the US and other SEATO countries to prepare the ground for an attack on China during the Bandung conference. Zhou Enlai was taken aback by Romulo's attack and had to think of a new strategy to counter his attack. I saw Zhou going back to the Hotel and coming back to the conference hall, where he threw away his prepared speech and made an impromptu speech to tone down the atmosphere. Zhou, in response to Romulo's allegations had said: 'I come here to make friends and not enemies'.

China was prepared to speak even to the Americans. The whole atmosphere of the meeting changed. Later, Zhou Enlai met Romulo and discussed the Dual Nationality Act proposed during the Bandung conference. Only on this occasion did I not see Romulo joke. Towards the end of his life, Romulo became disenchanted with the authoritarian regime of President Marcos. He was upset by the way Senator Benigno Aquino was assassinated. He made a speech after that incident and said, 'For the first time in 37 years, I appear before the United Nations General Assembly with my head bowed in shame.' He visited the home of Ninoy Aquino's mother and paid his last respects to the martyred hero and expressed his sincere condolence. He was the only high-ranking official of the Marcos' regime to perform this gallant act. He was a great admirer of Aquino. In January 1984, on his 85th birthday, he retired from public service. President Marcos awarded him the *Bayani ng Bagong Republika*



Medal and promoted him to Major General Romulo spent his last days at home in Dasmariflas Village, Makati, Metro Manila, writing his new books with the help of his American wife. He died in December 1985 at the age of 86. He was given a hero's burial at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

### **Mariano Ponce (马利要诺·波恩氏)**

Mariano Ponce (1863–1918) was an intimate friend of both Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Jose Rizal and considered a great a figure in the history of the Philippines. He took part in Rizal's 'propaganda movement' as head of the glorious trinity. He was a dedicated patriot, a prolific writer and a magnificent researcher. Born in Baliwang, Bulacan on March 23, 1918, he was the eldest son of the seven children of Mariano Ponce, Sr. and Mariana Collantes de Los Santos. After completing his primary education, he enrolled in San Juan de letran college where he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1885. Two years later, he took up medicine at the University of Santo Tomas. He left for Europe and studied at the Central University of Madrid, where he finished medicine in 1889. Whilst studying in Spain, he worked hand-in-hand with Marcelo del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena and Jose Rizal to support Filipino representation in the Spanish Cortes and other reforms. He was imprisoned when the revolution began in August 1896 but was later released.

Escaping another arrest, he fled to Hong Kong via France, where he conspired with a group of Filipinos who served as the international front of their country's revolution. Ponce wrote many books on biographies, politics, sociology and he traveled under various pseudonyms — Naning (his pet name), Kalipulako and Tigbalang (supernatural being in Philippines folklore).

Most important of his writings in the organ of Propaganda was the *Filipinos celebres* (celebrated Filipinos). In his writings, he depicted the deeds of his illustrious countrymen and debunked the malicious charge made by Spanish writers that the Filipinos lacked intellectual capacity. He met General Aguinaldo, the famous Filipino fighter who later became president of Philippines, in Hong Kong and



later his secretary. He was appointed by Aguinaldo as ‘diplomatic agent’ of the Philippines revolutionary government in Japan to seek aid and purchase weapons and munition for the revolution. On June 29, 1898, Ponce landed in Yokohama on a secret mission to purchase arms, where he met Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Ponce returned to Manila in 1907 after 20 years of patriotic work abroad. He was accompanied by his Japanese wife, Okiyo Udanwara, who had helped him during his stay in Japan. He participated actively in the building of a new nation over the ashes of war. He became editor of the *El Renacimiento*, in 1908–1909 and was one of the founders of *El Ideal*, the organ of the Nacionalista Party. He entered politics and was elected to the Philippines assembly (1910–1912) representing the second district of Bulacan. During his last years of life, Ponce devoted his energy doing intensive research and writing on Philippines history, biography, ethnology, folklore and bibliography. Among his writings were *Sun Yat-sen A Biography of the Father of the Chinese Republic* (1912) and *Ang Wika at Lahi* (1917), a critical essay on the importance of the national language. In May 1918, he left Manila for China to visit his friend Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and upon arrival in Hong Kong, fell seriously ill and died in a hospital there at the age of 55. His body was embalmed and brought back to Manila. President Sun Yat-sen and his friends in Hong Kong and Europe sent messages of condolence to his family and people.

### **Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孙中山) and the Philippines Revolution**

The role played by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Chinese Republic, in furnishing arms and ammunition for the Philippines revolution was seldom known and not adequately recorded. Carlos Quirino, the Director of the Philippine National Library and author of several books, visited the Taiwan contemporary history archives at Shao Teng in Taiwan sometime in the early 1960s and went through some documents relating to the 1911 Chinese revolution, which was jealously guarded in a secret, fire-and-termites proof building. He found some materials in a series of correspondence between Dr. Sun during his

stay in Yokoyama and a Filipino revolutionist Ponce with regard to the assistance rendered by Dr. Sun in the supply of arms and ammunition among the tons of thousands of documents on file. The friendship between Ponce and Dr. Sun dated from late in the winter of 1898 when both were invited to a dinner in Tokyo in the home of Inukai Ki, member of the imperial diet and a leader of the Shimpoto or Democratic Party of Japan. Ponce was sent to Japan, together with Faustino Lichauco, by the Hong Kong revolutionary junta to enlist the active support of the Imperial Japanese government in support of the revolution. The Japanese government ignored their pleas for fear of offending the United States of America which was about to annex the Philippines by the Treaty of Paris in December 1898.

General Aguinaldo, the Filipino leader of the revolutionaries, had pinned his hopes on the Japanese who were manufacturing Murata rifles for their own army. Dr. Sun had experience in Japan with the purchase of arms for the Chinese revolution and had put Ponce in touch with Miyasaki Yorazo, who, with the backing of their mutual friend Inukai Ki, entrusted the details to Nakamura Yaroku, who made the purchase from the firm of Mitsui Kaisha. The *Nonubiki Maru* ship was supposed to carry the shipment of five million cartridges and several thousand rifles to a secret port in northern Luzon through Shanghai because the Japanese would not permit the direct export to the Philippines. It was therefore necessary for Dr. Sun to have one of his followers, a rich merchant named Wan Chi, to appear as the buyer and to purchase nominally by the ship so that the Japanese government could feign ignorance should the Americans come to know about the deal. *Nonubiki Maru* left Nagasaki in July 1899 with a small number of Japanese officers, who volunteered for duty with General Aguinaldo, led by Captains Taihara and Kirayama. Two days later, when the ship reached Shanghai near the island of Banto, it foundered in a storm and sank with all its cargo and many of the crew and passengers. An English ship rescued the survivors, who described details of the disaster. It was imperative that the fire-arms from Japan arrive to help Aguinaldo's forces before the beginning of the dry season in November of that year. According to

documents found, Ponce wrote to Dr. Sun telling why he could not dispense with the money he had raised in Hong Kong. He said: 'I regret that we cannot dispose of more money than what we had on hand and half a million bullets were enough for the moment'. He sounded desperate because Aguinaldo was backed against a military disaster. Later on, Ponce wrote another letter to Dr. Sun dated January 25, 1900, stating in part: 'I understood from your telegram that it was now impossible for us to proceed with the business. We are very sorry for our bad luck, but we know that we cannot do anything against destiny ... we will wait for a better chance'. It appeared that the ammunitions which were supposed to be shipped and kept in the warehouse of a Japanese merchant named Okura were nothing but scrap iron. An investigation revealed that Miyazaki and Nakamura had swindled the Filipinos in the affair, giving rise to well-based suspicions that the shipment abroad the ill-fated *Nonubiki Maru* were also useless pieces of scrap iron and that the shipwreck had been purposely carried out to conceal the felony.

Ponce and Dr. Sun remained lifelong friends. In 1912, a year after the successful revolution, Ponce revealed that Dr. Sun was familiar with the Filipino problems and knew well the life of Dr. Jose Rizal and the dreams he had. Dr. Sun believed that all the Chinese leaders should know the Filipino leaders better so that they could work together for their independence. Ponce who had witnessed Dr. Sun speaking at rallies described him as 'a cold orator' — one who does not produce violent emotions or provoke passionate explosions. He said Dr. Sun 'speaks without vehemence, without fire, without surprises but his words were well-thought and phrased, delivered with much force of conviction and with stamped with sincerity.'

### **Ralph Nubla (高祖儒)**

Ralph Nubla was a prominent Chinese businessman born in Jin Jiang (晋江) Fujian province in 1911, when Dr. Sun Yat-sen successfully led a revolution in China. He accompanied his parents, who migrated to the Philippines and first settled down in Luzon. He studied in the Chung Zi Primary School (中西小学), graduated from the Philippine



Ralph Nubla

University in Economics and went to America for further studies. On his return to Manila, he went into business and became a close friend of Marcos. During the Marcos regime, with the support of the President, he was elected President of the Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industries Federation. As chief executive, he had easy access, a factor that reinforced his claims to leadership in the Philippine Chinese community. He was the leader of the tobacco business and opened up the biggest Transport Bank in Manila. He also helped Marcos in granting citizenship to a large number of Chinese. His contact with China was also close and he became Chairman of the *Lien He Ri Pao* (联合日报), the leading Chinese newspaper in Manila. Nubla had participated in more social and economic activities involving the Filipinos. A Catholic, he was conferred the Knighthood of Saint Sylvester by the Vatican in 1984 and enjoys the moniker ‘grand old man’ of the Federation.

### ***The Yangcos* 杨哥 (*Father and Son*)**

Among the earliest mestizos who became wealthy and made a name for themselves was the team known as Yangcos — Don Luis Yangco (father) and Don Teodoro (son), both genuine patriots and industrial barons. Luis Yangco, known as Capitan Lus, was born in Bacor, Cavite, in August 1841. His parents were Remingio Yangco, a

Filipino-Chinese mestizo, and Agatona Ronquillo, a Filipino-Spanish mestizo. His parents died early because of the cholera epidemic and he became an orphan brought up by his aunt. At the age of 13, he did odd jobs on the waterfront and ran errands for sailors carrying luggage for ship passengers. He used to gaze at the sunset and dreamt of owning as many ships as he saw. Through living frugally, he saved enough money to buy a *banca* (dugout boat), transported drinking water for the city residents and ferried *zacate* (fodder for the horses) from the river village to Manila. Eventually, he amassed a few thousand pesos and bought a sailboat and went on trading voyages to the southern islands. As time went on, he became prosperous and was appointed Capitan by the Spanish. He owned many trading ships, carrying cargoes and passengers to Visayas and Mindanao, as well a fleet of steamships sailing across Manila Bay to Zambales to the towns of Laguna de Bay. He became known as 'King of Manila Bay and Pasig River'. Despite business commitments, Capitan Luis was also active in politics, serving as Capitan Municipal (equivalent to Mayor) of Binondo in 1893. In 1894, he was appointed Regidor (Councilor) of the city of Manila. Although he was appointed by the Spaniards, he was a real Filipino patriot. He sympathised with the revolution led by Andres Bonifacio. He supplied the revolution with funds, foodstuff and other supplies. His activities came to the attention of the Spaniards, and he was arrested together with other patriots and imprisoned at Fort Santiago.

At that time, Jose Rizal was incarcerated in the same prison, awaiting his trial and subsequent execution. After six months of detention, he was released. He sailed for Spain with his son Teodoro and returned a year later to join the revolutionary forces of General Aguinaldo, who, knowing his business acumen appointed him Director General of the Treasury of the Revolutionary Government. Luis was fortunate to survive the Revolution and the Filipino-American War of 1899–1902. He resided in Manila and became a prominent businessman. He died of heart failure in October 1907, at the age of 66, the day when the First Philippine Assembly was inaugurated. He left behind a vast fortune to his wife and children. His

son, Teodoro carried on his business. After getting a degree of Bachelor of Arts from the Ateneo de Manila, Teodoro sailed for Spain for further studies. When he found that there was no business college in Spain, he moved to England, and attended a college near London. He travelled extensively in the US, Japan and China.

Don Teodoro played a prominent role in the business world as well as political affairs. Being a good friend of both Senate President Quezon and House of Speaker Osmena, he served as the Filipino Resident Commissioner in Washington, DC from 1917 to 1920 and later acted as honorary consul for the Republic of Mexico. He also took part in other civil organisations. Although a millionaire, he was frugal. Dressed in a plain white suit, with a black umbrella, he would shuttle from his house to his office on foot. Although he could well afford to own automobile, he never had one. He hated display of wealth and those who lived lavishly. Don Teodoro died in Manila, in April 1939 at the age of 78.

### ***Eduardo Conjuangco, Jr.***

Eduardo Conjuangco, Jr. was born on June 10, 1935. He was a well-known and influential tycoon and power broker in the Philippines. He was the Chief Executive of San Miguel Corporation, Philippine's largest food and beverage conglomerate. He had tried his hands in politics, running for president once but eventually losing to Fidel V. Ramos. He almost entered the presidential race again a few years later, but withdrew and played the role of a '*dalang*', the man who pulls strings. He supported a number of candidates for national and local elections and endorsed political appointees. He was often referred to as 'The Man of the Earth'. He was easily the country's most influential man with his wealth and connections. He was a close friend of the past president Ferdinand Marcos, a tie which would cause him an estranged relationship with his cousin, Corazon Aquino, after the assassination of the latter's husband, Benigno Aquino.

He left the country together with Marcos in 1986, and was estimated to have had acquired over 5,300 hectares of agricultural lands

in the towns of Himamaylan, Isabela, La Castellana, La Carlota, Pontevedra and San Enrique.<sup>2</sup> He owned sugar cane plantations, orchards, cattle ranches, fighting cocks and horse breeding farm business. Upon his return to the Philippines in 1991, he made the province a base for his recovery and busied himself with various expansion projects. In 1992, he set up the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) a vehicle he had used to further his presidential ambitions.

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<sup>2</sup>Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr. — WikiPilipinas. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Danding\\_Cojuangco](http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Danding_Cojuangco).

## Chapter Three

# The Mingling of Chinese and Javanese Blood — The *Peranakan* (土生华人)

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### Zheng He's (郑和) Expeditions to Indonesia and the Spread of Islam

The whole world knows about Admiral Zheng He, the Muslim eunuch of the Ming dynasty, who, during the reign of Emperor Yong Le (永乐), had led an expedition of 63 treasure ships to West Asia (meaning East, West and Southeast Asia) to strengthen China's image and make countries to pay homage to China. The Ming History (明史) mentioned frequently about the visits, its impact and the achievements, but it did not mention anything about what he did as a Muslim and his contributions towards the Islamisation of the Chinese in Java, which contributed to the creation of mixed-blood communities. Zheng He was better known outside China than within the country. In China, some scholars despised Zheng He because, in ancient China, eunuchs were never respected; after all they were only the faithful slaves of the emperors.

In 2005, when I attended a forum organised by Amoy University, one Chinese Professor went to the extent of saying: 'why should we commemorate someone who was after all a eunuch and who had done nothing for the country'. He was obviously ignorant of the contribution Zheng He had done to enhance China's image and for the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia, and people have built temples to commemorate him.





Zheng He

In Java Semarang, there is Sam Poh Beow (三宝庙); Sam Poh was the nickname for Zheng He. In Malacca, there is a Sam Poh Cave (三宝洞); in Penang Sam Poh Zhen (三宝井-well); in Thailand Sam Poh Gong (三宝宫-palace) and Sam Poh Kang (三宝港-port). In other places in Southeast Asia, one can find Sam Poh footprints and numerous historical relics in praise of this great diplomat and traveller. It seems he left nothing significant within the Chinese territories. One lady professor of Amoy University arranged a grand ceremony to be performed to celebrate the finding of a site which she believed Zheng He had resided. This resulted in a heated debate among professors as to the validity of her claim, as there was no record of any kind to prove that Zheng He had stayed there.

Among the countries Zheng He visited, the most important country to him was Java, where he seemed to have a secret agenda, not known

to the Chinese rulers and not mentioned anywhere in Chinese historical records. That agenda was his contribution spreading Islam to Java and his effort to cultivate a number of Muslim preacher one of whom became the leading *Wali Songo*, and a number of descendents came the nine Muslim Saints who had helped to overthrow the Hindu Majapahit Empire and made a great impact on the characteristics of Islam in Java.

In 1405, when Zheng He first led a fleet of 63 treasured ships to Java, it made a tremendous impact on the Javanese population, especially the Chinese immigrants. To the ancient Javanese, the size of the 63 treasured ships was something unbelievable. They had brought not only material wealth to the rulers of Java, but also Chinese maidens as well as bridal gifts. A few married into the royal families. This explains the existence of the Chinese cultural relics such as the *tandu* (or sedan chair), still being used in royal weddings to carry the brides.

Never before had such a gigantic fleet of treasure ships reached the shores of the Javan ports. According to a Chinese source, the imposing figure of Zheng He (who was nearly 3m tall) with a 5-inch waistline strapped with a huge belt, a prominent forehead with a eunuch cap, his shiny high eyebrows and long hanging earlobes, must have impressed the large crowd, especially the Chinese who boarded the ships to greet him. Although a eunuch, his high-pitched booming voice was rather commanding and he walked firmly like a tiger.

It was fasting month and the visitors discovered that Zheng He was not eating anything and being curious started to ask questions. Zheng He brought dozens of Muslim imams along and they began to talk about Islam and the rules fasting. And that was the beginning of the spreading of Islam. One of the imams was the great grandfather of Gus Dur, Abdul Rahman Wahid, who was once Prime Minister of Indonesia.

When Zheng He arrived in Java, it was ruled by the Hindu Majapahit kingdom, whose subjects were mostly Hindus and Buddhists, but the kingdom was about to collapse. At that time, Sunni Islam had only penetrated the coastal states of Sumatra, Aceh and Malacca and Java was still dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism. Zheng He



Abdul Rahman Wahid

could have been the first person who brought Hanafite Islam common than in China to Java.

Had the first trip to Java, inspired him to take up the private role of Islamisation of Java, especially the Chinese population?

### **Zheng He Lays the Foundation to Realise His Dream**

On his various visits to Java, his imams helped him to create a Muslim community, especially among the Chinese. They started to spread the gospel of Islam to the Chinese population.

According to the Archives of Sam Poh Long Chinese (三宝垄华人编年史) by 1411, various Muslim communities were already set up in Cirebon, Tuban, Molokertor and mosques were built in these places. In 1413, during his fourth trip to Java, Zheng He visited these mosques followed by Ma Huan (马欢), the Recorder of History. Zheng He's mission stayed in Java for more than a month and spent his time communicating with his new Muslim followers. The then Chinese Consul Wu Ping (吴宾), known as Laksamana Hadji Kung Wu Ping, also a Muslim, was helping Zheng He mingle with the crowd.

Wu Ping also help build mosques in Saridi and Talang. To facilitate the voyage of Zheng He, Wu Ping also built a huge torch to top of Gunung Di Ati. Wu Ping died in Java and was buried near the hill.

1419, Zheng He appointed Bong Ta Keng (彭德庆), the Chinese Navy Commander in Tjampa (present-day Cambodia), whom he came to know to be the Superintendent of Overseas Chinese in Demak, one of the towns of West Java. He was in charge of promoting trade among countries in Southeast Asia. Having served as the Head of the Hanafi Islam in Yunnan, he was familiar with the teaching of Islam. He made his office the centre for spreading Islam. He appointed many Muslim Chinese traders who came to trade with Java as heads of Chinese immigrants who have become Muslims.

In 1423, Bong Ta Keng appointed a leading Muslim from Yunnan named Gan Eng Chu (颜英裕) as administrator for the Chinese community in Java, Palembang and Kalimantan. In those days, Tuban was an important trading port for exports and, to a certain extend, he was regarded as the Chinese Consul General in Java. In fact, he became known as Kepala Pelabuhan Pula de Tuban, helping the Majapahit government to control the country's export. His performance had won the heart of the Queen of Majapahit Radia Su King Ta and was bestowed with the royal title of *Ayra*.

Another matter worth mentioning was that the son-in-law of Bong Ta Keng, Haji Mah Hong Fu (马洪福), was appointed as envoy to Majapahit in 1424. His wife, Putri Tiampa, was a princess from Tjampa (Cambodia), who had helped her husband a great deal to Islamise the Chinese population. She died in 1448 and was buried in Java. He left Java and returned to China only after 10 years of the burial according to local customs. This enhanced the prestige of Mah as a good Muslim.

Zheng He can be considered one of the earliest Muslims who had introduced Hanafite Islam to Java, but much of his work was not known and not recorded in Chinese history.

In the Semarang Zheng He temple, a great deal of materials about how the Muslim community came about and the personalities involved, all written in Chinese can be found.

Ma Huan (马欢) who was the Zheng He delegation script writer mentioned that several of the Chinese had been appointed as

Shanbandar (headmen) of the Chinese community. In the 18th century, many Hakkas (客家) migrated to Bangka (孟加) and Belitong (必立洞), when tin and gold deposits were found. Many of these Hakkas married native women, establishing families for themselves in the new environment. Their offspring were also the *peranakans* of Indonesia. The Hakkas kept their Chinese identity, although they adopted some of the local customs.

### **Zheng He's Other Functions in Indonesia**

When Zheng He's treasure ships arrived in Palembang in 1407, Chen Chor Yi (陈祖义), the most powerful pirate controlling the Straits of Malaca, tried to plunder the treasures in the ships. Chen, a Teochew criminal had escaped from Guangdong when Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋) was Emperor and landed in Palembang. He became a general under King Sri Vijaya as well as the most notorious and powerful pirate controlling the Straits of Melaka for several decades. At the height of his power, he had more than 100 pirate ships and had more than 19,000 pirate crews under his command. His sphere of influence extended to as far as Japan, Taiwan, the South Seas and the Indian Ocean. Many smaller countries had to pay tribute to him. The Chinese Emperor offered 500,000 taels of silver for his arrest, but he was not easily intimidated. When King Sri Vijaya died, he became more ruthless and conceited.

When Zheng He's expedition arrived in Palembang in 1407, he outwardly pretended to surrender at the request of the mission, while quietly planning to plunder the precious goods. His interior motive was exposed by a Chinese named Shi Qin Ching (施进卿), the religious Chief of Pelambang appointed by the Majapahit king. He was a Muslim who received the title of *Pati Palembang* to look after the affairs of the port. With this secret information, Zheng He's troops caught Chen and his pirate gangs by surprise and killed 5,000 men, burnt 10 ships and detained Chen and seized two bronze seals in his possession. He was taken to Beijing and publicly executed as a warning to others.

In Palembang, Zheng He also met another rich and powerful Chinese tycoon named Liang Dao Ming (梁道明), a Cantonese from

Nanhai, Guangdong, who migrated there when Sri Vijaya was about to fall. He brought along 1,000 of his clansmen. He helped King Vijaya fought the Mapajahit invaders and was appointed the Chief of Palembang. The Ming Court heard about the impending battle and sent a Battalion of soldiers under the command of Commander Yang Xin (杨欣) to appeal to Liang to negotiate for peace. The combined forces of Liang and Yang was so formidable that even the Majapahit rulers would not take them for granted. When Zheng He first arrived at Palembang, he heard of Liang's influence and invited him to pay homage to the Ming Emperor in Beijing and bestowed on him medals and appointed him as Kang Chu (港主) for the port. During those days, Liang controlled about 100 families and 10,000 people.

### **The *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints) and Their Impact on Indonesian Society**

The Hindu Majapahit empire was overthrown by the *Wali Songo* or otherwise known as the nine Muslim saints. The Java-centred Majapahit empire, which ruled from Java (1293–1500), was an archipelagic empire. It was at its peak of glory during the reign of Hayam Wuruk from 1350 to 1389. It was marked by the conquest of kingdoms of maritime Southeast Asia (including present-day Indonesia, East Timor, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei) collectively termed 'Nusantara' or islands in-between. It was the last of the empires of the Malay Archipelago and perhaps one of the greatest in history. The burial tombs of the *Wali Songo* saints scatter along northern coast of Java island between Surabaya and Ciebon in West Java.

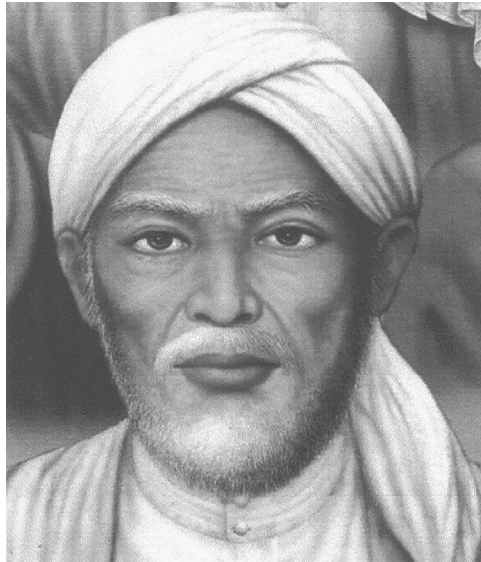
Sunan Ampel, one of the *Wali Songo* is historically regarded as the most influential and charismatic figure. He was an ethnic Chinese who had a Chinese name called Bong Swee Hoe. But he was completely Javanised, not knowing how to read Chinese. He was, in fact, the grandson of Bong Ta Keng, who was appointed Superintendent of Overseas Chinese in Demak by Zheng He. He was born in Tjampa, an Islamic kingdom located in the southern part of Vietnam

in 1401, and died there in 1481. He was the eldest of the *Wali Songo*, a prominent Muslim leader in the 15th century.

***Sunan Ampel Raden Rahmat — Bong Swi Hoe (彭瑞和)  
(1401–1481)***

Bong Swi Hoe is one of the most important *Wali Songo*, because it was he who succeeded in Javanising the Chinese immigrants and converting them into Muslims. He was the first to break off relations with Hanafi Islam, a sect practiced in Yunnan brought to Java by his grandfather Bong Ta Keng. Having been trained in Egypt and other Arab countries, he was more familiar with the Sunni sect.

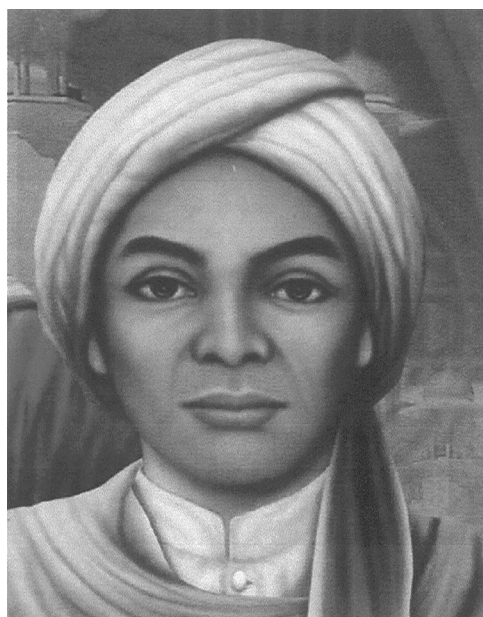
Although his grandfather was a Hanafite Muslim, things had changed and he adopted some of the teachings of the Sunni sect. Bong was sent from Palembang to assist the Chinese Muslim Capitan Soon Liong, who was a Chinese Muslim businessman from Semarang. Bong Swi Hoe was the Islamic teacher of Pinath. He devoted his efforts to



Sunan Ampel Raden Rahmat — Bong Swi Hoe



grooming Chinese immigrants residing in East Java and converting them to the Islamic religion as well as the Javanese way of life. He used Javanese as the language for preaching and encouraged the younger generation Chinese to assimilate into the Javanese community, to adopt Javanese names and lead the Javanese way of life. He also encouraged intermarriage between the Chinese and Javanese women. A great deal of Chinese characteristics found in the Javanese way of life came from the Bong Swee Hoe. There was a great deal of similarities between Chinese culture and Javanese culture. Both believe that a good gentleman should have the ability to hide his feelings, whether it was anger or happiness. The Chinese have a phrase, 'Xi Nu Bu Xing Yu Se' (喜怒不形于色), meaning never show happiness or anger on the face. They also believe that a good gentleman should be in full control of his inner feelings and the strength of a person comes from inside of the heart and not from outer appearance. In that sense, President Suharto was a real Javanese. In my contact with him for four and a half years, I never saw him lose his temper nor had I seen him express happiness on his face.



Sunan Drajat

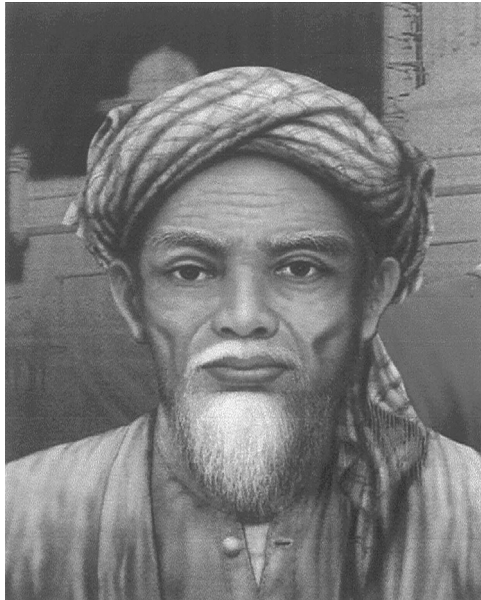


Sunan Ampel was the original leader of *Wali Songo*. He was the nephew of the King of Majapahit and a cousin of Raden Patah, the first Sultan of Demak. He was buried behind the Ampel Mosque in Surabaya and often visited by thousands of pilgrims.

The Bong family led by Bong Swi Hoe seem to take a lion share of the *Wali Songo*, the guardian of Islam. His eldest son Sunan Bonang (彭文安) known as Raden Makhdum Ibrahim, and a younger brother Bong Tak Keng (彭德强) was Sunan Drajat with an Arabic name of Syekh Jafar Shadig, and his grandson became Sunan Kudus. All of them were *Wali Songo*. They have been completely Javanised, lost their ethnic identity and identified themselves as Javanese.

### ***Sunan Bonang — Raden Makhdum Ibrahim (彭文安) (1465–1525)***

Sunan Bonang, whose Chinese name was Bong Boon Ann, was the fourth son of Sultan Ampel. His mother was Dewi Candrawati, the



Sunan Bonang — Raden Makhdum Ibrahim

daughter of King Brawijaya. He became a famous preacher because he had utilised ‘*bonang*’ a gamelan musical instrument to preach. Many people in Tuban were attracted by his new method of teaching. He was so popular that they call him Sunan Bonang. Islam forbids visual arts and other art form to propagate and he invented the shadow play — *Wayang kulit*, which was after all shadows and the gamelan music to achieve his purpose.

Bonang had many a number of followers in several places such as Jepara, Bawean and Madur. People adored him as a wise and intelligent preacher. He was very polite to his followers irrespective of their race. He wrote a popular book on theology and good for Muslim. He was the man who helped build the great Masjid at Demak.

About 90km northwest of Surabaya, one could find the tomb where Bonang was buried. The decorated tomb complex is uniquely structured with ancient disks embedded in the walls and porcelains with Arabic inscriptions in Chinese style.

### ***Sunan Kudus — Ja’far Shadiq (叶德书) (died 1550)***

Sunan Kudus must be Sunan Ampel’s daughter’s son married to someone with the surname of Yap, for he carried the surname of Yap (叶).

Sunan Kudus is considered the originator of Wayang gelek and he founded the masjid at Kudus using the doors of the palace of Majapahit. He was born in the Sultanate of Demak and was appointed Commander of the Army. From a young age, he learnt a lot from Sunan Kalijaga and applied most of the methods in Dawah teaching in Kalijaga.

He was a very tolerant preacher who was soft spoken and accommodating when confronted with local culture. He adopted Buddhist and Hindu symbols in his architectural design of mosques, minarets, entrance, gates and ablutions. They symbolised the Buddhist eightfold path. On one occasion, he deliberately tied his cow named ‘Kebo Gumarang’ in the mosque courtyard to appeal to his audience to listen to his sermon. This convinced the Hindus of his sincerity and they came to listen to his lectures.

Sunan Kudus was a good composer. He had composed the Javanese version of 1001 Arabian Nights prior to his book entitled: *The Book of One Thousand One Nights* during the Abassid Caliphate.

### **Sunan Gresik — Maulana Malik Ibrahim**

Maulana Malik Ibrahim appeared to be the only non-ethnic Chinese within the *Wali Songo*. He came to Java in 1404. He had worked in Gresik and Leran and died in 1419. He is known as the founder of the first Islamic school or *pesantren* in Java. Ibrahim's origin is unclear, but it was generally agreed that he originated from outside Java. Reading the inscription from his grave, it appears that he could have come from Persia (present-day Iran). Historically speaking, he came to Java with his father Syekh Jumadil Qubro and his brother Maulana, from Persia.

Ibrahim stayed in Vietnam for 13 years and taught farmers to grow crops more efficiently. He also offered healthcare support to farmers. He married one of the kings' daughters, whose name has been Indonesianised as Dewi Candrawalan, and had two sons. He returned to Java after converting many people to Islam.

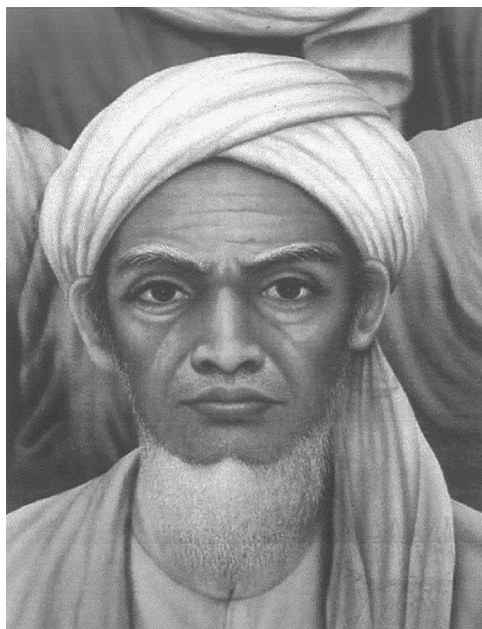
Ibrahim landed at Sembalo, Manyar about 5.6 m north of Gresik in the 1300s and became acquainted with the ruling class through trading. He also mingled with people from different castes and social strata who were more familiar with Hinduism. Through his contact with the rulers, he was granted land on the outskirts of Gresik which he used for preaching. He also founded the Islamic boarding school there. His habit of placing the Quran under his pillow made the people called him *Kakek Banial*.

There are several legends about Ibrahim. One of them says that while he was travelling, he came across a group of religious men who wanted to sacrifice a young woman to the gods. This was to avert a long-standing drought. He stopped the group from stabbing the woman and prayed for rain. When his prayers were answered, she was released.

Ibrahim was not initially considered one of the *Wali Songo* before the 19th century. After his grave was dug out, he was included in the core. Today, his grave is still without a headstone. It has become a common destination for pilgrims, who read the Quran and the life of Muhammed. In 1995, over 1.5 million pilgrims visit the grave.

**Sunan Giri — Raden Paku Giri — Swan Liong (萱龙)  
(1442–1586)**

Sunan Giri, also known as Raden Paku, was born in 1442 in Blambangan (now Banyuwangi) and was the son of Dewi Sekardadu and Maulana Shak of Melaka (brother of Maulana Malik Ibrahim). He was adopted as a son by Nyai Gede Pinatih (施大娘), the most distinguished preacher of Islam in Indonesia. Nyai was a Muslim and the eldest daughter of Shi Qin Ching (施进卿), Chieftain of Palembang. In a family power struggle, she lost her position to her younger sister. The Majapahit authorities sympathised with her and appointed her as Shahbandar. She became the liaison between the King and foreign merchants and in the collection of shipping dues and import and export tax. In 1486, there was an anti-Chinese riot in Majapahit, and Nyai Gede Piantih was assassinated.



Sunan Giri — Raden Paku Giri — Swan Liong

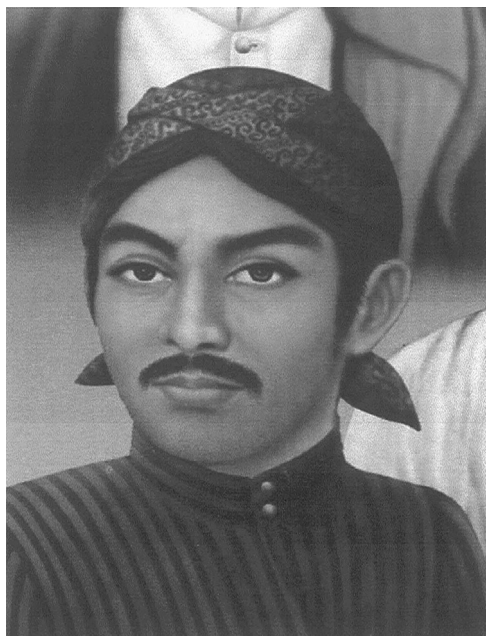
There is a legend about how she saved the life of Raden Paku. When Maulana Shak of Melaka came to Balambangan, he saved the life of the princess with his medical skill and the King promised to allow him to marry the princess. But when she was cured, the King changed his mind and wanted him killed. Maulana left the princess and escaped to Pasai. The King discovered that the princess was already pregnant.

In 1355, a child was born and the King wanted to get rid of the new-born baby. He arranged for the baby to be put in a wooden box and thrown into the sea. The princess was so heartbroken that she disappeared into the jungle and was never seen again. The box floated out to sea and with God's grace, it was picked up by Nyai Pinatih, when she saw the box, while sailing on a boat. She brought the baby home and was overjoyed to have found such a treasure. She brought him up and, when he turned 16, took him to be tutored by Sunan Ampel and later became one of the *Wali Songo*. He later married Sunan Ampel's daughter. He studied in Melakka and founded the Islamic School. She later established his own school in Desa Sidomukti at Southern Gresik in East Java — a location from which he got his name *Giri*, meaning hill. The Islamic school he established not only offered religious subjects, but also served as a centre for various civic activities connected with social development.

The King of Majapahit gave power to Giri to expand his role in political leadership. Sunan Giri, a proponent of orthodox Islam foretold the spread Islam to Lombok, Sulawesi and Maluku. He also predicted the rise of Mataram. He was the bastion of orthodox Islam and staged public discourse against the theological interpretations of modernised Islamic scholars of the 1800s and 1900s.

### ***Sunan Kalijaga — Raden Said — Gan Si Chang (颜子章) (1406–1546)***

Sunan Kalijaga was a *kapitan cina*, famous for creating the *gamelan sekaran* for use in the mosque of Demak which was built by him. He was born as Raden Mas Said of a Regent of Tuban in East Java. He was a close friend of Sunan Gunangjaati and had lived till 100 years old.



Sunan Kalijaga — Raden Said — Gan Si Chang

He had witnessed the fall of Majapahit and the rise of Demak, Cirebon, Banten and Pajang. During his lifetime, he had built two mosques, Masjid Agung Cirebon and Masjid Agung Demak. Sunan Bonang was known to be his mentor. Kalijaga believed in applying arts and culture as the medium for his preaching, particularly in carvings, *wayang kulit*, Gamelan music, drama and singing. From this he popularised *Baju Takwa*, a traditional dress costume for Indonesian Muslims.

***Sunan Gunang Jati — Sayid Syarif Hidayatullah —  
Toh Ah Bo (1448–1580)***

Gunang Jati was the offspring of a dynastic union between Syarif Abdullah, Maulana Huda, an Egyptian of Hashiemite descent and Nyai ara Santang, daughter of the infamous Prabu Siliwangi, Rajah of Sunda. As such, Syarif Hidayatullah could claim descent on the



Sunan Gunung Jati — Sayid Syarif Hidayatullah — Toh Ah Bo

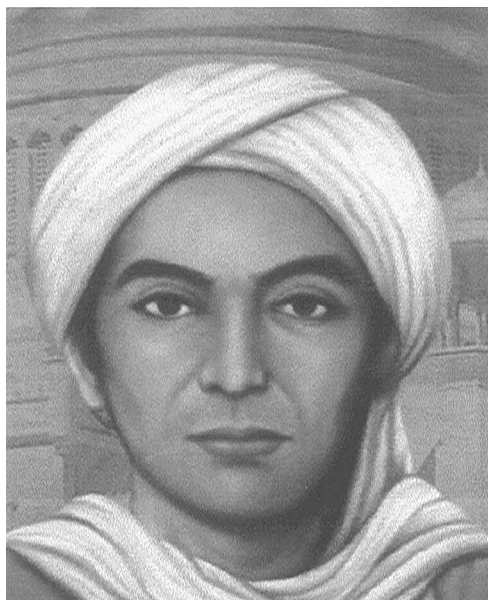
paternal side, from the Islamic Prophet Mohammed, through his daughter Fatima on his mother's side, from the god-kings of Hindu Sunda.

He studied Islam under the guidance of venerated scholars in Egypt and assumed a sultan's coronet, the only wali who was known to have accepted this. He used his kingship-imbued with the twin authority of his paternal and maternal royal ancestry to propagate Islam along northern coast of Java or the Pesisir. He took expeditions to Banten and the leader there voluntarily submitted the leadership to him but he was eventually appointed as the new leader of the Province which later became the kingdom of Banten.

### ***Sunan Muria — Raden Umar Said (1518–1530)***

Sunan Muria was the son of Sunan Kalijaga and therefore the grandson of Maullana Ishak. Mount Muria was named after him. His surname





Sunan Muria – Raden Umar Said

must be Gan, but his Chinese name is unknown. He has very close relationship with the ordinary people and tend to spread his teaching in rural and remote areas, including teaching the people how to farm, catch fish and other daily occupation. Although of Chinese descent, he was not good at speaking Chinese and a dialect mixed with Javanese.

### ***Raden Patah (陈金文) and the fall of Majapahit empire***

Although the *Wali Songo* contributed immensely towards the downfall of the Majapahit empire, the one who led soldiers to overthrow the regime was Raden Patah, who had a Chinese name called Tan Kim Boon, the descendant of one of the Princes of Majapahit Kertagejara, whose father took a Chinese Princess brought in by Admiral Zheng He as his second wife. A Chinese chronicle found in a temple of Sampo Kong in Semarang stated that Raden Patah founded the town of Demak, which was then a marshy area to the north of Semarang.





Raden Patah

When he grew up, Raden Patah was sent to Semarang to carry out grassroots activities and to raise an army to overthrow the Majapahit kingdom. By the time he arrived at Demak, the ruling elite of the kingdom consisted mainly of Chinese, a large proportion of whom have been Javanised. They had intermarried with Javanese women through the efforts of Bong Swi Hoe. The north coast of Java was the hub of many Muslim communities, both foreign and Javanese merchants. This was before the emergence of Demak. Unlike Bong Swi Hoe, who could neither understand nor speak Chinese, Kim Boon was fluent in Chinese and could work closely with the Chinese community. He was a young and energetic and dynamic person. He conducted negotiations with Hayam Wuruk and the Sultan of Metenam. He was considered the strongest man in Demak. In those days, most of the Chinese had become *peranakan* and married Javanese.

Kim Boon recruited about 1,000 daring soldiers comprising Javanese youths and *peranakans* and formed his own army. He was determined to oust the Majapahit King, despite the fact that he was related to the King.

Most of Kim Boon's soldiers were mixed blood. They wore a black cap to symbolise bravery. He used the mosque, which became his headquarters of the movement. The mosque still exists, with four pillars representing Sunan Ampel, Bonang and Sunan Kalijaga. The mosque had been renovated several times. The last time on March 21, 1987, when President Suharto came to officiate the opening.

In 1474, when the war still on against Majapahit, Kim Boon passed through Semarang for the first time, he rushed to the mosque built by Admiral Zheng He — the Sampo eunuch. He burst into tears when he found that the mosque was turned into a Buddhist temple. He prayed to Allah for strength and blessing so that he could build a proper mosque nearby. Admiral Ong Keng Hung (王景鸿), the Buddhist who was the second in command in Zheng He's fleet had converted the mosque into a temple to commemorate Zheng He after his death.

In 1477, when Kim Boon led his soldiers against the Majapahit and arrived at Semarang again, he went to the temple once again but was wise to leave the non-Muslim Chinese unmolested and did not damage the temple. But, he vowed that if his revolt against the Hindu Kingdom was successful, he would make the non-Muslim Chinese conform to an Islamic rule in Demak. When he became King of Demak in 1478, he kept his promise and built a mosque in Demak in order to spread Islam in its unadulterated form.

## **The Impact of *Wali Songo* on the Indonesian Society**

This concept of the *Wali Songo* signifies the formal acknowledgement in the Javanese historiography of the important role the Sino-Javanese religious leaders played in the early Islamisation of Java in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The Shafite Sino-Javanese Muslims and their descendants were fully acculturised in the Javanese mainstream society. They had completely lost their ethnic identity. They adopted not only Javanese or Muslim names but also the Javanese culture and civilisation and lifestyle. As a result, it was difficult to trace those Muslims of Chinese descent who had lived in Indonesia for generations.

Most of the Javanese believed that these *Wali Songo* had magic powers bestowed by Allah. There was a story about Sunan Kudus's

visit to Mecca. When he arrived in Mecca, there was an epidemic, and the Meccan authorities could do nothing to stop the calamity. Kudus used his magical power to wipe out the epidemic. The King of Saudi offered him gold and other valuable gifts, but he declined and collected a few pieces of rocks from Mecca, wrapped them up in his handkerchief and brought them back to Java. The birthplaces and graves of these nine *Wali Songo* have become sacred sites where Muslims go to worship.

Even President Suharto, who ruled Indonesia for more than 33 years, had to consult the *Wali Songo* before he stepped down from office. The *Wali Songo* were the descendants who inherited their positions from their forefathers were ordered to see him in the Presidential Palace. This shows how powerful their influence in Indonesian politics.

The Indonesian Muslims are basically divided into two categories: first the *Abangans* Muslims who not only pray to Allah, but also worship mountains, rivers, trees and mystical historical personalities such as *Wali Songo*. Most of the top Indonesian Muslim political leaders such as Sukarno and Suharto were *abangans*. I met many Indonesian political leaders, businessmen and scholars who believe in *Wali Songo*. One of them, Sujoeno Humardhani, Personal Assistant to Suharto, was one of my good friends. He told a lot of stories about *Wali Songo*. He said when Suharto first came into power, he was instructed to go to Bali to look for Gaja Mada's mask and hanged it in the Jakarta Presidential Palace in order to enhance the President's political power. He personally took me to the Bali temple and opened a special box which contained Gadjaja Mada's mask. President Suharto also got his soldiers to search for a special flower called *Keng Hwa* because it would bring good luck to the government. The only object that was missing was Sukarno's *Kris* (sword) which gave power.

I once visited the house of Pak. Sunarso, Indonesian Ambassador to Singapore. At the entrance of his house was a Chinese statue made of wood. He whispered to me: 'Sometimes when I am indecisive, I consult this statue'.

Mysticism seems to be in the blood of most *abangans*, and this must have been the influence of the *Wali Songo* who believed mysticism. It took me three years to study Javanese mysticism, and when

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew consulted me on how he could be a 'real friend of Suharto' after I have finished my job to arrange for his visit to Indonesia, I said: 'Go to the grave of the two marines we had hanged and put flowers'. Suharto, being an *abangan*, believed in pacifying the soul and their burial grounds. I recommended that when Premier Lee visit the Kalibata to place flowers on the burial grounds of Indonesian heroes, the two we had hanged were nearby and he should also go there to pay his respect. The sprinkling of flowers on the graves of the two Indonesian marines brought about the friendship and trust between the two leaders.

The other category of Muslims in Indonesia is called *Santris*, those who would only pray to Allah and stick by the strict rules of Middle East Islam. They are clamoring to make Indonesia an Islamic state conforming to Islamic laws for all people.

## **How I Came to Learn About *Wali Songo***

It was an accident of history that I learnt about the *Wali Songo* and their effort to Islamise the Chinese population. In 1959, when I was Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Culture, Prof. Slamet Muljana, an expert on Muslim affairs in Java, was attached to the Ministry as an advisor on Indonesian affairs. We were colleagues and soon became close friends. We talked about the Chinese in Indonesia. He gave me a book entitled *Tuanku Rao*, written in Bahasa Indonesia, which talked about a person called Mangaradja Onggan Parlindungan, who wrote a preamble for the book. It was through this book that I became interested in the *Wali Songo*. The book traced the origin of the *Wali Songo*, and how they helped Islamise the Chinese population in Java.

Professor Slamet was a friend of Onggan Parlindungan. In fact, Mangaradja was his form teacher. Mangaradja came to know a Dutch official named Poortman when they were schoolmates in the Technological College in Delft and who was later appointed Resident of Tanpanuli Sumatra. Poortman was instructed by the Amsterdam superiors to find out whether it was true that Raden Patah, the Muslim hero responsible for the defeat of the Majapahit Empire was

really Chinese. Poortman, the then adviser to the Dutch governor, visited the Sampo temple in Semarang in 1928 when the Communists were starting a revolt. With the help of the police, Poortman searched the temple and discovered a large pile of Chinese documents purporting to contain valuable information about the Chinese Muslim communities in Indonesia. Poortman was well-versed in the Chinese language and translated all the materials he found in the Dutch language. The book *Tuanku Rao* was based on information from Poortman's secret report submitted to the Dutch colonial administration. The secret report confirmed that Raden Patah was Jin Boon and also revealed a great deal of information about the Chinese Muslim community in those days.

Because of the sensitive nature of the Poortman Report, it was on restricted circulation among the Dutch administrators. These documents were then kept in the archives of the Governor General's office which afterward became the Istana Merdeka occupied by President Sukarno. The Japanese took over the building when they occupied Jakarta, but the Dutch took it back when they reoccupied Jakarta. During the changes, the documents disappeared.

According to the author Mangaradja, when he was studying in Delft, Holland, he had access to the preamble to these documents, a copy of which was found in Poortman's house.

Professor Muljana wrote a controversial book entitled '*The Fall of a Hindu-Java Kingdom*' and '*The Rise of Islamic States in Nusantara*'. The book mentioned that as early as the 15th century, the process of javanisation of the Chinese had already begun through intermarriages. The professor narrated many stories about the *Wali Songo*. When I became the Ambassador to Indonesia in 1970, I renewed my interest in *Wali Songo*, as well as Zheng He's role in introducing Islam when his fleet visited Indonesia.

## **Dutch Divide and Rule Colonisation Slows Down Assimilation**

The *Wali Songo* were the earliest *peranakans* in Indonesia. Had there been no Dutch colonialism, the Chinese in Indonesia would have

been completely Javanised either through Islam or intermarriage. The Dutch discovered that the Chinese were intelligent and industrious workers and hence started importing large numbers of Chinese coolies to Java. They treated the Chinese differently from the local Indonesian natives. They appointed prominent Chinese businessman as *capitan* to administer their own community. These *capitans* helped the Dutch recruit many labourers from China and to work in the rice and sugar plantations. They have the decide on civil and criminal affairs of minor importance. In 1740, by a special order of the governor-general, a Chinese court was set up to serve as registration of Chinese birth, deaths and marriages. This system lasted almost 300 years.

From 1619 to 1623, the five waves of Chinese immigrants arrived in Java, Ambon and Bandar to help cultivate spices, and other agricultural items. The Dutch also allowed many Chinese women to migrate to Java, thus ending the trend of intermarriage between the Chinese and the natives. With the arrival of Chinese women, the assimilation process began to decline. According to a report of 1770 from a British journalist Sydney Parkinson, in the whole of Batavia, there was only one Chinese woman; thus Chinese immigrants had to take local native girls as their wives. The Dutch authorities had the right to conscript every Chinese immigrant and to tax the natives heavily. But, if a native woman married a Chinese immigrant, she could be exempted from tax. Thus, whenever ships arrived with Chinese immigrants, native women would line up offering to marry them.

As more and more Chinese arrived in Batavia, it became an important centre for the Chinese community. In 1619, there were only about 400 Chinese, but by 1628, the number increased to 3,000. With the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, a large number of Chinese migrated southwards, especially to Batavia and by 1658, the number of Chinese has increased to 5,363.

## **The Chinese Under Dutch Colonialism**

Dutch colonialism was based on the principle that ‘racial consciousness is the lifeblood of colonial society’. The colonisers wanted to

divide and rule. Unlike the Spaniards, who were more religious minded and who forced Chinese to marry local Filipinos who were Catholics with a view of converting them, the Dutch were less religious and more commercial minded. What they wanted was to exploit the natural resources of the country and use cheap Chinese labour to tap them. They do not want to see closer contact between the Chinese and Indonesians and even less to encourage intermarriage between the Chinese immigrants and local Javanese.

They were class conscious. They divided the people into three categories: the 'white skin' — Dutch were classified as Class One; the 'yellow skin' — Chinese as Class Two; and the brown skin — *pribumi* indigenous Indonesians as Class Three. All aspects of life were racially distinguished, from train tickets to toilets. The Dutch prevented Javanese from sending rice to the Moluccas Islands and banned all Chinese, Malays and Javanese from entering Ambon Islands. As early as 1600, they had colonised Ambon and trained the Ambonese to become soldiers like the Gurkhas of British Nepal with a view of fighting the Javanese revolutionaries.

The Dutch discovered that the Chinese were intelligent and industrious workers and hence started importing large numbers of Chinese coolies to Java. In 1920, the first governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, Jn Pieerezoon Coen, established a system of Chinese Civil Service in Batavia to govern the Chinese community. He initiated the *capitan* system, which gave the *capitans* considerable powers over civil and criminal affairs. The first Chinese *capitan* was Soh Meng Kang (苏鸣岗), whom the Dutch addressed as *Bencon*. Soh was a Fujian from Quanzhou (泉州) who was installed in October 1619. He was a businessman and the head of the village who had contacted the Dutch Governor when he arrived. In 1636, he sailed to Awiwan and became the advisor to a Dutch representative in Taiwan, helping him recruit many labourers from China to work in the rice and sugar plantations.

By 1633, the title of *lieutenant* was created and the formerly successful system of governing the Chinese through their own leaders was extended by adding two more *majors*. The right of the *capitan* to decide civil and criminal cases of minor importance was placed in 1740 by a special order of the governor-general in a Chinese Court



which served as a registration office for Chinese births, deaths and marriages. This system lasted almost 300 years.

As early as 1655, the Dutch had established the Council of *Boedelmeesters* (Trustees) comprising both Dutch and Chinese residents. The Council administered inherited wealth or properties of deceased Chinese families who had no children who have come of age. The trustees deployed the wealth to build hospitals and orphanages. The Council enabled the Dutch and Chinese to jointly deal with issues relating to sanitation and debtor–creditor relations. The Chinese could take advantage of the Dutch commercial law which protected their property. Batavia being the headquarters of the Dutch East India Company or VOC (*Verrnigde Oost-Indesche Compagnie*), the Chinese enjoyed the best legal protection and many preferred to reside there. Hence from the founding of Batavia in 1619 to the end of the VOC in 1800, the Dutch and the Chinese had developed good relations.

### **The 1740 Tjiliwung Massacre of Chinese (红溪大屠杀)**

Things began to turn bad and ugly when the Dutch discovered that they were no match for the Chinese in the business world. Relations between the Chinese and the Dutch colonisers began to sour, and the Dutch started to introduce various measures to stifle the economic activities of the Chinese and imposed all sorts of taxes on them. They began to fear the economic strength of the Chinese.

The authorities required the Chinese residents to obtain resident permits in order to stay in one place. Those who infringed such laws were arrested, tortured and severely punished by having their properties taken away.

In 1739, the authorities arrested about 100 Chinese in Bekasi and Tanjong Priok for such offenses. There were also incidences of extortion by Dutch officials against well-to-do Chinese in order to gain profits.

In view of the drastic actions taken by the Dutch colonisers, the Chinese in various regions particularly Gandaria, began to organise themselves as a defence force. It started with 1,000 people and later increased to 5,000 men. In October 1740, about 600 armed Chinese clashed with some Dutch guards on duty, resulting in the killing of



two Dutch officials and 14 Dutch armed guards. On the October 9, 1740, Dutch military officers began to search Chinese houses for arms and imposed a midnight curfew, forbidding Chinese residents to leave their homes. On the same night, the Dutch carried out the first and most sinister massacre of the Chinese in Batavia. They burnt 600 houses, killing every Chinese man, woman and child. The loud screaming of Chinese voices choked the atmosphere and Chinese blood reddened the Tjiliwung River. The incident, known as the Tjiliwung Massacre, shook the world. It lasted for three days. The Dutch sent their fire brigades to extinguish the fire, which was smouldering only when they discovered that it was threatening the safety of their valuable godowns. On October 10, 1740, 5,000 to 6,000 Chinese armed volunteers tried to attack the Dutch fort, but the colonial power was too strong for them. Many of them sacrificed their lives and more than 500 Chinese were detained in prison and later executed. The wife of the Dutch Governor, Mrs. Valckenier, and his daughter went about helping to kill Chinese women and children. The Dutch Military Commission even passed a resolution to provide a bonus of two Dutch shillings for severing a Chinese head.

The Dutch colonialists' hatred for the Chinese was so great that they even massacred Chinese *capitans* that they had appointed. This wiped out almost the entire Chinese population in Batavia. Today, the Tanah Abang Street (Red Earth 红土街) still remains to remind us of the Dutch atrocities. The few remaining survivors of the massacre were in an area called *Glodok*.

When the Chinese Qing authorities heard about the massacre, the Emperor not only did not take any action against the Dutch, but also insinuated that '*the Chinese who had deserted the country deserved the ill-treatment*' because they were not loyal to their motherland and did not sweep the graves of their ancestors. Overseas Chinese began to realise that it had no benefit to be loyal to China and many began to think of assimilating into local society.

The massacre was a symptom of the decline of the Dutch Imperial power. There was rampant corruption in the Dutch administration in Batavia, once considered *The Pearl of Orient* (东方明珠). VOC ships

sank in the harbour of Batavia because they were overloaded with private goods belonging to Dutch officials obtained through bribery. VOC officials became very rich, but the Dutch East India Company accumulated more and more debts. VOC officials returned home to Holland as vulgar colonial *nabobs* who drove in cosy carts drawn by plumed horses accompanied by liveried servants overshadowing the great lords of the home country.

After 1760, the VOC became bankrupt, and only the Dutch taxpayer subsidies, given generously by Netherlands Estates General, kept up its existence. By 1789, when the French revolution erupted, the VOC declared bankruptcy and was taken over the Batavian Republic. The massacre also had implications *vis-à-vis* the Mataram Kingdom. One court faction of the Mataram tried to ally with the Chinese against the Dutch by proclaiming a new Sultan (Sultan Kuning or the Yellow Sunan) as King. He did not last long.

The feud within the Mataram kingdom reached a critical point in 1755 (the triumphant time in the war of succession of the Mataram throne). None of the rebel princes, united or alone, could defeat the ruling king, nor could the king overcome the rebels. The Dutch, tired of all the fighting and intrigue, finally brought the warring factions together and negotiated peace. Through the intermediary of the Dutch, the warring factions decided on the split of the once united monarchy of Mataram into two *kratons* — the royal seat of the Susuhunan of Surakarta, who retained the old title of the Emperor (*Susuhunan* in Javanese) and the *kratong* of the sultan of Yogyakarta.

After the massacre, the Dutch repented and made friends with the Chinese again as they needed them for their further exploitation of Indonesian natural resources. More and more Chinese left their homes and sailed in their dirty *tongkangs*, packed like sardines, to Indonesia. They first populated the long coastal areas of Java from Banten in the utmost West to Banjuwangi in the utmost East, where Chinese-like cities arose, with the graceful Chinese roofs and colourful artistic temples. Such were the old cities of Indramaju, Tjirebon, Tega, Pekalongan, Semarang, Djuwana, Rambang, Lasem, Tuban, Gresik, Pasuruan, Probolinggo and Situbondo.

## The Chinese *Kamp* and the *Peranakan*

After the Tjiliwung massacre, the Dutch adopted the Spanish *Parisan* method of isolating the Chinese resident from the rest of the population. In the case of Batavia, the specified area was known as the Chinese *kamp*, which the Dutch called *wikenssel*. This separation, together with the *passenssel* that required a pass for a Chinese planning to travel outside, restricted the movement of the Chinese population. However, in 1830, the Dutch officials began to rigorously enforce these restrictions. The *kamp* later became the Chinese ghettos or Chinatown and this residential pattern led to a zoning system.

Even before 1740, the Dutch preferred to isolate ethnic groups from each other. At the beginning, the purpose was derived more from religious considerations than racial. This was not too difficult to understand as the Dutch came from the 17th century Europe when religious intolerance was at its zenith. The term *peranakan*, was reflective of Dutch religious bias. The term was used to refer to Chinese who were Javanised or converted to Islam up till the early 19th century. The shaving of their pigtailed was one sure sign of conversion. The number seemed to be quite large. The VOC segregated them from the non-Muslim Chinese and allowed the Muslims to appoint their own leaders whom they called *capitan*. This system was, however, abolished in 1827, when they became indistinguishable from the indigenous Muslim population. The term *peranakan* had since been applied exclusively to Java-born Chinese, those who had been completely Javanised.

The Dutch divide-and-rule method, which they called *divide et impera*, used clothing or the style of dress as a tool to impose political control over the Chinese population. The Chinese, for example, were forbidden to dress like Europeans or indigenous people and could face a penalty or a fine if the rules were infringed. The Dutch feared that if the Chinese were allowed to dress like the indigenous people, they might mingle with them and influence them. They also feared that if they chased after Chinese debtors, they could disappear among the indigenous people by wearing similar clothing. It was easier for the Dutch to identify the Chinese with their distinct attire, and other distinguishable marks imposed on them.

Racially assigned neighbourhoods, which developed in Java, were maintained by the Dutch. There was a *kampung cina* (for people from China), a *kampung Arab* (for those from the Middle East) and *kampung Keling* (for those from India) and villagers had to obtain travel passes whenever they travelled outside their own *kampongs*. This divide-and-rule tactics discouraged intermarriage between the Chinese and Javanese.

### **The *Peranakans* (土生) Versus the *Sinkheks* (新客)**

During the 19th century, as more and more Chinese immigrants arrived in Java, the Chinese community became divided into two categories: the *Pernakans* and the Chinese immigrants who were called *sinkheks*. Initially, the *peranakan* community dominated the scene. The *sinkheks* arrived in Java as poor men with only worn-out clothing. They worked hard, saved enough money and sent a large part of it back to China to support their family and clansmen. They also bought property in China so that, one day, they might return to retire there. In the case of the *peranakans*, there was no such capital drain and with their enterprise and savings, they developed into a strong economic force in the colonial economy of the 19th century.

The elites of the *peranakan* community were appointed by the Dutch as *cabang atas* (meaning top officials). Wealth was the basis of their appointment to the position of *major, capitan and lietunant*. Wealth made it possible for the *peranakan* channels to become revenue farmers and this business became a family tradition but was restricted to a small circle of *peranakan* families. Through revenue, farms and trade monopolies, great wealth was accumulated, and the *cabang atas* could use them to maintain their status. They consolidated their position through intermarriages. Consequently, their sons and sons-in-law were appointed to positions of power in other towns and this helped them acquire farm lands. Inevitably, the *peranakan* communities were the most prosperous and commercially active centres of Javanse towns and cities.

Some wealthy *peranakan* Chinese mingled socially with the Dutch. They were expected to entertain the Dutch masters in their

otherwise monotonous life in the local colonial towns. Dutch officials and employees were restricted in their spending because they had to depend on fixed salaries from the government and the companies. The Dutch resident has often thrown receptions and parties on the occasion of royal birthdays but was very dependent on the support of the Javanese regent and the wealthy Chinese. The rich *peranakan* families would throw big parties to celebrate Chinese New Year, the birth of their siblings, a wedding, official recognition and appointments. On such occasions, the *caban atas* would bestow on the Dutch expensive gifts, for example, a fish with big diamonds on its eyes. The Dutch officials would be allowed to dance with their daughters.

Close relations between the *peranakans* and the Dutch officials influenced the culture of the *peranakan* society. The *caban Atas* bought expensive Dutch furniture and adopted the style of living of the Dutch. The Dutch needed the services of the *peranakans* and therefore set up Dutch schools and encouraged the children to *cabanga atas* and other elites to study Dutch. They even encouraged the *peranakans* to apply for Dutch citizenship. In the 20th century, naturalisation of Dutch citizenship became possible in Indonesia. In the late 19th century, rich *peranakan* Chinese began to hire more and more Dutch teachers for their children and sometimes even for themselves. Around the same time, missionary schools began to admit Chinese children. As a result, there emerged a group of *peranakan* Chinese who could understand the Dutch language and adopted Dutch culture.

It was a dream for the new Chinese immigrant to become a *cabang atas*. To realise such a dream, he made efforts to get accepted by the *peranakan* society, use its capital and business networks, and eventually assimilate into it. It was not far fetched though, as the *peranakan* society was competitive and only a few *cabang atas* families could maintain their position for generations and accepted those with high potential within their fold.

Language became the main obstacle for the *sinkheks*. They could not speak either Malay or Javanese and had to depend on the *peranakans* to interpret for them. Wealthy *peranakans* looked down on the *sinkheks* since they were poor and uneducated and their lowly behaviour of gambling, quarrelling and later smoking opium did not create a good impression on the minds of the *peranakans*.

The *peranakans*, however had their weaknesses. A great deal of their wealth dissipated due to legal expenses because of litigation over their inheritance, which often arose after the death of a wealthy *peranakan* as he often had a number of wives, concubines and children. Even if there was no litigation, wealth was dissipated when it was divided by a large number of children. Businesses entered into difficulties once there were disputes. Moreover, *peranakan* families were more conservative and family oriented and employed mainly family members. As many writers had pointed out, this familial characteristic prevented their business from expansion and usually kept them generally small and weak.

With the rise of Chinese nationalism, when Dr. Sun Yat-sen overthrew the feudalistic Manchu empire and with the spread of propaganda to revive the Chineseness among Chinese immigrants, the contradictions between *peranakans* and *sinkheks* widened. With the entry of more Chinese women, the Javanisation process of assimilation virtually came to a standstill. The Chinese in Indonesia began to think more like Chinese aliens than as assimilated *peranakans*.

### **Oei Tiong Ham (黄仲涵) (1866–1924): The Sugar King**

Many *peranakans* became millionaires under Dutch rule. One of them was Oei Tiong Ham, who became the ‘sugar king’ of Indonesia. His father Oei Tjie Sien, a Chinese migrant from Dongan (东安) in early 1800. He started off by doing odd jobs and in those days enormous ships were built in Quanzhou.

When Tjie Sien landed in Semarang, Java had long recovered from the Java War (1825–1830). In 1831, the population of Semarang was estimated slightly over six million. However, the cultivation system introduced by the Dutch limited the free movement of Chinese trade and goods. As at that time, China was in the midst of Taiping Rebellion, and a large number of Chinese migrated to Southeast Asia to escape the devastation.

Oei Tjie Sien was one of the immigrants. Unlike other Chinese immigrants who were mostly illiterate, Oei had some education which was unusual during those days. He did not have any financial capital

and in the early days of his life in Semarang, he had to peddle Chinese pots and wares. In Semarang, there were minor tensions and he helped smoothen relations between the Dutch officials and the Chinese.

Oei came at a time when it was possible for a *sinkhek* to become a *cabang atas*. His education certainly helped him draw close to the wealthy Chinese. His transition from rags to riches happened fairly quickly. He founded the Kian Gwan as a *kongsi* five years after his arrival in 1863. His quick assimilation into the *peranakan* society seemed to have made this possible. He traded in rice, sugar, Gambir and incense, for which he needed the capital of the *peranakans*. His main trading produce was sugar which was still a government monopoly.

In 1866, Oei Tiong Ham was born. He had seven brothers and sisters and he was the second in the family. When Tiong Ham was young, he studied Chinese and Bahasa and grew up in a business environment under his father's guidance. In 1884, his father arranged the marriage with one of the daughters of the well-established Goei family in Semarang. He was 18 then. It was through this marriage that Oei Tjie Sien entered the *cabang atas* class. The Goei family held revenue farms by virtue of their official positions. The founder of the family probably came to Java sometime in 1770s, and the family had become *peranakanised* by the time of the marriage.

Like a typical merchant who also looked for other business opportunities, Oei Tjie Sien also invested in real estate after becoming a successful businessman in trading. In 1883, he bought several properties from an opium farmer called Hoo who had gone bankrupt. But he was not rich enough to purchase an opium farm. After this, he retired and devoted his time doing gardening and pursuing his literary activities. When he died, he chose Oei Tiong Ham as successor, while leaving a large part of his wealth to other children.

Oei Tiong Ham was a dynamic businessman with different ideas from his father. He was appointed as lieutenant in 1886 and formally became a *cabang atas* and made a *major*. In many ways, he was more cautious and conservative, and yet innovative. For instance, his father had a strong adherence to Chinese clothing and wore a *queue*, while Oei Tiong Ham in 1889 petitioned the Dutch Government through



his Dutch lawyer, Baron C. Wan van Heechiren, for permission to cut his *queue* and dress in Western style. This petition was granted and he became the first Javanised Chinese to cut off his pigtail and wore a Western dress. In 1904, all the staff of Kian Gwan followed his example.

Unlike many of his Chinese contemporaries, Oei relied heavily on documented contracts in conducting his business. Unlike his father, he did not believe in the word of mouth. He depended on legal instruments to acquire the collateral for the loans he extended. Many owners of the sugar factories in East Java were unable to repay loans from Oei due to the sugar crisis of 1880. Using his rights as a creditor, he acquired five sugar factories. Sugar became the backbone of the company and he became rich. He expanded his business in rubber, shipping and finance and drew Chinese to Semarang like fruit bats to a mango tree.

In 1890, Oei was bestowed the title of *capitan* and was given a monopoly on the opium trade. That brought him a tremendous fortune and he became known as the sugar king throughout the world in 1894. He planted sugarcane with 7,982 hectares of land, and produced 100,000 tons of sugar each year.

Oei Tiong Ham took care not to offend the Dutch officials and demonstrated his obeisance by not overtaking the carriage of Dutch officials when he was riding a horse carriage. He, however, had political foresight and would take the risk when the opportunity arose. In the early 1900s, he was seen flaunting a British flag on his motorboat. He had also set up an office in London to sell his sugar products by 1910. Before that, sugar was exported only to the Netherlands market for Javanese sugar. With the success of his business, he earned enough money to plunge into buying opium farms in Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surakarta and Surabaya. In late 1880s, there was a crisis in the opium farm and only 4 of 19 opium farms could survive. Oei seized the opportunity to buy the opium farms which had been jealously guarded by the close-knit *cabang atas* family. These farms had been lucrative and had given them patronage as well as prestige in Chinese society.

Oei kept the opium farms until 1904 when the opium *regei* (regime) administered by the colonial government took them over.



By then he had made about 18 million guilders as net profits. This was little over a decade. In 1890, Oei acquired five sugar factories and installed new machines to produce kapok, rubber, tapioca and tea. He understood what money could do and used it to hire competent people and bought loyalty. He relied on outsiders he could trust to manage his business instead of his own relatives.

Oei was not only a businessman, but also a pioneer in political awakening. The expansion of his business coincided with the rise of Chinese nationalism. In 1904, he was the first Chinese in the country to cut off his pigtail to demonstrate his distaste for the Manchus. In 1911–1915, he supported the revolution of Dr. Sun Yat-sen against the Manchus and also against General Yuan Shikai (袁世凯) who took over from Dr. Sun and aspired to be the new emperor of China. Since 1912, he had served as President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Semarang. Testimony of Oei's reputation and social status were the visits he received from distinguished guests, such as the King of Siam and the Crown Prince of Denmark and Greece.

After the war, the Dutch authorities forced him to pay exorbitant taxes and offered to take over his company with seven million rupiahs, but he refused. Oei Tiong Ham made many friends all over Southeast East Asia. In Singapore, he became a friend of the famous Tjong brothers such as Tjong A Fie (锺亚飞) and Tjong Yong Hian (锺永贤) who were Chinese *capitans* in Medan. Oei realised the importance of Singapore and therefore joined the small league of successful overseas Chinese who behaved like Chinese.

By 1910, he was already recognised as the King or Lord of Java's sugar. In order to be able to resolve inheritance issues for his children which was highly regulated by the Dutch civil law, Oei moved to Singapore in 1921. He had not kept the Dutch consulate informed of his presence in Singapore. The Dutch law of 1910 stipulated that a Dutch subject would lose his status as a Dutch subject if he failed to report to the Dutch legation within three months of his arrival in a foreign land. He chose to give up his Dutch citizenship and became a Singaporean. He appointed his successors as he wished and died in 1924.

Although Oei was Chinese educated, he was careful not to associate himself too closely with Chinese political activities. He headed welcoming committees and acted as host to both the Chinese Imperial families and Republican envoys, but he did the same for the Crown Prince of Denmark and Greece. Many factions in China had contacted him for help since he was the richest man in Southeast Asia, but he kept a distance and did not support them financially. He took a neutral stand, although in earlier stage, he was in favour of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. One close associate of Dr. Sun once complained that the Chinese capitalists in Nanyang were against the revolution and afraid of it. It appeared that Oei to remain as apolitical as possible. He did not seek any official position on either the Qing authorities or the Republican regime. He neither received any decoration during the Qing dynasty nor any title from the regime.

Oei believed in enjoying life and was polygamous. He had too many children and could not keep track of them. He had eight official wives who bore him 13 sons and 13 daughters. In those days, polygamy was a status symbol. One of his grandsons told me that once he went to his grandfather for money. He said that his grandfather produced a book with the list of names of his offspring and asked him to identify himself and the name of his mother so that he could ascertain who he was. One of his daughters recalled in her autobiography: 'I used to stand on the wide veranda of our palace, waiting for the sight of Papa's carriage racing through the valley below. By the time it swept through the entrance gate, a Malay servant had appeared from nowhere carrying a hot towel soaked in the *Eau de Cologne* on a silver tray. Papa, impressively handsome, in immaculate white trousers and a smart Western-style white jacket, would wipe his hands and face with the scented towel before he stepped down from the carriage and approached me. It was like a ballet'.

Oei was a philanthropist. He contributed a lot of his wealth to charity, one of them was in education, the development of Singapore's Raffle's Institution, the Chinese High School and Dunearn School. Oei died of a heart attack in 1924. He was only 58 years old. His daughter Oei Hui-lan (黄惠兰) believed that he was poisoned by

Lucy Ho, his mistress. He was buried with his father in Semarang. Because of his wealth, Oei became known as the 200 million man.

## **The Spread of Chinese Nationalism**

Before and after the Dutch arrived at Batavia, there was not a single Chinese school in Indonesia. It was quite natural for local-born Chinese of immigrants to accept assimilation. By 1690, overseas Chinese in Batavia started the first Chinese school called Ming Cheng Shu Yuan (明诚书院). By 1901, Chinese merchants in Batavia established the first new style Chinese school. In 1906 when the Chinese businessmen organised their Chinese Chamber of Commerce. More Chinese schools began to appear. But it was not until 1911 after Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution when the tide of Chinese nationalism emerged. A group of reformists in China, led by Kang Youwei (康有为) and Liang Qichau (梁启超), initiated the 'hundred days reform' and wanted to turn China into a constitutional monarchy. This resulted in Empress Dowager taking drastic actions against the reformers and they had to go overseas for hiding.

In 1903, Kang Youwei came to Batavia to spread the tide of Chinese nationalism. Speaking to Chinese immigrants in a Batavia rally in Cantonese, he called upon the overseas Chinese to support Emperor Guangxu to change China into a constitutional monarchy and to remember that they were Chinese. Kang discovered that most Chinese have forgotten their own language and culture and was quite worried. He told the Chinese that they should pay loyalty to China instead of Dutch-owned Nusantara. He even brought the clothing of Emperor Guangxu (光绪皇帝), distributed golden, silver and bronze medals printed with the portrait of the Emperor. A large number of rich Chinese merchants supported Kang Youwei. One Chinese millionaire in Java even offered to contribute \$700,000 for a calligraphy written by Kang Youwei. Kang also established a *baohuangdang* (保皇党) to protect the royalty party in Batavia, backed by many overseas Chinese. A Chinese newspaper published in Batavia called *U Dao Ri Bao* (有道日报) became a mouthpiece of the *Baowang* (pro-royalty) group.

There was a clash between the *Bao Wang Dang* and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionary group who called themselves *tongmenghui* (同盟会) which had its headquarters in Tokyo and a branch in Batavia. The *dongmenhui* had several newspapers such as the *Min Feng Pao* (民峰报) and *Shi Min Pao* (世民报) and *Sumentara Pao* to challenge the pro-royalist *U Dao Ri Bao*. The two groups constantly engaged in a war of words. The *Dongmenghuis* group, which wanted a bloody revolution instead of constitutional changes in China, had set up *Soe Pao Sia* (书报社) all over the Dutch East Indies to spread Dr. Sun's revolutionary doctrine. Many local Chinese were so influenced by the propaganda that they wanted to return to China to die for their motherland.

In 1906, two Chinese editors, Pan Chuen Fatt (潘全发) and Yue Yong Chang (越永章) translated Dr. Sun's three principles (三民主义) into Bahasa. In the same year, Wang Jing Wei (汪精卫), who was the right-hand man of Dr. Sun, also came to Batavia to help raise funds for the *tongmenghui*. During the *Huanghuagang* (黄花岗) revolt, the Indonesian Chinese donated \$32,550 for the revolution. Wang later turned traitor by collaborating with the Japanese by setting up a puppet regime in Nanjing.

In Pangor Island, a group of young Chinese volunteered to return to China to join the revolution. All of them died and their names inscribed in a huge plaque called *Huanghuagang 72 Heroes Monument* (黄花岗七十二烈士碑) in Canton Guangdong.

News of the success of the Wuchang Revolt (武昌革命) spread fast to Batavia, and the Chinese immigrants in Indonesia began cutting off their pigtails. About 5,000 Chinese in Batavia gathered in the city centre to celebrate the victory of Dr. Sun revolution in overthrowing the 5,000-year-old feudal system. They set off crackers, hoisted the new Republican flag and sang *San Min Chu Yi*. The Dutch police tried to stop them by using water hoses but they defied their orders. A clash ensued, causing the death of three Chinese and the detention of over 100 people. After protests from Indonesian-wide Chinese and 30 associations and clans in Shanghai, the Dutch gave way and released those detained, finally allowing the Chinese to hoist the Republican flag.

### **Chinese and *peranakans* before the Indonesian independence**

After the independence of Indonesia, the Chinese and the *peranakans* were divided in their sense of loyalty. A minority continued as faithful citizens of the Dutch, but most of the Chinese, particularly the *peranakans*, were split in their views of loyalty. First was the *Sin Po* group consisting of pro-China elite who advocated the unity of *totoks* and *peranakans* and encouraged their children to study Chinese and to participate in Chinese politics. Second was the Chung Hua Hui (中华会)-CHH, the pro-Indonesia *Peranakan* body which felt that they had indigenous blood in them and should become the sons of Indonesia. The third was the Partai Tionghua Indonesia (PTI), a group of *penakans* who identified themselves more with the *pribumi* (native Indonesians) and their revolutionary movement.

#### **The pro-China *Sin Po* group (新报)**

The *Sin Po* group: had no interest in taking part in Indonesian politics. They felt that China should be the protector of all overseas Chinese and the *peranakans* could survive only by being linked with China. They were, however, unclear how China could protect them as the country was then weak. They believed that one day China would be strong enough to protect them through diplomatic channels. They were against the Dutch system of appointing Chinese officers which they felt should be abolished.

The *Sin Po* group was based in Batavia, a port which had a close link with Singapore, a largely Chinese city and the centre of Chinese nationalistic activities in Southeast Asia. The leaders of the *Sin Po* group were inspired by the prominent anti-Japanese hero Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚), the millionaire rubber magnet, who was never interested in local politics and was faithful only to China. The two most prominent leaders of this group were Tjoe Bou San and Kwee Kek Beng.

The *Sin Po* group published a newspaper in Batavia and became its important mouthpiece. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper was Tjoe Bou San (朱茂山), who strongly believed that the Chinese,

including the *penakans*, should be an integral part of the Great Chinese nation. Tjoe felt that the Indonesian Chinese as a separate group was meaningless in the eyes of the world because of their insignificant numbers and that they would become significant only when they combined forces with the hundreds of millions of Chinese in China. *Sin Po* successfully gained the support of a hundred thousand *peranakans* who wanted to retain their Chinese nationality.

In an article in the *Sin Po*, the case was presented as follows:

‘The Chinese in the Indies were aliens, as aliens they do not have to take part in local politics. One might argue that no one would protect the interests of the Chinese if they did not participate in the Volksraad. This was not true, because China had an embassy in The Hague which could deal directly with the Dutch authorities. The Chinese diplomats were far more capable than the Chinese members of the Volksraad, it also means that *peranakan* Chinese accepted the Dutch Onderdaanschap. As a Dutch subject, they would have to serve in the army. One might contend that the Dutch already claimed *peranakan* Chinese as their subjects. However, China still insists on the principle of *jus segnauinis*, so *peranakan* Chinese were still seen as the nationals of China. Totoks were considered aliens and would be eligible for European status. Taking part in Volksaad only isolates *peranakans* from totoks and China, so that China no longer has the right to protect the *peranakans*’.

### **Tjoe Bou San (1891–1825) (朱茂山)**

Tjoe was the principal brain behind the move to sinicise the *peranakans*. Born in 1891 in Batavia, he received some Dutch education; though largely self-taught, he was able to read Malay, English and Chinese. In 1909, he became the editor-in-chief of the Batavia weekly *Hou Tok Po* (好读报) Malay edition which had close link with a Chinese revolutionary association, the Soe Pao Sia (书报社). He was sympathetic towards Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s revolution. Later, he left the *Hou Tok Po* and stayed in Soerabaya for a while. In 1917, he visited China and worked as a *Sin Po* correspondent in China. In 1918, he returned to Batavia and became a director of *Sin Po*.

His first task was to campaign against the introduction of the Dutch Nationality Law which stipulated that all *peranakans* would become Dutch subjects. He claimed that *Sin Po* had collected the signatures of 30,000 *peranakans* who wanted to retain their Chinese nationality.

Tjoe suffered from tuberculosis for some time and this caused his premature death on September 3, 1925.

### **Kwee Kek Beng (郭克明) (1900–1975)**

A strong follower of Tjoe Bou San in his pro-China stance and who made *Sin Po* effectively one of the most influential *peranakan* newspaper was Kwee Kek Beng. Born in Batavia on November 6, 1900, he first attended the Hollands-Chinese School (HCS). Later he went to Hallandsch a school with Dutch teachers but whose students also studied Chinese. In 1922, he worked in Buienzog as a school teacher. Four months later, he was invited to work in *Bin Seng* and later transferred to the editorial board of *Sin Po*. He started as a reporter than later promoted as editor-in-chief.

After he became editor-in-chief, he wrote many books about China, mostly in the Dutch language. In 1929, he went to Singapore and Malaya and was impressed by the activities of the pro-China Chinese community. Later, he travelled to his ancestral land in 1933 and was impressed by the relics of Chinese civilisation. In China, he was awarded a medal by the Red Cross of China for his role in raising funds to relieve the poor there.

Following his return from China, he became even more China conscious and could not tolerate those *peranakans* who did not share his views. He became a real Chinese chauvinist who looked down on the Javanese whom he thought were uncivilised. He also hoped that when he retired, he would go back to China and be buried in Chinese soil. He felt that the *peranakans* who had been *desinicised* should be recinicised through the study of Chinese language. He proposed that the *peranakans* should use Mandarin in their daily conversations.

Kwee also proposed that Chinese history, geography and other knowledge pertaining to the heritage of Chinese culture should be

introduced in the curriculum of Chinese schools, so that they would benefit by the wisdom and civilisation of the Chinese people. He even dreamt of starting a Chinese university in the East Indies.

Kwee had hoped that China would become stronger internationally. When a split took place between Mao Zedong (毛泽东) and Chiang Kaishek (蒋介石) in the Chinese mainland, Kwee sided with Mao Zedong and criticised Chiang Kaishek. In the Dutch East Indies, there was constant conflict between the pro-Mao Zedong and pro-Chiang Kaishek groups. Schools that supported Mao was referred to as *Huang Pai* (黄派) and those in favour of Chiang Kaishek, the *Lan Pai* (蓝派). The Mao Zedong supporters were called *Hong Pi Gu* (红屁股) — the red buttocks and the Chiang Kaishek supporters were described as *Lan Yan Jing* (蓝眼睛).

Kwee was staunchly anti-Japanese and when Japan invaded China, he raised funds through a campaign to fight the Japanese. When the Japanese invaded Java, he and his family took refuge in Bandung, where he stayed until the Japanese surrendered. He published his memoirs in 1948 under the title *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Waartawn* '25 Years as Journalist', narrating stories and experiences as a journalist. Most of the prominent leaders of *penakans* were journalists, a profession which was easily linked to politics. He also wrote a book entitled *Storm over China* in the Dutch language. He translated Dr. Sun Yat-sen's *Strategy for China*. In 1962, he travelled extensively in Eastern Europe and China and completed a book called *Fifty Thousand Miles in a Day*.

A conference was held in Semarang in 1917, where 7,000 representatives from local councils throughout Java attended. Heated debates came about between the pro-China and the pro-Indonesian Chinese, and a resolution was passed against the sending a representative to the Volksraad. It marked a victory for Chinese nationalism in Java. It was a triumph for the large *peranakan* Chinese newspaper *Sin Po*.

### ***The pro-assimilation of peranakan***

The Chinese leader who advocated the idea of assimilating *peranakans* into Javanese was Kwee Hing Tjat (郭恒节), who originally



belong to the pro-China *Sin Po* group, but changed his mind after living in Shanghai for 10 years. In 1921, when he was a correspondent for *Sin Po*, he wrote a book entitled *Doea Kapala Batoe* (Two Stubborn Men), which related the story of a pro-China movement in Java before 1920. From the tone of the book, he was still pro-China and believed strongly in Chinese nationalism. In the early 1920s, he wrote another article entitled *Bahaya Poeti* (White Peril), which attacked Dutch colonialism. When he returned to Soerabaya, he was barred from landing. This incident led to strong protests from the Chinese community in Soerabaya.

Kwee then exiled himself to Shanghai where he lived for more than 10 years. It was through the influence of the multi-millionaire Oei Tiong Ham that he was allowed to return to Soerabaya. Oei Tiong Ham got his director Oei Ejong Hauw of his company to guarantee for him, giving the excuse that was required to publish a newspaper to advance his business. The newspaper called *Mata Hari* was published and Kwee was given a free hand to run it.

Living in China changed his outlook entirely. He found himself a stranger in China and a *peranakan*. He discovered that the *peranakans* were different in behaviour, customs, traditions, and thinking. In particular, he realised that the *peranakan* Chinese were more Indonesian than Chinese. It was this China experience that led him to advocate the conversion of the sons of Indonesia which he called *poetra* Indonesia. In Kwee's view, a *peranakan* had the duty to undertake all the responsibility identical with those who consider Indonesia his motherland, and to work with the Dutch the trustee of Indonesia.

The change of attitude of Kwee brought about a great deal of unhappiness among the pro-China *peranakans* in Soerabaya. He was denounced by the radical Indonesians for his pro-Dutch attitude. He soon revised his concept of 'the duty of an Indonesian son's arguing that the duty was to work wholeheartedly with the indigenous Indonesians for the independence of Indonesia'. He became a patriotic Indonesian.

Kwee was born in Soerabaya in 1891, educated in a Dutch vocational school and worked for *Kian Guan* belonging to Oei Tiong Ham after leaving school. In 1913, he became a journalist and pub-

lished *Bok Tok* in weekly newspaper based in Soubaya. In 1916, he came to Batavia and was appointed as editor-in-chief of *Sin Po*.

Kwee's idea of an Indonesian son was not confined to a political concept. He went further with the idea of assimilating *peranakan* into indigenous communities, particularly the Javanese. Like the *Wali Songo* Bong Sie Hoe of the Ming dynasty, he was advocating the assimilation of *peranakans* into *Javanese*. Kwee's new concept of *peranakan*, was discussed in both *peranakan* Chinese bodies and indigenous press. His idea was not criticised as there were no Chinese schools then during the days of *Wali Songo*. In his generation, when Chinese schools were everywhere, it would be an insult to be assimilated into Javanese. The Chinese had always felt that they were superior to the natives in terms of race and culture. Kwee's attempt to put the clock back faced insurmountable obstacles. Kwee died in Semarang in 1939 after suffering from high blood pressure.

### ***The Pro-Indonesian revolution group***

A group of Indonesian *peranakans* who identified themselves with the *pribumi* (native Indonesians) including their revolutionary movement for a party called *Partai Tionghus Indonesia* (PTI) led by a *peranakan* leader named Liem Koen Hian (林群贤). He advocated that the *peranakans* should work with the Indonesians for a self-governing Indonesia which he called *Indonesierschap* (in Dutch). Liem felt that the *peranakans* should be distinguished from *totoks* because they led a different way of life. He was in favour of *peranakans* being assimilated into the indigenous society, but he did not believe that they had to be converted to Islam, change their names or abandon their Chinese customs. He believed that an independent Indonesia should be able to accommodate cultural diversity and racial tolerance.

Liem was against the type of Chinese education sponsored by the THHK. He felt that Dutch education, combined with an Indonesian orientation, would be ideal for *peranakans*. At one juncture, he even suggested closing down Chinese schools.

In 1933, Liem went to Batavia to study law. Later, he became editor-in-chief of *Siang Po*, the mouthpiece of the Indonesian secular nationalists. On his initiative, a newspaper called *Begangoenan* published articles and statements made by prominent Indonesian nationalists such as Sanoesi Pane, Muhammad Yamin and Amir Sjarifoeddin.

On the eve of World War II, Liem was active in the anti-Japanese movement and engaged in polemics with Dr. Soetomo and his Parindra which held a pro-Japanese attitude. He wrote a book entitled *Tiongkok dan Jepang* (China and Japan) and expressed his feelings against the Japanese. He died in 1952 and remained a controversial figure in the *peranakan* leadership.

### **Ko Kwat Tiong (高厥忠) (1896–1970)**

Ko Kwat Tiong alias Saleh Mohammad was another prominent *peranakan* leader who was pro-Indonesian. He did not think that there was anything incompatible with being an Indonesian and a *peranakan*. He believed that the *peranakan* should remain Chinese. Their *Chineseness* should not be superficial and confined to external manifestations, but should include the Confucius, Mencius and Lao Tze worldviews. Ko's sense of justice led him to sympathise with the weak. He felt that *peranakans* should actively support the struggle of indigenous Indonesian independence.

Ko was born in 1896 and was the son of a Chinese *lieutenant* in Parakan. He attended a Dutch school in Semarang and graduated in 1914. He worked in a Dutch company and later joined *Palita*, a newspaper in Jogjakarta. After marrying a Javanese girl from Jogjakarta, he became active in local Chinese organisations.

In 1920, he went to the Netherlands to study law. Six years later, he obtained a degree and returned to Java as a qualified lawyer. Originally he joined the CHH in 1928 as he thought the *peranakans* should regard Dutch East Indies as their homeland. But he changed his mind and joined the Liem Koen Hian to promote PTI.

There was a clash of opinion between Liem and Ko on various aspects of PTI's policy towards Chinese schools. Ko was opposed to the presence of Chinese but more accommodating *vis-à-vis* the *totoks*,

while Liem thought *peranakans* should differentiate themselves from the *totok*.

The split became even worse on the eve of the Volksraad elections as both of them were contested for seats. None of them however got in. Ko was expelled from the PTI. It appears that the rift between them was more personal than ideological.

### ***Peranakan in the Eyes of Pribumi Political Parties***

On the whole, the *pribumi* indigenous Indonesians do not have a good opinion of Chinese and *peranakans* because they had cooperated with the Dutch and considered themselves one class higher than the indigenous Indonesian. Many of them looked down on the native Indonesians and treated them without kindness.

The Boedi Ostomo, a Javanese organisation, did not admit Chinese members. Some Muslim members of the Boedi Ostomo branched off to form the SI in 1912, to protect their business interest against Chinese domination. Once it became a political party, its aim became anti-Chinese and it succeeded in drawing support from various predominantly Islamic ethnic groups in Java, Sumatra and Celebes. In 1912, another organisation called the *Indesche Partij* was formed by a multi-racial concept but it was primarily a Eurasian party. The *peranakans* were not interested in these organisations.

In 1914, another political party called *Indischde Social Democratische Vereeniging* was formed in multi-racial lines, but it only appealed to a very small section of the *peranakan* Chinese in Java, who were mainly traders and artisans. This party, which later evolved into the PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party, tried to secure from local Chinese, particularly the Chinese labourers. They failed to attract the *totoks* partly because of the language barrier and partly because the *totoks* had strong Chinese orientation. The PKI then turned their attention to the *peranakans* where there was no language barrier and the *peranakans* were not pro-China. However, a very small number of *peranakans* joined the PKI. Though no exact membership figures were available, there were only eight *peranakans* among the 823 party activists. In those days, the Chinese Communist

Party and all Communist sympathisers joined the PKI. However, after the 1927 rebellion, they were all exiled to Boven Digoel. During the pro-nationalist phase, the relationship between the indigenous people and local Chinese in Java was not cordial. The indigenous people considered the Chinese as moneylenders and merchants belonging to the exploitative classes. Moreover, the Dutch *ethical policy* introduced at the beginning of the century included a number of measures clearly intended to protect the indigenous population against the Chinese. The Chinese felt that such measures were meant to discriminate them and to favour the advancement of the *pribumi*.

In 1912 and 1918, anti-Chinese riots took place which was largely believed to have been instigated by the leaders of the SI. The 1918 riot in Koedoes was a manifestation of a conflict of interest between local Chinese businessmen and the indigenous merchants. In this riot, a few Chinese were killed and many injured. Many Chinese houses were burnt down.

In the 1920s, many Chinese joined the strikes initiated by the Indonesian nationalists in Soerabaya and Semarang. A famous Indonesian author Ananda Doer once said 'In the struggle for Indonesian Independence, the overseas Chinese had contributed a lot'. Two Chinese activists, Ko Choon Yuen (高春源) and Tan Peng Kiat (陈炳杰) joined the Partai Kommunis Indonesia (PKI) in 1926–27 and participated in the PKI revolutionary activities. In 1933, the PKI chairman Suroemo wrote an article entitled '*History of the Peranakan and their Contributions*' praising their valuable contribution towards the Indonesian revolution. In one speech, he advocated that the *peranakans* should treat Indonesia as their motherland and Chinese as their fatherland.

In 1938, when Sukarno was exiled to Sumatra, he was strongly supported by a Chinese Muslim Huang Qing Shing (黄金星). But, most of the indigenous Indonesian nationalist parties did not accept the *peranakans* as indigenous partners.

The wave of Indonesian nationalism really started after the formation of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) in 1927 by Sukarno. The PNI's racial concept stated clearly that the persons eligible for membership in this party would be native Indonesians (*orang-orang bangs Indonesia*) not less than 18 years old and that other Asians

(*orang orang bangsa Asia yang lain*) could be associate members. The PNI leaders did not regard *peranakans* as indigenous Indonesians. Prior to the PNI's inception, Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, a member of the preparatory committee, proposed that *peranakans* should be allowed to be members of the Central Committee. His proposal was rejected and this made him dissociate from the party.

Another example of PNI's attitude towards the *peranakans* was the setting up of a PNI branch by a *peranakan*, Kwee Hong, in Palembang on his own initiative. He even held the founding meeting in his own house. Since he was a *peranakan* Chinese and he could only become an associate member according to PNI constitution, he was nevertheless active in setting up a branch in Bangka. Kwee was angry when the PNI did not accept his proposal and left the party because he felt that the leaders had treated him as an alien Chinese, no matter how much he tried to prove himself a true Indonesian, like the indigenous people.

The PNI and a group of Indonesian nationalists, secular or Muslim also disapproved of Liem Koen Hian's concept of cultural diversity and racial tolerance. Even the internationally minded socialist Indonesian leader Soetan Sjahir, writing in the 1930s, used the terms *Indonesische Volk* (Indonesian people) and Indonesia to refer to the indigenous Indonesians, excluding the non-indigenous group. On the other hand, a handful of Indonesian secular nationalists, strongly influenced by Marxism, began to develop a non-racial concept of an Indonesian nation in the 1930s. This group, which included Sanoesi Pane, Muhammad, Yamin and Amier Sjaarifoceddin, published a newspaper called *Kegungoesnan* (Arise) and later formed a political party, the Gerinddo, to propagate their ideas. Sanoesi, for instance was of the opinion that the *peranakans* were a constituent element of the Indonesian nation. He said the *peranakans* who were conscious of Indonesian nationhood deserved to be called Indonesians. At the Gerindo's Palembang congress, Amir Sjaarifoceddin justified the party opening its door to the *peranakans* on the grounds that Indonesian nationalists must face reality as there were more and more *peranakans* interested in joining the Indonesian nationalist movement. Amir gave the Girindos definition of nationality (*kebangsaan*)

in that the nationality of a person should not be decided by blood, or skin or the shape of one's face but by three factors: goal, destiny and desire. He said people with the same goal, destiny and desire must belong to one nation. He gave examples of Switzerland and the US as instances of nations whose citizens had not originated from one race. The decision of Girondo to accept *peranakans* as full members caused various reactions. Liem Koen Hian even left the PTI to join the Gerindo. But many indigenous Indonesians were still doubtful of the sincerity of *peranakans* to become Indonesians.

Later under the shadow of Japanese invasion, the Indonesian nationalists formed a combined political force called *Gapi*. The PTI and Partai Arab Indonesia supported the Gapi movement and wanted to join it but were offered only associate membership. Generally speaking, the Indonesian nationalist movement tended to exclude the *peranakan* Chinese. Although PKI tried to include them, it did not make much headway, because the communal feelings among members of the PTI were still strong and the Indonesian nationalists could not completely trust them.

## **Chinese and *Peranakans* Under Sukarno Regime**

Sukarno (1901–1970) was the Indonesian leader who brought about independence for the country and became President from 1945 to 1967, presiding with mixed success over the country's turbulent transition to independence. He was a highly educated leader, well versed in international politics, very ambitious, but quite non-racial in his approach to citizenship matters.

During his regime, Chinese language primary and middle schools everywhere sprang up like mushrooms. They were divided into pro-Beijing and pro-Taipei schools, the former supporting Mao Zedong and the latter Chiang Kai-shek. Sukarno got along well with Mao Zedong and therefore the pro-Mao schools had an advantage whereas the pro-Chiang Kai-shek schools suffered a setback. Sukarno was busy trying to form a nation out of so many races, tribes and religions whilst indulging in international politics. He was wise in adopting Malay as the Indonesian national language. If he had

chosen Javanese as the national language, Indonesia would have been divided.

He was non-racial and even appointed two *peranakans* as cabinet ministers, namely Oei Tjoe Tat and Siauw Geok Tjhan, the two Baperki leaders. Sukarno's father was a primary school teacher, an aristocrat named Raden Soekami Sosolihardjo. His Balinese mother was Ida Ayu Ny Oman Rai from Buteleng regency. Sukarno was born in Bitar East Java in the Dutch East Indies. He was admitted into a Dutch-run school as a child. He met the future nationalist Tjokroaminoto when he attended a secondary school in Sorabaya. In 1921, he began to study at the *Technische Hogeschool* in Bandung, where he studied engineering and focussed on architecture. A linguist, he was fluent in several languages, apart from Sundanese, Balinese and Bahasa, he was quite comfortable with German, English, French, Arabic and Japanese.

In 1927, he founded the *Partai National Indonesia* that opposed imperialism and capitalism. He was arrested by the Dutch colonial authorities in 1929 and sentenced to two years imprisonment. By the time he was released, he had become a popular hero and was arrested several times during 1930s. He was exiled when Japan occupied Indonesia in 1942.

I met Sukarno the first time during the Bandung conference in 1955 when I was a journalist. His striking personality and oratory skills impressed me. He spoke at the Bandung conference without a note on his table. He played an important role in the Afro-Asia Conference when the Heads of State, Prime Ministers and President of 29 Afro-Asian countries which had freed themselves from colonial rule gathered to discuss common problems affecting them. I met Sukarno again in 1960 when I went to Istana Negara Jakarta with Premier Lee Kuan Yew's delegation which called on President Sukarno. As Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, I was asked to arrange for the visit.

Sukarno made us wait for a few minutes in the visitor's hall and then appeared from a room with a walking stick stuck in his armpits. He took on the persona of a great leader, meeting the 'vassal state' of Singapore and did not bother with the usual protocol of seeing the



delegation off when the Singapore party left his palace. It could be interpreted as sheer arrogance.

Sukarno was cooperating with the PKI and was close to the Beijing Government. However, under pressure from the extreme Muslim group, his government had to ban all Chinese traders from operating a business in the countryside. This caused a great deal of unhappiness among the small Chinese traders. China's Foreign Minister Chen Yi (陈毅) was rather disturbed by the movements of the Indonesian Armed Forces in sabotaging the friendship between Indonesia and China. On December 1959, Beijing launched a campaign to call the overseas Chinese to return to China. For several weeks, Radio Beijing aired daily broadcasts urging the Chinese to return to the warm bosom of the motherland, where they would have had 'excellent opportunities to take part in socialist construction'. The vice-chairman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission Fang Fang (方方) declared that China would welcome not only those affected by the discriminatory Indonesian decree, but also all overseas Chinese including the *peranakans* who had the desire to return.

In May 1960, 40,000 Chinese had gathered in Indonesian ports awaiting passage to China. The number swelled to 119,000, making the job of shipping most difficult. China's small merchant fleet plied back and forth bringing the Chinese home. The vast majority of them were old or middle aged, of little economic benefit to China. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Army, on their part, began to step up a campaign to remove the Chinese settlers from West Java.

Forced by the growing strength of the Armed Forces, Sukarno turned around and following his visit to Beijing advanced his doctrine of the struggle between the newly emerging and old established forces, an idea almost identical to that expressed in Beijing's call for the Afro-Asian countries to unite against the big industrial Western powers. Indonesia and China went on to establish the Beijing-Jakarta axis and Sukarno started his confrontational policy against Malaysia.

When the Dutch were in power, an Indonesian Chinese Thio Thiam Tjong (张漆忠) the personal advisor of Governor-General Van Mook, took the initiative to form the *peranakan Tonga* (PT) or Chinese Union, with the purpose of unifying the ethnic Chinese in

Indonesia. The PI was recognised by the Dutch and had been invited to send delegation to the Dutch Parliament. After the Indonesian revolution, many PT members were of the opinion that Chinese Indonesians needed an organisation not only to look after their own interests, but also to bind them to fulfil their obligations to their country. They felt that the PT should be converted into a party in order to participate in nation building. The PT was transformed into *Partai Democratic Tionghua Indonesia* (PDTT) and Thio Thiam Tjong was elected chairman. For three years, the party stagnated and could not make headway. It was never represented in the Parliament or in the legislative body. It was discovered that Thio, the chairman who had a colonial background having advised the former Governor-General, was the stumbling block. The PDTT went around looking for someone more suitable to be the chairman and they found Siauw Geok Tjhan (萧玉灿), who had been jailed three times by the Dutch and the Republic. Siauw, who was then in his late 30s, suggested that the party be transformed into an ordinary association with the objective of promoting democracy and opposing racial discrimination and that the association should be opened to non-Chinese. The party was then dissolved and became the Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan (Baperki) or council for Indonesian Citizenship (印尼公民国籍协商会). The Baparki had the support from President Sukarno.

The Baperki played an important role in the field of education. In the 1960s, it set up Chinese schools throughout the archipelago and collected funds to build a university. The University of Baperki opened its branches in Semarang and Soerabaya. In 1965, university matriculated more than 6,000 students with about 10,000 taken in from its branches. Never had there been an occasion when the university had grown so swiftly. President Sukarno was amazed by its speedy growth and early vigour, which led him to give it a new name — Res Publika. Long before it was called Res Reblika, it had opened wide its doors to indigenous students, but only a few took the offer as they could easily get admission to the state universities.

Basically, Sukarno had used his strategy of *Nasakom* — trying to strike a balance between Nationalism, Army and Communism. He

felt the Army was getting too strong and he needed to counterbalance its military power. In his trip to Beijing, he asked China to supply arms and weapons in order to train a new military force under his command to balance the army. China, accordingly sent 5,000 rifles to Indonesia at his request. Sukarno wanted to build up a farmers unit using farmers as soldiers to balance to strength of the Armed forces.

In Indonesia, the *Hammer and sickle*, signs of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) dominated the scene. The PKI being under the leadership of the Audit, the Communist chief exerted tremendous control over the whole country and he had the support of Sukarno. Rally after rally staged by PKI could be seen throughout the peninsular country. The atmosphere was something like the Chinese cultural revolution. The PKI got the support from Baperki whose left-wing members were trying to mimic the Chinese cultural revolution. From time to time, Sukarno appeared on the stage, giving the impression that he was pro-Mao. This made the Indonesian Muslims and military rather nervous and uncomfortable.

Sukarno was then suffering from kidney trouble, and a friend from China sent a Chinese physician, a kidney expert, to treat him. There was a leak that Sukarno's health was in danger. PKI leaders were afraid that if anything should happen to Sukarno, the military would wipe them out. Similarly the Armed Forces were also worried that the PKI might make a pre-emptive move against the military. It was during this juncture, that the *lubang buaya* incident of the September 30, 1965 coup took place. Six military generals and one army officer were assassinated and thrown into a crocodile hole. One of the Generals was Yani, the Chief of Staff of the Army, one of those who did not want to listen to President Sukarno. The blame was put on the PKI implicating even Sukarno.

Suharto was then in charge of *kostrad*, a military establishment responsible for security in Jakarta. He was worried and frightened by the way PKI had imitated the Chinese cultural revolution in their rallies and demonstration. He saw the danger of China's interference in Indonesian internal politics and decided to do away with the influence. He gave the formal 'clean out' order and sent special Army

contingents to take control of the situation. The Army forces with the help of right-wing students carried out a mass massacre of nearly one million Communists and pro-Communists, including Chinese. In Bali, an estimated 80,000 people, or roughly 5% of the Bali population was killed. Many of the victims were members of Baperki. The villagers were brutally executed. The victims were hacked to death with knives and machine guns. Some of the killers were said to have drunk the blood of their victims and floated the people they had put to death. Central and East Java became another killing fields of Southeast Asia. The bloodshed was one of the worst of the 20th century, a fact admitted by the CIA.

After the *Gestapo* coup, Suharto came into power, and Sukarno was placed under house arrest. The Sukarno era of Baperki was over. The leaders of Baperki, such as Oei Tjoe Tat and Siauw Geok Tjhan, were detained. I met Oei Tjoe Tat in 1977 after his release from prison. He came to see me in my office introduced by an Indonesian friend. He told me that he was put in the same cell as Subandrio, former Foreign Minister and other PKI leaders. He said: 'When I was detained in the same cell as Subandrio, I felt that I was one of them. I am an Indonesian. I do not speak a word of Chinese and I am loyal to my country. I do not want to betray Chinese Indonesians who felt the same way as I do toward Indonesia. They had kept me in as an Indonesian and I cannot leave the country for the sake of my own comfort. My roots are in Indonesia. My family has lived here for five generations'.<sup>1</sup> He said that those who arrested had offered him repatriation to Holland, but he refused.

Tjoe Tat told me that when Indonesia imposed a confrontation against Malaysia, Sukarno sent him to various countries in Southeast Asia to convince the Chinese that the confrontation was not aimed at the Chinese. He had made arrangements to meet Lee Kuan Yew in Rome but something happened and the meeting did not materialise. Sukarno had asked Tjoe Tat to convey to Lee Kuan Yew that he had started the confrontation because of Tengku Abdul Rahman. He had

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<sup>1</sup>The Fragile Nation — Indonesia in Crisis — Scribd. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20195343/The-Fragile-Nation-Indonesia-in-Crisis>.

gone to Penang and Kuala Lumpur under cover to carry out an assignment to see the reaction of the Chinese towards confrontation. He discovered that the Indonesian confrontationists had distributed pamphlets in Malaysia to explain that Indonesia had to confront Malaya in order to save the Malays from Chinese domination. He returned to Jakarta and reported the matter to Sukarno. He told Sukarno that the pamphlets were distributed by helicopter by Indonesian confrontationists. Tjoe Tat said he was annoyed that Sukarno had, on one hand, sent him to explain to the Chinese that confrontation was not aimed at them, and on the other hand, allowed his men to distribute pamphlets contrary to his ideas. He questioned Sukarno about it. Sukarno was furious and flared up. Sukarno said: 'How dare you question my sincerity'.<sup>2</sup> Sukarno later investigated and discovered that one important member of his Cabinet was responsible for the pamphlets. He warned the person responsible that he would take drastic action against him if he did not destroy the pamphlets.

Tjoe Tat said on one occasion Sukarno had told him firmly that there was no necessity for Chinese to change their names. Sukarno said: 'Why should you change your name. It was given by your father and you should respect your father'.<sup>3</sup> He said Sukarno had always felt that the Chinese should be treated as one of the minorities.

### **Thung Liang Lee (汤良礼): 1903–1970** **An Outstanding Pro-Indonesian Leader**

After the 1965 *gestapu* coup, a *peranakan* Chinese journalist who was bi-lingual and who had obtained a B.Sc degree from London and Vienna became the most outstanding Chinese who strongly encouraged Chinese and *peranakans* to become Indonesian citizens. He formed the Indonesian Institute of International Affairs (Jakarta) and he became a member of the board of directors. He was also the editor of the institute journal *Indonesian Review of International Affairs*, published since 1969. Thung wrote an article entitled: 'The unreality

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

of Chinese nationalism in Indonesian apologia and reorientation' giving his advice to *peranakan* Chinese in Indonesia. His views were frank and sensible. He wrote:

'The Chinese loath to assimilate themselves with the native population especially since owing to Dutch colonial policy assimilation did not mean equalization of rights with the Indonesians. They succumbed to the Dutch view of regarding the Indonesians as a somewhat inferior race. There were few intermarriages. Racially, linguistically and psychologically, they were much closer to the China Chinese. They not only persisted in their refusal to assimilate themselves with their natural brothers and sisters, they even refused to regard the country of their birth and upbringing as their own, their true country. Yet, disregarding the facts of history and ethnology, they tried to become as Chinese as possible'.<sup>4</sup>

Thung Liang Lee felt that in the early days of the EIC, the Chinese immigrants were assimilated into the native population, having acquired a certain local strain in their blood. He added: 'Some of the well-known princely houses and aristocratic families of Indonesia like the Sultan of Palembang, Bantarn, Cirebon and the regents of Tjiamis and Sumedang have had Chinese ancestors and were proud to acknowledge the fact'.<sup>5</sup>

He continued:

'The Warga Negara status must be made into a reality by a proper response on our part. And this response must insist on the realization that our salvation depends on our realizing the unreality of Chinese nationalism and out renouncing all political and sentimental ties with the country that in fact had never wanted us. We must never again come under the delusion of China being our Fatherland, of being out true own country which loves and protects us and was therefore entitled to our allegiance and loyalty. Our true Fatherland was this country of Indonesia, the country of our mothers, our

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

grandmothers, great mothers and great-great-grandmothers. Our loyalty belongs to the Republic of Indonesia, and it must be one and undivided. Our efforts should be directed to making out of this archipelago, the kind of commonwealth we find in the United States or America — only without the racial discrimination that had become a blot on the American scene and a disgrace to modern civilizations. A change of heart more than a re-orientation of policy was required, for only with this change of heart, can we devote our best efforts and energy to the construction of our new Fatherland, as statesmanship no less than self-interest demands'.<sup>6</sup>

Thung was right in what he had said several decades ago. The Indonesian Chinese had to be more practical as the events in history have pointed to the fact that they have not been realistic. In 1960, several thousands fled to China with the hope of China protecting them and refusing to take up Indonesian citizenship. Instead they were sorely frustrated and disillusioned when the Chinese cultural revolution broke out in 1966. The Chinese government denounced and persecuted them as *right-wing revolutionaries* and *spies* of foreign countries. China had never wanted them, just as the Qing government had never protected the Chinese when they were massacred in 1740. Hundreds of thousands of Indonesian Chinese escaped to Hong Kong and were now stranded as *stateless* persons.

Thung was a *peranakan* who was not an ordinary person. He was familiar with China and who had served as Minister without Portfolio under Wang Jing Wei (汪精卫), who led the puppet government during Japanese occupation. In 1929, he was a journalist serving as principal correspondent in Europe for Guomindang Central Committee. The following year, he became correspondent in China for *Sozial-demokratischer Pressdienst Deutschlands (Berlin) Daily Herald, New Leader (both in London) and Sin Po (Jakarta)*. He was also the *New York Times* correspondent in Beijing. From 1931 to 1938, he was the managing director of the China United Press and editor of *The People Tribune* and concurrently a political association and Secretary of Wang Qin Wei.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Thung's publication included *China and Revolt* (London, 1927), *Foundation of Modern China* (London, 1928), *The Inner History of the Chinese Revolution* (London, 1930). *Wang Qing Wei: A Political Biography* (Beijing, 1931), *The Social Order in China* (Shanghai, 1936) and *China's New Currency System* (Shanghai, 1937).

## Chinese Under the Suharto Regime

When Suharto became President, he ruled Indonesia with an iron hand. Though he was not highly educated, he adopted Javanese feudalism and controlled the country like a Javanese king. He administered his country the same way a Javanese king would, using the *priayi* system and trusting only his favourite Chinese tycoons, whom he referred to as *cukongs*, to help exploit the country's natural resources. He knew how to use the Chinese brains for money, but took drastic steps to wipe out Chinese language and culture. His aim was to make the Chinese forget their language and culture and be completely assimilated into the Indonesian mould. Chinese associations, clubs and schools were taken over by the Army. No Chinese signboards were allowed throughout the country. When I went to Jakarta in 1970 to present credentials as Singapore Ambassador, I discovered that all Chinese signboards of restaurants, companies and buildings had disappeared. The Government also banned the *Sin Po*, the pro-Beijing Chinese daily. No Chinese newspapers from abroad were allowed entry into Indonesia. Sukarno's *Res Publik University* was taken over by the authorities and turned it into the *Tri Sakti*.

The way he got rid of Sukarno was interesting. It took him more than a year of wrestling and he did it in the typical Javanese style. There was a Javanese proverb which says '*Alan Alan asar kelakon*'.<sup>7</sup> It meant go with the flow as long as you need, to achieve your aim.

Although Suharto was in power, Sukarno was still the President. Sukarno asked Suharto, 'Harto, just what were you going to do with me?' Suharto replied 'Mr. President, I might have come from a poor farming family, but my father always reminded me to respect my

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



elders'. He used two phrases *mikul dhuwur* (respect for parents) and *mendhem hero* (not to call attention to shortcomings) to which Sukarno nodded in approval. Suharto told Sukarno that he always respected him like he did his own parents. He said, 'I consider you not only as our national leader but a parent as well. I would like to regard you highly, but unfortunately, you do not wish this.' Suharto meant that he had advised Sukarno to ban the PKI but he strongly resisted. Suharto was immensely patient with Sukarno.

After a year of tolerance and after he had shown his respect for Sukarno, the time came for him to oust Sukarno. This was when he got his team to the Istana and gave him only 12 hours to leave the palace and exiled him to the Bogor Palace. He was swift in action. He could not wait any longer because he was determined to lead the country.

Suharto was in a hurry to carry out his various objectives, one of which was to wipe out the Chinese language and culture and to assimilate the Chinese. I had then finished a book written in Chinese entitled: '*Between Myth and Reality Indonesia*' (印尼: 神话与现实) which describes the cultures of Indonesia's multi-ethnic society, hoping that the Chinese would understand his own countrymen better. But it was banned despite the fact that it would give Indonesian Chinese a great deal of benefit.

When I arrived in Indonesia as Singapore's Ambassador in June 1970, the *Nusantara* daily was most vociferous in its attack on the *cukong*. According to *Nusantara*, the *cukong* group consisted of more than 20 persons who had wide personal stakes in national projects ranging from airlines and banks to flour mills, important export companies, tourist corporations, restaurants, shipping companies, tin exporting concessions, rice milling plants, timber concessions and a variety of businesses. The article said that the *cukongs* had a steady and insider information on government contracts, investment credits and other funds. *Cukongs* held 90% of all projects and capital.

The article appalled key stakeholders in Jakarta and other newspapers carried the story in their dailies. Some members of the Parliament began to question the government on the media reports. The Suharto Government not only denied the allegations, but also had Dr. Hafas,

the editor on *Nusantara* detained. I met Dr. Hafas when we were invited to Australia for three weeks in 1955 as journalists. As members of the Asian delegation we toured Australia together and became friends. As a result of the article, Dr. Hafas was sentenced to two years jail.

The Suharto regime was fully aware of the danger of the anti-*cukongism* might lead to social unrest and economic chaos. Suharto's inner circles also realised that any move to curtail the *cukong* would lead to an exodus of Chinese capital from the country, which could result in economic chaos affecting the smooth development of the Repelita-Indonesia's development plans. Because of the capital that the Chinese possess, their business know-how and the trust they created overseas, even foreign investors from Western countries and from Japan began to have a preference for Chinese partnership instead of *pribumi* enterprises in their investments. The *pribumi* was afraid that if the tendency continued, it would deprive them of their chances of participating in economic development. The frustration could lead to anti-Chinese violence.

Thus, the Suharto regime had formed the *Kadin*, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce, comprising all indigenous Indonesian industrialists and traders to promote a better understanding between the *cukongs* and the indigenous entrepreneurs. During the 1971 and 1977 general elections, the *cukongs* cooperated with the government-sponsored party of Golkar, which won 70% of the 360 seats in Parliament.

### ***Suharto's policy of assimilating the Chinese***

When Suharto came into power, he took steps to assimilate as many Chinese as possible and to squash Chinese language and culture. He wanted the Chinese to give up their own language and forget about Chinese culture. He introduced his New Order, compelling Chinese to apply for citizenship and to change their names. It is estimated that there are three million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, of whom 914,000 were PRC citizens, 122,013 'stateless' and 1,907 Taiwanese nationals (1974 statistics). Under his New Order, all Chinese newspapers were

banned. He ordered that no Chinese characters should appear in any shop or building in the whole of Jakarta. He banned all publications written in Chinese character.

The clearest manifestation of the New Order Assimilation Policy was the name changing regulation issued in December 1966 immediately after the Gestapu coup in 1965. Suharto wanted the Chinese to forget that they were Chinese and take on an Indonesian name. Previously, the stated regulation (UU No. 4/1964) had enabled Indonesian citizens of foreign descent to change their names to Indonesian (or Indonesian sounding) names. However, the applicant had to obtain letters of recommendation and authentication from governors or local regents and local police chiefs. The government did not aggressively promote the law or actively encourage it. The Suharto regime simplified the process to encourage more Indonesian citizens of foreign descent to change their names. They had to submit their applications to local authorities for an affordable fee. The application would be forwarded to the Department of Justice. The approval will be granted if there were no objections from the local community within three months. This regulation was effective from January 1967 to March 1968, but was later extended for an additional year because Indonesian citizens of Chinese origin who changed their names were fewer than expected. In August, 1969, the Department of Justice announced that only 232,882 persons had changed their names. In 1980, the Suharto Government further simplified the process to accommodate the naturalisation of the local Chinese.

The simplification of procedures for naturalisation of Chinese into Indonesia citizens was one of the steps Suharto had taken to ensure that when Indonesia normalised her relations with Beijing, the problems of the Chinese would be minimised. The authorities want to be sure that the Chinese were being 'properly assimilated' before normalising relations with Beijing.

While playing golf with General Sumitro, Head of Kopkamtib in April 1971, he explained the intended meaning of 'properly assimilated'. He mentioned that the Chinese should forsake their own traditions and customs and adopt Indonesia traditions. They should not

identify themselves with Beijing or Taiwan. The Suharto regime hence banned the celebration of Chinese New Year, or any other festivals connected with Chinese history.

### ***Anti-Chinese riots — The worst in history***

Suharto's policy of creating a *cukong* class and his dream of assimilating the Chinese by change of names did not dampen the anti-Chinese feelings of the *pribumi*. Suharto had succeeded in assimilating the Chinese and *peranakans*, a large majority have forgotten their mother tongue and Chinese culture and began to behave like *pribumi* Indonesians. But he failed to breach the tap of the rich and poor, making the Chinese, especially the *cukongs*, richer as they got more opportunity to make money. By 1996, Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product grew at a rate of 8%, led by the manufacturing sector. Indonesia was experiencing an economic boom. Five months after the election, however, the country was caught in the Asian financial crisis, which brought the Thai Baht to the brink of collapse. Economic growth in Indonesia slowed down to 1.4% in the fourth quarter with the rupiah falling dismally from Rp2,450 to Rp4,000 against the US dollar between July and October. By January 1998, the rupiah declined further to one-sixth of its original value. With rising unemployment and inflated food prices, the public began to lose confidence in the government's ability to handle the economy. In May 1998, the Suharto Government announced that it would increase the price of gasoline by 70% and triple the cost of electricity. Students in Medan started demonstration on the campus.

On May 5, 1998, a riot erupted in Medan, when thousands of people mostly students poured into the streets and burned cars and shops through the late night. Shops owned by Chinese were looted and they clashed with the police. On May 9, the riot spread to Jakarta, and the Matahari department store was torched. It was estimated that at least 1,000 people died inside the building. Mobs also attacked Glodok and Jakarta's Chinatown and Tanjong Priok. Properties owned by Chinese were the main targets. The principal

target was Liem Sioe Liong (林绍良), the greatest *cukong* of all close to Suharto. Liem was the richest man in Indonesia, who had helped to groom Suharto's children in business know-how and who became billionaires. The rioters burnt down the house of Liem and he escaped to Singapore. His company had almost monopolised the building and manufacturing industries. It was alleged that he had used military power to evict families from their houses so that he could get land to develop into housing estates. Data compiled by the fact-finding team disclosed that reported 1,109 people killed by fire, 27 gunshot deaths. 91 were wounded and 31 individuals were missing. The government had misreported on the magnitude of violence. Only 288 and 101 were reported dead and injured while independent police reports recorded 463 dead and 69 wounded. The incident left 5,723 buildings damaged or an estimated Rp2.5 trillion (US\$238 million) worth of property damage with and 1,948 vehicles destroyed. Provocateurs suspected to be military, goaded rioters and screaming ethnic insults such as *Cina babi* (支那猪) — Chinese are pigs, *Ganyang Cina* (打倒支那人) — Crush the Chinese. Dozens of documented accounts reported that at least 168 Chinese women were raped, some by gangs.

It was evident that Suharto had lost control of his senior military leaders. He resigned one week after the violence on May 21. Internal investigations had revealed that there was an internal struggle within the military elite to determine a successor, culminating in violence. Many believed Kostrad commander Probowo Subianto, son-in-law of Suharto, was the brainchild behind the riots. Originally, Suharto had favoured General Wiranto, but two months after the riot, he chose Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie as his successor.

The riots became known in China as 'Black May' (黑色的五月). China had taken a mild approach to the rioting while the Taiwanese government took on a more aggressive role in demanding the trial of those involved in the violence. They even threatened to withdraw their investment from Indonesia estimated at US\$13 billion in 1998. On August 9, 1998, the Minister of Investment, Hamzah Haz, flew to Taiwan to apologise for the violence.

## **Chinese Under President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)**

Gus Dur, the leader of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), the largest and most influential Indonesian Islamic organisation with a membership of 35 million came into power in Indonesia in 1998. He was a provocative religious and political thinker and a leading proponent of secular democracy in Indonesia.

Gus Dur was considered part of a revolutionary generation of Islamic thinkers who were not afraid to do whatever they thought was good for the country and for Islam. When he came into power, he lifted the ban imposed by Suharto on the use of Chinese language and the practice of Chinese customs. He said: 'I am for an Indonesian society, not just an Islamic one'. In January 2000, he declared that the Chinese in Indonesia would be allowed to celebrate their lunar New Year in the traditional Chinese fashion. He also mentioned that he would allow Chinese schools and Chinese newspapers in Indonesia.

Soon after he was sworn in as President, his priority was to visit China and whilst in Beijing, he promised the Chinese leaders that there would be no more prejudice against the Chinese in Indonesia. In China, he publicly announced that his ancestor was Chinese and that they were the '*Tans*'. His great-great grandfather Tan Qin Han (陈金汉) came from Quan Zhou (泉州) and who accompanied Zheng He to Indonesia during the first visit. A book written in Chinese disclosed his ancestry, and he distributed the book copies to his Chinese guests. He was the first Indonesian leader who dared admit publicly that he had Chinese blood. In the anti-Chinese atmosphere in Indonesia, it was a courageous move on the part of Gus Dur to mention his Chinese ancestry.

Gus Dur suffered from eye problems and had diabetes. He had to be helped when he moved around and his health was poor. When visiting Beijing, the Chinese assigned an expert acupuncturists to accompany him to Jakarta and treated his eye for six months.

Since the year 2000, the Chinese in Indonesia celebrated their New Year in the traditional Chinese style with crackers and buntings in their houses and along the streets. Even the customary Lion dance, which was banned previously, was reinstated.

Gus Dur was a strategist. In order to stop racial and religious rioting throughout the country, he quietly called all the *ulamas* to his residence and called upon them to sign an agreement to sanction the shooting of anyone who should defy the law in their action to destroy life and property. All the *ulamas* signed the pledge. He then instructed the new Police Chief to order to shoot in Lombok the Muslim troublemakers who were about to destroy Christian churches and Christians. At least 12 persons were killed on the spot. Since then, the situation in Lombok has come under control. He also employed the same tactics in Maluku and Aceh. This serious attempt by Gus Dur would pave the way towards better peace and security in the country.

Gus Dur was against the drive by Muslim extremists to create an Islamic state of Indonesia. He reckoned that the formation of an Islamic state would dismantle the unity of the nation by excluding non-Muslim populations of the country. This would lead to unintended consequences and the emergence of separatist and secessionist tendencies. He condemned the Muslims who called for a *jihad* against the Christians in Maluku.

The Chinese throughout Indonesia loved Gus because he was the one President who allowed them to study Chinese, follow their own customs. He had a nickname called *Mang Kong* (盲公), the blind master.

Gus Dur was born on the 4th of the 8th month of the Islamic calendar in 1940 in Jombang, East Java, to Abdul Wahid Hasyim and Siti Solichah. He was the eldest of five children and born into a very prestigious family in the East Java Muslim community. His paternal grandfather, Hasyim Asy'ari, was the founder of the Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), while his maternal grandfather, Bissri Syansuri, was the first Wahid Hasyim involved in National Movement and would move on to become Indonesia's first Minister of Religious Affairs.

He took up journalism and wrote for magazine *Tempo* and *Kompas* newspapers. His articles gained wide circulation and he established a distinguished reputation as a social commentator. He rose to greater international stature when he received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1993 (Asia's equivalent of a Nobel Prize). Since 1994, he

had served as a member of the Presidential Board of the World Council on Religion and Peace.

I meet Gus Dur when he visited Singapore in connection with the formation of a global religion two years before he died. We had lunch together with other world famous monks. He was always cheerful and full of jokes. He died on December 30, 2009, at the age of 69. He died of heart and kidney failure after suffering from diabetes for many years.

### ***The golden period for Chinese***

The legacy left behind by the President Gus Dur remained unchanged despite the change of presidency. The period under President Susilo Bambang Yudhuyuno can be considered the golden era for Chinese and *peranakans* living in Indonesia. The President of the Chinese Indonesian Association which emerged after the fall of Suharto, Setiono, said ‘We feel more free, more equal’. As someone whose forebears arrived from China about eight generations ago, Setiono praised the multi-racial and multi-lingual policy initiated by President Gus Dul and continued by other governments had taken over. This policy had made Chinese and *peranakan* optimistic of their future in Indonesia.

The renewed optimism grew out of a fundamental change in the Indonesian law where the definition of being a ‘native’ was recast. In 2006, the Indonesian Government has passed a law which decreed that all who were born in Indonesia were Indonesians and indigenous. This was indeed a radical departure as the Indonesian society had traditionally segregated the Chinese all through colonial times and in the 33-year reign of Suharto’s regime. Other laws have removed the preferential or privileged treatment for ‘*pribumi*’ or indigenous groups in bank loans and awarding of government contracts, a policy which continues to be maintained in Malaysia where racial tensions are resurging.

The 1998 anti-Chinese violence was the prime impetus for the legal overhaul. In Indonesia today, Chinese schools have sprung up like mushrooms. According to statistics, there are 118 Chinese schools



throughout the country. At various universities such as Petra Christian University, Maranata University, Al Zhar University, Bina Nusantara University and Mulia University, have set up Chinese studies. Indonesian students going to China for further study have increased. China has also helped Indonesia groom Chinese language teachers.

The Chinese minority in Indonesia has shed their political apathy after decades of discrimination. They have started talking about political participation though the option of setting up a political party is not an option for the moment. In May 2012, the chairman of the Indonesian Chinese Association Eddie Lembong said most Chinese-Indonesian still regard politics as taboo. They fear talking about politics, let alone being involved. He urged the Chinese community to boost their knowledge of 'the philosophy and history of politics before establishing or entering into politics. He said it was necessary to start 'political formation based on ideology supported by the people rather than on ethnicity'.

There are many Indonesian *pribumi* students joining Chinese schools to study Chinese since they realise the benefit of the Chinese language since China has become a world power and the Chinese language has become useful.

In the history of Indonesia, the Chinese have gone through various turbulent experiences in the assimilation processes: during the Majapahit kingdom, nearly all Chinese were Islamised and Javanised, then came the Dutch occupation which stopped the assimilation, then the arrival of Chinese nationalism followed by Indonesian independence and the various different policies adopted by different political leaders.

## **The Impact of Chinese Immigrants in Indonesia**

The Chinese immigrants had gone through various crises resulting from assimilation. They have experienced the ups and downs of life under different rulers and they realised the fate of an immigrant. Their presence in Indonesia left an impact on the local environment, language and culture because of their interaction with local society. Apart from intermarriage, they introduced Confucianism, their dialect, language and culture.

When the Chinese migrated to Indonesia, they brought along with them with language and culture. Although the Chinese immigrants knew not much of Confucianism, it left behind some traces of its influence. As early as 1729, the Chinese had established a Confucian style of shrine. By 1919, there were already about 200 of such shrines, which were used to spread Confucianism. In 1923, a Chinese scholar Awning King (胡英恭) published a monthly magazine called *Kong Jiao Yue Bao* (孔教月报) to spread the teaching of Confucius. By 1955, Kong Jiao Hui (孔教会) (Confucius Teaching Association), had its headquarters in Jakarta, with branches in Solo, Surabaya, Bandung, Malang, Cirebon and Bogor. These premises formerly owned by the Confucianists had been turned into Chinese school premises. Although Confucianism did not make headway in Indonesia, the Suharto regime had recognised it as belonging to the Chinese.

The influence of Chinese culture and civilisation in Indonesia was quite widespread. First of all, let us look at the Chinese language words in the Indonesian language. The Indonesians have adopted many Chinese words in their vocabulary with regard to names of fruits, daily usage of commodities, gambling, human relations, counting, constructions, architecture, gambling and superstition, names of people and matters relating to sea communications.

The word *longan* (龙眼) was the same as the Chinese word for a kind of fruit produced in Guangdong. Other words such as *teh* (茶; tea); *tahu* (豆付; beans), *bacang* (肉糯; meat dumpling), *bakmi* (肉面; meat noodles), *bakbao* (肉包; meat ball) and other words relating to food. As for commodities, the word *anglo* (红炉; stove), *cavan* (茶碗; cups), *bakih* (木子; wooden slippers), *sempoa* (算盘; abacus), *kimkh* (金脚; silk clothing), were commonly used. In customs, the word *capgomeh* (十五夜; full moon) derived from a Fujian dialect, while *cengbeng* (清明) refers to the ghost festival and *pecun* (糯筰) refers to the Chang festival. In human relations, the word *engkim* (孺; aunt), *engko* (哥; brother), *engso* (嫂; sister-in-law). The numbers *ji* (二) means two and *go* (五) means five, *cepeh* (一百) means hundred and *ban* (万) means ten thousand and *cun* (寸) means an inch.

For construction terms, *lankan* (橰杆; pellars), *leteng* (楼上; upstairs) and *kongkoan* (公馆; clubs and associations). In gambling, beliefs and superstitions: *congki* (供棋; chess), *paikau* (排九; a game of chance) and *pakpui*, literally meaning to ask God for a divination. In human communication, *hoakiao* (华侨) refers to overseas Chinese, *tauke* (头家) means rich man, *Sinkhek* (新客) means new immigrant and *cukong* (主公) means a lord.

Other words such as *libai* (利害), meaning shrewd; *bojinceng* (无人情) referring to men with no feelings; *bocengli* (无情理) meaning unreasonable; *boyaukin* (不要紧) meaning nothing mind; *bumbeng* (文明) meaning civilised; *bosengli* (好生意) meaning good business; *jiatsim* (热心) meaning enthusiastic, *kangsin* (奸臣) — traitor, *kiamsiap* (嫌) — stingy, *kongdo* (功劳) — credit, *Kuamia* (看命) — fortune telling, *lauajiaty* (老热) — crowded with people, *lausit* (老实) — honest, *lohman* (落难) — disaster, *pangi* (便宜) — cheap, *pengan* (平安) — peaceful, *pucong* (不忠) — unfaithful and *unkih* (运气) means luck. Most of the Indonesian words with Chinese influence were derived from the Fujian dialect.

### **Chinese influence in clothing and customs**

The Indonesians are fond of wearing so-called *baju guntingan cina*, a kind of clothing introduced by immigrant Chinese in the early days. According to the Chinese historical record *Hai luk Chu* (海录注), the ladies in Kalimantan were fond of wearing the *Sinstang*, a kind of sarong-type of dress. The rich made them with Chinese silk. In the earlier days, a prominent leader from Minangkabau visited China and studied Chinese customs and traditions. After his return from China, he introduced the system of Chinese surnames to the Minangkabau society and also banned marriage between people of the same surnames.

### **The influence of Chinese medicine**

In the 17th century, Chinese medicine had helped to cure many Indonesians of various illnesses. There were many Chinese *Sinkhek*

(先生), physicians, who became prominent. They introduced Chinese medicinal practices such as acupuncture. One of them was even hired by the Dutch Governor to treat his wife. Since the 20th century, many *peranakans* have utilised *Menir* or *Jago*, which was known as *Toko Jamu*, a mixture of Chinese and Indonesian medicinal herbs which acts as an aphrodisiac. Many Chinese medical herbs have become part of Indonesian medicine such as 八角 (Adhas Cina); 胖大海 (Daun Sundamala); 中国蓖麻子 (Janak Cina); 佛手 (Jerul Tangan); 当归 (Ganti); 杜仲 (Kayu Rapat); 藏红 (Kuma-Kuma, Saprang); 白花菜 (Maja Muju); 米仔兰 (Pacar Cina); 破铜钱 (Semanggi: Patikan Cina); 水君子 (Wadani); 麝香 (Dedes Kalumpang Cina). The last was a medicinal herb most wanted by Chinese physicians. It has been said that one of Admiral Zheng He's main purpose for visiting Indonesia was because a lot of Dedes Kalumpang Cina (麝香) could be found there, which was said to be a useful element in abortions. In ancient days, it came in handy for emperors to get rid of whatever offsprings they did not want from their multiple concubines.

There was also some Chinese influence in the Javanese medical field. In the 20th century, many *peranakan* traders in Java have used Chinese herbs mixed with their medical products such as *menir*, *jago* and *jamu*. Other names of Javanese medical herbs also originated from China such as *adhas Cina*, *buah tempayan*, *kembang semangkok*, *Jaraka Cina*, *Jerul Tangan*, *ganti*, *Maja Muju*, *Samanggi* and *Wudani*.

### ***Influence on music and dance***

It was the *peranakans* who first developed the *gambang*, *jali-jali* and *balo-balo* and the *Si Pat Mo* (十八摩), Indonesian musical instruments based on Indonesian music. The *Si Pat Mo* was used to play music which sounds like Chinese music. Later, this instrument was further developed into the *Gambanag kromong*, which became famous throughout the world.

In the 17th century, the Fujianese puppet show called *potehi* (布袋戏) was introduced in Indonesia. The *potehi* later developed into

the sophisticated *wayang kulit*. In the early days, many stories of Chinese drama were used as themes of *potehi*. Later, the Indonesians used them to put on plays based on the Ramayana and other Indonesian stories. A Western researcher on Javanese gamelan music, Bernard Yzerdraat, wrote an article in a magazine called *Indonesia*, which compared Javanese gamelan music with Chinese music and found great similarities between them. Javanese and Balinese gamelan music are based on five tones, similar to Chinese music, while Western music contains seven tones. The Western notes of music include *do, re, mi, fa so, la, si* while Chinese music do not have the *fa* and *si* tones. Similarly, Javanese and Bali gamelan music do not have these as well.

In the 1940s, Java had 17,000 gamelan musical troupes and in Bali, today there are more than 1,500 gamelan troupes. According to the Rector of Javanese Musical Academy Mazu Pandamu, the Javanese and Balinese got their inspiration of the five-tone music from Yunnan's bronze drum. They used Javanese bronze and turned it into the Javanese gamelan based on the Chinese five-tone music.

An Indonesian expert in Chinese affairs, Buyong, Sali disclosed that in ancient days, Chinese descendents who had been Javanised often used gamelan music to celebrate their festive occasions and to preach Islam and the gamelan performance even included Chinese players. One of them was Ang Hien Ho (洪贤和), who was extremely skillful in gamelan technique. Another great Chinese performer was Chen Chang Qing (陈长青), who was very popular among the Javanese.

In the early days, rich Chinese in Semarang engaged gamelan music troupes to play in the Chinese hall and the performers sang Malay pantun (poetry) accompanied by gamelan music. Their instruments included Chinese *Mu Qin* (木琴) (gampang) and *Er Hu* (二胡), and *Keprak*. The most favourite theme was the Chinese wedding ceremony called *kia-lee* (行礼), popular until the end of the 19th century. By the 20th century, this practice disappeared.

There was also the *gambang kromong*, a form of traditional music in Jakarta, which was a fusion of Chinese and Javanese music. This music emerged in the 17th century as a result of the intermingling of Chinese, Javanese and Balinese. It was a combination of Javanese gamelan, Chinese *Yang Qin Er Hu* (洋琴二胡), Chinese flute and

drums. In 1883, it was used by the *peranakan* Chinese to celebrate weddings or funerals. When Java's Krakatau volcanic eruption took place in 1883, they used the music to ward off the volcano and it became even more popular.

Another example of Sino-Indonesian musical fusion was a music called *jeli-jeli* (土生产物), a *peranakan* creation meant to describe romance between men and women. It was once very popular in Jakarta. Its origin was Chinese, a kind of slow music from Fujian but it also included Malay pantun. This has since faded out of existence.

Another interesting Indonesian music called *sipatmo* (四八摸) which originated from China. The *sipatmo* was a hot favourite among young people. A musical critic Quek Kek Beng says that the word *sipatmo* is a Chinese name meaning 18 *mo* (meaning touch). The Indonesians sometimes called it 'Delepan Usapan'. There is little research as to why the Chinese music became Indonesian *sipatmo*.

The fusion of music is particularly popular in Ujong Pandang, Sulawesi. Many famous Ujong Pandang songs such as *tintang tintang* (丁当丁当) *the heart of the Emperor, Dragon race and the banquet of the eight saints* were all Chinese originated. In modern times, the most famous song circulating in China is *Bangawan Solo*. The composer Kesan led an Indonesian delegation to China in 1963 and introduced his composition to Chinese listeners and since then, it became very popular.

The earliest intermingling of dances between China and Indonesia was the Bali *barongsai* and *cokek* dances. These dances were usually performed during the Chinese New Year celebration. Barongsai (巴隆獅) was started in Java and later brought to Bali after the Islamic invasion of Java. It resembles the Chinese lion dance except the Balinese lions were mythical ones relating to the Hindu religion.

In 1974, a Singapore cultural and goodwill mission, led by the late Professor Yeoh Ghim Seng (杨锦成), then Speaker of Parliament, visited Bali and brought a Singapore Chinese Lion Troupe (新加坡狮队), which performed in Bali together with the barongsai. I welcomed them as Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia. I noticed the remarkable similarities between the barongsai and the lion dance. Both the Singapore and Bali lions have large bulging eyes, long beards, large

ears, big noses and wide mouths with snapping jaws. The conspicuous difference is with their teeth. Balinese lions have a pair of protruding Dracula like teeth from the sides of its mouth. Whereas the Chinese lion has a set of both properly filed and even teeth, ironically befitting the traditional Balinese requirements for all who wish to gain entry to heaven. Balinese and Singaporeans spectators were gripped with excitement when the Singapore lion, against a background of Balinese gamelan music accompanied by Chinese drums, tried to flirt with the timid barongsai.

The Balinese Barong dance represents a violent act of exorcising evil. Another interesting intermingling of culture can also be seen in the Javanese *Kraton* (皇宫 palace) dance. Among the dances was one which depicted the marriage between a Javanese king and a Chinese princess.

The Javanese *leong* (龙) dragon, the *ketoprak* and *potehi* (布袋戏) are also related to Chinese culture. This is particularly so with regard to *potehi* which, in the Fujian dialect, means puppet show *Po Te Hi*. The Chinese puppet show appeared first during the Han dynasty and began to spread to other parts of China including Fujian and Taiwan during the Tang dynasty. It was very popular particularly in Fujian and Taiwan. The Chinese immigrants to Indonesia might have brought it to Java during the 17th century. It was originally performed in Chinese temples and later spread to Semarang and other parts of Indonesia. Originally two languages were used — Fujian and Javanese, and later the name of *potehi* stuck and became part of Indonesian culture. It disappeared from Java after the September Gestapo coup which occurred on September 30, 1965. As for the Wayang Kulit, the Javanese performances were three centuries ahead of China although China, too, had wayang kulit or shadow puppet since the Song dynasty. However, the *wayang titi* is a marriage of Chinese and Indonesian culture.

## Chapter Four

# The Tayoke Kabya and the Kokangese in Myanmar

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### The *Tayoke Kabya* and the Kokangese (果敢人)

The Burmese had always taken pride in their race, believing that they can outperform the others. Although the British ruled them, they have never regarded colonial masters as equals. However, they do consider the Chinese as equals and have always referred to them as *paukphaw* or *next of kin*. Since ancient times, there have been streams of trade and people exchanges between the two countries. Burmese references to mixed-blood Chinese people and indigenous Burmese were recorded as *tayoke kabya*. *Tayoke* means Chinese and the word *kabya* means mixed-blood. The *kabya* have known to adhering to Chinese customs more than that of the Burmese. Many Burmese are believed to have some *kabya* blood as Chinese immigrants had traditionally secured Burmese citizenship through intermarriages with indigenous Burmese people. Common intermarriages between the Chinese and Burmese were also known as ethnic Barmar and hence the official figure of the Chinese constituting 3% of the population may be underestimated. According to a Census report of 1911, the Karens were shown to belong to the Tai-Chinese group. This classification was in general acceptance. They were considered both by Taw Sein Ko (陶先哥) and Duroiselle to be of Chinese origin. The Karens were supposed to be Chinese tribes driven southwards by the pressure imposed by the Shans.

Apart from the Karens, there were also Kokang Chinese and Shan Chinese. Large communities of Shan Chinese or Shan Tayoks inhabit



Upper Burma and the adjacent Chinese province of Yunnan (云南). As their name suggests, there was Chinese blood in these Tibeto-Burmese races. The Shan Tayoks were a big, fair, manly, thrifty and independent people. They often appear affluent, adorning a pretty scheme of light and dark blue and white clothes. Their women also wear shades of blue with aprons and turbans.

### **Cultural Characteristics and Inter-marriage of the Burmese and Chinese**

There have been intermarriages between Chinese and Burmese since ancient days. During the Sung, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, many Chinese immigrants took local Burmese girls as wives. The presence of jade mines attracted many Chinese miners to Burma. The first prominent offspring of such a mixed marriage took place during the reign of the Chinese Emperor Qian Long (乾隆皇帝) in 1785, when the Emperor presented the Burmese king who visited China with three beautiful Chinese princesses to celebrate his 80th birthday. The offspring of these Chinese princesses were irrevocably Chinese. In 1846, a prominent local Chinese by the name of Wu Yi Rong (伍尹蓉) became a teacher of three Burmese kings Pagan (蒲甘), Mindon (敏同) and Thidaw (锡袍). He was so popular and powerful, especially among the Chinese and *tayoke kabya*, that there was a saying — ‘In Heaven there was a Buddha and in this country, there’s Wu Yi Yong’ (天上佛神仙, 国中伍尹蓉). He was not only the king’s teacher but also his adviser. When Burma moved its capital, Yi Yong was asked to design a special palace where a fusion of Chinese culture and Burmese culture meet. In Burma, before the establishment of the Republic of China by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and Burmese women were common. The Burmese considered intermarriages with the Chinese acceptable and termed it *ka bia* (卡巴), meaning half and half. There was a rule in such mixed marriages in Burma. If the offspring was a male, he belongs to the father and if she was a girl, she goes to the mother. So when the immigrant goes back to China, he takes the son along, leaving the daughter to be looked after by the Burmese mother. These offspring of mixed marriages was

eventually assimilated into the Burmese society, speaking demotic Burmese, and dressing like the Burmese and acculturated to Burmese customs. There were intermarriages between Englishmen and Burmese, between Indians and Burmese and between Burmese and other foreigners as well. During the colonial days, thousands of British men married Burmese girls. The pride of the Burmese would never kowtow to anyone. They appear to have a strong sense of self-confidence; some might even consider it as a measure of over-confidence. They saw their Indian neighbours in less than favourable light as they were brought in as cheap labourers. They were often referred to as *kalas*, meaning Indians, or *kway kalas* meaning *dog-Indians*. Among the Burmese and their British colonial ‘masters’, they shared a mutual disdain for one another. Still, the average Burmese referred to their British colonialist as *guang phyn thakin gyi* meaning ‘big white bosses’ Aung San Suu Kyi (昂山素季), the present opposition leader who was under detention for a long time, married an Englishman. As a politician, she made a political error in choosing a foreigner as a husband because the Burmese generally do not trust foreigners. When her husband passed away, she was not allowed to attend his funeral which was held in England, a clear case of slight because of his race.

### **Characteristics of the *Tayoke Kabya***

The *tayoke kabyas* were weaved seamlessly into the Burmese social fabric. They speak Burmese and eat with their fingers, as deftly as the native Burmese. They learn to greet one another with the *ski-ko*, the traditional Burmese form of respect where you kneel, palms held together in front of your forehead and head bowed to the ground. They perform the *arnadeh*, one of those untranslatable Burmese words, which comparatively means exquisite politeness — an extreme consideration for other people’s feelings so that nobody feels in any way put out, indebted or embarrassed. In my interactions with Burmese friends, they have always shown their *arnadeh* to me. From a young age, the *tayoke kabya* child was taught never to fight or pick an argument with others. When one child was playing with a toy and a sibling comes into the room, the first child would automatically

offer the toy to the other child. Such was the upbringing in the *tayoke kabya*. Squabbling was not part of the Burmese vocabulary. The expression, 'Take it, please' was common among Burmese siblings instead of the 'This was mine' attitude prevalent in competitive societies. Such forms of early socialisation explain the Burmese resistance to competition and fear of modernity and inherent preference for introversion. Ne Win, Burma's supreme leader chose to isolate Burma from the outside world, even to the point of withdrawing from the non-aligned movement. There was an innate fear of being contaminated by the outside world. They prefer to live in a world of their own and were satisfied with what they have. This cultural behaviour was reinforced in Buddhist teachings which advocate selflessness of existence. Most *tayoke kabya* speak Burmese and regard it as their mother tongue. Those who have pursued tertiary education would learn Mandarin and English. The Fujian dialect was mostly spoken in Yangon as well as in Lower Myanmar, while Cantonese and Yunanese were used in Upper Myanmar.

### **No surnames (无姓)**

The Burmese were perhaps one of the few races in the world with no surnames or family names in the past. This, however, was fast changing as younger Burmese adopt the names of their ancestors. It was not possible to trace the parentage of a Burmese because a surname was not attached. It was also impossible to determine a person's sex or marital status from their names. Boys and girls may have the same name and women do not adopt their husband's name on marriage. Normally, names reflect the day of the week a child was born; certain letters and consonants were derived from the planets, reflecting how deep astrology was embedded in their culture. However, many Burmese Chinese have both Burmese and Chinese names. Furthermore, some offspring of Chinese descendants carry the surname of their father today. Given names in various Chinese dialects were often transliterated into the Burmese language, using proximate equivalents. 'Khin Aung', an common Burmese Chinese name may have the Chinese equivalent *qingfeng* (庆丰), corresponding to *Khin* and

‘*feng*’. The Burmese have no surnames. Hence the Chinese, particularly the *tayoke kabya*, tend to incorporate their given names to future generations for the purpose of tracing lineage. Basically, there were 10 common Chinese surnames in Yangon: Li (李), Peng (彭), Shi (时), Dong (董), Min (闽), Niu (牛), Bian (边), Xin (辛), Guan (关) and Tsui (徐). Burmese names also have a complex system of titles which denote social standing. As an adult, a man would be called *U*, which literally translates to mean *uncle*, but also denotes the respect of Mister. A woman was called *Daw* or aunt; *Ko* (哥) means elder brother, *Maung* (蒙) means younger brother and *Ma* means sister. In military circles, generals were referred to as *Bogyoke*, but this term was only used for the generals in high command.

## **The Chinese in Burma**

The earliest written evidence of Chinese migration were recorded in the Song (宋) and Ming (明) dynasties. In the 1700s, Ming dynasty princes settled in Kokang. Since the Sung dynasty, during the reign of the Burmese Pagan kings, Chinese culture began to spread to Burma. The first Burmese State, Pagan was very much influenced by China in the 11th century. For instance, Pagan’s building of Buddhist temples and the choice of Buddha images could be traced to Chinese influence. Till today, there were many Buddhist temples built in the Chinese style, such as *Sittand* and *Shwesan-daw*. The pair of huge lions in front of these temples was sufficient evidence of Chinese influence. In the third invasion of Burma in 1300 AD, the Mongolian soldiers participated in the construction of various irrigation projects, one of which was the Thintwe Canal. These canals helped farmers greatly in their production of rice. The early Chinese immigrants to Burma came from Yunnan, Funan and Jiangxi. These were mainly Chinese soldiers who were sent to fight the Burmese during the Sino-Burma wars. In the 13th century, there were three major wars between the two countries. It started with Mongolian troops occupying part of Burma and then established a Mongolian controlled province that introduced a Chinese military and civilian administrative system. The Mongolian colonisation lasted 20 tumultuous years.

When peace was restored, China established diplomatic relations with Burma with Burmese kings paying tribute to China for about 13 times and the Mongolians sending ambassadors to Burma six times. Many Mongolian soldiers and Chinese civil servants stayed behind and became assimilated. During the middle of the Ming dynasty, many Chinese went to Burma to mine jade. One prominent miner from Yunnan, named Wu San Xian (吴三贤) brought along with him about 10,000 people. Because of a dispute with the Qing authorities, several attempts were made to assassinate him. Towards the end of the Ming dynasty, the followers of Yongli (永历), the last emperor escaped to Burma, married local girls and assimilated with the local populace. The descendants of this group were referred to by the Burmese as the *Family of Gui* (鬼, *Gui* means devil in Chinese). There were three major groups with the surname of Gui and Ming. Another Chinese who went to Burma to trade was Du Wen Xiu (杜文秀), a Hui (Chinese Muslim) leader well known in the history of Yunnan, who was also known as the ‘Sultan of Dali’ in the late 19th century. Yunnan had a sizeable Muslim population who were unlike Muslims in other parts of China. They generally formed settlements at the cross-roads of trade routes used by Arab traders. Du Wen Xiu (1823–1872) was born in Yongcheng (present-day Baoshan Prefecture 保山) in Yunnan into a Hui (回) family. His father was an ordinary merchant. He studied Chinese and became a scholar or *Xiu Cai* (秀才) at 14. When he grew up, he went to Guangxi and met the Taiping rebellion leader Hong Xiu Quan (洪秀全).

In 1856, Du joined hands with other rebels belonging to the various races: the Han (汉), the Yi (意) and the Bai (白), and together, they captured Dali, that proved to be a devastating blow to the Qing authorities. They then became the Commander-in-Chief under his own flag called Ma (马). His forces remained powerful even after the collapse of the Taiping regime. In 1859, when King Mindon Min decided to move his capital to Mandalay, the Chinese were left behind. Their descendants, many of whom intermarried with Burmese women, remained important and respected citizens of Amarapura. For millennia, the Chinese travelled overland in Burma, down the north-eastern trade routes and along the great rivers. In centuries

past, many Chinese settlements were established along the routes. Broadly speaking, there were mainly two groups of Chinese immigrants: firstly the rural folks who comprise the Shan Tayok and the Kokang Chinese. They crossed the border of Yunnan during the time when the Shan principalities were under British administration. Secondly, there were the urban Chinese who have entirely different backgrounds. Many came to Rangoon by sea to work as merchants or coolies. Another group was found in more remote places such as the Shan state and Mandalay. They were called Panthay (班底), the descendants of soldiers who fought the Burmese during the Mongolian dynasty. Their ancestors have settled down in Yunnan over six centuries ago and intermarried with the local Han Chinese. Today, it would be difficult to distinguish them from other Chinese except for their Muslim faith and their attire. The Panthays rose in rebellion against the Chinese emperor in Beijing in 1856. They were led by General Du Wen Xiu. The fighting blocked Yunnan for nearly two decades and it was eventually subdued but many had lost their lives. Tens of thousands of Yunnanese were butchered when Beijing reasserted control over the area, and many survivors migrated across the mountains into the north-eastern Shan States. They settled in the immediate vicinity Hopang-Panglong area immediately south of the Kokang proper and spoke the same dialect as the Kokang Chinese. The Yunnan border areas are dominated by the Kokang Chinese and their Muslim Panthay cousins even up till today.

## **The Fujianese and Cantonese in Burma**

The majority of the immigrants were Fujianese and Cantonese. In the earlier days of British colonial rule, the Fujianese referred to Yangon as '*Jiek Dou Kang*' (绝头港), meaning a port which was far away. In those days, to reach Yangon from Amoy, the immigrants had to go through Swatow, Hongkong, Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore and Penang, which was normally a 10-day journey by boat. In the biography of Wang Chok Siang (黄绰卿), he said that many Cantonese from Taishan (台山), including technicians and bakers employed by British ships, landed in Yangon and married local Burmese girls. In Burma,

most of the Fujianese converse in dialects from Zhangzhou (漳州), Quanzhou (泉州) and Jinjiang (晋江), while the Cantonese speak dialects of Toisan and Sinhui (新会). As the Fujianese were in the majority, most of the Chinese, including the *Hakkas* from Yong Ding (永定), learnt to speak the Fujian dialects. They called the Cantonese Macau (妈祖) and the Cantonese called the Fujianese *Fujian Lang Kia* (福建人仔). All Chinese referred to local Burmese as *Udu* (乌度), the Indians as *Ubi* (乌披) and the Europeans as *Jou Hou* (臭猴, dirty monkey). The Chinese immigrant organisations were classified based on beliefs, like Buddhism, their place of birth and/or ancestor surnames. The Fujianese built a temple called Fujian Guan Yin Ting (福建观音亭), the Cantonese have their own Guan Yim Ting (广东观音亭) and Guangadong Gu Meow (广东古庙). The Fujianese formed associations connected to the village they came from, such as Qinkang, Zhuanzhou, Nanaun, Aunkwee, Tongaun, Huiaun or Amoy. The *Hakkas* formed the Yin Ho, Yong Ting, Aun Ling and the Cantonese the Ling Yang, Wu Yi, Kangzhou and Toishan. In surname-based organisations, the Lee (李) formed the Long Xi Tang (陇西堂), the Tan (陈) the Qing Chuan Tang (颍川堂), the Ong (王) the Tai Yuan Tang (太原堂) and the Ang (洪) and the Dun Huang Tang (敦煌堂). In the early days, when one visited Chinatowns, most houses would display their surnames in front of their homes. In Myanmar, the majority of the surnames was Lim (林), Tan (陈), Yang (杨), Lee (李), Chou (周), Wang (王), Chang (张), Su (苏), Huang (黄), Yeh (叶), Hse (许), Fang (方) and Wu (吴). In the past, the figure most revered by the Chinese was Kuan Kong (关公), more so than Confucius, because they admired the former's loyalty. When I visited the Temple of Kuan Kong in Chinatown, I saw a plaque written in Chinese characters: (身在曹营心在汉, 功同日月义同天) describing the feelings of Kuan Kong when he was detained by the vicious Cao Cao (曹操), who tried to win over his heart against Liu Pei, the Hero of the Three Kingdoms. They also hero-worshipped Fu Mah Choh (妈佛祖), a female deity, and offered a kind of red cake called *Ang Ku* (红古) when they celebrated her birthday. When they migrated to Burma, they brought along their secret societies such as Tian Di Hui (天地会) or Hung Men Hui (洪门会) or Ghee Heng



(义兴). They called the top leader Tua Ko (大哥) and second Ji Ko (二哥) and their advisor Juen Xi (军师). Like all Chinese in Southeast Asia, they celebrate the Chinese New Year, and all festivities connected with Chinese customs. The Chinese in Burma were deemed the most patriotic to China. In 1929, during the Moon Cake Festival, they organised a lantern festival flagging the Chinese Republican flag of (青天白日满地红), green sky and white sun with a red background. They were the first to respond to Dr. Sun Yat-sen by starting the Tong Meng Hui (同盟会). In October 1915, Wang Jing Wei, then the right-hand man of Dr. Sun Yat-sen visited Yangon and held a meeting of overseas Chinese in Jubilee Hall to propagate Chinese nationalism and was given a warm welcome. There was also a big welcome for Huang Xing (or Huang Hsing) (黄兴), another assistant of Dr. Sun, when he visited Yangon in August 1910, before the revolution succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu regime. However, during the feud between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese in Burma sided with Mao Zedong.

## **The Guang (广) and Jin (金) Chinese Ships**

Later during the Qing dynasty, the sea route became more popular than the land route. Many large vessels, some weighing more than 50 tons, sailed to China and brought back China wares, silk and tea, while Burma exported birds' nest and local produce. There were two distinct perceivable categories of Chinese immigrants. Firstly, the Fujianese who arrived in ships which had green hulls called *Jin Tou Chuan* (金头船) and the Chinese character *Jin* (金 means gold). The other category belonged to the Cantonese whose ships displayed the word *Guang* (广, meaning huge and wide) which had red hulls. These ships sailed back and forth to China, Burma, India and Malaya. Those sailing from Fujian were used by companies such as Jin Soon Seng (金顺生), Jin Ban Huat (金万发), Jin Guang Loong (金广隆) or Jin Guang Heng (金广兴). Cantonese ships were used by companies with names such as Guang Yeh Xing (广粤兴), Guang He Xin (广合新) or Guang He Chang (广合章). Later, when the modern steamers were invented, the Chinese vessels lost their significance and the period of Western



colonisation began. In 1871, a Chinese writer, Huang Zhi (黄智), wrote about the situation of the Chinese in *Hai Ke Ri Pao* (海格日报), a Chinese newspaper, 'There were tens of thousands of Chinese traders besides the Cantonese and Fujianese; there were Chinese from Zhejiang and Yunnan, most of whom have married Burmese wives. They import cotton and jade from Burma.' In 1877, when the Qing authorities set up a consulate in Singapore, a Chinese merchant by the name of Wang Yi Cai (王义才) suggested that they also establish a consulate in Aya, Burma, because there was already a large number of Chinese who had settled down in the country. The Qing administration did not pay much attention to his suggestion. In 1885, when Britain colonised Burma, there were already approximately more than 10,000 Chinese traders in Burma. The British imposed heavy taxes on Chinese merchants, which made life difficult for them. They appealed again to the Qing administration to set up a Chinese consulate to give them protection. Because of the squabbling between pro-royalist and the anti-Manchu Dong Men Hui set up by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the setting up of the consulate was delayed until 1909, two years before the fall of the Qing dynasty. The British allowed the Qing government to set up a consulate in Rangoon in exchange for a British consulate in Yunnan. In 1929, there were 122,000 Chinese. Within 10 years, the number increased to 193,000 and by 1931, the number went up to 250,000. During the Sino-Japanese war, more Chinese migrated to Burma to escape Japanese occupation and the number shot to 350,000. The majority were Fujianese, followed by Cantonese and Yunnanese. The Fujianese were fond of wearing long sleeves and were referred to by Burmese as the long sleeves men (长袖人; *eingyi shay*) in Burmese, whilst the Cantonese preferred short sleeves and were known as the short sleeves men (短袖人; *eingyi to*). They dealt with Burmese produce, trading and shipping. The Chinese were also divided into two categories: those who wore shorts (*leto* in Burmese language) were coolies, farmers and carpenters and those wore long trousers (*lelthe* in Burmese language) were the businessmen, bankers and entrepreneurs. In those days, the majority of those wearing shorts were Cantonese and those in long trousers were Fujianese. Anti-Chinese sentiments prevailed in the 1930s, despite the fact that the Burmese were more

anti-Indian because they were the majority outsiders, and many Indian money lenders who allegedly exploited them. In their struggle for independence, the Burmese nationalists had less ill-feeling against the Chinese even though many of the latter were wealthy.

## **Mutual Influences Between Chinese and Burmese**

The Chinese brought with them their Chinese culture and civilisation, which had an impact on Burma. There were many Burmese words which have originated from the Chinese language such as the Burmese word for chopsticks, tofu, boats and ships. Among the delegates of the Burmese delegation to China during the Qing dynasty was a Burmese named Kam Qien (甘前), who was well versed with the Chinese language. He visited China many times and had brought home to Burma several famous Chinese books such as the *Kangzi Dictionary* and prominent Chinese medical books. Many Chinese architects were involved in building the Shwesan daw and Sittand. Identical lion figurines in front of Burmese temples were similar to the Chinese lions. In clothing, the upper part of Burmese *longyi* was similar to the Teochiu collar and the Burmese call Chinese silk *lun taya*. In terms of food, many Chinese fruits and vegetables were introduced to Burma and the Burmese added the word *deyu* in front of these products to indicate where they were from. China also introduced their astrology and the Chinese system of counting, their calendar and weather measurement to them. The Chinese introduced their way of fortune telling by means of 12 animals. Chinese migrants also helped in Burma's silk industry, particularly in producing the best Burmese silk called *lun-taya*.

## **Burmese Superstition**

Most Burmese who were staunch Buddhists also pledge strong allegiance to fortune telling, especially the high monks known as *phongyi*, who were steeped in astrology. Burmese leaders even consult the astrologer on the right timing to leave their homes, especially before they go abroad. Every Burmese leader has a *phongyi* of their preferred

choice to give them advice. The Burmese consider it unlucky to urinate against the side of the house because it would upset the *nyat* or spirit of the Wilberocte. They also believe that every house in Burma has a resident *nyat*, including every pagoda, every shrine, every tree and every bush, everything in fact that needs protection by a guardian spirit. Burmese *nyats* have lovely names like the Lady with the White Umbrella, the Prince with the Green Slippers and the Laughing Woman with the Watermelon. During the British colonial days, there was even a *nyat* called Mayor Thompson. *Nyats* have to be constantly cajoled, appeased and bribed with gifts such as fruits or flowers or prayers. In this way, they would take their duties as guardians seriously. If the Burmese want to urinate against the side of a house, they would first utter the words *kador kador*, meaning forgive me, please forgive me. There was an old Burmese tradition referred to as *phonggyis* in where residents try not to step on the shadows of monks who come to the house every morning for alms, so as not to bring back luck. The monks too would make sure that they would not step on the shadows of the residents.

An example of the influence of Chinese superstition was the fact that the average Burmese like the number eight. There was an eight-day pagoda having eight niches, each containing a Buddha with figures of the eight planetary birds and animals situated between each one. A Burmese who has a name denoting a certain day of the week would go to the corner of the pagoda platform to pray. When President Ne Win was in power, he was largely influenced by superstition. He issued a decree in 1963 to discontinue the 50 and 100 kyat notes, alleging that they were subject to hoarding by black marketers and used for financing of various insurgencies. Though limited compensation was offered, this wiped out people's savings overnight. Then in September of 1987, he ordered the Burmese currency, Kyat, to be re-issued in denominations that added up to 90, because an astrologer said he would live to that age if he did so. Ne Win had a strong inclination for numerology and practiced what was known as an *idea*, a type of cannibalistic rituals and spells, supposedly performed to ward off misfortune.

A highly superstitious man, he had his own team of astrologers for consultation. During the 1993 National Convention Ne Win chose

January 9 as an auspicious date because there were a total 702 delegates, the figure divided by nine. However, only 699 delegates attended, creating an astrological catastrophe. Ne Win like Kittikachorn, the Thai Prime Minister who was also a staunch Buddhist, believed in fate as advised by his astrologers to step down from office. The present leadership in Myanmar, likewise, has been strongly influenced by soothsayers and numerologists whom they consult in making decisions connected with the state. On October 21, 2010, a new national flag was introduced, with the time, date and year, adding up to three and total nine. This new flag was reportedly raised by someone who was born on Thursday, while the old flag was lowered by someone born on a Tuesday. The abrupt release of the new flag was just two weeks before the election was held. The new flag had a big white star in the middle against horizontal stripes of yellow, green and red. Every single item had its significance. The new leaders probably consulted the soothsayers who told them to change the flag so that they could be successful in the coming elections.

Burmese women were known to be modest and they obey a strict dress code. They would avoid clothes that might expose their bodies, e.g., they would not wear mini-skirts. Their day-to-day attire would be a white embroidered cotton jacket, close fitting and cropped at the waist with long narrow sleeves. They also wear *longyi* or a sarong of heavy crimson silk, often richly embroidered with a wide black cotton band at the top to ensure a firm grip. Every Burmese boy, including the mixed blood, need to serve time as a novice monk when he reaches 13. His head would be shaven and he would wear the traditional robes and go out to beg. This was part of Buddhist training lasting six months. It was also interesting to see how they perform their *nun deh* which means ‘give me a kiss’. It was a passive, gentle and detached kiss unrelated to the western sexual act of intimacy.

### **Visit to Burma and Conversation with U Nu (吴努)**

My first visit to Rangoon was in 1962 when I was on my way back from India after attending a seminar organised by the Indian Institute of International Studies on ‘Democracy in Asia’. I was invited as the guest of U Nu’s government through a Burmese minister U Ba Swee

(吴巴瑞) working in the U Nu Cabinet who also attended the seminar. U Nu was then the Prime Minister and he was at the height of his popularity. He was the first prime minister of Burma after independence from Britain in January 1948. He attained this high position in tragic circumstances following the assassination of the nationalist leader Aung San and other Cabinet colleagues in July 1947. U Nu held office until 1958, with an interruption during 1956–1957 and then again from 1960–1962, when military intervention marked an end to civilian politics. I had met U Nu in Bandung for the second time when I attended the Afro–Asian conference as a journalist. He was short, muscular and, fair skinned with smiling eyes. I found him to be very hospitable. He was born in 1907 in Wakema and was educated in Rangoon University where he became President of the Students' Union in the mid-1930s. He became active after graduation and was detained by the colonial government at the outbreak of World War II. He was released after Japan occupied Burma. He served as Foreign Minister in the wartime cabinet headed by Ba Maw and then became Deputy to Aung San in the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), which spearheaded the drive for independence after the defeat of the Japanese. During our second meeting, we talked about the Bandung conference in 1954 and how he went there together with Zhou Enlai (周恩来). He was very much impressed by the Chinese leader. U Nu remembered how he negotiated a three-year trade agreement between Burma and China and got it confirmed in 1955 when he visited Beijing. China provided industrial facilities to Burma in return for rice.

Both U Nu and Zhou agreed that the nationals residing in their host countries should obey the local laws and customs. Zhou was referring to the 300,000 Chinese then residing in Burma, which was about 1.6% of the country's population when he visited Rangoon in 1956. U Nu told me that while he was in Beijing, he had given Chinese officials three assurances: that Burma would not be any power's lackey; that Burma would never 'betray the people's trust' and that Burma would do its utmost towards the achievement of world peace. I asked U Nu whether Burma needed any foreign aid to boost its economy, and his reply was, 'Burma would reject any foreign

aid that might compromise her military, political or economic independence'. He referred to the speech he made in June 1948 in which he said, 'Burma would enter into mutually beneficial treaties or arrangements in defence and economics with countries of common interest'. I remembered clearly a remark by U Nu, 'Burmese neutralism was like a fish meal where one should 'eat the meat, and spit out the bones'. He explained that the policy was determined by Burmese interests with respect to individual issues and in which the decision made reflects an independent viewpoint as it also supports other great-power blocs. U Nu argued that a neutral foreign policy was the only one that could enable Burma to avoid domination by a foreign power. He was the man who had formulated Burma's neutralism, carried forward by Ne Win. U Nu was detained after Ne Win took over power and was released in the fall of 1966. In April 1969, he was allowed to leave Burma, supposedly for a Buddhist pilgrimage. Instead, he sought to organise resistance from Thailand against the rule of Ne Win and he travelled extensively in search of support for a new political alliance that would overthrow Ne Win. In October 1969, he was granted political asylum in Thailand on condition that he did not engage the Democratic Party in Bangkok. But he set up a Parliamentary Democratic Party in Bangkok whose opposition program was broadcast in April 1970 to Burma by a group calling itself the Patriotic Youth Front. Late in May 1970, U Nu's party, the National United Party and the New Mon State Party agreed to collaborate to bring down Ne Win's regime and to establish a Federal Union Republic and restructure state lines to allow all ethnic people greater autonomy. Since then, U Nu's headquarters had reportedly been shifted to the Thai-Burma border in Tak province, from which he directed his partisans and broadcasted his messages. In 1973, he left for a sabbatical in the US before migrating to India for a decade. He returned to Burma to retire in 1980 after an amnesty was granted. He made an attempt to return to active politics in 1988 in the wake of the bloody confrontation between the armed forces and civilians demonstrators demanded democracy but failed. He was placed under house arrest in December 1989 and was later released in April 1992. He died later in 1996.

## Impression of Yangon (仰光)

When I was in Rangoon, the Minister for Culture hosted a Burmese dinner at his residence for me. It was there that I saw a charming Burmese lady playing the Burmese harp accompanied by Chinese gongs and cymbals. Burmese music was a combination of Indian and Chinese art. Similarly, the Burmese dress was very much a mixture of the tubular Indian skirt called *lonyis*, and collarless Chinese shirt. The only Burmese characteristic was the pointy cloth hat. I was captivated by the Burmese harp, which resembles a ship made of lacquer. It was really beautiful. I was also invited to a grand Burmese festival in a stadium, where performers from various Burmese tribes performed their tribal dances. There were the minorities such as the Tais Tibeto-Burman, Karen, Mon-Khers and Shans. While Burmese was the primary language, more than a hundred tongues were spoken in the country. Besides indigenous language groups, there were concentrations of Chinese and Indians, the result of Burma's trading crossroads for centuries. Then I went back to Rangoon again in 1996. The city had not changed much. The men and women were still wearing *lonyis*. As in the past, passengers hung onto the roofs of buses during peak hours, the monks with freshly shaven heads and flowing orange robes were still abound. While climatic changes affected most places globally, the Burmese monsoon drizzles continued to cleanse the city. The cheroots of old and rice noodles in fish soup remained as the few indulgences of the man-in-the-street. The roadside fires warming *mohinga*, a type of spicy noodle soup, trishaw riders standing as they pedalled and people spitting betel juice were the familiar sights that remained unchanged. Everywhere, there were signs of poverty — Burma's \$200 annual per capita income was among the world's lowest.

Meanwhile, the army was still taking harsh measures against peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators. I found an army barracks built next to the pagodas, with high walls and shooting holes, protecting military headquarters. During my earlier visit, I noticed the Burmese laughter to be infectious. However, after three decades of military dictatorship and deprivation, it took a toll on the general atmosphere. When I visited Burma again 34 years later, laughter

seemed to have left the country. I longed to hear someone enjoying a good laugh but found none. I strolled to the home of Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader at 54 University Avenue. I had visited the Mausoleum of her father Aung San, once Burma's most venerated figure, who founded Burma's Army and negotiated Burma's independence with the British. He was assassinated together with his entire cabinet members only six months before independence. This massacre led to the emergence of Ne Win. For the millions of Burmese, it was Aung San, with his masterful leadership of the Burmese Independence Army, who conceived of a grand coalition strategy in mobilising the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, and through tactical alliance with ethnic nationalities that brought about Burma's independence.

### **The Chinese Coolie Keng (苦力间) in Rangoon**

In the late 19th century when Chinese immigrants arrived in Rangoon, many had nowhere to stay. From 1872 to 1881, there were about 6,000 Chinese immigrants in Rangoon. Some of these immigrants took shelter in the homes of their friends and relatives, while a large number of them had to sleep on the roadside. Life was very difficult for them. One Chinese businessman by the name of Soh Ping Tang (苏炳堂) set aside one of his shops in the 23rd Street to accommodate these new immigrants, giving them beds to sleep and a place to take a bath and rest after their work. Later on, the government authorities renovated the place and it became known as Coolie Keng (house) of Rangoon. When opium was imported, this place became an opium den, and many opium smokers gathered there to smoke. This encouraged gangsterism and prostitution. After Soh Ping Tang died, the place was mismanaged, descended into ruins and was a den for beggars.

### **The Rise of Chinese Nationalism**

The rise of Chinese schools after Dr. Sun's revolution changed the psyche of the Chinese in Burma. The inflow of Chinese women from China also changed the pattern of intermarriages. The Dong Meng



Hui set up by Dr. Sun played a very important part in the changes. Between 1904 and 1921, there were 50 Chinese schools. The number increased to 74 in 1926 and by 1930; there were already 300 Chinese schools, with an enrollment of some 20,000 pupils. By 1948, there were more than 700 Chinese teachers and an enrollment of 18,000 pupils. All these pupils imbibed the spirit of Chinese nationalism and became patriotic to China. As they grew up, they realised that there were more Chinese than Burmese and took active part in promoting China. Before World War II, those educated in Chinese were aware of Japanese aggression in China and began to take part in anti-Japanese activities. The Chinese population had also grown to 190,000. Inter-marriages between the two races declined and the Chinese became distinctive from the Burmese, although they still followed Burmese customs. By 1962, when the Burmese Government tried to separate overseas Chinese from Chinese who had become Burmese citizens, there were still 100,000 Chinese who chose to retain Chinese citizenship. Presently there are 800,000 Chinese, of whom 350,000 were Fujianese, 250,000 Yunnanese and the rest were from Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan and Hunan. In Rangoon, there were 100,000 Chinese, the majority of whom were Cantonese.

### **Anti-Japanese Activities and the Exodus of Chinese**

The first anti-Japanese activity the Chinese took part in was to boycott Japanese goods, countrywide, where they joined hands with the Burmese Indian Congress and the Burmese Youth Socialists Party. Those who did not support were punished. The Chinese in Burma, especially the Chinese-educated, regarded themselves as overseas Chinese and launched anti-Japanese campaigns after the Lugouqiao Incident (卢沟桥事件) on July 7, 1937 when Japan invaded China. The Overseas Chinese in Burma responded to the appeal made by the Malayan leader Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚) to raise funds to fight the Japanese aggressors. In 1937, they raised more than US\$300,000 and also donated 16 airplanes, 10 lorries and 520,000 pieces of old clothing for the China front. They also helped build the Burmese road to

facilitate the transport of the Allied Forces, which went to fight the Japanese. In December 1941, when the Japanese planes bombed Rangoon, the Chinese escaped to the north towards Yunnan by crossing over mountains and rivers. About 5,000 Chinese were victims of the bombing and a further 2,000 died when the Japanese planes continued to bomb Yunnan. Those who remained in Rangoon, especially the educated Chinese, were persecuted by the Japanese because many of them were involved in anti-Japanese activities during British colonial period. In 1942, a Chinese leader, Zhang Guang Nian (张广年), organised an Overseas Chinese Workforce and returned to China to help fight the Japanese. During the Japanese occupation, some Japanese soldiers went around looking for Burmese girls to be nurses in the newly established field hospitals which were filled with wounded Japanese. When the British recaptured Burma, the Japanese shot all the Burmese nurses on the tennis court of a wealthy Burmese home. They would rather kill them than allow them to serve the British.

## **Chinese after Burma's Independence**

The immediate problem facing the Burmese leaders after independence was the removal of 1,500 Guomindang troops along the 1,350-mile-long border. Burma was on friendly terms with the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek before the Communist Party took over power in 1949 as the Nationalist Party had been a sponsor of Burma's entry into the United Nations in April 1948. But Rangoon also had to take account of American and British interests in formal defence ties with Burma, and the serious threat to national unity posed by rebel Communist forces which in 1949 were at the height of their military advances. The Burmese leaders also feared that the Chinese Communist forces might enter Burmese territory on the pretext of eliminating the KMT as its threat to Yunnan. They might attack the remaining KMT members or assist the Burmese Communists. The leaders raised the matter with the United Nations in August 1953 and with the help of the US and Thailand, the KMT troops began evacuating to Taiwan and in 1954 and in the spring of 1961. However, a number of KMT soldiers still roamed the Burma–Thailand

border, engaging in opium trade and occasionally collaborating with the Burmese minority Karen and Mon rebels. According to a former Chinese general who was in Burma in the early 1950s, two nationalist armies, based in northern Thailand, still operate in Burma today. One under General Tuan Wei-wen (端维文) may have about 1,500 men, the other under General Li Wen-huan (李文欢) who allegedly had almost 2,500 men. When Burma gained independence, the Chinese entered a new phase. For the first 10 years, the independent government of Burma under the leadership of U Nu was friendly and helpful to the Chinese. There was a cordial exchange of visits between leaders of Burma and China. It represented the golden period of the Chinese in Burma. When the British first colonised Burma, they brought a large number of Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, to settle in Rangoon. In 1939, it was estimated that 58% of the population of Rangoon was Indian. Most of the Indian migrants were Chettiar moneylenders, who gained control of large areas of paddy land in Ayeyarwady Delta region during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Some fled when growing resentment triggered riots against them. By 1960, there was still a fairly large Indian community of over one million. Most of them subsequently left because of the mismanagement of the government's economic policy. By then, the Chinese began to overtake the Indians in business opportunities and the Indians gradually lost their privileges. By 1957, the number of Chinese factories, commercial firms and hawker stalls exceeded 8,000, with a total capital exceeding 500 million kyat. In Rangoon, there were more than 200 Chinese shopping centres and the Chinese invested some 228 million kyat in mining, far exceeding the British capital of 175 million kyat and Indian capital of 59 million kyat. There were about 300 Chinese factories producing timber, rubber goods, soap, sweets, cigarettes and tin goods, constituting 75% of private enterprises in Burma.

### **Prominent *Tayoke Kabya* During British Occupation**

During the British administration under Sir Harcourt Butler and Sir Charles Innes, there was a prominent Chinese named Lee Xia Yang (李遐养) nicknamed Lee Ah Yuen (李亚愿), who was appointed as

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry. He was a *tayoke kabya*, born in Burma, whose ancestors came from Toisan, Guangdong province. He studied in Rangoon and went for further studies in England and became a lawyer. He was pro-British and got on well with the British colonial rulers. Lee was fully assimilated into Burmese culture and knew the only English and Burmese. He could hardly speak Mandarin. One well-known *kabya* called Ah Siak (亚锡) whose Chinese name was Chow Yen Siang (曹鸾翔), rose from the rank of a carpenter to a rich contractor by building the Parliament House of Rangoon and the barracks at Mingaladon, a town north of Rangoon. He was appointed an Assemblyman in the Parliament. Another Chinese, Chan Chor Khin, financed a gymnasium and an open-air theatre at Rangoon University. He was born in Rangoon and his ancestors came from the Fujian Dong Aun (东安).

### **Other Prominent *Tayoke Kabyas***

Among the prominent *tayoke kabyas* who participated in Burmese politics were San Yu, President of Burma in the 1980s; Maung Aye, another staunch supporter of Ne Win who later became opposition leader after the *coup d'état*; Thakin Ba Thein Tin (达金·巴廷丁) leader of the Burmese Communist Party from 1970s to the 1990s, Dr. Kyaw Myint (高明博士), who became Minister of Health; Myo Thant, former Minister of Information under SLORC; Kyaw Ba (高巴) General Formal Minister of Hotel and Tourism; Colonel Tan Yu Sai (陈裕才), Minister of Trade during Ne Win's regime; U Thauang (宇当), Minister of Labour and Technical Science, who retired and was appointed Ambassador and Mun Thi (满蒂) Minister of Energy. Apart from Ne Win, there were also several *tayoke kabyas* who joined the army and were promoted to the rank of generals. The most famous one was Khin Nyunt, a confidant of Ne Win, later promoted as Chief of Intelligence and then Prime Minister. Others include Colonel Kyi Maung, who became Army Commander of Rangoon in the 1960s and Aung Gyi, leading army dissident and Ne Win's former deputy conspirator in the 1962 *coup d'état*. Another well-known *tayoke kabya* in Southeast Asia was Aw Boon Haw (胡文虎), a *Hakka* who was known as the Tiger Balm King.

## Ne Win (奈温) (1911–2002)

Ne Win led a *coup d'état* in 1962 and declared himself head of state. Although a *tayoke kabya*, he took drastic measures against Chinese education. All schools were nationalised, including Chinese schools. He created discriminative measures against Chinese businessmen, which caused an exodus of 100,000 Chinese. Ne Win implemented his Burmese way to Socialism and nationalised all industries which destroyed the wealth of Chinese entrepreneurs.

The strong man who held tremendous political power in Burma for 30 years was a descendant of a Chinese migrant. Not much has been written about his past. His ancestor was a *Hakka*. He was born into an educated middle class family in Paungadale about 200 miles north of Rangoon in 1910. Originally called Thakin Shu Maung (达金·徐蒙), he took the name of Bo Ne Win (波奈温), meaning Son of Glory General (光荣之子), at the time when he helped form the association of 30 comrades. Educated in Rangoon University, he left without a degree in 1931 and worked in a post office. Not long after, he joined the Ba-Sein Tun Ok (Socialist) faction of the Dobama, and was one of the 30 young men selected for military training by the Japanese. Aung San led the team which was widely known as the Burma Independence Army (BIA). The BIA made its debut at the dawn of British retreat. Ne Win's was specifically tasked to organise the resistance force behind the British lines. On March 27, 1945, the Burma National Army (successor to the BIA) turned against the Japanese following the British re-invasion of Burma. Ne Win quickly took charge of the anti-Communist operations in alliance with the British.

Ne Win became second in command and later Commander of the Burma Rifles shortly after the war. In 1947, he took part in politics and became a Member of Parliament, advancing his military career to the rank of Brigadier General in 1948 and then Major-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Army in 1949. In 1950, he served as Minister for Defence as well Minister for Home Affairs under the U Nu (吴努) Government. In 1958, when the U Nu Government was shaky, he staged a *coup d'état* in 1962 and since then took absolute hold of political power. He quickly moved to form the

Revolutionary Council made up of military personnel: 15 Army officers, one Navy man and one Air Force officer. On 30th April, the council published its manifesto entitled *The Burmese Way to Socialism*.

Ne Win has been at the helm of Myanmar's military regime since 1962. The Burmese dare not mention him by name and merely call him Number One. He was believed to have amassed a sizeable personal fortune, held in foreign banks. Over the years of ruling the country, he created the Military Intelligence (MI), which has built up a network of spies throughout the country. Teachers and lecturers receive regular visits from the MI. They had to sign an undertaking to behave in a way befitting their status to avoid being spied upon. Students and their parents too had to give similar guarantees. In Myanmar's 350,000 strong armies, it was believed that there was an agent for every 10 soldiers. Such agents were blackmailed into spying. The man responsible for running MI was General Khin Nyunt (钦玉将军), who later became powerful after Ne Win stepped down. Ne Win was reported to have warned the people that he would kill anyone who dares to go against his will. He carried out his threat in the 1988 disturbance when an estimated 20,000 people were massacred.

Under Ne Win, spies also kept an eye on the *hnakaung shay* community (the foreign long noses) to make sure they did not instigate disturbances. Giant red and white sign boards appeared in strategic locations in most towns and cities, a reminder to Burmese to 'love and cherish the motherland' and 'to safeguard national independence'. MI agents kept close tabs of the remaining elected parliamentarians from the National League for the man was said to be paranoid about his own security. My Burmese relative was once introduced to him at his Palace. He bowed to Ne Win from a distance as he was not allowed to get near him. He would only allow his guests with the rank of minister to come near him. It was said that he kept a revolver on his desk and on the rare occasions that he ventured out in public, he was surrounded by bodyguards. Then on August 8, 1988, the entire population rose against Ne Win. They fought with whatever they could get against the army, and even some of the soldiers were reluctant to shoot them. The people power was so overwhelming that the Ne Win regime was finally toppled. Ne Win's father was Chinese and

his mother, Burmese. His ancestors came from Meixian, Guangdong, of Hakka heritage. He read biology in his two years at Rangoon University which began in 1929. He had hoped to become a doctor. His interest in politics interrupted his college education when he joined the nationalist organisation Dobama Asiayone in 1931. He joined a secret ceremony among the 30 who swore allegiance to their common cause and after that drank each other's blood from a communal cup.

Ne Win's had helped to organise the resistance force behind the British lines. Then one day, when the 30 comrades were supposed to be gathered at a certain place, Ne Win was not to be found. According to a book written in the Burmese language by General Ag Than entitled *Aung San's History*, Ne Win was found to be having a good time with a girl. When he returned, Aung San reprimanded him at a conference making him lose face. The author alleged that it was Ne Win who masterminded the massacre plot which killed the whole Cabinet on July 19, 1947. Ne Win was said to have married seven times. He had four children. Just before he died, he built a pagoda, which stands near Shwedagon in Yangon, in an attempt to recompensate for his sins.

For 12 years, Ne Win ruled by decree with all power vested in the Revolutionary Council. A policy of nationalism was implemented, where foreign businesses, mostly Chinese, were nationalised, including the banks. He put his own men in charge of commerce and industries. He pursued a foreign policy of neutrality and isolated Burma from the outside world. He ruled Burma with an iron fist and reformed the government structure and introducing constitutional authoritarianism. Ne Win ruled the country like a dictator. First, Ne Win, in an effort to civilise the system, dropped his military title. Burma was changed to Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. He became President and Chairman of the Burma Socialist Program Party was fielding his Cabinet with 16 out of 17 ministerial posts. In 1979, Ne Win's so-called Socialist Burma was the first to withdraw from the 88-member nonaligned nations for fear of interference from the non-aligned movement.

Ne Win's Government isolated the country from the world. He nationalised the economy, which fuelled the ubiquitous black market



and fostered rampant smuggling. The central government slid slowly into bankruptcy. He rigorously pursued the policy of autarky, expelling foreigners and restricting visits by foreigners. It was three days initially and after 1972 it was limited to one week. Political oppression inevitably caused a brain drain, as many in the educated workforce chose to emigrate.

In 1981, Ne Win stepped down as President and nominated a loyal disciple U San Yu to succeed him. He was then 71 years old and continued to control the affairs of the state throughout his chairmanship of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (缅甸社会计划党). From then onwards, student demonstrations escalated and thousands of students fled to the Thai border. In July 1988, Ne Win announced his retirement as chairman of the party. In August the same year, when a huge popular demonstration erupted, he crushed it with the *tatmadaw* (military), resulting in thousands of people being shot dead on the streets. As demonstrations continued, Ne Win promised a referendum with a general election to be held later. In September 1988, the Chief of Staff, General Saw Maung (苏蒙) announced the imposition of martial law over radio and the setting up of the State Law and Other Restoration Council. He appointed himself as Prime Minister.

While still under house arrest, the 92-year-old Ne Win died at his lakeside house in Yangon on December 5, 2002. The death was not reported by the Burmese media or the *junta*. However, paid obituary notices appeared in government-controlled newspapers in Burmese and many were kept uninformed. Ne Win was not afforded a state funeral. The hastily arranged funeral was attended by about 30 people, while his former contacts or junior colleagues were strongly discouraged to participate. Sandar Win, his daughter, who was also on house arrest, was allowed to attend the funeral and the cremation. She observed the ritual of scattering her father's ashes into the Hlaing River. Many people in Burma continue to think that he is still alive.

I met Ne Win when he officially visited Singapore in 1979. I was one of the guests invited to attend a dinner given by the Acting President P. Coomaraswamy at the Istana in his honour. I remembered what Ne Win had said in his banquet speech which stressed the 'freedom of every country to live its own life in its own way', typical



of Burmese character of not wanting outsiders to interfere with their own way of life. He was tall and had a Hakka face, handsome with a pair of fierce eyes. I did not have an opportunity to have a conversation with him because of the crowd and only shook hands with him. He often came to Singapore for medical treatment and was close to the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

### ***Khin Nyunt (钦玉) — The head of secret police (b. 1939)***

After Ne Win stepped down, the next powerful man in Burma was Khin Nyunt (钦玉), a confidant of Ne Win. He was First Secretary of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in September 1988. After the removal of the chairman of SLORC General Saw Maung in April 1992, he gained significant respect and power. His authority came from his close relationship with Ne Win who was his patron and supported him despite his ailment.

Ne Win had carried out a number of assassinations in Burma to eliminate his opponents with the help of Khin Nyunt. Until late 2004, Khin Nyunt, Chief of Military Intelligence, together with General Than Shwe and General Maung Aye, were a formidable military trio. But he was later ousted in a purge engineered by General Than Shwe (陈瑞). My second son-in-law Graham Bell, a Scottish businessman, often contacted him when he visited Rangoon where they discussed business issues. Khin Nyunt emerged as a very powerful general.

Khin Nyunt was born on October 11, 1939, in Kyauktan, a district in Yangon. He was a *tayoke kabya* with a Teochiu father and Burmese mother. He studied psychology at the University of Rangoon before entering the armed forces. He began his career in the infantry and rose rapidly to command a division and later transferred to the Military Intelligence. From August 25, 2003 to October 2004, he held the dual appointment of Prime Minister and Chief of Intelligence. He was married to Daw Kin Win Shwe, a medical doctor with one daughter and two sons. He had a career in the military. He was summoned to Yangon in response to the October 8, 1983, attack on a South Korean delegation visiting Yangon, during which quite a few

South Korean cabinet ministers died. The attackers were covert terrorists from North Korea. Khin Nyunt hence was appointed Chief of Intelligence. He was highly regarded as a protégé of Ne Win and held the position till 1990s. He was the man who had influenced Ne Win to keep closer to the People's Republic of China.

Shortly after he became the Prime Minister, he published a seven-point roadmap for the restoration of democracy, but it was seen as a perpetuation of military rule in Myanmar, hardly a democratic move. Both the Myanmar opposition and the foreign governments in the West were strongly opposed to it.

The first step he advocated was the recalling of the suspended National Convention (NC) which was supposed to lay down the basic principles for a new Constitution. Khin Nyunt's role in the Government offered hope and speculation of democratic reforms, as he was moderate, open and pragmatic. He was keen to engage in a dialogue with Aung Sang Suu Nyi and the democratic opposition members. If Khin Nyunt had stayed longer in his post, critics claim that Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Aung San, the national hero, would have emerged as the new popular political leader. She had formed the National League for Democracy (NLD) to fight elections. The NLD party however was barred from participating in the elections and placed under house arrest. In September 1991, she received the Nobel Peace Prize. When the general elections were finally held, the NLD captured 82% of the votes. Despite the overwhelming victory, she was under house arrest but free to move as The Lady, Aung San Suu Kyi has come to be seen both in Burma and abroad as a symbol of implacable but peaceful resistance to the military oppression. As time passed, Suu Kyi remained effectively isolated in Yangon, whilst the NLD became increasingly irrelevant to the aspirations and needs of the average Burmese citizen.

Meanwhile, the military's stranglehold on Burma had become even more absolute while it continued constructive engagement with ASEAN and secured military support from China. The hardliners who opposed any relaxation of military rule were the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Chairman, Than Shwe and his deputy, General Maung Aye. Both Maung Aye and General Than Shwe

conspired to topple Khin Nyunt. In 1992, a group of military leaders tried to remove him because of his close relations with the PRC, but they failed. Khin Aung Myint was believed to have been the prime influence in managing the country's burgeoning relationship with the PRC as well as responsible for sustaining military pressure against dissident ethnic minorities, such as the Kachin. He was then seen by ASEAN leaders as the 'best hope for returning the country to democracy'.<sup>1</sup>

On October 28, 2004, in a single sentence statement signed by SPDC Chairman, Senior General Than Shwe, 'Khin Nyunt was permitted to retire on health grounds'. In fact, he was immediately placed under house arrest. Allegations of corruption were officially made several days later. His arrest was the result of a behind-the-scene power struggle among senior officials in the Myanmar armed forces. Than Shwe succeeded to clip the wings of the intelligence faction and took over command of the armed forces. On July 2005, Khin Nyunt was found guilty on various corruption charges by a Special Tribunal inside Insein prison near Yangon. He was eventually sentenced to 44 years of imprisonment on July 21, 2006. It was highly likely that he served much of the sentence under house arrest. Khin Nyunt's sons were also sentenced to 51 and 58 years respectively.

### **San Yu (山友) (1918–1996)**

General San Yu, a *tayoke kabya*, was a faithful acolyte of Ne Win for over 40 years. His father was Hakka and his mother Burmese. He was born on March 3, 1918, in Theal Kone, Pyay and was the son of U San Pe and Daw Shwe Lai.

San Yu was studying medicine in Rangoon at the outbreak of World War II. He participated in the student uprising. In the same year, he entered the Burma Independence Army in Pyat and then became an officer in the Japanese sponsored Burma Defence Army

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar reshuffles cabinet, new prime minister named. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-78867437.html>.

and continued with the military career after the war. He went to the United States for training and rose rapidly in the military hierarchy and was a member of the Revolutionary Council under Ne Win which seized power in 1962.

After the overthrow of U Nu on March 2, 1962, he was appointed as Chairman of the New State Constitution Drafting Commission which was formed by the Revolutionary Council. On February 15, 1963 he became the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army. This was in the immediate aftermath of the military *coup d'état* that year. He was later made the Commander of the Armed Forces with the rank of a General. In 1964, he became General Secretary of the Central Organizing Committee of the ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). He subsequently held the positions of Deputy Prime Minister and also Minister of Defence. On April 1972, he became the General Secretary of the Council of State of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, better known as BSPP. He retired from the position at the same time as Ne Win in October 1981. From November 9, 1981 to July 27, 1988, San Yu served as the President of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. He was elected by the Burmese Legislature (Pyithu Hluttaw). Political turbulence in 1988 caused the ruling military establishment to set up a new form of government. After his retirement and throughout the turmoil that ensued with the 1988 pro-democracy demonstration and military *coup d'état*, San Yu lived quietly in his suburban Rangoon home. In the post-independence period, he became, after Ne Win, the second-longest serving President of Burma. He died on January 30, 1996.

### **Aung Gyi**

Aung Gan Gyi, son of a Chinese father and Burmese mother, was born in 1919. He was a member of Ne Win's 4th Burma Rifles, eventually rising to the position of Brigadier General. His father was Hakka. His Chinese name was Chen Tianwang (陈天旺), in addition to a commonly used name, Ang Ji (昂季). In Ne Win's caretaker government of 1958–1960, Ang Ji had a role. In his memoirs entitled *Saturday Son*, published in 1974, U Nu, then the Prime Minister of

Myanmar, claimed that he was under duress to handover power to the caretaker government. He was given the ultimatum by Aung Gyi and Brigadier Maung Maung. He was told that if he did not step down, there would be a *coup d'état*. Aung Gyi was the number two in the Revolutionary Council set up after the 1962 *coup d'état*, serving as Vice-Chief of Staff and Minister of Trade and Industry. He was known as Ne Win's heir apparent. U Nu accused Aung Gyi as the 'real culprit' responsible for the devastation of the Rangoon University Student Union Building which took place on July 8, 1962. Aung Gyi was subsequently ousted in 1963 for the statements he had made in Japan about the cause of the 1962 *coup d'état*. He had criticised the Council's economic policies too. He was imprisoned in 1965–1968 and again in 1973–1974. His connection with Ne Win continued despite the above and he retained his loyalty to the armed forces. He was by nature a hot-tempered man. Prior to the 8888 Nationwide Popular Pro-Democracy Protests, Aung Gyi had written long open letters to Ne Win which was widely distributed throughout the country, criticising the government's way to socialism. In his letter, he warned of possible unrest. He also reiterated that there was need for economic reforms. In 1968, he emerged as a prominent opposition leader and was imprisoned between July and August 1988. Just before the *coup d'état*, Aung Gyi told a crowd that he guaranteed that the army would not stage a *coup d'état* and that the interim government would be formed soon. He said, 'I will kill myself if the army staged a *coup d'état*'. Interestingly after the *coup d'état*, he told people who came to listen to his speech that they 'must not think badly about the army'. The National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed with Aung Gyi as Chairman and Aung San Suu Kyi as General Secretary in September 1988. In December 1988, he resigned from the NLD, alleging communist infiltration. He went on to register the Union National Democracy Party (UNDP) on December 16, 1988. In May 1990, only one UNDP candidate was elected in the general elections. The NDP, on the other hand, fielded 447 candidates, of which 392 were elected. In 1993, in a drastic change of events, Aung Gyi was sentenced to six months imprisonment. This was for a minor offence for not paying a bill for eggs. In 1998, in his visit to the US,

he managed to record an extensive interview with Radio Free Asia. He also accused the top *junta* leaders of corruption and Aung San Suu Kyi of involvement with the Communists. Being a staunch supporter of Ne Win, he said he hoped that Ne Win could contribute something to the country before he died ‘because he knows what was right and what was wrong’. At the funeral of Ne Win, Aung Gyi spoke fondly of his achievements in helping Myanmar gain independence in 1948. But he blamed Ne Win for betraying his country and democracy by staging a *coup d’état*. He ended with ‘He died an inglorious death. It was a sad and tragic ending’.<sup>2</sup>

### **Maung Aye (蒙艾) (b. 1937)**

Maung Aye, who became Vice-Chairman of SPDC and Chief of Staff of Myanmar Armed Forces, was born of a Chinese father and Burmese mother. A career soldier, he became the second most powerful man in Myanmar. He was alleged to have strong ties with Burma’s drug lords in the Golden Triangle while he was still a colonel in the late 1970s and 1980s, before joining the military leadership in 1993. His ruthlessness, xenophobia and strong opposition to allowing Aung San Suu Kyi any political role in the country were well known. A graduate of a prestigious military academy, he has been able to extricate himself from the major crises, mistakes and embarrassment of the *junta*, including the Depaying Incident and the 1988 uprising. He appeared to be the only alternative to Than Shwe and was believed to have the support of many of the various strata of Burmese society. A veteran diplomat, who regularly met government, military and business leaders from Burma during his numerous visits, once said that Maung Aye could stop Burma from falling further and could invigorate the armed forces and redefine its role in national politics. While Maung Aye respected Than Shwe enough not to confront him openly and make him feel threatened, he did want to minimise his power. But both had one shared view and that was, they ignored international pressure and

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<sup>2</sup>Aung Gyi — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aung\\_Gyi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aung_Gyi).



Maung Aye

were prepared to break all ties with the international community then. In October 1995, Maung Aye visited Tokyo to court Japanese economic aid and investment to help his country migrate from a centrally planned socialist economy to a free market economy. He was then Vice-Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council. Since the military assumed power in the 1988 *coup d'état*, Japan has yet to disburse the loans that it had earlier pledged. This was for six infrastructure projects, including 27 billion yen to facelift the international airport in Rangoon. Japan wanted to see a soft landing for the transfer of power before resuming the loan or consider future loans to Myanmar.

### ***U Kyi Maung (1920–2004)***

U Kyi Maung was Army Commander of Rangoon in 1960s. His father was Teochew and mother Burmese. As a student at Rangoon University, he actively participated in the student movement for independence. In 1938, when the students rose to protest the colonial administration, U Kyi Maung marched ahead of the demonstration, holding aloft the flag for the students' union. He was one of



U Kyi Maung

the students struck by the police during the demonstration. At the outbreak of World War II, U Kyi Maung joined the Burma Independence Army and remained with the armed forces until 1963. He fervently opposed the 1962 military takeover led by General Ne Win as he staunchly believed in the importance of an apolitical professional army. A year later he was requested to leave the service when he was Commander of the South Western Command, including Rangoon. Following his retirement, the military and later the Burmese Socialist Programme Party government continued to be suspicious of him. He was detained twice for a total period of seven years. He was also arrested for a month shortly after the outbreak of the democracy movement in 1988. In 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi appointed him as one of the 12 members of the Executive Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD). He was responsible in leading the NLD into resounding victory when Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, Vice-Chairman of NLD were both arrested in July 1989. However, he was arrested and tried by the military tribunal a few months after the elections. He was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment and charged under the State Secrets Act. Many concluded that the authorities refused to honour the election results and NLD's victory. Instead,



they were planning to curtail the movement by placing the leaders under detention. He was released in 1995 but his freedom was short lived. A demonstration against the regime was staged by some 200 to 300 students from the Rangoon Institute of Technology. U Kyi Maung made a speech to supporters along with Aung San Suu Kyi at the front gate of Aung's house and he was once again arrested in October 1996. In 1997, the mild mannered U Kyi Maung resigned from NLD over a dispute on methods of achieving power. U Kyi Maung did not believe in using violence to achieve political power but would defend others with violence if there were no other means. In the last few years he distanced himself from Burmese politics. He died in August 2004.

### **U Kyaw Win (宇高文)**

May Flower Kyaw Win, otherwise known as U Kyaw Win, was one of the leading industrialists and bankers in Burma. Born into a poor Chinese family in a small village in Northern Shan State, U Kyaw Win was a self-made man. His father was Chinese and mother Shan. In 1968, when he was in his twenties, he worked in the border town of Tachilek, where he established a business relationship with Thai businessmen. His close Thai business alliance was Choon Tangkakarn, owner of the Pathumthani Sawmills who once cooperated with the former drug lord Khun Sa. From there, he made his fortune. His May Flower Bank was the third largest bank in Burma. It was the first bank to have a 24-hour automatic teller machine in November 1995 and also the first to introduce computer network for transactions. The bank has 10 branches in Burma. Besides banking, U Kyaw Win's business included timber, airways and natural resources.

### **Tay Za (铁沙)**

Tay Za, the multi-millionaire tycoon who deals with telephones and arms is believed to be closely linked to the military and government

top leader General Than Shwe. He traded arms with the United Wa State Army which was involved in the drug trade, in addition to serving the procurement needs of the military government. The United Wa State Army was related to the United Wa State Party and has a 30,000 strong army, which launched attacks on a Shan rebel group in the Shan state. Observers believe that Tay Za was favoured by the head of the Burmese junta, Than Shwe. One businessman claimed that whenever Than Shwe's family took a holiday at Ngwe Saung beach, Irrawaddy Division, they would stay at Tay Za's Myanmar Treasure Beach Resort. Tay Za has good connections in China. When Khin Nyunt was in power, Tay Za signed an agreement with the GSM contract with the Myanmar Government, the Telecommunication and China ZTE, the country's leading telecommunication manufacturer which provided for the sale of 199,000 mobile phones in Rangoon and Mandalay. One businessman in Rangoon alleged that mobile phone contract award was in exchange for the building of the controversial Nanmyint Tower at the Pagan World Heritage site. It was believed that the recently inaugurated tower was Than Shwe's idea. Tay Za was the Managing Director of the Htoo Trading Company, a major player in Burma's tourism, logging, real estate, hotel and housing development sectors. Tay Za owns at least three big hotels and has undertaken to build an airport. Since 1990s, he has been the *junta's* sole representative in arms trading. He has been dealing with the Russian helicopter company Rostvertol and Russian Export Military Industrial Group. He had helped the military procure MIG-29 fighter jets helicopters from Russia in this capacity.

## **Downturn in Sino-Burma Relations**

As the Chinese controlled the economy of the country; the Burmese nationalists became jealous of their economic success and started to design economic policies to minimise the influence of the Chinese. This was particularly so when General Ne Win staged a *coup d'état* and took over power in 1962. In 1963, the Ne win

government nationalised all trades and industry. The policy greatly affected the Chinese whose businesses were officially nationalised. In 1964, the government banned the circulation of currency notes exceeding \$50 and \$100. This damaged the economy of the Chinese in Burma as only the Chinese had big notes, and they lost their wealth overnight. The Chinese consequently returned to China. Although in 1949, China established diplomatic relations with Burma, Beijing did not raise the problem of Chinese losses due to Burma's monetary policies. The decline of the Chinese economic power and the exodus of Chinese from Burma affected the economic development of the country. Till today, whilst all Southeast Asian countries have made progress, Myanmar was still economically challenged because of the lack of Chinese foreign investment and their entrepreneurial know-how. Although the remnant Chinese have become Myanmar citizens, they are not well treated and integrated with the Myanmar lifestyle becoming more difficult for them.

### **Impact of Chinese Cultural Revolution on Sino-Burmese Relations**

Mao's Cultural Revolution had a tremendous impact on Burma and Southeast Asia. Many leaders of the Communist parties in Southeast Asia returned to China after having been brainwashed by extremist Chinese Communist leaders. Under the direction of Bo Tun Nyein, the White flag of the Burmese Communist Party carried out raids on villagers and Buddhist monasteries in an attempt to strike fear into the peasant population, upset government administration and bring about rice shortage. One directive demanded the building of Red Power even if it meant resorting to murder. Likewise, a Burmese exile in Beijing displayed his loyalty to the communists' cause by stipulating that the party's armed struggle was bound to succeed as long as it adhered to Mao's thoughts, possessed an armed force under the party's leadership and relied on the masses and a 'worker-peasant alliance'. Ne Win took drastic measures to curb Chinese shops and

schools in 1966 when China started its Cultural Revolution. The PRC encouraged the White flags of the Burmese Communist party to overthrow the Ne Win regime. In January 1966, China's Ambassador to Myanmar, Keng Piao and most of his staff were recalled to Beijing. They were replaced by diplomatic personnel headed by Hsiao Ming, representing the Gang of Four who started the Cultural Revolution to encourage the Chinese in Burma to stage a similar revolution. The new entourage, apparently inspired by the Cultural Revolution fervour experienced during their stay on the Chinese mainland, brought back to Rangoon Mao's red books, Mao's badges, Mao's button and other items. The Cultural Revolution which sparked off in China in the early 1960s had a tremendous impact on the overseas Chinese in Burma. The Chinese youth in Burma especially in Rangoon and Bhamo started a fashion of wearing Mao badges. Nearly all teachers and students in Bhamo Chinese schools wore Mao hats and pinned Mao's badges with Mao's image on their chests. They also shouted Mao slogans and read Mao's *Red Book* in public, imitating movements in China. This aroused the attention of the Burmese authorities which started to take action to restrict such behaviour. The Burmese authorities regarded the practice of promoting Maoism in Burma as 'unBurmese' and took steps to restrict them. In Bhamo, the security forces went about demanding that Chinese teachers and students take off their Mao badges and Mao hats. The students were adamant and refused to do so. Then the Burmese Education Department had to issue an order banning Mao badges in schools and stipulated that anyone wearing a Mao badge in school would be dismissed. As a result, many students were expelled from schools. Two school officials went to the Education Ministry to explain their action and were detained. The Chinese in Bhamo were furious with the action taken by the authorities and started to stage street demonstrations to protest against the authorities. This move coincided with the shortage of food in Burma and the rebellion spread throughout the country. In March 1967, a minority rebellion occupied Gyobingauk for few hours and retreated after that. The authorities blamed the Chinese for the rebellion. This unrest spread like wildfire throughout the whole country,

especially in Rangoon. By June 1967, some hooligans surrounded the Kemmendine Burma Chinese High School (缅甸华人中学), now Rangoon Regional College and the Bahan Kokine Nanyang Chinese High School of Burma. They beat up the principal, teachers and students. This resulted in an open conflict between the students and the hooligans. The hooligans set fire to the school and about 20 teachers were burnt to death. Three teachers jumped down from the fourth floor and were killed. This conflict spread to the entire Chinatown, and many shops were burnt down, causing damage to Chinese property and lives. On June 29, 1967, about 5,000 Burmese shouted anti-Chinese slogans and surrounded the Chinese Embassy, China News Agency and other Chinese business firms, staging a large-scale anti-Chinese demonstration. They killed the Chinese expert, Liu Yi, who was sent to Burma to help the country, and they slaughtered 44 overseas Chinese. In addition, they held 1,300 Chinese hostages and detained 89 Chinese for questioning. The Chinese Government strongly protested against the Burmese action *vis-à-vis* Chinese and withdrew their ambassador.

A large batch of Chinese packed up and went back to China. China also severed diplomatic relations with Burma. Throughout 1967, the Burmese authorities continued to put local Chinese on trial, accusing them of subversion. By 1968, China agreed to accept local nationals who wished to leave Burma. According to the *Rangoon Working People's Daily* (工人日报) dated May 23, 1968, about 1,500 Chinese left Burma during the first five months. However, the breakdown of relations between China and Burma did not last long. Later, the Burmese Government apologised and requested to resume diplomatic relations, promising to release those detained. China resumed diplomatic relations with Burma and friendship was gradually renewed between the two countries. For a decade after the anti-Chinese riots, Burma received full-scale support from China. This had a great impact on the direction of armed conflict and ethnic politics in the country. With thousands of freshly armed recruits among such nationalities as the Wa and Kokang, the communists of Burma were able to seize control of the vast newly liberated zones in ethnic minority lands along the China frontier,

from where it attempted to spread insurrection into the urban areas and central Irrawaddy plains. There was a reduction in hostile exchanges between Chinese and Burmese officials. On November 6, 1967, at a seminar, Ne Win expressed a desire to heal the wounds of incidents in 1967. He said he would do whatever he could to restore old friendship between the two countries. The repatriation of Chinese from Burma in 1968 reflected the possible change of attitude in Beijing's reconciliation with Burma. During the year, the Chinese Red Cross donated 10,000 Yuan to the Burmese Red Cross to assist in the relief of hurricane victims. The Chinese Charge's participation in the Martyrs Day on July 19 to commemorate the death of the Burmese hero Aung San was another reflection of the positive change in the relationship. Burmese officials reciprocated by attending a reception held by the Chinese military attaché in Rangoon commemorating the financial support of the Chinese Army on August 1. Burmese officials started attending China's National Day reception in Beijing and Chinese embassy personnel began hosting Burmese officials in Rangoon. By October 1970, Ne Win sent greetings to Chou Enlai and a new Burmese ambassador was appointed to China.

### **Kokangere (果敢) — The Chinese Minority**

Burma has been unique in Southeast Asia in having not just immigrant Chinese but its own indigenous Chinese minority living on the Burmese side of the border in Kokang. The minority group was called Kokangese. There has been very little scrutiny of the Mandarin-speaking people of Burma, whether Hui or Han. Kokang was left alone, and over generations there grew a political entity formed by the Yang clan, to whom were given hereditary rights to rule Kokang as a vassal of the Chinese emperor. The House of Yang originated when a Ming loyalist, a tea trader by profession, fled westwards from the Qing advance in the mid-17th century. He became a minor warlord in the marches of Yunnan, and kept the turbulent non-Chinese minorities under control. His descendants came to rule over a population that was mainly Han, and their little court was culturally Chinese.

By the late 18th century, the Yang family had gained recognition from the authorities in Yunnan, while simultaneously paying tribute to the Shan ruler of Hsenwi. After the British had forced China to accept the inclusion of Kokang in Burma in 1897, the House of Yang attempted to shake off the suzerainty of Hsenwi. Kokang prospered by replacing tea with opium, gaining an exemption from the 1923 British prohibition on cultivating this crop, and hiring out mules to the Indian army. With the arrival of the Japanese in 1942, the House of Yang threw in its lot with the Guomindang authorities in Yunnan, while staving off Chinese plans to annex the principality. This loyalty was rewarded after the war, when Britain at last made Kokang a Shan State in its own right in 1947. However, independent Burma betrayed the spirit of the Panglong Agreement of 1946.

After a brief Indian summer, the regime born of the 1962 *coup d'état* dismantled the Shan States. Armed struggle in Kokang from 1963 to 1968 was financed by smuggling opium to Thailand, and much of the population left for Thailand and Lashio. The Communist Party gained a precarious ascendancy in Kokang in the 1980s, and when the *junta* finally agreed to a measure of autonomy in 1990, the House of Yang was no more in power. The Kokangese became prominent on world stage when Myanmar soldiers clashed with this ethnic minority troops in the northeast of Myanmar, killing one person and wounding dozen others. Tens of thousands of Kokangese fled to the border town of Nansan in China's Yunnan province. Two decades ago, the Myanmar central government had essentially ceded control of Kokang to a local militia after signing a ceasefire pact. The Myanmar *junta*, however, has been trying to consolidate its control of the country, including Kokang, ahead of the national elections in 2010. The Kokang regime has about 20,000 soldiers and was known to possess heavy weaponry, including field artillery and anti-tank missiles. Like various ethnic groups within Myanmar, the Kokang control large pockets of territory in the northern borderland areas of Myanmar, covering more than 10,000 square kilometres with a population of about 150,000. It was home to a large number of ethnic Chinese, many of whom were Chinese citizens who own shops or to business in Myanmar. The

Kokangese soldiers were losing the fight against the Myanmar forces because of their numbers. There was fear among Kokangese that they may lose their autonomy. The Kokang rulers were also concerned that they may lose their control over the opium trade, jade and other products such as pepper.

## **Kokang**

Kokang was a narrow strip of land which lies in the north-eastern tip of the Shan States. It was bounded on the east by the Chinese Shan States of Zengkhan, Gengma and Mengding, on the north by Lungling in China and on the south by the Wa state. Kokang encompasses a large tract of the Tibetan plateau and the land was dotted with mountain ranges in the northern parts. The average elevation of the ranges was around 1,200 m with the highest soaring to more than 2,400 m offering spectacular and breathtaking scenery. The nature of the geographical situation determines the characteristics of the Kokang people. The rugged terrain and harsh inclement weather has rendered them a hardy and sturdy stock more akin to the Kachins, Nepalese or Tibetans. Being agrarian people, they were simple in outlook and regard their more sophisticated neighbours such as the Yunnanese traders as crafty, scheming and dishonest in comparison to them. They feel uncomfortable and confused in the company of bureaucrats. Both the Hans and the Shans in Kokang lived together amicably. There has not been any recorded antagonism or ethnic tensions between the two groups. The Hans have absorbed many Shan words into their vocabulary, such as the names of oranges, papaya and other local vegetables. Some of the names of places in Kokang still retain their Shan identity, especially those with the prefixes Mong and Nam. Kokang has also adopted Shan designations for some of its local administrative officers such as Kyin Mu (Kin Mong), Tu Tou (Htamong) and Peng Meng (a Chinese corruption of Htomong). In religion, Kokang has not only adopted the Shan worship of the forest rat (Sao Mong) but has elevated this event into a serious and solemn ceremony led by the ruling family. This event has taken on a military significance.



Before going to the battlefield, it was the tradition to offer a bullock to the forest rat. Frequent contacts between the two communities have resulted in some members speaking the language of the other. The ruling House of Yang has a tradition of close association with the Shans. For instance, Yang Guo Sheng (杨国生), the Kokang leader, could speak Shan and in fact he was known as Khun Lu Kwan (坤六官), the Khun was a Shan title and Lu Lwan was Chinese for the 6th rank. Yang's grandson Wen Pin continued this tradition and, in one instance, offered one of his sons for adoption by a Shan Chief. During the 1960s, when Kokang was engaged in the revolution against the Ne Win regime, some of the most trusted supporters were Shans from Kunlong. Owing to its remoteness, the central government has had difficulty in exercising direct control over the area and preferred to allow the barbarians to rule themselves so long as they acknowledge the imperial suzerainty and pay tributes. The Han rulers had limited knowledge of the local language and culture. Difficulties in communication often resulted in misunderstanding and tensions.

Thus, for centuries the Kokang people had their own *tu-szu* system, which allowed the indigenous to exercise autonomy. Chinese pragmatism dates back as far as the period of the warring states when Zhu Kerliang, the military strategist, visited the area. His footprints were still considered sacred landmarks by the people of Kokang. Under the Ming dynasty, the *tu-szu* system was institutionalised although it was still hereditary in nature. The word *tu* (土) means local, indigenous or non-Han and *szu* (士) means official. Practical considerations such as the formidable topography, difficulties in communications and political expedience allowed this system to continue untouched for a long time. The presence of the British in Burma in the 19th century posed new threats to the Chinese. The states lying along the borders of Kokang became buffers to inhibit the tide of British colonialism. The *tu-szu* who guarded the frontiers were rewarded with titles and granted hereditary rights in return for recognition of Chinese imperial power which was a device to perpetuate the extension of the Chinese empire without having to use force. Under the rule of the Yang family, the gentry adhered to the Confucian moral code. The Kokang celebrated the spring festival just as other

Chinese. They practiced ancestor worship which takes place in the first two weeks of the third lunar month at the tombs of their ancestors. Relatives and friends were invited to such occasions when pigs would be slaughtered and incense and paper money burnt. There was a unique custom in Kokang culture. When someone, particularly a child, was ill, a special ceremony was performed to ensure that the soul does not leave the body. People would offer flowers and fruits and incense on their ancestral altar and a religious priest would hold a bowl of rice topped with a boiled egg on which a braided piece of red string was placed. He would call for the soul to come back. One of the most popular activities in Kokang was called *ta bao* (打包; throwing ball). The ball was made of triangles of coloured silk or knitted wool stitched together and stuffed with uncooked rice. The bao was played only between the opposite sex either in pairs or in teams of four members on each side. It was customary for the girls to have the prerogative to catch it with both hands. Many marriages resulted from this game. When the boys throw the ball, the girls who catch them would be natural life partners.

### **Yang Wen Ping (杨文炳)**

In March 1942, the Japanese, with the help of Burmese nationalists, occupied Rangoon. In anticipation of such an event, the Burmese government had already evacuated to the north of Maymyo in February. The Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek cooperated with the British by sending General Tu Li-Ming (杜利民) to help British soldiers fight the Japanese. Soon after the fall of Rangoon, the Japanese troops came to Kokang. They negotiated with the descendant of the Yang House, Yang Wen Pin for surrender. Wen Pin attended the meeting sponsored by the Japanese Military Chief and decided to fight the invaders. But he had no regular forces and could in no way defend against the mighty Japanese soldiers. He wrote to the Central government for assistance, but in vain. Having been refused military aid by the Burmese Government, he proceeded to procure arms and ammunition with his own money and borrowed from other Kokang elite to arm his own defence force. Despite orders from the Japanese

authorities that someone caught selling arms or ammunitions to Kokang would be beheaded, Wen Pin bought 200 rifles from retreating British and Chinese troops, some Bren guns and about 50,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. Between 1942 and September 1943, it was estimated that the expenditure on arms and supplies including food, salary, and uniforms for his Kokang troops amounted to RS11,714,900 (about 100,000 British pounds Sterling). Later, Yang moved his family to Kyu Wa Kyai, six miles north of Kya Diling. This was a precautionary measure as the remnants of the Chinese army had passed through Kokang on their way back to Yunnan. The Kokang people provided food and shelter to these troops. Yang Wen Pin became the commander of the Kokang Self-Defence Force under the command of the 11th Army Group of the Chinese Expeditionary Force.

They attacked the Japanese fort, a Phongyi Kyaung (monastery), from Hsiao Dilin and Manka. The Japanese were caught sleeping and the Kokang killed or wounded about 80 Japanese and Shans. The rest of the Japanese who were hidden under the monastery returned fire with their machine guns and rifles killing four or five Chinese soldiers and one Kokang man. Throughout the war, the Kokang forces kept the Japanese at bay and never advanced beyond Kunlong. One year after the Japanese invasion, Yang Wen Pin was invited to Chongqing to meet Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. In May 1943, he arrived at Chongqing accompanied by his third son Yang Kyein Sein. The purpose was to seek help from the Chinese Government since they were refused assistance by the British. Generalissimo spoke highly of Yang Wen Pin and in appreciation of his wartime efforts, presented him with a ceremonial suit of a long coat and short jacket, a sword inscribed with his personal monogram, a medal of merit with a Chinese flag in the centre, a military uniform and books. After the meeting, Chiang instructed the 11th and 12th Army Group to send troops to support and cooperate with the Kokang Forces. Later, due to a conspiracy of the Chinese Generals, Yang Wei Pin was kept isolated from his people and stayed in a private house under surveillance. He was later detained and tried

by a martial court and imprisoned. In April 1944 he was released. The verdict was 'Not guilty but too rich.'

### **Khun Sa (坤沙) and Burma's Drug Barons (1934–2004)**

The opium trade in the Shan and Kachin states provide funds for their armies as it did for the Burma Communist Party which was, until recently, operating in the remote northern region. About half of the heroin on America's streets comes from the Golden Triangle, and Myanmar was by far the biggest producer. The US embassy in Yangon believes that the value of narcotics exports appears to be worth as much as all legal exports of those in the United States. Much of the opium was controlled by Khun Sa, whose Chinese name was Chang Chi Fu (张奇夫). He was born of a Chinese father and Shan mother. He was raised by his grandfather, the *myoza* (ruler) of



Khun Sa

Loimaw, as he was an orphan. In 1954, when he was 20 years old, he returned to the village of Loimaw where he assumed his grandfather's title. Within a few years, he recruited a force of several hundred Chinese and Shan. At first he worked for the Guomindang, but later he was appointed government militia leader. He was supplied not only with weapons, but also with army instructors to give his troops military training. His force, financed by the opium trade, has about 800 men. He later became a major player in the early 1960s in the Golden Triangle, then the world's major source of opium and its derivative, heroin. He was a shiftless youth with a criminal disposition and embarked in the opium trade in the early 1960s when he was head of a local militia under the command of the Burmese army. His career halted temporarily between 1969 and 1974 when he was detained. His release was secured by his supporters in exchange for two Soviet doctors whom they had abducted. He then set up a base in north-western Thailand in coalition with elements of the Guomindang who had retreated and settled down in Burma in 1949. He received the support from the Thai army because of his anti-Communist credentials, until a change of political circumstances led to his forces being driven back into Burma in January 1982. Khun Sa, meaning 'Prince of Prosperity' was disliked by the ordinary people, who would often call him 'Prince of Darkness'. During the 1980s and through to 1995, Khun Sa was regarded by America's Drug Enforcement Agency as 'the most important mafia drug lord in the entire globe'. He had his own private Mong Tai Army with 15,000 men carrying arms that controlled much of highland Shan state. His headquarters at Homong near the Thai border, boasted its own factories, brothels, street lighting, telephones and power station. Although he claimed to be a freedom fighter, few people believed that and considered him a drug baron. There were also other private armies operating in the Golden Triangle which were mostly drug-related, such as the Kokang Army and the United Wa State Army. Hun Sa's influence began to decline during 1995 and, at the end of the year, he surrendered power to the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council). He was pressured by the Thais, who had cultivated a close friendship with Myanmar's generals, and the increasing

strength of the SLORC's armed forces, and he hence decided to strike a deal with Yangon and surrender while he was still alive. He was later airlifted to the capital, where he claimed he just wanted to enjoy a quiet retirement. After Khun Sa's surrender, Homong, which was once the wealthiest corners of Myanmar became a destitute town. Within a few months, the population dropped from 18,000 to 4,000, as people abandoned the place whose economic *raison d'être* had vanished in a puff of smoke. When Khun Sa's army vanished, the prostitutes left for Bangkok and the soldiers melted into the jungle. Khun Sa died in his house in Yangon at the age of 74. Khuensai Jaiyen, a former secretary for Khun Sa who works with ethnic Shan minority, said his former boss was cremated in Yangon where he lived in seclusion since 1996, in veiled secrecy.

## **The Last Ming Emperor in Burma**

In 1644, when the Manchus conquered China, the Ming Emperor committed suicide, leaving Yungli who ascended the throne in Nanjing. Being driven from Nanjing, he retired in Yunnan, retaining the title of Emperor. He demanded revenue from the Shan states, west of the Salsin River. This alarmed the Burmese court, as it was reminiscent of the superiority exercised by the Mongols nearly 400 years ago. There was a minor conflict between Chinese and Burmese soldiers on the border and the Burmese were defeated. In 1658, the pseudo-emperor Yungli was driven out of Yunnan by the Manchus. He fled to Moulmein, the frontier town of Burma, near a branch of the Upper Tapeng River. He made a request to the Chief of Bamoa for refuge in Burma and was willing to offer 100 vessels of gold to the Burmese King. After some delay, Yungli was allowed to proceed and was provided with a suitable residence at Sagaing. Yungli brought a large number of followers, his family, relatives and friends. His small army, comprising 1,478 people, entered the country and behaved like invaders, plundering and cruelly treating the inhabitants. They burned down the villages and monasteries without mercy. When questioned, Yungli said that his officers were ignorant of them having become subjects of the King of Burma. They threw down

their arms when they were threatened by the King. The King of Burma, suspicious of Yungli, separated his followers from him, and hence reduced the original numbers. Yungli was summoned and when his followers thought that their emperor was in danger, took up arms against the Burmese soldiers and a scuffle followed, resulting in their deaths. Yungli saved himself. According to Burmese history, Yungli's children all turned Christians and were allowed to live in the Burmese capital. All Yungli's followers stayed on in Burma and became naturalised Burmese.

## Chapter Five

# The Konkat-Cen in Cambodia

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From early Cambodian history till the beginning of the 20th century, almost all Chinese emigrants to Cambodia were male and most settled permanently in Cambodia, marrying Khmer women and establishing Cambodian families. Inter-marriages were not only common, but also provided a crucial entry to Cambodian commerce and society. According to Wang Dayuan (汪大渊), a great traveller during the Mongolian period, the Chinese settlers took advantage of the easy availability of food, women, housing, furniture and trade. By choosing Cambodia, these early immigrants had abandoned China; the laws of ancient China deemed the very act of forsaking one's ancestral homeland the lowest form of crime, punishable by death. Recognising the economic and cultural value of diverse ethnic groups, successive monarchs maintained an open-door immigrant policy, offering asylum to Chinese refugees from the 13th to 19th century. Unclouded by the virulent ethnic nationalism that has coloured so many 20th century Southeast Asian regimes, Cambodian kings such as Ang Duong (洪端) appointed Chinese, Sino-Khmer, Vietnamese and Cham people as provincial governors. These officials known as *Oknya* (奥雅) in Cambodian language backed the King's claim to the throne and were handsomely rewarded. Chinese and Sino-Khmers were accepted as part of the Cambodian kingdom but were regarded as a separate communities, subject to special taxation and privileged by the King's leasing of opium and gambling concessions. Those who were born in Cambodia were appointed to high positions. Sino-Khmers retained a distinct cultural identity which was also perceived as a threat.



Struck by a large number of Sino-Khmers in the pepper plantations of the 1960s, Pavie, a Cambodian expert, noted that the Chinese marry native girls outside of China with their children acculturated in the custom and religion of the birthplaces where they stay. The children assimilate gradually into the population while the father after making his fortune, returns to China. In early 20th century Cambodia, a Chinese son-in-law was a hefty catch. Sino-Khmers were then regarded as a natural union of two races. To this day people boast about being pure Sino-Khmers. The Cambodians used the word *enchaw* (应召) to refer to pure Chinese who emigrated to Cambodia from China. Second- and third-generation Chinese, who were the offspring from Chinese lineage, was known as *Cen-koncen* (人共人) meaning children of Chinese or *koncaw-Cen* (共召人), grandchildren of Chinese. A more colloquial Khmer term for Chinese in Cambodia comes from the extremely popular Khmer folk-tale 'The Story of Tun Ciy' (顿塞).

## The Story of Tun Ciy

Tun Ciy was a celebrated Khmer sage whose fame reached China. The Emperor of China appointed a Chinese sage and a Chinese professor to bring 500 boats to Cambodia for a contest of wits with the Khmer scholar. The Chinese professor lost to Tun Ciy and this led some court officials to tell the King to exile him to China because he was too smart. In China, Tun Ciy insulted the Chinese Emperor and was imprisoned. Nevertheless, he made a kite which produced the wailing cry of an animal and created havoc for the Emperor. The court officials advised the emperor to release Tun Ciy, who returned home with much wealth and a boat with 100 Chinese. On his return, Tun Ciy built a house for the Chinese so that they could live in comfort. That was why the Chinese today was widely known as '*Cen A-Ciy*', meaning the Chinese who came with Tun Ciy. Cambodia's relations with China dated as far back as 1296 during the Yuan dynasty.

According to excerpts from a Chinese chronicler Zhou Daguan, who visited the famous Angkor Wat (吴哥窟), Cambodians would

traditionally show the Chinese great respect and call him ‘Buddha’, throwing themselves on the ground and bowing low before him. Although ethnic Chinese in Cambodia may refer to themselves by either *konkaw-Cen* or *Cen A-Ciy*, they would freely refer to themselves as *khmae-yeung*, meaning ‘we Khmer’ (我们高棉人), where Khmer indicates the attachment to the Khmer nation. Those who were of ethnic Chinese origin, but integrated into Khmer society through intermarriages were often described as having *col khmae* meaning assimilated with the Khmers, even if they have joined Chinese associations or retained their Chinese identity. There was a difference between the Chinese in Phnom Penh (金边) and Siem Reap (暹粒). In Siemreap, the Chinese community was culturally less clearly defined than that of Phnom Penh. A greater proportion of the Chinese in Siemreap have assimilated to the Khmer culture, and hence it was more difficult for an observer to differentiate a Chinese from a Khmer. In comparison with Phnom Penh, the 1961 census show that the majority of the Chinese in Siemreap identified themselves as Cambodian citizens and twice as great a proportion considered Khmer as their mother tongue. In Phnom Penh, only 1 in 15 Chinese married a Cambodian as against one to five in Siemreap. Three times as great a proportion of Chinese households spoke Khmer at home in Siemreap (13.6%) compared to Phnom Penh (4.4%).

## **Early Origins of Chinese in Cambodia**

Chinese migration in Cambodia was rich in its oral tradition. The names of places and Khmer folklore reflect the stories of early Chinese immigration. A monument in Weeping Chinese Village (哭泣华人村) was dedicated to the Chinese who were dislocated on arrival. The Cambodians refer to this as Phum Cen-yum in the Krang Cheik district of Kompong Speu, a historical entry point for Chinese immigrating to Cambodia. The monument was named after the Chinese who wept and wailed as they searched in vain for familiar landmarks. Legend says that this village was the first point of arrival for many Fujian Chinese centuries ago. Formerly known as Sampoupun (Fleet

of boats, 三宝船), the Koh Tiew commune in the Koh Thom district of Kandal province was remembered as a port for Chinese trade with the embryonic Cambodian state of Funan (扶南) in local legends. Oral history recounts how successive waves of Chinese migrated to Sampoupun in the 1st, 6th, 13th, 18th and 20th century. A similar legend, passed on by a Sino-Khmer in Kampot (金宝), holds that Tuk Meah (金船, meaning Golden Boat) earned its name centuries ago from Chinese shipments to Tuk Meah. After unloading the goods, the boats would take a cargo of gold back to China. At the beginning of the 15th century, Admiral Zheng He's treasury ships touched Champa (占巴) but did not go to Cambodia. However, the Cambodians have one reference to Zheng He on his visit to Cambodia.

One prominent Cambodian explained to me the origin of the name of the town Tuk Meah (金船, Golden Ship) as follows: The Chinese name for this town was Chin Chuan (金船, Golden ship) because San Pao Kong (三宝公, meaning Zheng He) brought a golden ship. His sailors wanted a drink and he told them to take water from behind the ship, never from the front, or else they would not have a river to continue their journey. The sailors obeyed, except for once they were deceived by curiosity to drink from the front. Then suddenly, they found they were sitting on a road instead of a river and the boat could not move any more. It gradually sank into the mud and could no longer be located. People still wait for the day when it would rise from the mud.

Zheng He's voyage stimulated demand for Chinese goods in Cambodia, and there was a general increase in trade between China and Cambodia. The founding of Phnom Penh as a capital by King Ponshea-Yat in 1434 resulted in higher volumes of trade in the beginning of the 15th century, in porcelain, textiles and rare metals. Phnom Penh was a prosperous trading city dependant on foreign trade — a break away from Khmer of the past. Ships could sail in from the sea along the Mekong and continued further to Phnom Penh. The capital represented the change in the state and standing of Cambodian society: a change from an almost self-sufficient economy to one dependent on foreign trade. Such stories point to the fact that the ethnic

Chinese were a continuing feature in the history and economic and cultural life of Cambodians. These tales however, have very few written records. Among the earliest record of written history reveals the flow of Chinese immigrants who escaped from China's poverty-stricken villages for the ease of Cambodian living. The fall of the Song dynasty in 1276 saw China's first wave of political refugees. Refusing to surrender to their new Mongol rulers, many Song loyalists fled to Indochina, where some of them attempted to raise a local army to recapture their lost territories. Some 300 years later, the Chinese plight recurred when a Manchu invasion toppled the Ming dynasty and a Ming loyalist fled southwards. By this time, as a Ming dynasty archive notes, there was already a Chinese settlement in Cambodia in the shape of a wooden city in Klovek. The Ming resistant leader Zheng Chenggong (郑成功) reportedly enlisted the support of overseas Chinese from Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam in his campaigns against the Manchus. In 1679, a Cantonese general gave up his struggle against the Manchus and settled his troops in Mytho in what was then southern Cambodia. These early waves of Chinese immigrants created the Chinese community in Cambodia. Over the next few centuries, the community embraced refugees escaping from feudal warlords, famine and drought that ravaged China's coastal provinces and Chinese fleeing the punitive taxes and discrimination of 19th century Vietnam.

## **Ethnic Chinese in the Khmer Vocabulary**

By 1434, Phnom Penh (金边) was a trading city par excellence, and it quickly attracted a heterogeneous population of Chinese, Malays, Indians, Annamese and Japanese. One can assume Chinese superiority in trade with Khmer adoption of Chinese measures for silver and grain and inclusion of the Cantonese numbers in multiples of ten from 30 to 90 and the Cantonese word for 10,000 men in Khmer vocabulary. In 1606, a Portuguese visitor reported 3,000 Chinese living in Phnom Penh. The first Chinese settlers may have been from Fujian, but two major groups of Ming patriots fleeing the victorious Manchu armies at the end of the 17th century brought Cantonese and

Hainanese into the region. In 1679, General Yang Yandi (杨燕蒂) led several thousand Cantonese to My Tho, later moving to Saigon-Cholon, some of whom went up the Mekong into Cambodia. About the same time, a young patriot from Hainan, Mac Cuu Mo Jiu, settled in Cambodia, rising quickly in the feudal hierarchy to become a Provincial Governor of the coastal region, where he encouraged Hainanese settlement and established Cambodia's major port at Ha Tien (华天). The region was known for its vast pepper cultivation. The Chinese in Cambodia historically consisted of five main dialect groups, all of southern China: the Teochius, Fujianese Cantonese, Hainanese and Hakkas. Both Hainan and Fujian associations were active in Phnom Penh by 1884.

It appears that these associations were spontaneously formed, as neither the Cambodian nor the French administrators required them to do so. Like other places in Asia where the Chinese had migrated to, such associations were established because of a natural need to communicate with others and to help one another. During the 1880s, there were frequent disagreements between the two rival associations in Phnom Penh. During colonial days, when the French required the dialect Chinese groups to form congregations (集团), the Fujianese in Battambang formed a separate congregation, whose symbol was a tiger. The Cantonese, Hainanese and Hakka grouped under a goat banner. The Teochius had their own congregation whose symbol was a horse. The Cantonese with their goat sign and the Teochius with their horse sign would both shy away from marriage with people belonging to the Fujian tiger congregation. The Teochius were prominent in business and trade, the Cantonese specialised as craftsmen in the building industry, the Hainanese dominated the food and catering industry and the Fujianese followed their traditional careers as government civil servants or traders in books and textile. The Hakka, the smallest group, specialised in running coffee shops and peddling fruit in blue wooden carts which was still a symbol of Phnom Penh street life. In agriculture, the Teochiu and Cantonese specialised in tobacco farming, a major regional industry. In Kampot, rural Hainanese historically specialised in pepper-farming and urban Hainanese in the sale of hardware, while the Teochiu dealt with gold

and currency. There was also economic competition between different dialect groups such as between the Teochiu and Hainanese over the control of gambling, fish farming and the sale of fish in early 20th century in Kampot, a fact which often led to friction and sometimes even violent clashes.

## **Chinese Dialect Groups in Cambodia and Intermarriage**

By the 1920s, witnessed a gradual disappearance of the distinct Sino-Khmer community. This was partly due to the declining Sino-Khmer birth rates resulting from the large influx of Chinese women from 1923 to 1929. Women and children from China comprised half of all immigrants to Cambodia. Although the 20th century Chinese male was more likely to emigrate with his family than his predecessors, many new Chinese immigrants took Khmer mistress with whom they had children. There were no legal impediments to intermarriage between a Khmer woman and a Chinese man under the 1920 Civil Code, both partners could retain their nationality. By contrast, however, if a Chinese woman were to marry a Khmer man, she had to renounce her Chinese nationality and become Cambodian. Prior to French rule, the Sino-Khmers were automatically Cambodians. Sino-Khmers were not registered as such in official records until 1892, when the French protectorate gave Sino-Khmer metis and their sons the choice of registering on the poll tax list as either Cambodians or Chinese. Those who had Chinese fathers automatically registered as Chinese. The Teochius were the dominant dialect group in Cambodia. There was evidence of a Teochiu community as early as 1880 in Phnom Penh from and from 1900s in Kampot and Kompong Cham. Most of the Teochiu immigration to Cambodia took place at the dawn of the annexation of Battambang by the Thais in 1941. Thousands of Teochiu Chinese, who formed the majority in Bangkok, poured into Battambang and radically changed the demography of the town where the Fujianese and Cantonese held sway. When Battambang returned to Cambodia in 1945, the Teochiu settlers stayed on to escape the stringent anti-Chinese restrictions operative in

Thailand since the 1930s. In Cambodia, the Chinese did not suffer such discrimination and the Teochius fanned out across the length and breadth of Cambodia. Eventually, they soon outnumbered the Fujianese and Cantonese settlers in Battambang and they also dominated the business scene. Nowadays, the Teochiu dialect was the language of commerce in the town.

Not many Teochiu men took Khmer wives. Those who did were more likely to teach their wives Chinese instead of Khmer language. This was a typical characteristic of the Teochius who were more conservative than other Chinese countrymen. In the early days, even in China, the Teochiu parents preferred their offspring to marry from their own clan and for historical reasons, they did not approve of their offspring marrying Fujianese. In 1880s Phnom Penh prospered with the expansion of the Cantonese brick kilns. The Cantonese emerged as the second largest dialect group in Cambodia by 1960. Punitive tax and other discriminatory measures directed at the Chinese in imperial Vietnam drove many Chinese descendants to Cambodia. The Cantonese generally did not encourage their offspring to marry Cambodian girls. Fujianese were generally open to intermarriages in Cambodia. Fujianese prided on integrating into Cambodian society better than other dialect groups.

The Fujianese wanted their children to become Khmers without which they could not rise to positions of power in local government. Fujianese generally have deep knowledge of Khmer and serve in government posts. The Fujianese willingness to give up their identity in mixing with Khmers was an important attribute distinguishing them from other Chinese. As a result, most of them have lost their identity through intermarriages and assimilated with Cambodian customs and traditions. A third-generation Fujianese would not appreciate someone asking him whether he speaks Chinese. He would probably reply in Cambodian, '*Kaut now srok khmae, rien phiesa khmae*', meaning 'I am born in Cambodia and I study Cambodian'. Some third- and fourth-generation Fujianese learnt from their parents and grandparents that the Fujianese was the first Chinese settlers in Cambodia. They cited examples of how their ancestors came to build Cambodia's earliest temples dedicated to Fujian deities and how their ancestors

had worshipped Admiral Zheng He, who mesmerised 15th century Southeast Asia with his fantastic array of naval ships. In fact several inscriptions on the Chinese temple at Wat Nokor in Kompong Cham were to Zheng He. They were also proud that the Fujianese congregation early this century founded the largest temple in Cambodia — the Xietiangong Temple (谢天公庙). Each year, King Sihanouk would organise a procession which paraded through the streets as well as on the grounds of the royal palace. He would invite wealthy businessmen and important officials to this famous temple.

The Hakkas formed a tiny proportion of Cambodia's Chinese community. They concentrated in Stung Treng, where their pre-eminence had led to the adoption of Hakka as the *lingua franca* of the Chinese community by the 1960s. Outside Stung Treng, the Hakka was scattered in various villages. Like the Fujianese, the Hakkas have no objection to taking Cambodian girls as long-term partners.

The Hainanese comprised an estimated 10% of Chinese in Cambodia. They refer to themselves as Hai Nam Khang (海南航), being the old name for Hainan Island. There was a steady stream of emigration from Hainan to Cambodia throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. Widely known as the second Hainan by Cambodia's Chinese community, Kampot was home to two historic settlements of Hainanese in Tuk Meah and Kampong Trach. The trailblazer of Hainanese emigration to Kampot was initiated by a Ming patriot named Mac Cuu, who arrived in Cambodia in 1675. He built up so much wealth and reputation that the Cambodian King appointed him as a Provincial Governor (Oknya) in 1708. In colonial days, Kep and Kampot were the main channels for the import of Chinese labourers. Kampot was close to 3,000 Hainanese and the Hainanese and Teochius the only dialect groups in Kampot that formed a critical mass with their own congregation. In 1939, when Japan occupied Hainan, they conscripted many Hainanese to work on the Kampot (甘波) airfield. The production of pepper in Kampot fell and the number of pepper planters gradually declined. By 1963, Cham and Khmer pepper planters outnumbered the Hainanese. During this period, farmers diversified into salt



production successfully. The Kampot Hainanese prided themselves on the genealogy of Bentougong (本土公, God of the earth), a divinity specific to Cambodia.

## **Cambodian Customs and Traditions**

In the past, most Khmers married in their teenage years and once a couple was betrothed, premarital intercourse was acceptable. A major rite for a girl before marriage, according to Zhou, was *chen-t'en* (倾天), which would shock present-day girls in other societies. The *chen-t'en* involved a priest who would deflower the bride with his hand after a lavish celebration. Gifts of alcohol, silver, betel, rice, cloth and silk would be lavished on the priest. There were age variations in the ceremonial practice, with the poorest families conducting the ceremony for girls aged 11 while wealthier households would do so for girls between seven to nine years old. Khmer women apparently pass urine standing up, which shocked Zhou, who thought it was absurd. The Cambodians found the Chinese behaviour of cleansing themselves after the call of nature with paper instead of water rather amusing. They also found the Chinese custom of using human manure to fertilise the fields as rather 'shocking', as they considered it bodily pollution, a belief probably inherited from India. More puzzling was the practice amongst ancient Khmers in disposing of their dead. Corpses were discarded outside the city or in the wild for animals to consume. Or they were buried or cremated. Death, like in other societies was an occasion of grief, albeit the Khmers believed in reincarnation. Mourners would shave their heads as a token of respect and loss.

Khmers were devoutly religious and often converged the traditional elements of folk religion, superstition and strains of Hinduism, or more accurately Shaivism, with the practice of Theravada Buddhism. The centre of life and activity has always revolved around the Buddhist temple serviced by saffron-clad monks. These monks have, for many hundreds of years, begged for alms and preached renunciation to earthly attachments. For most Khmers, religion and life was inseparable. Pol Pot's (波尔布特) attempt to do away with religion had failed, so had the Christian missionaries who spent 800 years trying to

convert them to accept Christianity. The Khmer royal families of the past were incompetent and lived a life of licentiousness. They smoked opium, indulged in alcohol and showed little concern for the administrative affairs of the country. They maintained a royal harem and wasted away the greater part of the country's revenue. The harem existed in a town within a town, inhabited by Norodom's 400 to 500 wives and concubines with a total population of up to 1,500 women and children plus palace guards and other staff.

### **Cambodian Attitudes Towards Cenhaw**

The Cambodians use Khmer terms to describe the five major Chinese dialect groups who have settled down in Cambodia. They refer to the Cantonese as *Cen-kangtong* (广东人), the Fujianese as *Cen-hokkien* (福建人), the Teochius as *Cen-teociem* (潮州人) and Hainanese as *cen-Tainan* (海南人). On the whole, the Cambodians refer to immigrants from PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore as *cen-deykok* (他国人), meaning dry-land Chinese. As this verbal delineation suggests, the Cambodians make a clear distinction between those recent immigrants, generally regarded as foreigners, and long-term Chinese residents of Cambodia, generally accepted as an integral part of the Cambodian social fabric. But, generally speaking, the Cambodians refer to overseas Chinese as '*huaqiao*' (华侨), which carries connotations of temporary residence. However, most Chinese were reluctant to use this phrase today, because the *huaqiao* have been regarded as the fifth-column in Cambodia during various periods: 1967–1970 under Sihanouk, 1970–1975 under Lon Nol (龙诺), 1973–1975 by the Khmer Rouge in some liberated zones, 1975–1978 in Democratic Kampuchea and 1979–1989 under the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

### **The Chinese Under French Rule**

Cambodia was under the joint protection of Vietnam and Siam in the 1860s when the French decided to set up a protectorate. Initially, the French intended to treat Cambodia as a buffer between Siam and its

more valuable colony of Cochin China (southern Vietnam). France, however, eventually took full control over its administration, financial and legal systems and its commercial affairs. The French colonial masters perceived the Cambodians as lazy and simple, a sort of noble savage with a great but lost civilisation, and they brought in Vietnamese bureaucrats to staff the civil service in Phnom Penh. They also used Vietnamese workers to tap the rubber plantations in East Cambodia. Large numbers of Vietnamese farmers and fishermen were also allowed to settle down in Cambodia. The French confiscation of a large percentage of rice harvest created a level of rural indebtedness, which never occurred in Cambodia before. It therefore created a state of increased dependence (of the Khmer peasants) on Chinese money lenders. In the 15th century, immigrants from Guangdong, Fujian and other parts of China began arriving in Cambodia. Although still connected to ancestral villages and family lineages in China, they assimilated into the Cambodian society, often through intermarriages. Occasionally, some of the brighter Chinese immigrants even joined the court of ministers. The native Cambodians, especially women, like to marry the Chinese, and most Cambodian men treated the Chinese as their equals. As in other Southeast Asian countries, ethnic Chinese dominated trade, a state of affairs that French colonial authorities regarded as politically threatening.

A French Resident-Supérieur Aymonier in 1875 observed that in Cambodia, as everywhere else, the Chinese have gained dominance by manipulating the weakness, corruption or lack of firmness of local authorities. In Cambodia, the French adopted the Nguyen emperor Gia Long's (嘉龙) pattern of indirect rule through the *huiguan* (会馆). The various dialect groups such as the Fujianeses, Teochius, Hainanese and Hakkas were represented as congregations with a chieftain. Each group was a discrete social unit, and formed an enclosed constituency for business relations, marriage arrangements, voluntary associations and dealings with the French administration. The French used the congregations system to rule the Chinese, stating that the number of congregations in each district would depend on the size of the Chinese population. There were at least 70 congregations in Cambodia by the end of the French rule. The Cantonese

congregations in Kompong-Chan and Phnom Penh had relations with each other, the respective chiefs operating independently and with no responsibilities beyond their own congregations. The congregations had two main purposes: to collect revenue and police the foreign population whose alien culture and community solidarity, made it difficult to tax and govern in a more direct way. The chief collected the personal taxes of all the Chinese and handed them over to the immigration Bureau.

The power of the chief (邦主) was established on the immigrant as soon as the latter is admitted into the country. Since it was compulsory for every Chinese to belong to a congregation, the chiefs exercised legal authority to accept or reject any immigrant. An individual refused by the congregation was not admitted to the country. Thus, the chief had tremendous power over the members of his congregation from the moment the members arrived in Cambodia. Although the chief was not conferred police power, the police force outside the Chinese community was at his bidding. He could intervene when an illegal act had been committed. The sanction available to the chief in the control of his congregation included fines and commercial penalties backed by the police force and most importantly, sanction of deportation. They had a four-year term. Chinese community organisations in French Cambodia were governed by congregations, which gave form and power to the *huiguan*. The latter was at the heart of the Chinese social structure. The prime requisite for achieving political power in the *huiguan* was wealth, not only because money could buy power, but also because wealth was the principal index of prestige among the Chinese in Phnom Penh, as in other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The French had always considered the Chinese as distinct from the Khmers despite years of assimilation. The French had therefore imposed different administration methods and techniques as against governing the Khmers. The congregations encouraged obedience to Chinese behavioural patterns and values by enforcing legal separation, hence creating a separate sub-state.

The French passed laws to distinguish the Chinese from the Khmers. A decree of December 17, 1901, ruled that Sino-Khmers must renounce Chinese clothes and pigtails to be registered and to

enjoy favourable Cambodian tax rates. The 1920 Civil Code forced Sino-Khmers aged between 21 and 26 years, to identify themselves as either Chinese or Khmer. By that decree, only those who could prove they had more Khmer than Chinese blood could opt for Cambodian nationality. However, by 1920s, Chinese who married Khmer women were raising their sons as Chinese. In line with Chinese patrilineal and patrilocal traditions, Chinese fathers encouraged their Sino-Khmer sons to retain Chinese hairstyles and dress, to the extent that even after the pigtail was banned in mainland China, Sino-Khmer boys in Cambodia continued wearing a mixed hairstyle combining a Chinese pigtail with a Khmer topknot.

## **Chinese Influence in Cambodian Civilisation and Culture**

Chinese influence on Cambodian civilisation and culture extended to art, food, fashion and language. Unlike Vietnam, where colonial pressure consolidated China's influence, Cambodia evolved through a gradual process of mutual borrowing. In fact, in the early days, Chinese craftsmen from China went to Cambodia to help sculpt the bas-reliefs of the north-facing wall in the eastern wing of Angkor Wat. The number of Chinese words used in Khmer for everyday articles of clothing, furniture and food was sufficient evidence of the extent of Chinese influence. Until the 19th century, the *yeak* (giant) costumes in the traditional Khmer theatre performances were overtly Khmer. But in the 20th century, most of the costumes have become noticeably Chinese. While the number of intermarriages and cultural exchanges indicate a favourable change towards the Chinese, some 20th-century traditional Khmer verses and folklores portray the Chinese negatively as figures of fear and envy. The Chinese were generally portrayed in Khmer folklores as powerful, scheming and mercenary. A Khmer minstrel, Dram Ngoy, won fame in the early 20th century by producing ballads which encouraged the Khmers to learn mathematics and commerce 'so as to protect themselves from exploitation by Chinese traders and money lenders'. In Cambodia, it was common for the Khmers to borrow money from Chinese money

lenders and when they failed to repay the loan, their land would be confiscated. However, this wariness was often mixed with admiration.

An editorial in a 1937 issue of *Nagaramarta*, Cambodia's first Khmer-language newspaper held up Chinese thrift and industry as ideals for the Khmer nation. The article noted how the Chinese came to Cambodia with no capital, but only the shirts on their backs with a mat and a pillow. Not before long however they would be running their own business. A 1950s version of the traditional Khmer verse Chap Proh warns, 'If at noon you clout a Chinese head, by evening he will bind your feet, hang you high, head down, eyes fixed, face abashed as he demands his money forthwith'. Proverbs, such as 'never quarrel with a woman, never fight a lawsuit against a Chinese', reflects the Chinese as a powerful and cunning, who could always outwit the naïve Khmers. The Khmers therefore chose to remember the story of Tun Ciy (顿塞), which narrates how Chinese emperors were duped time and again by the quick-witted Khmer hero Tun Ciy. However, the wealth and oral history of the Khmer state attest to the harmony in Sino-Cambodian interstate and inter-ethnic relations. Two versions of oral history about the 13th century Chinese temple at Wat Nokor in Kompong Cham describe the building of the temple by Khmer Prince Serei Sokun-Nobot or King Jaravarman VII as dedicated to the Chinese who had saved the lives of his people. In these early portraits and traditional tales, the Chinese were not feared as fifth columnists (第五纵队) or third force (第三势力) or as agents of expansion commissioned by a foreign government.

## **Chinese Schools Ignored Khmer Language and Culture**

Dr. Sun Yat-sen's campaign to spread Chinese education among the Chinese of Southeast Asia also had an impact in Cambodia. Under French rule, the Chinese built schools to teach Chinese according to their chosen methods, on condition that French and Khmer languages were also taught for at least three to five hours per week. Between 1901 and 1938, 95 Chinese schools were built in Cambodia,

including two middle schools and 93 primary schools. The teachers, recruited from China, brought new books and ideas. There were only male students, as Chinese parents feared admitting their daughters to school as they might fall in love or be abused. In 1938 over 4,000 students enrolled in Chinese schools across Cambodia. The early 1960s saw a rapid increase of Chinese schools at village, district and provincial levels. By 1967, there were 120 Chinese schools and the enrollment had grown to 25,665. In Phnom Penh, there were 11,350 Chinese students at 27 schools. In the same year, infuriated by PRC meddling in Cambodia's internal politics, Sihanouk ordered a clamp-down to purge the student movement of red elements.

A huge public campaign was organised to encourage the country's youth to swear on bended knees loyalty to the Prince and the fatherland. In June 1967, the Ministry of Education issued a circular ordering that textbooks be supervised and that the Cambodian language be taught in all foreign-run private schools, most of which were Chinese schools. In Chinese schools, the focus was more on China with little attention paid to the Cambodian language and Khmer culture. In the late 1960s, many Chinese schools taught no Khmer and offered no courses in Cambodian history, geography or culture. As a result, some graduates of these schools spoke no Khmer. By the end of the Sihanouk era, many ethnic Chinese in Cambodia knew very little Khmer. The Ministry of Education directive followed an open letter issued by the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh asserting that it was the sacred right of all Chinese to read Beijing literature and wear Chairman Mao badges. The 1967 directive however did not altogether eliminate the Chinese communist influence of Cambodia.

### **Assimilating the Chinese in Cambodia**

There was already a great deal of natural assimilation, taking place before the colonial period through intermarriages. The one hundred *Cen A-Ciy* who arrived in Cambodia on boats, together with the Khmer sage Tun Ciy, could be the earliest Chinese who integrated with the Cambodian society. The French colonialists had classified the Cambodian people into two categories: the Chinese were the rich and

the ordinary Khmers the lower class. During the Qing dynasty, there was little correlation between pigtailed and Chinese racial purity. Numerous Sino-Khmers wore yellow robes and went to the wat (temple). Travellers to Cambodia in 1901 noted that in language, mores and culture, the Sino-Khmers followed their mothers and considered themselves Cambodian. After one or two generations, just as the *lokjins* in Thailand, the offspring of the Chinese replaced their pigtailed with short hair and wore *sampots* (Cambodian dress). The Chinese saw the wisdom and pragmatism of assimilation because they gained nothing by holding on to their Chinese citizenship.

Chinese Government records depicted overseas Chinese as pirates, traitors and deserters. In 1603, the Ming Government tacitly endorsed the massacre of 25,000 Chinese in the Philippines and tolerated the Dutch massacre of Chinese in Java in 1740. They knew they had no protection and the most prudent were to become Cambodians. It was not until the late 19th century that China recognised overseas Chinese as a useful source of wealth for the country. The French colonialists only saw the Chinese as a source of cheap labour for economic exploitation of Cambodia. But, they had a vested interest in separating the Chinese from the Cambodians with the divide-and-rule policy.

The Chinese came to realise their 'Chineseness' only after Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Kang Youwei visited Southeast Asia to encourage them to study Chinese and reminded them that they belonged to the Chinese race. The rise of Chinese nationalism channelled long-standing emotional and psychological sentiments into political, economic and educational activities. Led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, Chinese nationalists encouraged Chinese schools and cultural organisations to be set up. In 1909, the Qing authorities registered a sweeping change to its traditional view of overseas Chinese in its Nationality Law. From then on, Chineseness was no longer seen as a uniquely territorial condition conferred by birth in the ancestral land. The new Nationality Law established the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), making China the centre of their loyalty based on blood relations. Any person born of a Chinese father, or a Chinese mother became a Chinese regardless of the place of birth. The Nationality Law thus gave



overseas Chinese formal legal recognition while creating an imagined community of Chinese scattered across Southeast Asia.

## **Conditions of Chinese After Cambodian Independence**

When Cambodia gained independence, the Cambodian nationalists drew their moral authority from old sayings fused with new meaning. A Cambodian newspaper *Nagaravatta* spoke of ‘we Khmers (*khmae-yeung*)’, ‘masters of the country (*mucab srok*)’, ‘our country (*srok yeung*)’, ‘Khmer racenation (*ciet khmae*)’ and depicted the Chinese and Vietnamese as outsiders. The nationalist government passed citizenship laws regulated by Kram 913-NS of November 1954, which conferred citizenship on both *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* bases. Under this law, children of at least one Cambodian citizen would gain Cambodian citizenship, as did anyone born in Cambodia, no matter where their parents came from. The Naturalization Law of 1954 was amended in 1959 to restrict naturalisation to people fluent in Khmer and to those who demonstrated sufficient assimilation of the customs, morals and traditions of Cambodia. The law, however, failed to cast legal clarity on the term nationality. This vagueness had important ramifications for laws such as the Civil Service Law of 1953 which conferred rights on the premise of nationality.

This law restricted admission to the civil service for those who could prove that they had Cambodian nationality. Since Cambodian nationality was not normally interpreted as equal to Cambodian citizenship, this ruling effectively banned ethnic Chinese from participation in the civil service. Meanwhile, the People’s Republic of China introduced a policy towards overseas Chinese, urging Chinese in Cambodia to identify with their host country. During his visit to Cambodia in 1956, Zhou Enlai (周恩来) made a public bid calling for Chinese to respect the laws, customs, habits and religion of the Khmers, and to intermarry with them, become Cambodian citizens and, if they did so, to refrain from further involvement in overseas Chinese organisations. When Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi (刘少奇) visited Cambodia in 1956 and 1963, the Chinese mobilised all

affiliated associations throughout the country to stage a mass welcoming ceremony in Phnom Penh for the duo.

## **The Chinese Under Norodom Sihanouk (西哈努克)**

When Prince Norodom Sihanouk came into power, he recognised that ethnicity was frequently associated with social and economic roles in Cambodia. The vast majority of Khmers worked in the rice paddies of the Cambodian countryside, satisfying Sihanouk's vision of his happy 'children'. At the opposite end of the social-economic spectrum was the aristocracy, the Khmers and mixed blood Sino-Thai-Vietnamese Khmers, who dined with the prince and were his supporting cast. The important sector and majority of the residents of Phnom Penh were either Chinese or Vietnamese. The Chinese dominated the economy, particularly its trading and formal banking sectors. Some of them were assimilated through intermarriage with Khmer ladies and were fused into the Cambodian society. The full-blooded Chinese, who were not yet assimilated, presented a nearly impenetrable wall against Cambodians, preventing the latter from entering their commercial world. The Vietnamese were more insular, divided from the Khmers by cultural and language differences and by racial antagonism. In the cities, the Vietnamese worked as artists, small traders, clerks, or domestic servants for Western residences, and in the countryside, they lived as fishermen along rivers and the Tonle Sap Lake.

The rest of the Cambodian population consisted of Cham Muslims and the north-eastern minorities who remained isolated and largely untouched by modern life. When Sihanouk took over power, Cambodia exported rice, rubber, and pepper. France, the Sino-Soviet bloc and the United States provided foreign aid. This assistance not only helped build hospitals, schools, and a transportation infrastructure, but also ensured that despite corruption and inefficiency, enough money trickled down to ward off hunger and discontent. Phnom Penh buzzed with cultural glories, all of which owed their patronage to Sihanouk. There was the Royal Ballet, the National Museum, and a lavish palace, built by the French where he could

invite the elites for dinner. On one level, the affable, accessible Sihanouk was extremely popular; especially in the countryside where Cambodian peasants adored him, not just as royalty but many also felt that he was an embodiment of the country itself.

However, in the capital and larger cities, many Cambodians especially the educated blamed him for condoning corruption and political intimidation. Sihanouk ascended the throne in 1955 when his father abdicated the throne. He threw himself into politics and formed a new political entity called the Sangkum Reasr Niyum (人民社会主义结合, People's Socialist Community), a populist movement that sought to absorb and dissolve all other political parties. Through intimidation, violence and relentless propaganda and with the help of his own personal popularity among the Cambodian peasants, Sihanouk easily won elections against the remnants of the Democrats and a more left-leaning party Pracheachun (The People). The Sangkum launched the prince into 15 years of power while co-opting much of Cambodian society. It rarely demanded ideological conformity from its members, merely absolute loyalty. On foreign policy, Sihanouk sought to secure Cambodia's neutrality while accepting financial support from rival powers. This tight-rope policy allowed for both American economic aid as well as Cambodian participation in the international non-aligned movement. Political realities eventually pushed Sihanouk away from the Americans. Having co-opted the cause of independence from Cambodia nationalists, Sihanouk attempted to isolate the left by stealing what remained anti-imperialism. In 1955, he rejected the offer made by the anticommunist Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and won economic assistance from communist China and political support from the Viet Minh. He even appointed a prominent leftist Khieu Samphan (乔森番) to his Cabinet and began to call himself a socialist.

Having embarked on a neutral foreign policy, Sihanouk began to have banks nationalised in 1963. Many foreign-owned companies were either closed down or absorbed into a state-administered National Company for export and import. Foreign investment was restricted and prices were fixed in an effort to protect local companies from competition from imported goods. By nationalising the banks,

Sihanouk had specially intended to undermine the influence of the Sino-Khmer commercial elite, whose ties to capitalist Thailand and to South Vietnam he had long feared. This policy alienated him from the country's biggest business communities, who found ways to achieve their aims through bribing corrupt officials. However Sihanouk's policy against the Sino-Khmer businessmen failed because it was an impossible dream to struggle against the free-market economy. A few years later, Sihanouk had to change his policy and by 1979, he adopted a policy that gave more freedom to Sino-Khmer businessmen.

During the Sihanouk regime, there was considerable economic advancement in the country. There were altogether 3,346 private factories, 99% of which belonged to the Chinese. In 1961, there were 1,092 rice mills, 90% of those also belonged to the Chinese. It was the golden period for Chinese businessmen. In the early period of his reign, Sihanouk's sense of nationalism compelled him to restrict the entry of Chinese in some professions. This he did through socialist reforms and by nationalising Chinese controlled import and export. Nevertheless when he turned to Beijing for assistance, he broke relations with America and befriended pro-Beijing Chinese elements within Cambodia, discriminating against pro-Taiwan groups. As a result, many Chinese migrated to Taipei, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Laos. Nearly all pro-Taiwan associations were subsequently closed.

### **First Visit to Phnom Penh (金边印象)**

I first met Sihanouk at the Bandung Conference in 1955 when I was sent on official assignment by the Nanyang Siang Pau to cover the Afro-Asian conference attended by 29 Afro-Asian leaders. Subsequently in 1963, in my capacity as the Chairman of the National Theatre Trust, I was in Phnom Penh to invite Sihanouk's son and daughters to perform in the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival which was to be held at the still-to-be completed National Theatre in Singapore. I went to the palace to see Prince Sihanouk and he was very hospitable.



Former King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia and the Author Mr Lee Khoon Choy

I recall him as a flamboyant and energetic Cambodian leader who was well-versed in the artistic field and himself a producer. He was nevertheless a good conversationalist and was thankful that we had invited his Royal Ballet troupe to perform at the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival. He told me that the Royal Ballet had never performed in public except on royal occasions, but was prepared to allow the Royal Ballet troupe to go to Singapore. He instructed his officials to discuss the more specific details with me. We had a glimpse of the Royal Ballet and Princess Bofa Dewi, his daughter whom he deeply loved and his sons performed for us. It was really impressive. However, one thing weighed heavily on my shoulders: I had to guarantee the safety of the royal family, Bofa Dewi, her sister and brother Chakrapong who came along with the Cambodian delegation to dance in the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival. I also had to guarantee the safety of their jewelry worth half a million dollars. I signed a guarantee and later passed on the burden to the Singapore's Commissioner of Police Le Cain when I returned to Singapore. The Cambodian Royal Ballet was a hit at the festival with its beautifully decorated prop of Angkor Wat. It was the first time Singaporeans had ever seen such

a grand Cambodian ballet. I met Sihanouk again sometime in 1978 when I was serving as the Deputy Chairman of the People's Association. He came to Singapore to learn about grassroots development and was keen on organisational aspects of the association.

## **Chinese Newspapers: Past and Present**

Cambodia's first Chinese newspaper, the *Boyintai*, a twice-weekly tabloid started business in 1938 till 1946. In 1946 three newspapers emerged. These were *Dazhong Bao* (大众报, a Popular Newspaper), *Huashang Bao* (华商报, a Chinese Commercial Newspaper) and *Zhongmian Bao* (中棉报, China Cambodian News). The Chinese in Cambodia relied on newspapers from Saigon and Tokin for most of the colonial period. Chinese newspapers expanded fast after Cambodian independence. By the 1960s, Chinese-language newspapers outnumbered the Khmer- and French-language papers and were widely distributed throughout the country. There was the *Xin Bao* (新报), which represented the views of rightwing Guomintang and had a circulation of 6,000 in 1962–1963. However, by 1967, a survey conducted by a US journalist reported that all of the five Chinese newspapers had switched to a pro-Beijing line under the pressure from the Chinese Embassy.

Of the five newspapers, two were of Teochiu origin and three Cantonese. These newspapers made attempts to prove their Cambodian loyalty by giving coverage to the activities of Sihanouk and his government while carrying 'direct' Chinese propaganda material in the form of short stories with testimonials, and anti-American fulminations. The five newspapers were *Cong Thuong Bao* (工商报, Journal of Trade and Commerce), *Mekong Yat Bao* (湄江日报, Mekong Daily), *Mien Hoa Bao* (棉华报, Khmer-Chinese Daily), *Kwai Bao* (快报, The Express) and *Sanh Bao* (商报, Afternoon News). The *Mekong Yat Bao* (湄江日报) founded in 1952 and appears to be earliest and largest of all Chinese newspapers with a circulation of 720,016 copies daily. Once stoutly pro-Guomintang, the paper appeared to have adopted a pro-Beijing stance. *Mien Hoa Bao* was the most pro-Beijing, featuring *Xinhua News Agency* news.

Chinese journals included Yazhou Ribao (亚洲日报, *Asia Weekly*) and Renquan Yuekan (人月, *Human Rights Weekly*). Most of these journals had limited circulation and closed down eventually as they lacked the intellectual and financial resources. The leftist press included Mianhua Ribao (棉华日报), Refeng Wenbao (热风文报), Gongshang Ribao (工商日报), and Shangwu Bao (商务报). In addition, about 5,000 Chinese newspapers were imported from Saigon and Tonkin daily.

In 1967, Sihanouk clamped down on pro-communist Cambodian publications and singled out the Chinese newspaper *Soriya* (苏利亚) and expelled Chau Seng (超成), the leftist Sino-Khmer Director of *La Nouvelle Depeche* newspaper. He also suspended production of all Chinese and Vietnamese newspapers on grounds that they were ‘under the orders of Beijing and Hanoi’. Importing PRC publications were prohibited, although publications from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore were allowed on a smaller scale. *The Nationalist* newspaper explained this clampdown as a move ‘to make our Chinese friends understand that Cambodia cannot grant an import license for a cultural revolution of which it was not a customer’.

Since 1985, when Hun Sen abolished the ‘351 Policy’ which discriminated against ethnic Chinese, the Chinese community started to revive the Chinese-language newspapers. The Cambodian Chinese Association (柬华公会) launched a Chinese newspaper called *The Cambodian Chinese Newspaper* (柬华日报). Even Prime Minister Hun Sen sent a letter to the association congratulating its birth at its inauguration on August 22, 1998. He said, ‘I hope that this newspaper would encourage the Chinese community to abide by Cambodian law, promote racial harmony and help develop the country’s economy’. Because of its strong economic backing, it became the most popular paper in Cambodia and a mouthpiece for the association. The Board of Directors of the Cambodian Chinese Association comprised influential Chinese in Cambodia belonging to different clans such as Teochius, Fujianese, Cantonese, Hakkas and Hainanese. *The Cambodian Chinese Newspaper* was housed in a modern building, with modern equipment and had employed a prominent local Chinese journalist Yang Wen (杨文) as Chief Editor, an import from China. Yang had served the *Hua*



*Shang Ri Bao* (华商日报) as chief editor for six years. However, owing to the fact that not many Chinese were able to read the Chinese script, the circulation was limited to 1,000. Apart from the association's newspaper, the next notable Chinese newspaper was the *Hua Shang Ri Bao* (华商日报) which was plagued by rivalry between pro-Taiwan and pro-Beijing editorial staff for three to four months in 2004. The other two Chinese newspapers were *Xin Shi Dai Bao* (新时代报) and *Da Zhong Ri Bao* (大众日报), each of which only sells 800 copies a day. The readers were mainly workers and employees from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. The three Chinese newspapers, apart from the one published by the Cambodian Chinese Association, employ editors from China.

## **Chinese Clan Associations**

In contrast to the Chinese in other parts of the world, the Chinese in Cambodia did not organise associations based on clans. Clans refer to the use of common surnames as a criterion of association. In Saigon, for instance, clan association were not present among the Chinese community. Clan associations were called *tongxing* (同姓, same surname). Tongxing associations had not existed in Cambodia. However, the only clan association discovered in Phnom Penh for the French period was a guild of drapers, all of whom had the surname Guo (郭) and who came from the Teochiu district of Chaoyang (潮阳). A Mr. Guo from Chaoyang established a successful drapery shop in Phnom Penh many years ago and as it expanded, he sent for clansmen from China to join him in the enterprise. All members of this guild came from Chaoyang, and they formed a small portion of the total Teochiu migrants from that district. One-quarter of the Teochius in Phnom Penh were from Chaoyang. This could have been the only clan association in Cambodia.

## **The Secret Societies**

During the first phase of the French rule, two secret societies drew the congregations together. The two societies were the Hungmen



Hui (洪门会) and San He Hui (三合会), which operated as separate organisations although both names refer to Triad Societies. San He Hui seems to have been in more common use in China than among the Diaspora. It was confined to the Cantonese while Hungmen Hui drew its membership from among the Teochius. The French were aware of the danger of a secret society named the Society of Heaven and Earth which was affiliated with its mother organisation in China. While the San He Hui was nothing but a criminal association, the Hongmen Hui have had a legacy. The Han race have used it to overthrow the Manchu Qing dynasty. Members of the Hongmen Hui still had high ideals of fellowship for protection and welfare. The two underground bodies often fought each other, sometimes violently in street wars, disturbing the peace and interrupting business, to the growing disgust of the Chinese community. With the help of the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh (胡志明), the French Commissioner of Police finally got rid of the secret societies in 1920s.

### **Sihanouk *vis-a-vis* Chinese Cultural Revolution**

Like other countries in Southeast Asia, Cambodia also encountered similar experiences in dealing with the spread of the Cultural Revolution. In mid-1966, when there were outbreaks of anti-government violence in various provinces, Sihanouk's administration had to confront an upsurge of proletariat activity among some overseas Chinese. Influenced by the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh became a centre for Maoist propaganda and encouraged the local Chinese to emulate the Red Guards (红卫兵). Before this episode ended in early September 1967, Sino-Cambodia relations reached the breaking point. Sihanouk questioned the sincerity of China's friendship and grew very angry with the Red Guard activities in Phnom Penh. He said such activities were 'seriously hurting the national economy' and he made serious accusations against the Sino-Khmers (the konkat-cen) as 'remaining very Chinese at heart'. He was angry that they were circulating communist publications in the schools, propagating communism in newspapers, movies and the arts, and putting up wall posters styled

after Red Guards that were insulting to the Sangkum. He specifically accused the Khmer–China Friendship Association (高棉中国友好协会) of the engineering unjust criticism of his regime. The Chinese were assisted in their subversive actions by two Chinese leftists Hou You and Hu Nim. He argued that such agitations threatened the traditional friendship between China and Cambodia. He resorted to countermeasures against the activities of the Red Guards. At the same time, Sihanouk tried his best to befriend China despite the activities of the Red Guard in Phnom Penh. While he attempted to keep the relationship alive, he was unable to contain the frustration of public figures, who vented their annoyances with China. The most vocal of them was Tep Chieu Kheng (郑召庆), a member of the shadow cabinet and editor of the journal *Khmer Ekreach*. He published an article critical of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Embassy expressed its regrets over the article but *Khmer Ekreach* repeated its adverse comments on the Cultural Revolution and added that the Embassy was guilty of subversion in Cambodia. The Embassy's attempts to justify exuberant displays of pro-Mao sentiment in the Chinese community particularly rankled Cambodia.

Sihanouk later came out to attack the Red Guards, labelling the Cultural Revolution as 'an erroneous policy' and berated the Red Guards as having 'had won contempt and not admiration'. However, later the Sihanouk government was forced to crackdown on the Chinese school system, imposing controls over their curricula, teaching practices and Chinese language training in an effort to stop the spread of the Maoist doctrine. Black market practices were also dealt with more severely than before.

## **Impact of Chinese Cultural Revolution on Cambodia**

The Chinese Cultural Revolution, however, had a bigger impact in Cambodia because its extremist leaders, such as Pol Pot, visited Beijing and were brainwashed and indoctrinated by Mao Zedong and the Gang of Four (四人帮). Some critics believe that Mao had wanted

Pol Pot to experiment his utopian dream on Cambodian land. On April 17, 1975, Khmer Rouge soldiers, after gaining power, marched into Phnom Penh and started their cultural revolution with a similar tone. The revolution was aimed at eliminating all remnants of the country's political, economic and cultural life. Judges, teachers, bankers, soldiers and politicians and ordinary citizens, especially the Chinese, were subject to execution. Unfortunately, the target of the cultural revolution was the Chinese population as they were considered capitalist and decadent. It was a nightmare for the Chinese population. When the Khmer Rouge ill-treated the Chinese population in Cambodia, Beijing could not intervene as China was persecuting its own people and clamping down on dissent. The Khmer Rouge soldiers dressed in black or green pajamas and heavily armed, marched into Phnom Penh, offering a vision of the years to come. Seemingly angry even in victory, they patrolled the strange urban landscape without a hint of jubilation. The new occupiers of the capital were thoroughly indoctrinated and filled with contempt.

The urban Cambodians tried to accommodate these Khmer soldiers and hoped that they could offer their services to the new masters. But the soldiers pointed their guns at them and instructed them to move out of the city, explaining that the Americans were about to bomb the city. The middle-class and wealthy Cambodians desperately sold their gold and clothing and hid valuables in and around their houses with the hope that they might one day return to their homes. Preparing for an uncertain journey, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians paraded out of the city and marched towards the countryside. Deprived of medicine, food and water, the old and sick died along the way. Khmer soldiers shot many who complained or tried to resist. More than a dozen families, including my wife's relatives, were among those who escaped the city. I met my wife's aunt Madam Eng (翁太) in Paris, and she recalled how her family escaped from Cambodia to Paris. It was a horrible experience and she broke down while she was narrating the experience. As her husband was a rich merchant, the whole family became the target of the brutal purge.

The Khmer soldiers identified military officers of the former regime and executed them. In the process of evacuation, these

evacuees were told to produce their 'biographies' and to confess their wrongdoings. Those who survived the trek were treated with outright contempt. Being indoctrinated, the Khmer soldiers had deep-seated, visceral distrust of the city people, whom they saw as reactionary, corrupt and degenerating as well as disloyal to the revolution. They wanted to create a 'new people' out of the revolution. Under the new regime which named itself 'Democratic Kampuchea' in 1976, all international telephone calls, telegrams, cable or mail were cut off. International flights were discontinued except for official visits back and forth to Beijing and Hanoi. The regime closed all borders while foreigners, save for Chinese advisers and the staffs of a mere eight embassies, were expelled. Diplomats allowed to live in the capital were prohibited from moving around the empty streets of Phnom Penh. The separation of the new people from their urban lives occurred simultaneously with the country's self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world.

## **The Konkat-Cen in Cambodia**

The Khmer Rouge leadership remained invisible, and few had heard of Pol Pot, 'the great leader'. At a congress held in April 1975, Sihanouk who was still in China, and was referred to as president of the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) and Head of State. The new rulers were identified only as Angkar, the organisation, while the leadership was described as the Upper Organisation (Angkar Loeu, 上层组织). The ultimate leader was unquestionably a person called Saloth Sar, known to his colleagues as Pol Pot, brother Number One. Other members included French-educated Cambodian Ieng Sary (殷少里), Son Sen (宋成), the defence minister and Khieu Samphan (乔森番), who was once a Minister in the Sihanouk cabinet. After exploiting Sihanouk, he was exiled to China following a short period of detention. When he was detained, they refused to convey the message of condolence for Mao Zedong's death. The new leadership abolished currency, markets private property and goods. They administration took over the distribution of all food. Obsessed with uniformity and the eradication of 'reactionary'

culture, they gave orders to flog Buddhist monks and sent them to work in the fields, forbade all religious rites, destroyed and desecrated pagodas, and burned or shredded books. Under the Cultural Revolution, Cambodians, with the exception of Khmer Rouge cadres and soldiers, worked in the fields through the day. Even after sunset, they spent their time in community halls engaging in political education, self-criticism and criticism of others. The Khmer Rouge frequently separated men from women and organised mass marriages that were forced upon single people. There were many widows and widowers whose spouses died along the journey. They were also forced to remarry. Children often lived separately and were encouraged to spy on or betray their parents. It was no different from China during the Cultural Revolution. Pol Pot's Cultural Revolution made Phnom Penh a 'human hell'. The rich became poor while the city which was known as the 'Paris of the East' became a 'city of devil'. They forced people, even the weak ones, to work. They abolished money and American dollars, gold and silver became valueless. Pol Pot believed in the big rice bowl system where everyone eats from the big bowl.

### **Chinese Under Lon Nol (龙诺) Regime**

Marshall Lon Nol became notorious as the leader of the coup which overthrew Prince Norodom Sihanouk on March 18, 1970. The monarchy came to an end. In October 1970, he established the Khmer Republic. It was however short-lived as the Khmer Rouge assumed power in April 1975. Lon Nol was born on November 13, 1913, in Prey Veng Province. Educated at the Lycee Sisowath, from which he joined the French colonial administration, he rose rapidly to become a Provincial Governor at the age of 32. During World War II, he became Chief of the Cambodian police and later transferred to the military command, displaying loyalty to King Norodom Sihanouk. By the end of 1955, he became both Commander-in Chief and Minister of Defence. He was Prime Minister from 1966–1967. He returned as Prime Minister in 1969 as Prince Sihanouk began to lose grip on Cambodia.

After the removal of Sihanouk, Lon Nol, who was a practicing mystic, showed incompetency as a military leader in the face of a Vietnamese-led insurgency. In February 1971, he suffered a fatal stroke from which he never recovered. Nevertheless, with the backing of the US, he continued holding on to power. It was his rule, which was corrupt and incompetent which consequently led to the Khmer Rouge takeover. He was persuaded to go into exile in 1975. He settled down in Hawaii until 1979 when he moved to California where he died in November 1985. The expansion of the US–Vietnam war into Cambodia saw the destruction of much of the ethnic Chinese community's socio-cultural landscape. Like Sihanouk, the pro-West General Lon Nol stressed the ethnic homogeneity of Cambodia, asserting that all ethnic groups in Cambodia belonged to the great Khmer race, except for the Chinese and Vietnamese. Within months of coming to power, Lon Nol's state sponsored massacre of hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese got the Chinese panicky. Lon Nol, who was Sihanouk's conservative Defence Chief, staged a coup in 1970 when the latter was on a trip to France, and his fortunes turned for the worst. This had major repercussions for the Chinese as Lon Nol did not trust them. It was not long before that he started introducing repressive and discriminatory measures against the Chinese. He encouraged anti-Chinese sentiments by accusing the Chinese of undermining Khmer culture and morality.

Together with widespread and increasing economic hardship, this sparked anti-Chinese riots in Phnom Penh, Battambang and Svay Rieng, where Chinese shops were torched and several Chinese traders killed. Chinese schools that were located in liberated zones beyond Lon Nol's jurisdiction were bombed. Similarly, Chinese temples, alongside the temples of other ethnic groups, were demolished. Chinese sports associations folded and those Chinese newspapers that had started up again after Sihanouk's 1967 ban were once again closed. Such riots were unprecedented in Cambodian history and it frightened the Chinese. The Chinese had to abandon their cultural distinctiveness and affiliation to community associations and language. Hence, they tried to avoid speaking Chinese and Chinese education went underground.

The irony was that Lon Nol had Chinese blood as he was a konkat-cen. All pro-Beijing associations were suppressed. The leaders left the country for Beijing or closed down their associations. Some of the pro-Beijing Sino-Khmers who were opportunists started to cooperate with the Lon Nol regime. Two months after he took over power, Lon Nol realised the consequences of the anti-Chinese movement and made an announcement over radio in May 1970 to stop the anti-Chinese rage. He said that both Chinese and Khmers had blood relations and that they should cooperate and work closely as brothers. Despite his friendly announcement, Lon Nol took drastic steps against the Chinese population. He formed an association called the Federated Association of Chinese (华人联合会) and issued special identity cards to Chinese residents to differentiate them from Khmer citizens. Under this system, he ordered the Chinese to pay special taxes and demanded that the rich donate money (purportedly) for the Defence Fund. During the period 1970 to 1973, when American planes rained bombs on Phnom Penh, most of the houses in Chinatown were destroyed and many Chinese temples and houses were damaged. Tens of thousands of Chinese became refugees.

### **Draconian Assimilation**

By emulating Mao's proletariat Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge tried to kill two birds with one stone. They were obsessed with the idea of bringing about uniformity in human behaviour and eradication of 'reactionary' culture and hence tried to assimilate ethnic Chinese to become Khmers and forced them to give up their Chinese language and culture. They compelled all non-Khmers to conform to one social ideal. In addition, dress, language and skin colour served as key measures of 'Khmerness' under the Khmer Rouge rule. Dark skin colour was the badge of 'pure Khmer' and a sure sign of a life of outdoor labour, the badge of the 'indigenous' people. Thus, dark skin might imply racial and social purity, whereas the 'chalk faces' of the Chinese had negative racial and social connotations. In the eyes of some CGDK cadres, ethnic dissent was an equal crime to political dissent. The Khmer Rouge forced the Chinese to 'become Khmer' in

habitat, dress and food. They prohibited the Chinese from calling their parents ‘*ba*’ or ‘*ma*’ and insisted that they used the Khmer word *owpuk-mday*. They encouraged people to call each other as ‘*mit*’ or ‘*met*’, which meant friends or comrades in Khmer language. They invented new terms such as ‘*hot dam*’, which meant forging a new revolution.

Whoever was caught speaking Chinese would be deprived of meals for a day. Those who were caught writing Chinese could be punished with death. The Khmer Rouge forced the Chinese to wear Khmer peasant clothes, shave their heads and change their names to sound Khmer. To them, Chinese ethnicity became practically synonymous with the bourgeois class. The FUNK prohibited state institutions, police force and state industries from hiring ethnic Chinese. In Phnom Penh, intellectuals of Chinese descent were denied positions in the new government, regardless of their political orientation. Pol Pot’s method of assimilation was much harsher than that of President Suharto in Indonesia. Ethnic Chinese in Cambodia have had little association with China after having had migrated for generations. Only one Chinese out of seven was not a Cambodian citizen and only one in 23 had been born in China. Whatever role the PRC had in supporting Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, it had been the Khmers who had carried out the policies of FUNK. The regime’s attempts to draw a closer connection between Pol Pot and the ethnic Chinese were complicated by the pain inflicted by the Khmer Rouge on Sino-Khmers. By 1977, most Cambodians were suffering from malnutrition. The rice that the newly ‘self-sufficient’ Cambodians harvested diminished due to unrealistic production goals and the pressure to feed the leadership or the army. In addition, some of it was exported to China in exchange for aid and to engage Chinese advisers.

Under the Pol Pot regime, executions occurred almost randomly, inspired by the slightest suspicion of disobedience or if one resembled to have bourgeois background. Khmer Rouge soldiers killed without impunity. They had sharp eyes for the slightest mistakes. The Khmer Rouge resented traditional education like the radicals of the Cultural Revolution in China of the 1960s. Immediately after the fall of Phnom Penh, thousands of teachers were executed. Those who



graduated prior to 1975 survived as they did no reveal their identities. Aside from teaching the basic 3 Rs of education, reading, writing and arithmetic, the objective was to instill revolutionary values in the young. The Khmer Rouge resisted Cambodia's traditional values and therefore had to re-orientate the values of the young with that of the older generation. Hence the Khmer Rouge made the children spy on their parents under the control of a secret police. In addition, the Khmer Rouge regarded the country's 40,000 to 60,000 Buddhist monks as 'social parasites' and forced them into labour brigades. Many monks were executed and temples and pagodas were demolished to make way for prisons and warehouses. Images of Buddha were defaced and dumped into rivers and lakes. People found praying or expressing religious sentiments were often killed. The Christian and Muslim communities were also persecuted. In Phnom Penh, the august Roman Catholic cathedral was razed to the ground. Muslims were tortured to eat pork and those who resisted were executed. Despite the mass killing of the Chinese, it was interesting to note that the PRC under the Gang of Four still supported Pol Pot. The PRC had advisers in Phnom Penh, but could not do anything to help the Cambodian Chinese. When they were confronted by Chinese who complained about their sufferings, the advisers could only answer, 'This is Cambodian politics, we cannot interfere'. Many Chinese who had escaped to other countries lamented that they preferred to be dogs in America than to be a Chinese in Cambodia. In an open letter from a doctor, Lim Ping Guang (林炳光), he reported that in 1977, there was a shooting competition in Phnom Penh where 3,872 Chinese were shot during the competition within a day. After the competition, there was even a competition for cutting off the heads of Chinese. Within three hours, 876 Chinese were beheaded.

An interpreter by the name of Chong Guang Wen (钟广文) who was working for the Chinese Embassy during the Pol Pot regime escaped to Bangkok and wrote in English to the Bangkok Post. He revealed that Beijing had sent 15,000 advisers to Phnom Penh, 200 tanks and 300 vehicles and 300 big guns and 30,000 bullets and 6 anti-aircrafts and 2,800-tonne battleships in aid of FUNK. In the

biggest post-colonial wave of Chinese immigration, the DK regime deployed thousands of advisers from the PRC, principally in Kompong Chung, to assist with the building of an airstrip. To the astonishment of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, PRC advisers joined in the DK chorus of rhetoric against overseas Chinese, and rejected all approaches for help with the perennial refrain — ‘endure’ (忍耐). During the period of Pol Pot’s rule, 90% of the Chinese, which amounted to some three million, were eliminated. In the mid-1980s, Cambodia’s international image was tarnished; in large part by *The Killing Fields*, Roland Joffe’s 1984 film about the *New York Times* correspondent Sydney Schanberg and his assistant Dith Pran who escaped from Phnom Penh in 1979. This film took the world by surprise as it depicted the tyranny of Pol Pot’s rule behind the bamboo curtain.

### **Pol Pot (波尔布特)**

The Khmers of Cambodia have always been impassioned by politics. Kampuchea Krom was under colonial control since her division of motherland, Cambodia. The Khmers suffered in the hands of foreigners for ages. From an early age, they had to defend themselves against Vietnam to maintain their own culture. Pol Pot (1928–1998) was infused with this mentality. He initiated draconian measures against the Chinese in Cambodia. Although he had Chinese blood himself, being a konkat-cen, he was a Khmer extremist and an idealist who adored Mao Zedong. Pol Pot or Saloth Sar was born into a moderately wealthy family of Chinese–Khmer descent on May 19, 1928. He was born in a place called Kampong Thom. At the age of six, he went to a school near the Lotus Temple to study the Cambodian language. At nine, he became a monk, and when he was 12, he gave up his monkhood. In 1935, he left Prek Svay to attend the Ecole Miche, a Catholic school in Phnom Penh.

In 1947, he gained admission to the exclusive Lycee Sisowath but was unsuccessful in his studies. He earned the scholarship to study radio electronics at EFR (École Française de Radioélectricité) in Paris from 1949 to 1953. He had moved to north of Phnom Penh, where he studied in a technical school at Russey Keo. He was awarded a

scholarship because of his family's royal connections through concubines. In 1950, whilst in Paris, he enrolled with the international labour brigade to build roads in Yugoslavia. When Soviet Union recognised Viet Minh as the post-independent government of Vietnam, the anti-colonial stance of the French Communist Party's (PCF) attracted many young Cambodians including Pol Pot. He subsequently joined a communist cell known as the Cercle Marxiste that had taken control of the Khmer Students' Association (AER) in 1951. This was a secret movement. Within a few months, Saloth joined the PCF. Historian Philip Short recorded that Saloth's weak academic accomplishments helped him to work with the anti-intellectual PCF,<sup>1</sup> whose primary support base was the uneducated peasants. They were regarded as the true proletariat and he quickly established a leadership role for himself among the Cercle Marxiste. He returned to Cambodia in January 1953 after failing to complete his studies in three successive years. He devoted most of his time in political study within the Marxist circle, heavily influenced by the Stalinist persuasion of the Communist Party of France. During this period, he established a personal bond among a small group of politicised fellow Khmers who had a sense of mission. When he returned to Phnom Penh, Saloth became the liaison between the underground communists, Democrats and Prachachon. He married Khieu Ponnary, the sister of Ieng Sary's wife. In 1955 to 1962 he worked as a school teacher in Phnom Penh and taught French literature and history at Chamraon Vichea, a private college. When the Communist Party of Cambodia was formed in secret in 1960, he became a member of its central committee. In 1962, when its general secretary mysteriously disappeared, who was believed to be murdered, he took over the post.

In 1963, the police sought him out as his home was listed as leftist suspects. He had made contacts with Vietnamese units fighting against South Vietnam and therefore fled to the Vietnamese border region. In 1963 when Prince Sihanouk's Government wanted to arrest him, he went into the jungle and that was the beginning of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pol Pot general knowledge. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://seylaphal.wordpress.com/pol-pot/>

Khmer Rouge. Later in 1964 the Cambodian Communists set up their own base camp after he had solicited the help of the Vietnamese. In 1965, Sihanouk carried out another wave of repression against the communist and Saloth spent his time strengthening the Khmer Rouge. In 1965, Pol Pot visited China and stayed there for two months. During his visit, he met the Chinese supreme leader Mao Zedong and Mao's 'ghost writer' Chen Boda (陈伯达) and Zhang Chunqiao (张春桥). He was very much influenced by Mao's theory of the Utopian society where no money was necessary and where every citizen had complete equality. Pol Pot returned to Cambodia and started to carry out what he had seen during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. He started a campaign similar to the 'The Great Leap Forward' (大跃进) Cultural Revolution practiced by the Chinese Communists between 1966 to 1976. There were rumours that Mao had tried to use the Cambodia to experiment his revolutionary ideas. Mao had supplied all the Chinese advisors to Pol Pot during the Cultural Revolution. Pol Pot emulated this model by executing professionals and promoting those who demonstrated pure ideological stances, including children, to serve as doctors and nurses. As a result of this revolution, many rich Chinese were eliminated and Cambodia became a country of the poor. Furniture, televisions, motor cars and modern amenities were the target of attack by the Khmer Rouge. They were all burnt. Cambodia ran amok.

Pol Pot stepped down from the party in 1985. He claimed to have been suffering from a severe asthma condition but remained the *de facto* Khmer Rouge leader. He led the anti-Vietnam alliance from behind. He handed operations to Son Sen, his choice successor. He was brought to China for cancer treatment in 1986 and stayed there till 1988. With the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, Pol Pot who had sought refuge in Thailand returned to Cambodia. He moved to the West, near the Thai border to establish his stronghold. He resisted the coalition government, refused to cooperate in the roadmap for peace and continued in the guerrilla warfare. In June 1997, Pol Pot ordered the execution of his lifelong right-hand man Son Sen for attempting to make a settlement with the new Cambodian government. Eleven members of his family were killed. He then fled

to his northern stronghold, but was later arrested by the Khmer Rouge military Chief Ta Mok. On the night of April 1998, the Khmer Rouge sacrificed him to the international tribunal. This was announced over the Voice of America. Pol Pot who listened to VOA died in his bed, while waiting to be moved to another location. He cheated justice by dying in his sleep, taking with him the dark secrets of his regime. The body was cremated at Anlong Veng within the confines of the Khmer Rouge, raising suspicion that he committed suicide.

I met an 84-year-old Chinese born in Cambodia, named Ng Xi Beng (黄时明) in Hong Kong in June 2012, someone who had personally experienced the disaster of the Pol Pot disaster in the 1970s. Ng was an underground agent appointed by the Chinese Communist Party to spy on Vietnam. He himself is a Communist and has written two volumes entitled ‘逐浪湄河-红色高棉实录’ or ‘*Waves through Mekong River*’, which was a record of what took place during the Red Khmer Rough rampage of Phnom Penh city.

According to Ng, when the Khmer Rough red soldiers marched into Phnom Penh, they forced every family to leave their homes and drove them into the streets. Their destination — the untilled land in the countryside. The ordinary people had no time to pack. They took whatever they could get and including some food and clothing. Many of them were old and weak, but they had to walk until they fell dead. Even the patients in the hospitals were forced to leave. Many of them could hardly walk. Most of them died while walking towards the countryside because of fatigue. A large number died of hunger. Those who were still young had to dig out roots of trees to survive. Many were stung to death by wild snakes which were plentiful in the countryside.

The whole idea was to turn them into farmers, providing them with ‘chankouals’. Those above 60 years old were forced to do odd jobs. Those who disobeyed had their arms severed by sword and bled to death. They tried to imitate the cultural revolution of China and perhaps outdid it. They claimed to have succeeded in transforming city slickers into farmers, something which French colonisers and Prince Sihanouk had failed to achieve. One of the leaders once spoke

loudly to them: ‘We decided to drive you city slickers from the city to the countryside in order to develop our country’s economy. This is our new invention. The French colonisers had failed, so too Sihaunouk, we have succeeded. Just think: if the countryside economy is developed, Cambodia will have plenty of rice, fruits and we will open our stomach and eat as much as we can’.

The city slickers took shelter in concentration camps like sardines and they were forced to construct their own makeshift dwellings. Ng witnessed his business friend committed suicide after his wife fell into a pond and died and his son died of sickness. Life became so unbearable that many chose to commit suicide. ‘When we left the city, Cambodia became a ghost city, the roads without a single walker, house without tenants. The whole exercise started in July 1975 to 1979’. It was only after Vietnamese troops occupied Cambodia that ended the disaster. But, a new colonialism began.

## **Chinese Blood in Khmer Leaders**

Interestingly, Son Sen, Ieng Sary, Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan were kongkat-cen, of mixed blood. Not much has been written about their Chinese heritage and their early childhood. It was recorded that all the four were educated in Paris and got their inspiration from the French Communist Party, which provided them with the foundation to initiate the Cambodian Communist revolution. Pol Pot was most certainly inspired by the Chinese leader Mao Zedong and imbued the idea of pure society from him. Mao did not interfere with Pol Pot’s purge against the Chinese population because he believed that it was a class struggle which cut across race relations. In fact Mao committed a similar crime with the Cultural Revolution on his Chinese population. The Chinese Communist Party promoted the hatred of intellectuals and the bourgeoisie and embraced the old revolutionary precept of ‘red over expertise’. Similarly, Pol Pot, mimicking the Cultural Revolution, chased all the city folks to the countryside, killed professionals and appointed ideologues to positions of power. Both of them had deported hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Vietnamese.

## **Ieng Sary's (殷沙里) Visit to Singapore**

Ieng Sary, the Khmer leader with Chinese blood visited Singapore as Cambodia's diplomatic envoy at the height of the Khmer Rouge's regime. He had used a Chinese name in his passport called Su Hou (苏浩) and recorded his birthplace as Beijing and his birth dated on January 30, 1930. Everyone knows that Ieng Sary was born in Chau Thabnh, Tra Vinh province, southern Vietnam in October 1924. His father was Khmer and mother Chinese. He changed his name from Vietnamese Kim Trang when he joined the Khmer Rouge. Phnom Penh's Lycee Sisowath was where Sary and Pol Pot were educated. They met their wives, the sisters Khiue Tirth and Khieu Ponnary there. Sary was engaged to Khieu Thirith before he left to study in Paris. Sary projected an image of being a qualified French professor, someone who was always smiling and courteous, and who did not allow his poor students to pay for the course. He lived in a house close to Chamcara Mon where he went about with a bicycle. Students could find him there and ask him for explanations because he was simple and affable. He expressed his disgust for royalty which he said had reduced the people to slavery. He once said, 'How many human lives have been sacrificed for the construction of Angkor Wat?' He had contempt for the King. He possessed numerous Chinese publications written in French which he willingly loaned to those who wished to consult them. He was a Khmer Rouge's ideologist before the Chinese withdrew their support following the 1991 International Conference on Cambodia in Paris. This subsequently led to his political demotion. On his return from France, Ieng Sary became a teacher and was active in the underground revolutionary activity. In 1963, Prince Sihanouk published his name in a list of subversives, together with Pol Pot's. He left Phnom Penh for the forests of eastern Cambodia. Ieng Sary was a powerful figure in Pol Pot's regime as his relatives were appointed to key administrative positions. The Head of Calmette Hospital was his daughter. She barely graduated from secondary school. Though lacking fluency in English language, Ieng Sary's niece was appointed as an English translator for Radio Phnom Penh. The leadership's intense secrecy and distrust of outsiders necessitated heavy reliance on family ties.

In 1971, Ieng Sary was reported to have visited Beijing as an envoy for the Khmer Rouge to contact both Vietnamese and Chinese Communist parties. The Khmer Rouge leadership had disappeared, leaving a report that one of the leaders; Ieng Sary had gone to Beijing to beg Sihanouk to come forward to project the public image of Cambodia. Supporting China's resolution, the prince explained that it was not about political differences or human rights but a question of whether Cambodia would lose its identity and become a province of the Vietnamese imperialists and their Soviet masters. When the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, Ieng Sary was a Prince Sihanouk's watchdog and had accompanied him to Algeria for the non-alignment conference in 1973. He was Foreign Minister during the Khmer Rouge's rule and was responsible for negotiating with Thailand and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries including Singapore. He came to Singapore and met the Singapore Foreign Minister Rajaretnam when I was present. I was then the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. We discussed the impending danger of a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. He came to warn Minister Rajaretnam that the invasion was inevitable. At our dinner party, I noticed he had developed the expensive taste of a bourgeois, demonstrating a preference for cigars and brandy. He was a jovial character and often cracked jokes. Before the city was occupied by the Vietnamese in January 1979, Ieng Sary escaped from Phnom Penh by train to Thailand. He travelled to Beijing and represented the exile government as Deputy Prime Minister in charge of foreign affairs at the end of 1979. After 1982, he gave up formal responsibility for foreign affairs to his Khmer Rouge colleague, Khieu Samphan. Since then, he had not held an official position and played the role of an intermediary for the dissemination of Chinese material and military assistance. After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, Ieng Sary and his family were seldom mentioned.

### **Khieu Samphan (乔森番)**

Khieu Samphan was born on July 27, 1931, in Svay Rieng Province. His father was a Khmer and his mother a Chinese. At a very young



age, he lost his father, who was a low-ranking civil servant from Suay Rieng and his mother settled in Toul Sheuv in a poor area of Kompong Cham, bringing with her the two sons. To earn a living for her small family, she sold vegetables in the village market. Young Samphan, who attended the primary school of Kompong Cham, was reserved. One of his friends remembered him as being well acquainted with the lowest depth of misery. Having received his primary school certificate, he also left for Sisowath School in Phnom Penh. He stayed in the hostel meant for students from the provinces, and he was quite easily passed off as a bourgeois. In contrast to the sons of the poor who slept on simple mats furnished by the establishment, he brought with him a mattress, bed sheets and a bolster. He was intelligent and serious in his studies and obtained his diplomas without difficulty. In 1954, he won a scholarship to Paris for further studies. He wasted no time on worldly frivolity and took no interest in feminine, Parisian charms. He was judged as 'pure, idealistic, reflective, and free from worldly vices'. In Paris, he was in touch with the Marxist Leninist group, which advocated violence to overthrow the establishment. His thesis was to create an Utopian society where money was not necessary. He was convinced that the easiest way to do that was to carry out a class struggle and eliminate those who were dispensable.

After graduating from Paris, these students who returned to Cambodia were divided into two camps, one was the extreme group led by Pol Pot and Ieng Sary who advocated overthrowing the regime by violence, and the other was the moderate group led by Khieu Samphan, who believed that it was necessary to have a revolution from above, seek power from inside, take the command posts and have a revolution. His doctorate thesis was on 'Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development', in which he stressed that the country's strength lay in the villages where most of the population lived. His thesis had become the basis of Khmer Rouge's forced transfer of Phnom Penh's population to the country paddy fields, although initially the method he prescribed in 1959 was moderate compared to the barbaric style of Khmer Rouge. Khieu Samphan returned to Cambodia in 1959 and became a professor of

Political Economy at the Faculty of Law in Phnom Penh. He lived in a miserly manner in a house without water in the suburb of the town, moving about with his bicycle, and later by motorbike. He directed the newspaper '*l'observateur*' that promulgated his advanced ideas among the teachers and students. In 1960, as he was coming out of the National Congress, the royal police, on the order of Kou Roun (the Minister of Police), arrested him and undressed him in public. This was meant to humiliate him because he had dared criticise the regime. In 1962, he entered Parliament as a member of Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Popular Socialist Community) and later as the Minister of State for Commerce. In 1967, he was out of favour and went to Phnom Penh to join the Khmer Rouge. After 1970, when Sihanouk was deposed, he became Minister of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister under the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (Grunk), an alliance between Sihanouk and Khmer Rouge. He was a member of the Politburo of the National United Forum (FUNK) set up by Sihanouk. He was also Commander-in-Chief of the Khmer Rouge. Following the Khmer Rouge victory in September 1975, he replaced Sihanouk as Head of State in April 1976. After Pol Pot was ousted as Prime Minister and later exiled, Khieu Samphan took over the post as Prime Minister.

### **Son Sen (宋成) (1930–1997)**

Son Sen was born in June 1930 in a remote place called Travinh, southern Vietnam. His parents were purportedly of Sino-Vietnamese ancestry and belonged to the landed gentry. His father was Khmer and mother Chinese. Too old to be admitted to the Sisowath School, he entered a normal school where he was a boarder. There he learnt order and discipline. Though of weak health, he was serious and intelligent. Son Sen was junior to Ieng Sary by several years and originated from Phum Sambour in the same district as him. More discreet than his compatriot Sary, he never spoke of politics. After obtaining his secondary school diploma, he pursued his further studies in Paris. There he became associated with Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Khieu

Samphan and got involved with anti-colonial agitation and the struggle for the immediate and total independence of Cambodia.

On his return to Phnom Penh, he shared the same ideological positions of Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan which was that Prince Sihanouk was a principal enemy of the Khmer people and that it was necessary to overthrow him by force. Son Sen continued with his teaching career in primary school. He married Miss Yun Yat (云月), a young, reserved girl who taught at the Sisowath School. Gradually, he rose in ranks and became Director of Studies at the National Pedagogic Institute. He created the environment which served as the breeding ground for revolutionaries. He had intellectual qualities but lacked flexibility. In 1962, he was arrested for committing acts against the monarchy. After his release, he went into the jungle to join the Khmer Rouge. In 1972, he was appointed Chief of Staff of the Khmer Army. In 1976, he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in charge of national security and took control of the famous Tuslan gaol. He was responsible for the list of persons who would be court marshalled by Pol Pot. Sometime in 1979, Pol Pot quit his military post and appointed Son Sen to replace him. In 1982, he became a member of the Defence Consultation Committee which often met Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann. In 1985, he replaced Pol Pot as Head of the Military Committee responsible for the fight on the frontier of Northern Cambodia. His wife was appointed as Minister of Culture in 1976. In 1993, during the Cambodian general elections supervised by the UN, Son Sen was the go-between with the UN negotiating on how Khmer Rouge should surrender. In June 1997, Son Sen and his whole family of more than 10 persons were assassinated in Phnom Penh. Khieu Samphan had accused him of losing control of Siam Reap enabling Hun Sen's troop to take advantage by occupying the territory. Pol Pot and his 200 comrades were forced to vacate their stronghold. His supporters had asked Son Sen to withdraw but he refused. They took out their pistols and shot him. Pol Pot believed that Son Sen was being in contact with then Prime Minister Hun Sen and was negotiating with government forces to surrender. Son Sen's brother Nikang (尼刚), who became a general, escaped with 30 of his men. Later, he joined the Hun Sen army and was appointed a three-star

general, helping to win over Khmer soldiers. After Son Sen's assassination, Khieu Samphan and the other Khmer leaders were detained for questioning. The death of Son Sen spelt the end of the Khmer Rouge.

## **Present-Day Cambodian Leaders with Chinese Blood**

There were many present-day Cambodian political leaders whom I consider bearing Chinese heritage. The Deputy Prime Minister Sok Aun (素安), the Foreign Minister Hor Namhong (何南丰), the Minister of Trade Cham Bio Sai (占比塞), the former Mayor of Phnom Penh Supala Cheah (谢索帕拉), and the opposition leader in Parliament Loo Lai Sheng (吕来盛), all had Chinese ancestors. Most were Teochiu and for generations had married Cambodian women, hence becoming konkat-cen. Apart from Supala Cheah, these Cambodian leaders did not speak Chinese or their own dialect. They were completely assimilated into the Cambodian society and regarded themselves as Cambodians. It was often said that at least half of the Cambodian population have Chinese blood. These mixed-blood leaders were closely connected with Hun Sen, the Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister Sok Aun was formerly an English teacher for Hun Sen who shadowed him through his rise to power. So was the Minister of Trade Chan Bio Sai (陈妙才) and Foreign Minister Ho Nam Hong (何南丰). Both Sok Aun and Supala Cheah were invited to become honorary advisors by the Cambodian Chinese Association. Overall, those who held real power were mostly Cambodians. The konkat-cen leaders were shy about using Chinese in public for fear that they might be misunderstood. As China's influence began to grow, the konkat-cen leaders began to strengthen their position. However in terms of organisation, the konkat-cen was still far behind most other overseas Chinese in the rest of Southeast Asia.

### **Sok An (素安) — Deputy Prime Minister**

The Deputy Prime Minister Sok An was the most powerful leader in Cambodia after Hun Sen. He was the brain behind the

Cambodian civil administration. His face has strong Chinese features and the colour of his skin was clearly Chinese. However, he has lost touch with his Chinese culture and instead spoke Cambodian and English. He began his career by teaching Hun Sen the English language. He then became a confidant of the leader and was later persuaded to take part in politics. Sok An was close to Hun Sen and he later married the daughter of Hun Sen, further strengthening the family ties.

Sok An is well respected by the Chinese community, especially the merchants and industrialists, because he behaves like a Chinese gentleman with distinctive Chinese demeanour, ‘喜怒不形于色’, i.e. expressionless and inscrutable. He believes in efficiency and has vast experience in administrative matters. Hun Sen has left the day-to-day running of the government to him. Nearly all Chinese businessmen seek his guidance. He also helped the Chinese Community repossess a Chinese temple previously confiscated by the government. In his early 1960s, Sok An was allegedly in ill health owing to his hard work. He lives in the city of Phnom Penh and has 370 hectares of agricultural land, about 20 kilometres from the city. There, he breeds thousands of cows, chickens and all types of tropical fruits such as nangka, pineapple, and others. His main hobby was cock fighting and he spends his weekends watching cock fights. On September 17, 2009, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The delegation of the Cambodian Council of Ministers was led by Sok An. FAO supported a two-year project worth US\$470,000 to improve the technical capacity of Cambodia to produce silk and with courses that introduced new techniques to farmers. In that ceremony, Sok An said that Cambodia only produced 50 tonnes of silk, but had been using 400 tonnes of silk per year. Therefore, Cambodia had to import up to 350 tonnes of raw silk per year from China and Vietnam with a price of US\$25,000 per tonne. Thus, Cambodia was losing about US\$10 million per year to foreign farmers. Silk was important for Cambodia’s rural economy and for reducing poverty in the country.

### **Hor Namhong (何南丰) — Foreign Minister**

The ancestry of Hor Namhong, the Cambodian Foreign Minister, can be traced to the Teochiu Prefecture. He was born on November 15, 1935, in Phnom Penh. He held the position for three years from 1990 to 1993. He was a member of the Cambodian People's Party. He studied in the University of Paris and obtained a Diploma of Ecole Royale Administration and Master of Law at the Faculty of Law and Diploma of the Institute of High International Studies. He was appointed as Ambassador to Cuba in 1973 and Ambassador to the USSR in 1982. He was an important negotiator in the peace talks to end the 'Cambodia Conflict' in 1987. From 1993 to 1998, he was posted to France as Ambassador, and in 2004, became Deputy Prime Minister. He received the following awards: Grand Officer of Monisaraphon; Grand Officer of the National Order du Merite of France and Grand Cross of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant of Thailand.<sup>2</sup> As Foreign Minister, he had to resolve the dispute Cambodia had with Thailand over an ancient temple and the violent clash between the two countries resulting in seven soldiers being killed. Soldiers from Cambodia and Thailand continued to comb the area. There have been incursions which have triggered battles between the two countries. Because of the dispute, Minister Hor was granted an audience with the Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

### **Supala Cheah (谢索帕拉)**

The Mayor of Phnom Penh, Supala Cheah, also has Chinese blood. His forefathers also migrated from the Teochiu Prefecture. He is 55 years old and does not speak Chinese. He was educated in French and Cambodian, and since 2000 served as Mayor for a few years. He became a Senator. During his term as Mayor, Phnom Penh was saddled with crime, especially kidnapping. The most famous crime

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.mfaic.gov.kh/mofa/default.aspx?id=96>

involved the murder of the President of the Cambodian Taiwan Business Association Lee Zhi Xin (李志鑫), who was shot on July 5, 2000 on his way home. The news shook Taiwanese business circles. Lee was friendly and helpful to both Chinese and Cambodians and had been very popular to all Chinese living in Phnom Penh, irrespective of whether they were Fujianese, Cantonese, Teochius or Hakkas. His death hampered Cambodian efforts to draw foreign investment. On July 11, the police arrested a Taiwanese businessman Tan Qi Li (陈启礼) and discovered 20 short guns and 2,000 bullets in his house in Phnom Penh. They also found that he had four passports, namely Hong Kong, Taiwan including Cambodian Diplomatic passport. He had given an interview with *TV Cambodia* where he claimed that the price of taking a life was US\$300 in Cambodia. He even demonstrated how he could shoot like a cowboy at the interview. Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia for 30 years had created fear in Phnom Penh, with no security for the individual. In a city where there was one pistol for every 20 people, capital punishment was abolished and criminals were given a free hand. Under such circumstances, Supala Cheah became the Mayor, and his biggest challenge was to tackle rampant crime. Being young and dynamic, he lost no time in having Tan Qi Li arrested, tried and sentenced to jail. He also challenged the underworld of 30 Taiwanese gangsters and had some of them arrested. As a result of his good work, crime rates in Phnom Penh are on the decline.

### ***The Rise of Hun Sen (洪森)***

Hun Sen was born on August 5, 1952, in the Stoeung Trang District, Kampong Chan Province. As a teenager, he went to Phnom Penh Secondary School in the Lycee Indra Devi and lived in Neakavoan Pagoda. When Cambodia plunged into war in the 1970s, he was inspired by the appeal of Prince Sihanouk against the Imperialists. Hun Sen became a part of the independence movement at the age of 18. However, prior to the victory in 1975, during a guerrilla battle, he suffered an injury and lost his left eye. After treatment, Hun Sen married Bun Rany and had three sons and three daughters. Hun Sen,

who was believed to have Chinese blood, was from a poor farmer's family. It was believed that his ancestor came from a Teochiu family and his mother was Khmer. Enlisted into the revolutionary movement by a cousin of his in the late 1960s, he served as a Khmer Rouge courier. Being energetic and smart, he rose to the ranks of commander in the Eastern Zone military. Hun Sen was a soldier with the notorious Khmer Rouge during his teenage years. He was an opportunist who clawed his way to the top of a fractured country and has remained there for more than 30 years.

As the Khmer Rouge's unit commander at 18, he defected to start a rebel operation out of Vietnam. Although he had no power base when he arrived in Vietnam in 1977 for training, the Vietnamese authorities began to trust him. Unlike Heng Samrin, Hun Sen had demonstrated that he had the verbal skills necessary for diplomacy. He was ambitious and motivated, representing Vietnam while taking part in the Vietnam–Cambodia relations under the name of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. In order to control PRK's most sensitive political matters, the Vietnamese established party committees for internal security, national defense and diplomacy to be chaired by Chea Sim, Pen Sovan and Hun Sen, who had direct control over these matters. In Hun Sen, the Vietnamese had found a Cambodian leader who could be entrusted to protect Hanoi's interests yet who was not overly dependent on Vietnamese support. Whether he was a Marxist was no longer important. The Vietnamese were bent on suppressing internal debate so long as no one challenged the legitimacy of the regime and the occupation. Meanwhile, Hun Sen's political ambition remained hidden.

Hun Sen became Foreign Minister under the PRK. He learned about bureaucracy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he built his patronage. Through the Foreign Ministry, he also had control over the day-to-day affairs of the Cambodians by controlling their contact with foreigners and foreign organisations. When he became Prime Minister, he was increasingly disillusioned with the ideological approach to problems and took measures to form a non-ideological regime. He transferred the state's entire industrial sector over to the Party. He told a visiting Vietnamese delegation



that the only political solution was for state factories to be translated to private factories. If they were left with the state, the three parties of Sihanouk, Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge would have expended these funds lavishly.

Privatisation accelerated throughout the year. The leadership was less anxious to privatise its rubber plantations, which unlike state factories had the capacity to generate revenues. The most urgent privatisation and the biggest problems occurred in Phnom Penh where property was most valuable. With a political solution and possibly an election approaching, Hun Sen viewed distribution of land as a priority.

With the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, Hun Sen tried to contact Sihanouk in order to place himself between the affable prince and his seemingly intractable Cambodian and foreign allies. Sihanouk was anxious to distance himself from both the Khmer Rouge and the Chinese. Both of them met in a four-star hotel in the French town of Fete-en Tardenois in December 1987. Following the meeting, Hun Sen in 1988 proposed a series of economic reforms including an injection of private capital into previously state-controlled sectors. Being a practical man, Hun Sen had finally arrived at an economic system that made sense to him. He had given up on communism but he had not yet embraced capitalism, as he believed in state intervention. Given the catastrophes of the recent past, Hun Sen experimented on practical ways to rebuild the country.

### ***Hun Sen: The Cambodian 'strongman'***

In 1992, the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC), which was charged by the United Nations to oversee peacekeeping in Cambodia arrived in Phnom Penh. In 1993, they sponsored free elections and were boycotted by the Khmer Rouge which threatened to kill those who voted. They also refused to allow UNTAC personnel into their zones. Four parties stood for election. The most important ones being Son Sann's KPNLF; the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK); the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) led by Lon Nol general Sak,

Sutsakhan; Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) headed by Sihanouk's son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh (拉那迪王子).<sup>3</sup> Just over a million valid votes were cast, despite the threats of the Khmer Rouge. FUNCINPEC secured the largest vote of 45–47% although no single party gained an absolute majority. The CPP led by Hun Sen gathered 38.23% and the other parties managed 12.59% among them. This translated into 58 seats for FUNCINPEC, 51 for CCP, 10 for the BLDP and 1 for the small Moulinaka party.

Sihanouk saw the victory of his party as an opportunity to regain his position which he held prior to the Lon Nol coup as Head of Government as well as Chief of State. He behaved rather erratically by blowing hot and cold in his attitude towards UNTAC staff. He announced that he would head a coalition government, acting as president of a Council of Ministers and as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. To his surprise, his son Prince Ranariddh, who was the leader of FUNCINPEC, rejected the plan, resulting in Sihanouk sputtering about 'dis-obedience' and threatened to play Hun Sen and Ranariddh against one another. But finally, when all things were settled, Sihanouk had to resign to a ceremonial role as 'King', until his retirement in 2004. His son Sihamoni took over from him in October 2004. While he remained popular, 'Sihanoukism' was indeed dead. The relations between Hun Sen and Ranariddh deteriorated, with both parties suspecting each other of suturing deals with Khmer Rouge factions. When Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan made peace with the government, massive defections took place starting in 1996.

The remnant Khmer Rouge retreated to the Dangrek Mountains near Anlong Veng with Pol Pot. Ranariddh accused Hun Sen of speaking on the sly with the Khmer Rouge. In an article written by author William Shawcross, he was quoted as saying, 'We do not "hug" and kiss each other, nor do we love each other'. A showdown

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<sup>3</sup>A Short History of Cambodia — Scribd. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://it.scribd.com/doc/34079166/%CE%91-Short-History-of-Cambodia>.

was looming, with Hun Sen who had the military might in contrast to Ranariddh's paralysed forces. As Mao Zedong once remarked — 'Power grows from the mouth of a gun'. Hun Sen had an upper hand. In July 1997, Hun Sen staged a bloody coup against his coalition partner FUNCINPEC. The latter's forces were outnumbered and outgunned. Many were killed and wounded in the shootouts in the streets of Phnom Penh. Ranariddh fled and a number of his supporters were executed, some tortured and others shot while trying to escape. Hun Sen had made a pre-emptive move to prevent a possible merger between FUNCINPEC and the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen thus emerged as the country's most powerful figure. US scholar Stephen Hender once described Hun Sen as, 'both a competent political administrator and a ruthless political criminal'. In 1998, Hun Sen surprised his critics by announcing that his country would hold fresh elections for the National Assembly.

The Cambodian elections were held on July 26, 1998, with international observers from the European Union, ASEAN and NGOs supervising the process. The result was a clear victory for CPP, although it could not form the two-thirds majority to form the government. CPP therefore formed a new coalition with FUNCINPEC bartering small portfolios. Hun Sen won another important political victory when Cambodia was accepted as a member of ASEAN one year later. The CPP-dominated government again in July 2003, when it won a majority of votes again and was unlikely to be challenged in the near future. However, Hun Sen had inherited tremendous problems as Cambodia continues to be a poor nation. Of its 13 million people, almost a third to half were living on less than US\$1 per day. About 50% of the country's children under five were underweight. Corruption scares off foreign investors. Prostitution, including child prostitution, has also become a major problem. An estimated 60,000 to 80,000 were prostitutes with a third under the age of 17. In 2002, HIV/Aids accounted for over 17,000 deaths in Cambodia. Although the country faces insurmountable problems, Cambodians believe that sooner or later, they would be able to overcome them. There was a Cambodian proverb which said '*Rok khmer moun de soun*' meaning the country of the Khmers would never die. Hun Sen was a strong leader with a

strong will. Opinion among Cambodia's intelligentsia was sharply divided, but many who dislike his authoritarian ways, keep a low profile, wary of the country's harsh defamation laws. Hun Sen has harassed opposition parties, threatened vocal journalists and shut down critical media. In the late 1990s, biographers Julie and Harish Mehta were told that he wanted to be like other Southeast Asian strongmen who could build the Cambodian economy. Hun Sen, along with a handful of cronies, have been accused of siphoning wealth from Cambodia's natural resources, which he strongly denies. His government has been called a plutocracy — by the rich for the rich. Public opinion, on him continues to be divided.

### **Hun Sen's Attitude Towards the Chinese**

Hun Sen was very liberal towards the Chinese. The Chinese under Hun Sen's rule have excelled in various fields, such as in economy, education and culture. Many Chinese who survived the Pol Pot massacre have come back to their motherland to restart their business with new experiences and with the money they had earned from the outside world. One can argue that Cambodia was seemingly an ideal place for the Chinese to settle down compared to other countries in Southeast Asia. When I visited Phnom Penh recently, nearly every shop and company in the city carried Chinese signboards alongside Cambodian ones. The Chinese signages was sometimes even bigger than the Cambodian words. There were nearly 70 Chinese schools, with a total enrollment of 40,000. The largest was Duan Hua School (端华学校) in Phnom Penh which has established two branches with a total enrollment of 12,000. It was perhaps the largest Chinese school in Southeast Asia. In Phnom Penh, more and more people have begun to speak Mandarin. Some critics ascribed his pro-Chinese attitude to the fact that he has a Chinese wife. She was of Hainanese descent and her Chinese name was Woon Siam Xiang (温婵香). Hun Sen admitted that his family was very much influenced by Chinese customs and traditions, but denied that it had anything to do with his policy. Hun Sen married Woon Siam Xiang in 1975 during the turbulent period under Pol Pot and they were separated by the chaotic war,

but were reunited in 1979. At the ceremony where Hun Sen was bestowed with the World's Peace Award, husband and wife embraced one another warmly in public. Hun Sen has five children and an adopted daughter. One of his sons was educated in France and another in Singapore. He was very strict with his children and did not pamper them. He restrained them from abusing their privilege over others. He was hot-tempered and sometimes used vulgar words. He was aware of this weakness. He read a lot, played football, tennis and loved swimming. His favourite novel was *'The Story of the Monkey'* written by a Cambodian, inspired by the Indian Ramayana. He believes in racial harmony and allows the Chinese to speak their language, enjoy their festivities and co-opted the Chinese into the civil service, military and police service.

The Chinese have received better treatment under Hun Sen than any other regime in Cambodian history, including those under Sihanouk. There were several ministers in his cabinet and military leaders who have Chinese blood and he has treated them like any other Cambodian citizen. When he visited China, he met Jiang Zemin (江泽民), Zhu Rongji (朱镕基) and Li Peng (李鹏) and other military leaders. Jiang Zemin called him *'hao peng you'* (好朋友, meaning good friend), when Hun Sen met him a second time. Hun Sen highly regarded Deng Xiaoping's reforms and the way he ran the country. When the Chairman of the People's Consultative Body (政协) Li Rui Huan (李瑞环) visited Phnom Penh, he told the Chinese living there, 'You are my relatives and are like children married away. You must abide by the laws of Cambodia, be loyal to the country and help develop your second motherland'. The former Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Hu Qian (胡建) described Cambodia's relationship with China as 'the golden period in Cambodian history'. When Wu Yi (吴仪), the lady Chinese Minister visited Cambodia in 2002, she signed the Sino-Cambodian Economic Cooperation Agreement and since then a great deal of Chinese economic support has been extended to the country. In 2003–2004, China helped train 46 military personnel and refurbished the military equipment left over by the Russians. During this period,

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<sup>4</sup>Work in Progress (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://vanessafitter.blogspot.com/>

China invested more than US\$32 millions in Cambodia, which represented 50.66% of the country's total foreign investments. Wen Jia Bao (温家宝), the Chinese Premier, described Cambodia as the 'friendliest' country to China. Because of the excellent relations between the two countries, Hun Sen has high regard for the Chinese in Cambodia. He once said of the Chinese, 'The Chinese have become a small minority in Cambodia, but they have contributed a great deal to the development of the country. They are our brothers and sisters'.<sup>4</sup> Since 1994, Chinese business and education have been revived in Cambodia. In 1995, there were 3,000 Chinese business firms in Phnom Penh, and about 65% (1980) displaying Chinese character signboards. In the countryside, there were 800 Chinese companies. Nearly 90% of the Chinese in Cambodia were engaged in business.

When Hun Sen gave a talk in Singapore in June 2004, I attended his lecture. I met him after the talk. He appeared to me to be rather ambitious. He admitted to me that it was difficult for Cambodia to compete with Singapore and Malaysia, but said he hoped to catch up with Vietnam and Indonesia within 15 years. Of Singapore, he said that it was a good example for Cambodia. Singapore learnt how to attract talent and ensure a strong rule of law to safeguard security. Hun Sen was a key figure in the Paris talks which brokered peace in Cambodia. He became Premier in 1985 and, with a few brief interruptions, had remained unchallenged in the post and consolidated his position. Since Hun Sen came into power in 1985, he abolished the so-called Circular 351, which was known for years as shorthand for discriminatory policies against the Chinese. He encouraged the Chinese to form a Cambodian Chinese Federation. The Federation has become the highest body overseeing the interests of ethnic Chinese. The Federation has its own newspaper called *The Cambodian Chinese Daily*, which has become the voice of the community.

## **The Chinese and Konkat-Cen in Cambodia**

In 1975, the population of Cambodia was 7,000,000, among them were 500,000 Chinese. During Pol Pot's three-year rule (from April 1975 to January 1979) about 2,000,000 Cambodians were either

executed or died of hunger and sickness when they were forced out of the city. Among them were 250,000 Chinese including Sino-Khmers, the *konkat-cen*. During the past two decades, tremendous changes have occurred in the structure of the Chinese community. The older generations have either passed away or migrated because of the country's upheavals or were executed by Pol Pot. A new generation of Cambodians, the *konkat-cen*, have emerged. The 1984 census report showed that 90% of those with Chinese blood have registered as Cambodians instead of Chinese. Among the *konkat-cen*, many have risen to high positions, including the Deputy Prime Minister. Many were cabinet ministers and top civil servants. All these leaders with Chinese blood have been completely assimilated into the Cambodian society, speaking the Cambodian language, dressed as Cambodians and have lost their cultural roots. There were still a minority who remembered their ancestors and continued to study Chinese, abide by Chinese customs and spoke different Chinese dialects.

The social upheaval of 1970–1979 fragmented long-standing single dialect group communities. There was also a rapid fall of the Chinese population, leading to a shortage of eligible marriage partners. As at present there would have been far more intermarriages between dialect groups than before the start of the war. Moreover, forced assimilation under Pol Pot and long-term closure of Chinese schools in Cambodia meant that many more Chinese speak Khmer than was previously the case. Both Khmer and Mandarin now serve as a common language, enabling communications between people. The PRC has officially sanctioned Chinese associations since 1991 and Chinese solidarity outside Phnom Penh has largely taken the form of Chinese associations. Different dialect groups pool their resources to rebuild Chinese education and revive Chinese festivals and traditions under the auspices of these associations. There was a trend towards the resurrection of distinct Teochiu, Fujianese, Hainanese, Cantonese and Hakka associations.

## **Dialect Groups Today in Cambodia**

The majority of Teochius, the largest dialect group comprising close to 80% of Chinese in Cambodia, were businessmen. The Cantonese,

the second largest group, were artisans, car mechanics and blacksmiths and air-conditioner technicians. The Hainanese, the third largest group, specialised in the catering industry as cooks and coffee shop operators. The Fujianese, the fourth largest, have careers in government; while the Hakka, the smallest group, specialise in running coffee shops and peddling fruit.

The Teochiu community has renovated some of their temples and has revived the Duanhua School, the most famous and the largest Chinese school in Phnom Penh. The school now has 7,000 students, with 3,000 attending night classes. The school was financed by fees, fund-raising by the Teochiu Association and individual contributions from wealthy members of the community. Faced with \$70,000 rent per annum on two schools annexes, Duanhua (端华) ran a high-profile fund-raising campaign through the newspapers in Cambodia in November 1995. The Chief Editor of Cambodia's leading Chinese newspaper in Teochiu, *Huashang Ribao*, focused on Teochiu activities as well as other Chinese dialect activities in Cambodia.

## **The Konkat-Cen in Cambodia**

The Cantonese, who were once against intermarriages, have now changed their attitude. Formerly living exclusively from other dialect groups, they now mingle with the Fujians, Teochius, and Hakkas and even among Khmers and Vietnamese. They tried to reclaim the old Cantonese Temple in Phnom Penh, but it was rejected by the Cambodian authorities as it was now re-purposed. The Head of the Cantonese Association told me that many Cantonese families both rich and poor were beginning to observe the Khmer custom of cremating their dead, in contrast to past practice of burial. The Cantonese school in Phnom Penh was reopened in 1995, financed by family donations and by the Cantonese Association of Vietnam. Of its 130 students, 28 were Khmer. The Fujianese suffered far greater casualties than other dialect groups under Pol Pot as they were mostly civil servants who were targets of elimination by the Khmer Rouge. Many of them were executed during the Khmer Rouge anti-reactionary campaigns. As a result, the Fujianese



population decreased considerably. The Fujianese had suffered despite the fact that they were the most open-minded about inter-marriages with Cambodian women. With the donations from Cambodian Chinese now living in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Canada, the Sino-Khmer Fujianese have managed to restore the famous Xietiangong (谢天公庙) Temple to its former glory in Phnom Penh. But they have not succeeded in reopening their school due to the recent Cambodian policy of providing alternative sites for new schools. The Fujian Association was now raising funds to restart a Fujian School. The Hainanese Association has revived their activities on its original site in Phnom Penh and has refurbished the Hainanese temple. It has also reopened the historic Jicheng Gongxiao (志清公校, Jicheng Public School). The school now teaches Mandarin, English as well as Khmer and accepts students from all dialect groups, including non-Chinese children. It now has 2,500 students. The Hainanese takes pride in the fact that they constitute 5% of the Cambodian Chinese population. An estimated 95% were born locally and most of them were *konkats*. The Hakkas, who were the smallest dialect group in Phnom Penh, were handicapped by finances when they tried to reopen their Hakka School.

The Head of the Hakka Association Yu Heing (余乡) told me that with the help of donations from Hakkas in Hong Kong, Canada, Malaysia and Thailand, the Association succeeded in resurrecting Zhongzheng Xuexiao (中正学校) the Hakka School in Phnom Penh. The school now has 370 students, less than two-third of the enrollment in the 1960s. The lessons of the past teach the Chinese, especially the *konkat* in Cambodia today, to stay clear of politics. They feel that as citizens of Cambodia, they should love Cambodia (*sralanh Khmae*), be sensitive to Khmer feelings and raise Khmer morale (*leuk tuk-cet Khmae*). The *kongkats* were also leisurely like their Cambodian brothers. They see this as a way to enjoy a longer life. About 80 percent of the Cambodian economy was in the hands of the Chinese and the *kongkat*. In Cambodia, the Chinese and especially the *konkat* were allowed to join the armed forces, yet only a minority of them would choose to take up arms. They prefer to do business. Some Chinese who have contributed towards the development of Cambodia

were bestowed with honorary titles for their contributions by Hun Sen. There were at least 20 of them who have received such titles. One of them was Chia Ge Chew (谢克周, President of the Cambodian Chinese Federation) since 1990.

### **The *Cen-Deykok* (他国人) — New Chinese Immigrants**

There was a new category of Chinese immigrants in Cambodia today. They started migrating to Cambodia when the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia. This coincided with the Tiananmen affair in China. Subsequently the weakening of border controls, the end of the war and the burgeoning of economic opportunities in Cambodia made the Cambodian passport an attractive and expensive item for Chinese immigrants. Some of the new Chinese immigrants have moved into the country through relatives, dialect affinity or the provision of specialist skills such as dentistry, medicine and Mandarin teaching. This sudden influx of Chinese immigrants was referred to by Cambodians as *cen-deykok*. They were able to distinguish between the *cenhaw*, the *cen-konkat* and *cen-deykok*. They do not confuse the *cen-deykok* with the long-standing Chinese community, especially the second- and third-generation who have become Khmers. The new arrivals were seen as foreigners and aliens and as such elicit feelings of suspicion and resentment especially those loitering in the streets or hanging out on balconies and houses. The Cambodian authorities were keeping an eye on these new immigrants and the kongkats too were worried that their behaviour might hamper the cordial relations cemented with the Khmers.

### **The Great Exodus of Refugees from Cambodia**

During the Khmer Rouge era, about 50,000 Cambodians fled to Thailand and an estimated 150,000 fled to Vietnam. Most of them were Chinese. When the Khmer Rouge regime began to crumble under the onslaught of the Vietnamese in late 1978, this triggered a massive exodus of Cambodian refugees. About 630,000 braved hostile

fire, minefields, bandits and border checks to leave the country between 1979 and 1981. In subsequent years, about 208,000 resettled in countries outside Cambodia including 136,000 in the US, 32,000 in France and 13,000 each in Australia and Canada. Throughout 1978, there was an increase in the exodus of Cambodian refugees. ASEAN countries were inclined to seek closer relations with Vietnam to stem the outflow. Then, Vietnamese troops swept across Cambodia and with the Khmer Rouge, caused hundreds of thousands Cambodians especially Chinese–Cambodians, to escape to Thailand. By early 1979, an estimated 100,000 Cambodians were living in two sprawling encampments, Nong Samet and Mak Mun, controlled by non-Communist resistance forces loosely known as the *Khmer Serei* (Free Khmer, 自由高棉). In the south of Aranaprathet, more than 60,000 refugees sought sanctuary with the Vietnamese attacks on Khmer strongholds. To the north, tens of thousands more Cambodians began crossing the border at Nong Samet. The Vietnamese authorities put Hun Sen in charge of Cambodia. The anti-Chinese policy gradually mellowed when the Vietnamese were forced out of Cambodia after China's attack against Vietnam. During 1986–1989, a Chinese association was able to operate in Kampot, informally as a welfare agency since 1986 and formally as the Chinese Association of Kampot in 1988. A Chinese coffin shop opened in Phnom Penh in 1986, and the famous Chinese Buddhist temple at Takhmau reopened in 1987. In 1990, the government established the Association of Chinese Nationals in Cambodia which secured the cultural mandate, albeit forbidden to engage in politics. Today, the Chinese population of Cambodia numbers about 350,000. The Chinese population of Phnom Penh was now 200,000 with new arrivals from Shanghai as doctors and architects as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

### **The Chinese Under Heng Samrin (韩桑林) Regime**

Born on May 25, 1934, Heng Samrin was born to a well-to-do peasant trader. His father was believed to be a Chinese from the Ponhea district of Kompong Cham province. He attended local schools, but no one was certain if he completed his secondary school. He fought

alongside the Viet Minh against the French colonial government as early as the 1950s. He is believed to Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) serving in the United Khmer Issarak (Freedom) Front, as evidenced in official statements. Heng Samrin acquired ideological and organisational training here. After the 1954 Geneva Conference, he left for Hanoi and returned to Cambodia in 1956 to join the Krom Pracheachon (Citizens Association). This was an anti-Sihanouk underground organisation established in 1954 which eventually emerged as the legal communist body to participate in national elections. The rise of popular unrest, however, did not provide Heng Samrin the opportunity to acquire public attention. The Khmer Rouge had launched strikes and demonstrations against the Sihanouk's rule. Heng Samrin was incidentally named political commissar and commander of the 4th Infantry Division of the government's Revolutionary Army in 1976. This was shortly before Pol Pot rose to become the Prime Minister of Kampuchea. In 1978, Heng Samrin announced a commitment to abolish the excesses of Pol Pot's regime and established an independent democratic movement called 'moving towards socialism'. The new rulers of Vietnam got Heng Samrin to be Head of State. As a former member of the Eastern Zone Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, Heng Samrin had in fact defected from the Khmer Rouge. In January 1979, the new regime was established under the name of the People's Republic of Kampuchea or PRK. Together with Hun Sen and Cheah Sim (谢心), he boarded a Vietnamese jeep and entered Phnom Penh, a city none of whom had seen for more than a decade. The scene was bleak. The whole city was deserted. Cars were left to rust, schools lay in rubble, pigs and chickens roamed the city and snakes slid through the high grass. Heng Samrin was virtually unknown to ordinary Cambodians.

He was referred to by the Cambodians as the 'cattle rustler' and a cheap Vietnamese lackey who sold himself to 'Le Duan-Phan Van Dong clique' in Hanoi. His power and influence in the new regime was hardly visible. The Vietnamese had boosted his reputation because his brother Heng Sam Huoy, another Eastern Zone officer, was executed by the Khmer Rouge in May 1978. Heng Samrin was

uneducated and yet rigidly Marxists in outlook, well trusted by the Vietnamese. With this background, Heng Samrin obviously needed the support of the Vietnamese to develop his personal power base in Cambodia. Among the most powerful leader in his inner Cabinet was Chea Sim, who was appointed Minister of the Interior. Chea Sim joined the revolution in the late 1940s initially as an organiser among Cambodian monks and understood how to cultivate a patronage system and inspire loyalty in his followers. The Vietnamese valued his ability to co-opt Khmer Rouge defectors. Chea Sim was in the inner circle of power and was responsible for reviewing all important political cases, government secrecy, local training and the interrogation of prisoners. Most important to him was his control over applications to join the police. Chea Sim, then 46 years old, was two years older than Samrin. The police forces would not consider hiring ethnic Chinese or Sino-Khmers. They also prohibited state institutions and state industries from hiring ethnic Chinese. In Phnom Penh, intellectuals of Chinese descent were denied positions in the new government, regardless of their political stance.

By 1982, the Heng Samrin regime was taking concerted measures to clear ‘Chinese capitalists’. They conducted a survey to determine the nature of Chinese capitalism, and how the Chinese managed their business and the value of the capital they possessed. The purpose was to ‘uncover’ Chinese networks in the country. In order to do this, a circular called Circular 351 was issued, an instrument of discrimination against the Chinese. The Circular 351 instructed state officials to investigate the citizenship status of the Chinese people, their geographic origins, the duration of stay in Cambodia, their families, overseas connections, language abilities, political leanings and past affiliations. This included a scrutiny of whether they had ever worked in the police, military or courts of the Sihanouk, Non Lol or Pol Pot regimes. The Circular also revealed PKK’s fascination with the fear of Chinese commerce, inquiring into the profession of every Chinese and the ownership of every photo shop, copy shop, radio repair shop, publishing houses, dentists and even noodle shops. By uncovering this information, the party hoped to have a glimpse at the flow of money in Cambodia — the Chinese trading companies operating

between Phnom Penh and Thailand and between Cambodia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Officials were also asked to collect information on the means of transportation, number of employees, salaries, and sources of equipment, capital and the organisational structures of Chinese enterprises as well as management efficiency.

The implementation of Circular 351 was carried out with venomous racial prejudice. Worst of all, the officers who were implementing the initiatives were mostly uneducated and were up against the Chinese. Their goal for the interview was to elicit a 'confession' from the Chinese. However, some of the interviewers were also interested in taking bribes from the ethnic Chinese, more than building socialism. Oppressing capitalists were found to be more lucrative than shutting down and replacing them with state institutions. Over time, PKK cadres became less and less interested in repressing the Chinese and gradually became dependent on Chinese capitalists. Ultimately, the indifference of the Phnom Penh population guaranteed the failure of Circular 351. The Chinese resisted the policy and refused to cooperate. Once it became clear to the residents of Phnom Penh that the state could not feed them, they concluded that the private Chinese dominated commercial sector offered the only solution to the country's economic problems. They began to ignore Circular 351 and the discrimination automatically subsided.

Under PRK's authority, a vast majority of Cambodians suffered as the regime was isolated by international organisations. During the 1979 famine, the country was deprived of economic and humanitarian aid. Seven million Cambodians were denied the right to development and many suffered because the UN Development Programme, the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and Asian Development Bank denied them any form of assistance. The UNICEF and International Red Cross afforded marginal and insufficient humanitarian aid. In 1981, the removal of Prime Minister Pen Sovann and the subsequent death of his immediate successor Chan Si (陈时) in Moscow in 1984 demonstrated the extent of Vietnamese control in Cambodia. Both men were affiliated with 'Khmer Viet Minh' and committed to the socialist policies while the Hun Sen-Heng Samrin wing were more nationalist minded and inclined to be critical of the

Vietnamese. It seemed ironic, given the fact that both sides were trained in Vietnam during their long exile after 1954. Pen Sovann, who devoted his life to the communist cause, suddenly disappeared from public view. The Khmer Prime Minister was detained for a number of years in a Vietnamese prison and placed under house arrest in Hanoi thereafter. He was exiled to a foreign land without a trial. His 'crime' was nothing more than being too independent minded, and his views came into conflict with the Politburo in Hanoi. He was harbouring economic nationalism and resisted the Vietnamese immigration policy. He was removed from office as the Vietnamese could not see eye to eye with him. The second man, Chan Si, who succeeded Pen Sovann as Prime Minister, was also a competent and well-educated man, mild-mannered and accommodating but was too nationalistic in his approach. During his trip to Moscow, Chan Si was mysteriously taken ill and was given a state funeral in Phnom Penh. Pen Sovann, when he was released from his detention, claimed that Chan Si had been murdered on Hun Sen's orders. This was reported by the *Cambodian Daily* although there is no evidence that corroborate this accusation. Chan Si's death represented a major turning point in the history of PRK and in the revolution itself. Chan Si died in late 1984, having had served merely for four years. During his tenure, he was loyal to the Vietnamese and no one knows why Hanoi would want him murdered. However, because the Vietnamese had arrested a Prime Minister of Cambodia and pronounced him 'ill', this gave rise to suspicion. His death paved the way for Hun Sen's (洪森) promotion to the premiership. Heng Samrin was today still powerful in Cambodia under the premiership of Hun Sen. He and Cheah Sim were both influential at the party level and according to the constitution, the Government has to consult the party before making decisions of major issues as well as obtaining its approval.

### **The Arrest of Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan**

On November 12, 2007, Ieng Sary who was already 77 years old was arrested together with his wife after a dawn raid on the couple's plush villa in the outskirts. He was the No. 3 man in the Khmer Rouge and

faced charges of crimes committed against humanity and war crimes stemming from the 1970s Cambodian massacre. The No. 1 man Pol Pot, escaped arrest and died in 1998. Ta Mok, the No. 2 man died in 2006 in government custody and none of the group's other top leaders have yet faced trial. The pair was believed to be two of the five unnamed suspects listed by the United Nations-backed tribunal. Two others have been taken into custody. Ieng Sary had repeatedly denied responsibility for any crimes. He once said in Bangkok that he has done nothing wrong and that he was a gentle person. He reiterated that he believes in good deeds. He even claimed to have 'saved several people's lives' during the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. But the tribunal judges thought otherwise and accused him of promoting, instigating, facilitating, encouraging and condoning the perpetration of Khmer Rouge atrocities. The alleged crimes of his wife were believed to include participation in the planning, directing, coordinating and ordering of widespread purges. She had served as Minister of Social Action, and was considered among the half-dozen most powerful personalities in CGDK. One of the sore issues had been an amnesty granted to Ieng Sary by the Cambodian government after his defection from the Khmer Rouge in 1996. In 1999, when Khieu Samphan was back in Phnom Penh, he pronounced the demise of the Khmer Rouge and apologised to the people for what the Khmer Rouge had done. Ieng Sary surrendered in 1996.

The Head of state of former Democratic Kampuchea, Khieu Samphan was arrested and detained in November 2007 immediately after he was released from a hospital in Phnom Penh. He had been admitted there for a stroke condition. He was the fifth Khmer Rouge leader to be detained by the UN-backed genocide tribunal ahead of the trials in 2008. Police escorted him from the hospital, holding his arms for support and led him to a police car that sped away in a convoy of half-dozen police vehicles. Khieu Samphan was interviewed by the tribunal judges, although no charges were yet announced. He did not deny the bloodletting that was inflicted by the Khmer Rouge in late the 1970s. However, he denied any direct role in the regime's excesses that led to the deaths of some 1.7 million people. He had successfully re-branded himself as a nationalist and a public intellectual



and demonstrated ignorance of Khmer Rouge's atrocities in its four-year reign. In a book written by him entitled *Reflection on Cambodians History from Ancient Times to the Era of Democratic Kampuchea*, published days before his arrest, Khieu Samphan continued to deny that the regime intentionally committed mass murder. He said, 'There was no policy of starving the people. There was no policy of mass killings. The regime always thought about the people's well-being'. Genocide researchers admit that there was not as much evidence against Khieu Samphan as existed against other leaders, but he was aware of the execution policies and did nothing to stop them. Beside Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan, two other suspects — the regime's ideologist Nuos Chea (谢怒士) and Kang Cuck Eva (康德华) — also known as Duch who headed the group's S-21 torture centre, were detained in early 2007 on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The arrests came almost three decades after they lost power. Many feared that the ageing suspects might die before they were ever brought to trial. The UN-backed tribunal was created in 2006 after seven years of negotiations between the world body and Cambodia.

## **Ta Mok (大目) (1924–2006)**

Ta Mok, also known as 'Brother Number Five' was a leading Khmer Rouge figure. His name means 'grandfather Mok' in Khmer. He also carried the names of Ek Choen, Oeung Choen and Ung Choeun.

Of Chinese-Khmer descent, he was born in 1924. His family was from Takeo Province and became a Buddhist monk in the 1930s and was trained in the Buddhist priesthood at Pali. At the age of 16, he left the monastery to take part in the resistance against the French colonial rule and later in the anti-Japanese resistance in the 1940s. He joined the anti-French Khmer Issarak in 1964 and joined the Khmer Rouge. By the 1960s, he was already a general and the group's Chief of Staff. He emerged very powerful within the party as Pol Pot endorsed him and appointed him to lead the national army of Democratic Kampuchea. Around 1970, he lost his lower leg in fighting. In 1975, he directed the massive purges that characterised the short-lived Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979) earning him the

nickname Butcher. Ta Mok seized control of one faction in 1997 with the party split. He appointed himself as the supreme commander. Pol Pot was forced to flee to the northern stronghold. Ta Mok later sentenced him to house arrest in perpetuity. In April 1998, Ta Mok and Pol Pot sought refuge in the forest when the government was under siege. Pol Pot died on April 15, 1998, from a heart attack whilst under Ta Mok's custody. In 1999, the Cambodian army encircled and captured Ta Mok near the Thai border and detained him in Phnom Penh. Ta Mok was the last surviving member of the Khmer Rouge leadership who had been brought back to Cambodia. Others had died or secured immunity from the Hun Sen Government, including Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary. In prison, his detention period was repeatedly extended without being brought to trial. In February 2002, he was charged with crimes against humanity. He fell into a coma and died in a military hospital on July 21, 2006.

### **Nuon Chea — Chief Ideologist of Khmer Rouge**

Nuon Chea, also known as Long Bunrout was born on July 7, 1926. He was a retired Cambodian Communist politician and former chief ideologist of the Khmer Rouge. Nuon Chea or Lau Ben Kon (刘平坤) was born to a Chinese father who was a trader as well as a corn farmer called Lao Liv. His mother, Dos Peanh, was a daughter of a Chinese father from Shantou who married a Khmer wife. Raised in both Chinese and Khmer customs, Nuon Chea started school at an early age of seven. He was educated in French, Thai and Khmer. Devoted to Theravada Buddhism, his family also observed the Lunar New Year and Qingming festival which embraced Chinese customs. A graduate of Thammasat University in Bangkok in the 1940s he had also served with the diplomatic corps of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thailand. The Communist Party of Siam in Bangkok offered him the first opportunity for politically engagement. By the 1960s, he rose in the ranks of the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (later renamed as the Communist Party of Kampuchea) and held the position of the Deputy General Secretary. He was referred to as 'Brother No. 2' in Democratic Kampuchea. Chea,

unlike his contemporaries in the party, was not educated in Paris. In 1976, he was President of the Standing Committee of Kampuchea People's Representative Assembly, but was forced to abandon the post along with others when Vietnam captured Phnom Penh in January 1979.

After bargaining with the Cambodian government, Nuon Chea surrendered as a remnant of the Khmer Rouge resistance movement on December 29, 1998. In a press conference, he expressed regret and sorrow for the suffering of Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. The Hun Sen Government agreed to forsake attempts to prosecute him, although the international community and sections of Cambodian society mounted pressure to have him tried. He lived for years as a free man, with his wife in the modest home in Pailin, although subordinates and documentary evidence warrant trial for crimes against humanity. But this was not for long as he was arrested in September 2007 and flown to the Cambodia Tribunal in Phnom Penh. He was charged with war crimes against humanity. He has since been held in detention, though he has sought to be released. Speaking in court in early February 2008, he said his case should be handled according to international legal standards.

## **The Return of Chinese Refugees**

Since 1979, 70% of the Chinese who migrated overseas because of the country's disasters and upheaval have returned to Phnom Penh. They brought along capital investments and modern industrial and technical knowhow to help the country's economic development. One of the biggest investors was KT Pacific, a family group from America, whose business interests include the construction of hotels, and commercial activities including trading. These newcomers call themselves Xin Xing Hua Ren (新华人), meaning the new breed of Chinese. The earliest to arrive in Phnom Penh were the Taiwanese and businessmen from Hong Kong, followed by those from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Hospitality and entertainment business ventures in Cambodia were monopolised by the Taiwanese and Hong Kong businessmen. Chinese investors from

the mainland too have come to explore golden opportunities. The Sichuans started the first Sichuan hot pot restaurant, with the Shanghainese opening up traditional Chinese medicine shops, dental practices and the manufacturing of modern machine tools. The Chinese have helped those who stayed behind to reopen their clan associations and later formed the All Cambodia Chinese Federation, which was officially opened in August 1990. By May 1994, the Federation has established eight branches throughout the country. Chinese schools have also sprung up. By 1999, there were 78 Chinese schools, with a total enrollment of 40,000 students. There were 900 teachers, mainly from Guangdong and Guangxi. The teaching of Chinese had become very popular in Cambodia. Most of the books came from Malaysia. Many Chinese newspapers were also established by Malaysian Chinese, one of which was the *Jin Bian Ri Bao* (金边日报, Phnom Penh News) and the *Chinese Daily*. The Chinese in Bangkok have also opened Chinese newspapers called the *Asia News*. Local Chinese have joined in to establish the *Gao Mian Du Li Bao* (高棉独立报, Phnom Penh Independent Daily). The Chinese were allowed to celebrate their New Year and observe other festivities throughout the country. When Li Rui Huan (李瑞环), the former President of the People's Political Consultative Committee visited Cambodia, he told the Chinese residents to obey the laws of the host country and try to help develop the country even though they were ethnic Chinese from mainland China.

### **The Return of Yang Qi Chiew (杨启秋)**

One among the many who returned was Yang Qi Chiew, known to be the most active Chinese businessman in Cambodia. He was Secretary General of the Cambodian Chinese Federation (柬华总会) and President of Cambodia's biggest Chinese clan association — the Teochew Hui Kuan (潮州会馆). He was a successful businessman before the advent of the Pol Pot regime. In 1979, after Pol Pot's mass massacre, he lost his wife, one son and one daughter and escaped by

boat overseas. In 1984, he returned to Cambodia and started a little stall, selling things to earn a living. After eight years of struggle, he succeeded in rebuilding his business and became rich again. He started off as a wholesale agent for French and Belgium goods and later delved into real estate, construction and manufacturing industries. He now owns 16 hectares of industrial real estate and was connected to seven companies in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. He had invested in the garment weaving industry which supplies clothing for the military. He had 2,000 weaving machines in his estate. Yang was lucky to marry a dynamic lady named Chai Chiow Ngo (蔡巧娥) after his release from the Pol Pot prison. He was poor as at that time when they were married. She helped him in his business. After they became rich, she opened two jewelry shops. Both of them were elected into the Cambodian Business Association as directors. Although Yang was not highly educated, he spent a lot of his time promoting Chinese education and culture as well as looking after Chinese temples. Under his leadership, Chinese schools have expanded in Cambodia. Today there would be 78 Chinese primary and middle schools, with an enrollment of 50,000 students. The biggest Chinese School in Cambodia was the Tuan Mong School run by the Association with an enrollment of 14,000. He was also involved with charity work for the benefit of poor Cambodians. In view of what he has done for society, he was bestowed with the Grand Cross of the Royal Order of Cambodia. As he was close to the Cambodian leadership, he has invited Sok Aun, and the Mayor of Cambodia, Supala Cheah, as Honorary Adviser to the Association.

## *Chapter Six*

# **The Minh Huong (明乡) of Vietnam**

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The Chinese had been implementing a well-constructed policy of assimilation as with the ‘cult of the Emperor’ — the Son of Heaven in Vietnam since the first Chinese Emperor Qin Shihuang (秦始皇) ruled China. By the 3rd century BCE, the Han group that was cradled in the Yellow River basin, inherited a unified China from Qin Shihuang (秦始皇). China’s first Emperor sent an expedition to conquer the kingdom of Au Lac. Throughout the 1,000-year history between the two countries, Vietnam became a vassal state and was inevitably influenced in many ways by the Chinese. The Han Chinese used Confucianism as a doctrine to assimilate the Vietnamese. The society was slowly transformed into a feudal state. Vietnam, which was originally a matriarchal society, slowly evolved into a patriarchal society. Daoism and Buddhism penetrated along with Confucianism into the Vietnamese society. The Vietnamese tried, on many occasions, to fight their stronger neighbour and strongly resisted the assimilation by the Chinese and made various attempts to revolt against their rule. This resulted in a love–hate relationship between Vietnam and China.

## **The Story of Meng Her (孟获)**

The migration of Chinese started with the Three Kingdoms period (三国时代), when Zhu Geliang’s (诸葛亮) troops marched into Vietnam to subdue Meng Her, who was a Vietnamese. During the period of the Three Kingdoms, the Shu Kingdom (蜀), with Liu Bei

as 'King', tried to conquer Vietnam in an attempt to remove a possible obstacle in capturing power in central China. Zhu Geliang, Liu Bei's (刘备) strategist, commanded the troops and indulged in a bitter struggle with Meng Her's troops. Zhu Keliang caught the Vietnamese leader Meng Her, a fierce and stubborn fighter, six times and released him. Meng Her attacked the Chinese garrisons time and again, and whenever he was caught and set free, he refused to admit defeat. Zhu Geliang was instructed to defeat the Vietnamese once and for all instead of winning wars. When the seventh time came, he had destroyed all his forces and the Vietnamese finally surrendered to the Chinese. Their chief Meng Her surrendered all the titles of the land to Zhu Geliang and waited to be beheaded. Zhu knew then that he had won over the heart of the people. Instead of chopping off his head, Zhu returned all the titles and proclaimed him the Chief of his people. Since then, Meng Her became loyal to China. When I was in Hanoi, I visited the cemetery of Meng Her, regarded as a hero by the Vietnamese. During the Qin dynasty, Emperor Qin Shihuang (秦始皇) sent Chinese criminals to Vietnam, who mixed freely with local Vietnamese women, resulting in intermarriages between the Han race and the Vietnamese since 179 BC. At the end of the Qin dynasty, a Chinese general, believed to be of mixed-blood, called Trieu Da (Chao To, 赵佗) rose to be the leader in a region called Loong Chuan (龙川) and declared himself as King of Nam Viet (南越王) in 179 BC. When Han Gaozu (汉高祖) came into power, Trieu Da united the Yueh tribe and defeated the Han soldiers. In order to pacify the Viets, the Han emperors decided to grant autonomy to the Kingdom Viet, encouraging them to pay tribute once in three years. However, after Trieu Da's death, his descendants were divided into two camps when the Empress, a Chinese, inherited the throne. One camp wanted to remain paying tribute to the Chinese emperor. The other camp, led by the Prime Minister Lu Gia (吕嘉), an indigenous Vietnamese General, wanted to maintain a distance from China and refused obeisance. When conflict emerged between the two camps, China intervened in favour of the Empress. Lu Gia had the Empress and her son killed, which culminated in China's mass invasion of Vietnam.

## The Minh Huong of Vietnam

On conquering the Viet territories, the Chinese divided it into nine regions. In one of the regions, which was now regarded as the Fujian province, the Yueh tribe under the leadership of Wu Chu (无诸) and Yaw (摇), both supported the Han soldiers during the war between the Chu (楚) and Han (汉), otherwise known as the Chu Han Xiang Zheng (楚汉相争). Thus, when the Han emperor won the war, Wu Chu was declared the Yueh King of Fujian and Yaw was declared King of Eastern Seas (东海王). There were frequent clashes between the Yueh King of Fujian and the King of Eastern Seas, and the Chinese emperors tried to take a neutral stance but invariably got entangled. It was highly frustrating and time consuming for the Chinese to deal with the internal affairs of the Yueh tribe, because some of the people were Chinese while others were mixed blood or indigenous people. They decided to adopt the policy of forceful assimilation of the Yueh tribe into Han race and culture. The founder of the Vietnam Kingdom Chao To (赵佗) could be considered as the earliest *minh huong* (明乡; mixed blood), although in those days, no such name was yet coined for the offsprings of Chinese and Vietnamese. The Han-Viets (汉越) dominated in the first and second centuries AD. Among those who rebelled against Chinese rule were the Chinese settlers who were already assimilated into Vietnamese society. More than 120 Han tombs constructed in bricks have been excavated in northern Vietnam, indicating that Han families preferred to remain Vietnamese rather than return to China. They had assimilated to their host societies and could not be regarded as Chinese. Although the assimilation resulted in the adoption of Chinese vocabulary and technical terms into the new culture, after a generation or two, they began to speak Vietnamese. The second century AD was a time of rebellion in Giao Chi (交趾), Cuu Chan (九真) and Nhat Nam (日南), largely due to the declining legitimacy of the Han administrators who concentrated their energies on making their own fortunes and returning to China as soon as they could. Revolts against corrupt and repressive Chinese officials were often led by the *minh huong*. The fall of the Han dynasty in China further strengthened the allegiance of the Han-Viet ruling



elite to their new society and gave them a sense of their own independent political power. This set the stage for the mingling of blood between Chinese and the Vietnamese leaders. In fact, since the Han dynasty, the second-generation Chinese immigrants who arrived in Vietnam began marrying Vietnamese girls and by the third generation, the offsprings of such marriages have been almost completely assimilated into the Vietnamese society. When Vietnam became independent from Chinese rule, there was a reversal of the assimilation process. It was the beginning of the Vietnamisation of Chinese.

### **Ming's Assimilation of Vietnamese**

Since the Tang (唐) dynasty, it was the dream of the Chinese emperors to assimilate the Vietnamese. The Chinese ruling circles have never given up their dream of expanding into Vietnam to bring her within the ambit of Chinese rule. During the Sung dynasty, a Sung General Chau Chong (赵忠) escaped to Vietnam. He was highly regarded by the Vietnamese King as a brave hero and helped Vietnam defeat the Mongolian invasion. Later, Chau Chong became naturalised as a Vietnamese, possibly the second *minh huang*. From the Sung dynasty onwards, the Vietnamese became independent of Chinese control. The Sung administration advanced in sea navigation having invented the compass. Chinese merchants from Quanzhou and Guangdong started exporting porcelains, silk, Chinese herbs and wine to Europe through Vietnam. The trade between China and Vietnam flourished. During the 13th century, the Mongolians under Kublai Khan invaded Vietnam three times. The Vietnamese soldiers commanded by Tran Hung Dao (陈兴道), repulsed each offensive. In 1287, in a battle in Red River valley, the Vietnamese repelled 300,000 Mongol troops. In a victory poem, a Vietnamese general affirmed that 'this ancient land shall live forever.' The Vietminh commander General Vo Nguyen Giap (武元甲) aroused Tran Hung Dao's memory seven centuries later as he launched an operation against the French in the same area. After defeating the Mongolians, the Vietnamese went on to conquer their southern neighbours Champ, just as Vietnam had occupied Cambodia and Laos after defeating the

Americans. Exhausted by their campaigns against Champ, the Vietnamese again fell prey to China, this time under the Ming Emperors, whose rule over Vietnam was its worst in history. Chinese provincial governors subjected Vietnamese peasants to forced labour in gold mines and other ores, cut rare woods and grow spices which were then exported to China along with elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, pearls and precious stones. The Chinese imperialists imposed their culture, confiscated Vietnamese literature and compelled schools to teach the Han language. In doing so they suppressed Vietnamese culture and permitted only the worship of Chinese gods.

For 20 years, the Chinese rulers of the Ming dynasty resorted to violence, extortion, exploitation and radical obscurantism to efface all traces of the past and to make Vietnam a Chinese province. Chinese manners and customs were imposed by force, with Vietnamese intellectual publications burnt and works of art and treasures carried away. An imperial edict prescribed the burning of all books, xylographic blocks and textbooks for students. The finest paper with ideograms were burnt, the only exception being economic publications and the blocks used to print Buddhist and Daoist books. The Chinese compelled Vietnamese women to adorn Chinese garments and prevented the men from cutting their hair. Since the 10th century, however, Vietnam has had enough spirit, intelligence, energy and effective strength to oppose the Chinese forces. That spirit and intelligence waxed and endured through a 1,000 years of Chinese domination and anti-Chinese resistance. It was deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture and upbringing that they are not Chinese and they need not become one — ‘We bathe ourselves in our own pond, and are no fools to carry gold to dump into Ngo river’.

Historically, Chinese rule in Vietnam received strong reception to the influence of Chinese culture. On the other hand, it also generated popular opposition, the tendency towards the de-sinicisation and nationalisation of Vietnamese culture. In 1416, during the reign of Emperor Yung Lo, when he was moving China’s capital to Beijing, a large number of young and intelligent Vietnamese youth were kidnapped by Zhang Phu (张辅), who castrated them in order to serve in the Chinese Imperial Palace. One of the victims Nguyen Binh (阮文),

nicknamed Ah Liew (苗留), became a prominent eunuch. He was put in charge of building the Imperial Palace because of his knowledge of architecture. As Chief of Imperial Architectural Planning, Nguyen completed the famous Forbidden City in 1445 after putting in 10 years of effort. Even today, the remains of the Forbidden City planned by him are preserved. Unfortunately, Nguyen was only an eunuch. His social position in the Chinese society was low. He died as a eunuch, despite his great contribution to Chinese architecture. It was around the same time when Zheng He, who would later become a famous Muslim admiral, was castrated at the age of nine. There are many other Vietnamese who had contributed towards China's development. One famous person was Ly Dang (黎澄) and his son Ly Su Lam (黎叔林), who were regarded as inventors of the Fire Weapon. Unfortunately, they died in prison because they went against the famous Chinese eunuch Wei Zhong Xian (魏忠贤). Another Vietnamese by the name of Yang Lian (杨涟) was the teacher of China's famous statesman Shi Kefa (史可法), and Chen Ru (陈儒), a hero who fought against the Japanese during the reign of Ming Emperor Jia Jing (嘉靖). Several waves of Chinese migration into Vietnam happened during the Ming dynasty. According to Chinese historian, the first wave brought a hundred households of the Meos (苗) referred to Hmongs in Vietnam to Dong Van (同文) district, the present-day Ha Giang Province (河江). The second wave of some 200 households arrived in the same district and the third wave of some 10,000 originating from the Chinese provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan, arrived in Lai Chau province (莱州). There are also 30 groups of Yao (姚), the minority race of China who now live in the northern mountains as far as Ninh Binh (宁平). During the Qing dynasty, a sea blockade was imposed to prevent coastal Han race from collaborating with Zheng Chenggong (郑成功), the pro-Ming hero who had established a stronghold in Taiwan.

Vietnam maintained its vassal-state relation with China during the early period of the Qing rule. But, from time to time, the two countries did not get along well, and the Vietnamese were reluctant to follow the instructions of the Qing rulers. By 1788, when Qian Long (乾隆) Emperor became the new ruler, he sent a massive force to

suppress Vietnam, intervening in their internal royal feud. At the beginning, they won the battle, but were later repulsed by the Vietnamese. Many Qing soldiers who were defeated stayed behind in Vietnam. By 1851 when the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国) erupted in China, the Qing dynasty had no energy to deal with Vietnam for they had to use whatever forces they had to suppress the Taiping rebellion. When they finally succeeded in quelling the rebellion, hundreds of thousands of Taiping rebels flocked to Vietnam and started plundering the defenseless villages. Many of these rebels stayed behind and became Vietnamese Chinese. At this juncture, the French missionaries who were preaching Catholicism and who refrained from engaging in politics, suddenly began to take an interest in power politics. Their leader Napoleon III decided on armed intervention in Vietnam. In 1858, under the pretext of defending the Catholic population whom they claimed were being persecuted, French gunboats attacked Tourane, the present-day Danang (岷港). The French troops were aided considerably by French missionaries who sent their missions to act as guides and reinforcements. By 1897, France had conquered Vietnam. The conquerors held many trump cards: the weakness and vacillation of the Hue (Vietnamese royal family Court), the peasant revolts, 400,000 Catholics in the northern delta, and the reflux of Taiping rebels chased across the border from China who pillaged the highlands.

### **Third *Minh Huong* King Ly Cong Uan (李公蘊) (974–1028)**

Ly Cong Uan was the founder of the Ly dynasty (李朝) (1009–1225). His ancestor was a Fujianese from the village of An Hai (安海镇) of Jinjiang (晋江市), who migrated to Gu Fa village (古法村), Dong Ann County (东岸县) of North Liao Ning Province (辽宁省). It was believed that he was a descendant of Tang Tai Zong (唐太宗). His father migrated to Vietnam and became involved with a Vietnamese known as 'Pham Thi'. In 974, Ly Cong Uan was born at Co Phap Pagoda, Dinh Bang, Tu Som, Bac Ninh Province. His mother gave him away to a superior monk named Ly Khanh Van (李重文) and he

was brought up as a monk and became a naturalised Vietnamese at the age of three. He was given the name of Ly Cong Uan. He grew up under the protection of Ly Van Hanh, also known as Van Hanh, a respected monk in the holy Anterior Ly Dynasty Court. It was commonly known that Ly had no father. His mother Madam Phan (范) died soon after she gave Ly away to the monk. He was a bright and strong-minded boy. Because of his upbringing, he grew in stature demonstrating outstanding talent in both political and military affairs. He rose to the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Guards.

The last Le King Le Long Dinh (黎龙鋌) died in 1009 under the ferocity and cruelty inflicted upon his subjects, which brought grief and anger against the late monarch. An official Dao Cam Moc and Van Hanh used their power and influence to enthrone Ly Cong Uan, who was also known as Ly Thai To (李太祖) with the support of the people. After ascension to the throne, Ly Cong Uan named his era *Thuan Thien* (顺天), meaning 'follow the celestial will'. The new King Ly changed Vietnamese capital to Dai La, present-day Hanoi in 1010. Ly ascended the throne when the Sung dynasty of China was in political chaos, and he was appointed by the Chinese Emperor as 'King of Chiaw Zi' (交趾). The Kingdom grew so strong that he conquered Chenla (真腊), the present Kampuchea. Legend has it that on a sunny day, when the royal barge landed in Dai Loc (大禄), the King saw a golden dragon soaring into the sky. Reading this as a good omen, he named the new capital Thanh Long City (升龙) or City of the Soaring Dragon. He changed the defensive mentality of the Vietnamese to that of looking forward. He built the dyke system to protect rice-producing areas. He also founded the Quc Tu Giam, the first university to hold regular examinations for the selection of capable commoners for government positions. Since he grew up in the temple, Ly became a staunch Buddhist and promoted Buddhism, without undermining Confucianism and Daoism, which had been a foundation of the Vietnamese society for 360 years. He adopted the Confucian model of government. The influence of Confucianism in Vietnam was tenacious because it was rooted in the country's educational system until the 20th century. He built many beautiful pagodas which are preserved to-date.

When I was in Hanoi, I visited Quan Thanh (观圣庙), which was built in 1102, a really magnificent temple. One of the queens by the name of Lan (兰), was accused of ordering the assassination of one of her rivals. She was punished and was to spend the rest of her life building 100 pagodas to redeem herself. That was why there are so many pagodas in Hanoi. Ly decreed a general amnesty to all political prisoners when he ascended the throne and abolished all methods of torture and destroyed the instruments of torture. He also introduced a written legislation and imposed severe punishment on those who rebelled against the state. He prohibited the sale of slaves below the age of 18. In those days, slavery was common in Vietnam. The Ly dynasty lasted for eight generations and Ly's descendants succeeded one another during which, they resisted many invasions from the soldiers of the Song dynasty. His immediate successor, General Ly Thuong Kiet (李常杰) faced an invasion of over 100,000 Sung troops, but the General held them in check at the Cau (桥) river frontline for over two months. In order to engage his troops actively, Ly Thuong Kiet wrote a poem which was circulated among all defenders of the Chu River front-line. The poem translated by Mary Cowan read — 'Over mountains and rivers of the South reigns the Emperor of the South. And it stands written forever in the Book of Heaven. How was it then that you strangers dare to invade our land? Your armies, without, pity, shall be annihilated'.<sup>1</sup>

Ly Thuong Kiet (1019–1105) was a Vietnamese eunuch and a General during the Ly dynasty. He penned what was considered the first Vietnamese declaration of independence and was still regarded as a Vietnamese national hero. Although he had Chinese blood, he was loyal to Vietnam and regarded the Chinese as 'strangers'. Born to the Ngo family in the Dai Viet capital of Thang Long, Ngo Tuan was his real name and his father served the Emperor as a captain in the calvary in 1036. He became a eunuch to guide the imperial guards later. The royal name, Ly Thuong Kiet, was given to him because of his loyalty, bravery and intelligence. He held many important positions in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ly Thuong Kiet — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BD\\_Th%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Dng\\_Ki%E1%BB%87t](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BD_Th%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Dng_Ki%E1%BB%87t).

Court. The Sung invaders were driven back, and peace and territorial sovereignty of Vietnam was restored. Ly Thuong Kiet had an impressive record in wars against Champa Kingdoms' invasions. Despite the fact that they were anti-China, the kings of the Ly dynasty were deeply enthusiastic about Chinese culture and the Chinese administrative system. In 1075, Ly Thuong Kiet introduced the Imperial examination of recruiting high-level civil servant through *qin zi* (进士) system for the first time. Ten candidates passed the examination and one Chinese named Le Van Thinh (黎文盛), who was a scholar of Confucianism, conducted the examinations. Works of Confucianism, as interpreted by Chu Hi (朱熹) of the Sung dynasty made up a body of doctrines which had to be memorised by candidates for mandarin competitions. Confucianism directed man towards the fulfillment of his social duties, at the top of which were absolute fidelity to the king and respect for social hierarchy. Ly died in 1028 at the age of 55, having ruled for 19 years. He had eight generations of successors, which lasted 215 years, the longest in the history of Vietnam. By 1164, during the reign of Song Xiao Zong (宋孝宗), the King of Chiaw Zi, Ly Anh Tong, Ly Thien To (李天祚) changed the name of Chiaw Zi to An Nam (安南). Ly Anh Tong died in 1175 having ruled Vietnam for 40 years. The Ly dynasty was replaced by the Tran (陈) dynasty. It was widely acknowledged that the Tran family originated in China, probably from Fujian. The Tran gained access to the wealth by marrying into the royal family and eventually took over power.

## **China's Recognition of Vietnam's Independence**

The Vietnamese were able to enjoy independence for 900 years, challenged only by a brief occupation during the 15th century. It was Ngo Quyen (吴权), founder of the Ngo dynasty, who put an end to Chinese domination in 938 and the process of the formation of a centralised monarch state began. But the country underwent a phase of conflict and instability owing to the persisting feudal divisions. Sung China took advantage of these to attempt a re-conquest, but the expeditionary forces were beaten on land and sea in 981. It was only during the Ly and the Tran dynasties that the monarchy installed a



truly stable power, and moulded a Southeast Asian Vietnamese culture. Under the Ly dynasty, Vietnam witnessed a remarkable cultural flowering with Buddhism playing a dominant role and Confucianism gaining political influence. Religious architecture and sculpture flourished with a multiplication of pagodas and temples built. The popular opera Cheo and the classical opera Tuong as well as the water puppets, were established.

Two years after defeating the Chinese, China finally recognised Vietnam's independence, and Le Loi resumed the tributary tie to China as insurance. He established his capital in Hanoi, calling the city Dong Kinh (东京), hence the name Tonkin in northern Vietnam. In 1829, the Nguyen government prohibited *minh huong* families from returning to China and, in 1842, registered them separately from the immigrant Chinese. The *minh huong* were allowed to take civil service examinations and opened the door to higher social status. In the 19th century, the *minh huong* participated in politics and among those who succeeded was Trinh Hoai Duc (郑怀德) (1765–1825) and Phan Thanh Gian (潘清简) (1795–1876), both of whom became cabinet ministers during the Nguyen dynasty as well as celebrated scholars and both have Chinese blood. Another *minh huong* was made the Regent in 1883. Some observers reckon that even Ngo Dinh Diem (吴廷炎), the South Vietnamese president from 1954 to 1963 was a *minh huong*. During his reign, Ngo tried to naturalise the Chinese so as to limit their economic dominance. Despite their Chinese blood, the *minh huong* were completely vietnamised in their behaviour and attitude. Their descendants were to contribute to the exploitation of the Cuu Long Delta (九龙) and the development of trade in the South.

The nature of Vietnamese resistance against China changed in the 10th century. The new emperor Dinh Bo Linh (丁保宁) who pronounced his own kingdom the 'Kingdom of Watchful Hawk' organised a peasant army commanded by urban intellectuals. The Chinese recognised Vietnam's independence in exchange for regular tributes and payments even when his dynasty lasted only a decade. It was the similar pattern of a tributary system which China had imposed on other states of Southeast Asia.



## **Self-Exiled Chinese Generals and the Beginning of Minh Huong**

The severe regime of the Ming emperors provoked an insurrection. This time, the Vietnamese saviour was Le Loi, who became a powerful Vietnamese emperor equal only to Ho Chi Minh in its pantheon of heroes. He withdrew to the mountains near his residence and mobilised relatives, friends, villagers and even local marauders to his cause. He taught them guerrilla tactics which Tran Hung Dao had successfully deployed to subjugate the Mongolians. The Chinese became increasingly insecure as the insurrection spread. They took refuge in towns and their big battalions ventured out only during the day. Gradually as he grew stronger, Le Loi struck at the Chinese directly, deploying platoons of elephants against the horse cavalry of the Chinese. Not only did he crush the Chinese decisively, Le's dynasty, the longest in Vietnamese history, became a model of enlightenment — at least during the early phase of its nearly 400-year span.

## **End of Ming and Beginning of Qing Dynasty**

As at that time, a significant number of Chinese minorities known in Vietnamese as the San Diu and Ngai ethnic groups, settled down in the coastal province of Quang Ninh (广宁) and Hai Phong (海防). They considered themselves local and easily assimilated into the native society through intermarriage. They tended to congregate in valleys, along rivers and coastal areas and on islands. Then, by the 17th century, there was exodus of Chinese immigrants from China because of the Manchu invasion. They were all loyal to the Ming emperors and refused to kowtow to the Manchu rulers. The Chinese immigrants who were called Hoa settled down in Pho Hien, a rival commercial centre in the North which was the second capital of Vietnam. Vietnam was divided into the North and Dang Ngoai (outer region dominated by the Trinh family) and the South (inner region governed by the Nguyen family) during the period between 17th and 18th century under the nominal rule of the Le Dynasty. This period saw the emergence and development of Pho Hien, whose ruins are scattered in the

present-day town of Hung Yen, some 50 km east of Hanoi on the other side of Red River.

After the Chinese fled the Manchus and settled down in Vietnam, they became influential and dominant in the country. When Japan banned her ships from engaging in external trade, it became an opportunity for the Chinese to take over the export and import of goods. They acted as intermediaries for foreigners and in many cases became naturalised and behaved like Vietnamese. Through Pho Hien came luxury goods for the Vietnamese Courts, weapons and ammunition for the army, gold, silver, medicines, porcelains and Chinese textiles. They also exported Vietnamese spices, ceramics and silk products. The early groups who arrived in Vietnam from the 18th to 20th century were from the Guangdong province. The final group of mainland Chinese migrants came during the 1940s. A large proportion of the Hoa who were living outside of Vietnam spoke the Vietnamese accent of Cantonese as their mother tongue. The second group of Hoa spoke Teochius. Due to the cultural affinity with the Vietnamese and close proximity to China, the Hoa retained their traditional Chinese culture. The intermarriages between the Hoa and the majority Kinh ethnic was the highest compared to other minorities in Vietnam. There was also an intermarriage between the Chinese and the Vietnamese minority race called Ngai (艾) who lived near the Chinese frontier. The Chinese have largely retained their cultural identity, speaking and behaving like Chinese. By 1955, North Vietnam and China agreed that the Hoa should be gradually assimilated into the Vietnamese society with Vietnamese citizenship granted to them.

### **The Vietnamese Bias Against the *Minh Huong***

Although the Vietnamese authorities tried to assimilate the Chinese, there was an inert feeling among the Vietnamese against the *minh huong*. They set themselves apart from the *minh huong*, using the term *chu khach*, meaning passengers in a ship. Some Vietnamese used the word *tau* to address them. This reminded the *minh huong* of the time when they came in big ships to trade with Vietnam and that they

were outsiders. This feeling of prejudice persisted until after the Sino-Vietnamese war when they became apparent. Many of the *minh huong* became frustrated with the Vietnamese authorities and had second thoughts of identifying with them. As refugees who arrived in America, they reinstated their Chinese identity by discarding Vietnamese surnames which were demanded by the dictatorial regime of Ngo Dinh Diem (吴廷炎) of the former South Vietnam, for their original surnames. Duong was reverted to Tang (唐), Hoang to Wong (黄), Truong to Chang (张) and Tran to Chen (陈).

Today, there are many Chinese Vietnamese communities in Australia, Canada, France, and the US, where the *minh huong* significantly revitalised the otherwise old Chinatowns. The established Chinatowns of Los Angeles, Houston, Toronto and Paris continue to carry a Vietnamese flavour due to the large presence of Hoa and *minh huongs*. It was sad to see the *minh huong*, who did their best to serve their motherland Vietnam faced discrimination following the clash of Sino-Vietnamese interests.

### **Vietnamese Alphabet: *Chu Nom* (字喃)**

In the 13th century, the Vietnamese began to invent their own alphabets in writing Han words and they called it *Chu Nom*, meaning the characters of the Southern country. It was based on the Han character but sounded Vietnamese. From the Ly dynasty onwards, the Vietnamese began using the *Chu Nom*. The Vietnamese script was written in *Chu Nom* to reflect the spoken Vietnamese and, in particular, lessened the inconvenience for those who used the Chinese characters which were hard for the common people to understand. After all, the Han characters were foreign to the Vietnamese who were more connected with the Kher civilisation. The move to ‘*chuno-mise*’ the Chinese characters took place almost the same time when the Koreans created Korean alphabets to replace the Chinese characters during the Yi dynasty under King Sejong. By the 14th century, the *Chu Nom* became popular, and the Tran dynasty scholars started to use the new Vietnamese alphabets to compose poems called ‘Nam Onn poems’ (南音诗). The famous scholar who promoted *Chu Nom*

was Le Quy Ly (黎季犛), who encouraged the translation of Chinese books into *Chu Nom*. However, *Chu Nom* was confined to describe names of persons and places. It was difficult to learn and could not replace the Han characters completely. Most Vietnamese still preferred to use Han characters to write articles and poems and found it a useful language for imperial examinations.

## The Romanisation of Vietnamese Script

Before the arrival of Alexandre De Rhodes, the Roman Catholic Priest, most Vietnamese knew Chinese characters and was proud to recite Tang poetry, and the literary circles used to communicate with one another in Chinese characters. Alexandre De Rhodes's introduction of the romanised script into the Vietnamese language changed everything. This romanised script *Quoc Ngu* (国语) became easier to learn and master compared to *Chu Nom* or the Han characters. The romanised scripts allowed the French to translate Christian texts more easily, and subsequent adoption of this *quoc ngu* as the national script, meant that the peasantry were diverted away from acquiring Chinese language. The *quoc ngu* was used by the French administration in Tonkin from 1900, so that even bureaucracy began to abandon Chinese and this was accelerated with the abolition of the traditional examination system in 1916. The French also abolished the use of the Han characters. As time elapsed, the Chinese characters became totally foreign to the vast majority of the Vietnamese today. The romanised script originally created for the use of French missionaries to understand the Vietnamese Chinese script, was imposed by the French after they conquered Vietnam. It helped them spread their Christian religion. The innovation, however, endangered the traditional Confucianist tradition. The Vietnamese emperors feared that Christianity might portend European imperialism. With the introduction of the romanised script of the Vietnamese Han script, the Vietnamese gradually lost their ability to read Chinese script. Today, volumes of Han scripts about Vietnamese are available in the archives, but few could understand them.

## China's Influence on Vietnamese Language and Culture

Vietnamese political culture was largely of Chinese origin. Vietnam's institutions were forged by over 1,000 years of Chinese rule and imposition of the Chinese system based on Confucianism, which stressed the importance of the village, endowing it with clearly defined relationship to the centre. Those who ruled did so with the consent of Heaven and were considered divine. Loyalty to a monarch meant defending national territory. The legacy of Chinese domination had reiterated the importance of territorial integrity. The supreme leader of Vietnam Ho Chi Minh's (胡志明) father was a Confucian scholar, so were Vo Nguyen Giap (武元甲), Le Duc Tho (黎德寿) and Mai Chi Tho (梅志寿), the other Vietnamese leaders who also emerged from scholarly Confucius families. Some observers have commented that the French found difficulty in transforming the North Vietnamese compared to those from the South because they were more influenced by Confucianism. The French had imposed colonial rule on the South, making the North only a protectorate. Having been ruled by China for more than 10 centuries, a lot of Chinese vocabulary were adopted into the Vietnamese language. Chinese language and literature was pervasive in Vietnamese administration. Hence common Chinese terms on science, politics, education, and philosophy entered the common Vietnamese lexicon. The word for nation in Vietnamese languages was *quoc gia*, which was similar to *guo jia* (国家) in Mandarin. The word *Viet Nam* was similar to the Chinese character *Yue Nan* (越南), so was *chinh tri* (政治) and *kinh te* (经济). The Vietnamese currency '*dong*' sounds very much the same as the word for Chinese coin *tong ban* (铜板). The Vietnamese use the word *Tion Su* to describe scholars with PhD and higher degrees. The word *Tion Su* comes from Chinese words *Jin Shi* (进士), and the word *tam biet* was similar to the Chinese word *zan bie* (暂别). The Vietnamese term for emperor was *hoang de* (皇帝), and empress *hoang hau* (皇后) and royal family *hoang gia* (皇家), which are similar to Chinese. The words *quoc hoi* (国会), *quoc phong* (国防), *quoc ky* (国旗), *quoc phu* (国父) and *quoc te* (国际) are also similar to Chinese.

They also refer to politics as *chinh dang* (政党) which was similar to the Chinese. Also similar are *chinh phu* (政府), government, *chinh quyen* (政权), power. Other words include *vien* (*yuan* 园 in Mandarin), garden; *tam* (*tim* 心 in Hainan dialect), heart; *vo khi* (武器), weapon; *vo su* (武师), pugilist; *binh an* (平安), peace; *binh dang* (平等), equality; *chien su* (战事), war; and *chien thuat* (战术), military strategy.

The Vietnamese also follow Chinese characters to describe foreign countries such Bo Dao Nha for Portugal, similar to Chinese words Pu Tao Ya (葡萄牙). England as Anh Cat Loi and in Chinese, it is Anh Ke Li. Very similar to Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese lexicon, these terms carry a different pronunciation in Vietnamese. However, a system of establishing rules on how to pronounce Chinese characters was developed over the years. In the early days, a Vietnamese scholar had to pass the civil service examinations which comprised writings of Chinese philosophers and the spoken language of the Chinese rulers. Although the Chinese had spoken and written Chinese, the language of the courts, of bureaucracy, the urban elite and much of commerce, they were unable to supplant the Vietnamese spoken language elsewhere. Despite the adoption of tonal pronunciation and many borrowed vocabulary, language was the key factor in retaining a sense of being Vietnamese. In the countryside, culture was based on a different language with an oral tradition. How much of the Vietnamese lexicon was Chinese? Some estimates put the number at 60%. Other Vietnamese linguists have put the figure even higher. There are 5,000 entries in a recently published dictionary of Vietnamese re-duplicants, which, compared to a regular dictionary of 50,000 entries, was a significant amount. Many of these words came from the Han era, the old Sino-Vietnamese layer, all of which have lexical counterparts from the subsequent Tang dynasty. The Han dynasty imposed marriage, education and certain farming practices on the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese language, particularly those relating to kin and kinship, have Chinese origins. It would not be wrong to assume that the Vietnamese are socially conditioned by the Chinese kinship system.

However, some Sino-Vietnamese words invented by the Vietnamese are not present in Chinese vocabulary such as *linh muc*

(灵牧), spiritual shepherd or pastor. The Chinese refer to a pastor as *mu shi* (牧师). The Vietnamese language is essentially a Mon-Khmer language and did not have a tonal system and belonged to the prototypical Mon-Khmer structure. Thus, despite the heavy lexical borrowing from the Chinese language, Chinese influence on Vietnamese linguistic structure was minimal and much of it emerged only within the last several centuries. The core vocabulary of the Vietnamese language was still Mon-Khmer in origin.

Despite all the help China had given to the Vietnamese revolutionaries in their fight against French and American colonialists, the Vietnamese never forgot the 1,100 years of bitter Chinese rule. When I went to see the Water Puppet show near the Tortoise Lake, the audiences were reminded of the story of the Restoration of the Sword, describing how the Vietnamese had defeated the Chinese invaders with the sword bestowed by Heaven and how the tortoise had wanted it back after the victory. The Vietnamese opera have inherited the tradition of Chinese opera and the contents of their opera were based on the *Three Kingdoms* (三国演义) and *Journey to the West* (西游记) and performed according to Chinese tradition, except that the words were spoken in Vietnamese. It appears that up to the 15th century the Vietnamese elite were influenced culturally by the Chinese, especially the dance and music forms and the types of musical instruments. Today, the Vietnamese musical instruments are very influenced by the Chinese, except that the Vietnamese use them to play Vietnamese music, such as *gu zheng*, *er hu*, *yang qin* and the *aerophones*.

In the economic domain, most of the art and craft came from China. For example, the making of handicraft such as weaving and basket making with bamboo, rattan and fabric silk originated from China. Likewise luxury goods for use in the courts and local functionaries like engraved gold and silverware and lacquer has semblance of Chinese knowhow. Vietnamese houses, religious and other buildings and monuments were constructed according to the Chinese architectural and town planning models. Although the first rulers of independent Vietnam tried to cast off the heavy blanket of Chinese influence, notably by trying to replace Confucian elements in the

administrative and educational apparatus with Buddhist ones, they soon discovered that without such Confucian guidelines, they simply could not administer the state effectively.

Recent diggings in 1965 at the site of Chuong Son Pagoda (章山塔) built in 1105 uncovered figures of fabulous birds with human bodies among other motifs: chrysanthemums phoenixes and mostly dragons — representative of works during that period. The dragon appears a fabulous animal whose image was deeply engraved in the Vietnamese national tradition in almost all constructions. The legendary belief that Vietnamese were descendants of the Dragon was dominant. When a monarchy was established, the dragon was the paramount symbol of the king. The dragon made its appearance in China as early as the Han dynasty, with a marked hieratic character, each detail — paw, nail, scale mane — being distinctly drawn against a background of stylised clouds. The dragon in the works of Ly period looks more natural, closer to the snake from which it springs with a lithe undulating posture, a pointed tail and without complicated details. Its paws evoke birds claws and its mane that of a horse. The head was small, with wide nostrils and on top an s-shaped double curve, a characteristic feature of the bronze drums of the Dong Son period.

## **Chinese in Vietnam Under French Rule**

When the French conquered Vietnam in 1872, a French trader Jean Dupuis, an adventurer supported by Paris, penetrated the capital of Hanoi with his troops made up of Chinese pirates called Yellow Flags, the Yunnanese mercenaries. He had at his disposal a fifth column recruited among Chinese traders in the Rue des Voiles, who supplied him with funds and information. In the two French assaults on Hanoi in 1873 and 1882, Vietnamese streets were ransacked by French troops while Chinese streets remained untouched. This incident has aroused the suspicion of the Vietnamese towards the Chinese. For centuries, they hated the Chinese because they refused to be ruled by a foreign power, and now they found the Chinese cooperating with the French to suppress them. The beginnings of the French colonisation saw the increasing fortune of Chinese settlers. Vietnamese families



had to move to other streets. Until the first French war of re-conquest in 1946 the right-hand side of the Rue des Voile was occupied by the offices of Chinese agents. The Chinese built the first movie house there and called it 'The Family'. It showed Chinese films from Hong Kong as well as America. Today, the Chinese still have their own clan associations, their temples and Chinese schools teaching children their mother tongue. In festive seasons, the Chinese still celebrate their own new year and other festivals. However, almost every Chinese today speak Vietnamese and have become Vietnamese citizens. The French ruled over Vietnam, progressively from 1858 to 1886, exercising through three administrative divisions: Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin. In Cochinchina, the number of Chinese rose from 44,000 in 1873 to 56,000 in 1889, with Cholon home to 16,000 and Saigon more than 7,000. In Tonkin and Annam, Chinese were concentrated in Haiphong (海防), Hanoi (河内) and Da Nang (岷港), but they did not become nearly as numerous there as they did in the south.

Up to a point, the French encouraged immigration, contracting Chinese labourers to work as miners, rubber tappers and railroad builders. The French perpetuated the bang system instituted by earlier Vietnamese rulers, calling the groupings congregations. The five congregations of Cantonese, Teochius, Hakkas, Fujianese and Hainanese formed their own associations and were responsible for collecting taxes from individual groups. Their activities centred on the *huiguans* (会馆) they have formed. These *huiguans* were very active, looking after schools and hospitals and management of Chinese graveyards. There were over 200 Chinese schools in South Vietnam in 1956 and six hospitals before 1975. The Chinese were of immense help to the French in their exploitation of Vietnam's natural resources. They filled the French colonisers' manpower needs and provided revenue. It was the Chinese who ran most of the revenue farms, especially opium, and these were the major source of financial support for the early French colonial bureaucracy and its projects. Yet, the French discriminated against the Chinese in terms of granting of licenses which normally cost twice as much as that paid by Frenchmen. The Chinese were unhappy with such discrimination and they staged a revolt. The most famous anti-French uprising in Vietnam was led by

Phan Xich Long (潘赤龙), the ‘big brother’ of the Heaven and Earth Society (*Tiandi hui*; 天地会) a Chinese secret society from Cholon. He was executed along with 56 of his ‘brothers’ by the French and was buried in Cholon in 1916. The French monopolised all industries, including rice mills, and the industrial sector. Large French concessionary companies controlled all the mines from which Chinese had extracted coal and other minerals.

## **Prominent Chinese Military Generals**

By the end of the 17th century, the Chinese who came to seek shelter in Vietnam in large numbers were allowed by Nguyen seigneurs to settle down in the Dong Nai (同奈) basin and in the Mekong basin, the present-day population of Nam Bo (南部). There are three dominant groups: Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese, with a Vietnamese dominance in Nam Bo. In the spring of 1679, a prominent military general from China of the Long Men (龙门), Dragon Gate Regiment, Yang Yan Di (杨彦迪), accompanied by his Deputy Wang Jin (王进), together with the Commander-in-Chief of the Kau Lei, Chen Shang Chuan (陈上川) and his deputy Chen An Ping (陈安平) led 3,000 Chinese troops, deserting China and escaping to Southern Vietnam with 50 ships at a port near Saigon. They pleaded with the Vietnamese authorities for political asylum. It was during this time when the Vietnamese political leaders in the North and the South were struggling for power. They differed in their policy towards the Chinese. The Trinh lords of North Vietnam had constantly issued laws during the 17th century to tighten the control over Chinese migration. In 1666, all Chinese who wanted to live permanently in Vietnam would have to register and dress in Vietnamese garments. Temporary residents were segregated and placed away from the Vietnamese. The Nguyen lords had occupied South Vietnam and had extended their influence to Chenla (真腊), Cambodia. Under the rule of the Nguyen, the Vietnamese took a more relaxed attitude towards the Chinese, and many Chinese, especially Teochius, migrated to Vietnam. Though the Nguyen did not accept the Chinese generals, they extended their hospitality to the newcomers. On one hand, they could strengthen their

military power by absorbing the Chinese soldiers, and on the other hand, they could use the Chinese manpower to help till the rich South Vietnamese soil. The Chinese played an intricate role in the Tay Son period in the 18th century when Nguyen An (阮安) found the Chinese to be a useful source for manpower and money. When Tay Son (郑顺) raided Dong Nai Dai Pho, the main Chinese trading centre in Mekong Delta, the Chinese fled to Saigon and established what was today called the Cholon — the Chinatown of Saigon. When Tay Son captured Cholon in 1782, they massacred more than 10,000 Chinese, most of whom were Teochius. Nguyen Anh, however defeated Tay Son and recognised the semi-autonomous status of the Chinese and registered them as permanent residents.

### **Liu Yung Fook**

During the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), many supporters of the rebellion escaped to Vietnam after the rebellion ended. One of the generals of the Black Flag was Liu Yung Fook. He was 29 when he fled to Vietnam with 400 of his soldiers and helped the Vietnamese General Nguyen Van Hung (阮文雄) fight the French in 1873 in Hanoi. He succeeded in defeating the French invaders and killed 100 of them. Liu was highly praised by the Vietnamese who awarded him governor of three provinces on both sides of the Red River. Liu's Black Flag did a great deal for the Vietnamese troops. But in 1886, the Qing government ordered the Black Flag unit to return to China following a compromise they reached with the French. In 1894, when the Sino-Japanese war broke out, Liu was ordered to fight the Japanese in Taiwan. Liu Yung Fook, nicknamed Yen Ding a Hakka, was born in Qingzhou. His ancestor was from Guangxi. He was the leader of the Tien Di Hui (天地会) and many of his followers stayed back in Vietnam after he left the country. They also married Vietnamese women and became *minh huong*.

### **Chen Shang Chuan (陈上川)**

Among the Ming generals, the most successful in developing his position on Vietnamese soil was Chen Shang Chuan. He was assigned to

a region called Gia Ding (嘉定). Through the diligence and efforts of his followers, he turned Gia Ding from a barren land into a prosperous port which later became known as 'A pearl of the Far East' (东方明珠). In Gia Ding, a temple was built to commemorate Chen Sang Chuan. In 1778, Gia Ding also had an association called Minh Huong Gia Thanh, where a special tablet was erected to commemorate him. Chen was born on October 23, 1626, during the era of Emperor Kangxi, Qing dynasty in Kang Jiang City in Guangdong Province. He was brought up in a fairly rich family with his brother in business. Later, they moved to Hainan Island. In 1646, when he was only 20, he joined the anti-Qing organisation to help overthrow the Manchu dynasty. He enrolled as a soldier supporting the last emperor of Ming Yong Li (永历). He later became the Commander-in-Chief of an army led by Zheng Chenggong (郑成功), who was stationed in Taiwan. He was involved with a battle against the Qing soldiers in Qinzhou (钦州) in Guangxi and drove his enemies out and occupied it for 15 years. He protected Southeast Asian trading ships crossing Qinzhou.

Before the Manchus took over China, he brought his thousands of soldiers and migrated to Vietnam and helped the Nguyen lords to defend their country and develop their resources. Together with other generals and their soldiers, they took Vietnamese wives and made Vietnam their homeland. At the same time, they were still loyal to the Ming dynasty. He lived to a ripe old age of 90. Chen and his followers called themselves *nguai Minh Huong*, especially their descendants. Through the influence of Vietnamese mothers, the descendants of *minh huong* began to learn the Vietnamese language, dressed and behaved like Vietnamese. Unlike the *peranakans* in Indonesia, *babas* in Malaysia, the *lokjins* in Thailand or the *mestizos* in the Philippines, the *minh huong* did not develop a distinct style of dress, cuisine or language. The crossover of the Chinese to Vietnamese culture was therefore shorter and smoother. They just retained their Chinese culture and embraced Vietnamese dress and lifestyle. The Nguyen lords, of course, encourage them to do so and provided them special rights and privileges to separate them from the pure Chinese immigrants. In 1829, the Nguyen government banned

*minh huong* families from returning to China. In 1842, the government registered them separately from immigrant Chinese. The Vietnamese authorities grouped them under the category of Vietnamese instead of the Chinese. To please the *minh huong*, the authorities allowed them to sit for the imperial examinations and some became civil servants and even top government officials, rising to the rank of ministers. They paid a little more tax than the Vietnamese, but they were entitled to own land and property. Although they had Chinese blood, they adopted a Vietnamese political outlook. In fact, this group of politicians promoted the Vietnamese form of writing. This was the beginning of the switch in the assimilation process. In the past, it was the Chinese trying to assimilate the Vietnamese by force, and this time it was the Vietnamese who were beginning to assimilate the Chinese.

### **Top Minh Huong Ministers in Vietnam**

As a result of the new system introduced by the Vietnamese Ngyuen lords, many *minh huong* passed the imperial examinations and were appointed as Cabinet Ministers to help run the country. Among the most well-known were: Chen Yang Chun (陈养纯), 1813–1883, a Fujianese from Zhangzhou Longxi (漳州龙溪), who migrated to Vietnam after the fall of the Ming dynasty. In 1838, he took advantage of the new Vietnamese laws and sat for the imperial examination. He obtained the Jin Shi (进士) title and was appointed as a Cabinet Minister. He worked his way up to become a member of the Privy Council and later became Minister of Defence. He was also involved with the foreign policy making process. In 1867, he was sent as Envoy to sign an agreement with France. He died in 1883 and was succeeded by his son Ee Tek (嗣德) and when Chen Ee Tek died, he was succeeded by his own son Yue Tek (育德). The Chen family helped to rule Vietnam for three generations. Chen Yue Tek was involved in the palace politics during the period of succession of the throne. Wu Ren Jing (吴仁静), 1769–1815, a Cantonese, migrated to Gia Ding also after the fall of the Ming dynasty. He was not only a good scholar but a good writer. He passed the imperial

examination and became a Han Lin (翰林). In 1802, he was appointed as Cabinet Minister and later on rose to the rank of Minister for Labour. He wrote a book entitled *Yi An Feng Tu Ji* (义安风土记), describing the customs and traditions of the people, especially the *minh huong*. I had personally found this book useful in my attempt to study the *minh huong* lifestyle. Another well-known individual was Moh Tian Zi, a linguist who helped promote literary relations between Vietnam and Japan. He wrote many books and was better known for his poems.

## Japanese Occupation

The capitulation of France to Hitler's German army in June 1940 dragged Indochina into the war on the side of axis powers. French Indochina was unprepared for the outbreak of World War II. When the war struck, the French colonialist government called on Indochina's local reserve army including many Vietnamese and the *minh huong* and sent them to Europe to fight their war. Meanwhile, Japan had to forge an agreement with French Indochina in order to block off the aid mainly from the US, which was passing along Tonkin's Yunnan railway to Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist troops in China. Japan had signed the agreement from a military point of view, allowing France to continue to administer Indochina including Vietnam. This would enable Japan to occupy French Indochinese territories without using military force. From Tokyo's standpoint, making use of the French colonial administration appeared to be the cheapest and most effective way of maintaining calm and allowing Japan to get on with military operations elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia. From the French point of view, it would retain its colonial rights in Indochina. With the fall of France, the 40,000 Japanese soldiers stationed in Hanoi launched a surprise operation in its airbase at Gia Lam and disarmed the 90,000 French troops. The French later surrendered. French colonialism was over. Abiding with the Confucian principles of 'rectification of names', the new Japanese-sponsored regime in Vietnam ordered all French place names to be replaced by Vietnamese names.

**Ngo Dinh Diem (吴廷炎)**

Ngo Dinh Diem (1901–1963) was president of the Republic of South Vietnam from its proclamation on October 28, 1955, until his assassination on November 2, 1963. He was born into an aristocratic Roman Catholic family. The family had close ties with the Emperor and therefore he served Emperor Bao Dai during the French colonial rule which lasted till 1933. Diem, however, opposed both French colonial rule and the communist-led national independence movements during and after the war. As he was staunchly anti-communist, he rejected an offer to serve in Ho Chi Minh's brief postwar government in 1945. He was in exile, establishing key political contacts and securing American support while independence forces battled the French. He had high hopes of leading a postwar government. One chronicle dubbed Ngo as the last Confucianist who believed that Vietnam needed the benevolent, authoritarian rule of enlightened elites. Ngo Dinh Diem was a *minh huong*. His family, traditionally mandarins, had been Catholics for more than two centuries. He underwent a typical educational route studying law at the University of Hanoi. He was admitted into the imperial service and rose to



Ngo Dinh Diem

become Minister of the Interior. He was appointed by Emperor Bao Dai in 1933. But he soon resigned in protest against French colonial rule. His nationalist sentiments and credentials assured, he withdrew from public and became a priest. He accompanied his mother to live in Kansas. He grew up speaking with a Missouri accent but he retained his French citizenship. He enlisted in the French army at the outbreak of World War II, deserting when France surrendered in 1940. He managed to escape from Europe to the US, where the OSS recruited him to parachute back into France and link up with a French resistance unit. When the war ended in Europe, he transferred to Asia to join the French and Vietnamese commandos to harass Japanese posts in northern Vietnam. Committed to celibacy, Diem came under the powerful influence of his brother, who was Minister for Interior Ngo Dinh Nhu (吴廷温) and the latter's formidable wife, Mdm Nhu (温太太). He left Vietnam in late 1950s and traveled to Japan, Italy, the Philippines, the US and Belgium, enjoying the hospitality of a network of Catholic associates. In 1953, he went to France and served there till June 1954 when Bao Dai, influenced by the Eisenhower administration, invited him to become Prime Minister. He returned to Saigon in time to oppose the terms of the Geneva Agreements on Indochina. He built up his political position with the US, after crushing the criminal Binh Xuyen (平川党) organisation and two other religious sects. In October 1955, he held a spurious referendum, enabling him to remove Bao Dai as head of State of Vietnam and to have himself appointed as President of the Republic of Vietnam. He occupied Hanoi after Japan's defeat and dealt with the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh and the other Viet Minh leaders. During those early days in Vietnam, he befriended many young Vietnamese officers and political figures who later became his informants.

Before Bao Dai died in June 1954, he persuaded Diem to swear by the crucifix that he would defend Vietnam 'against the Communists and, if necessary against the French'. In naming Diem Prime Minister, he unwittingly dug his own political grave. Diem was a fervent anti-Communist, an extension of his religious beliefs. Even Ho Chi Minh respected his patriotism. When Ho Chi Minh sought



his cooperation, he refused as he was embittered by the Communist's assassination of his brother Ngo Dinh Khoi, who was the Governor of Quang Nai Province. Diem agreed to this proposal and with American help soon became a dictator President and applied a policy of systemic terror against the entire southern population. He deployed fascist methods to eliminate his opponents through massacre, torture, deportation, mass imprisonment, raids and other draconian tactics. It was the dark ages for the Vietnamese. Except for a group gathered around Ngo Dinh Bien's family, and adventurers prepared to do anything to get rich, all social classes and strata were subject to repression: peasants, workers, intellectuals, patriotic bourgeois or those who simply wanted to see an establishment of normal relations with the North, ethnic minorities, non-Catholic religious sects. Even ministers had to go into exile to escape the police. With the Americans' blessing and advice, Diem, his brothers and his notorious sister-in-law Mdm Ngo Dinh Nhu, exercised his powers of life and death over the people.

For a while, Washington thought that US domination in South Vietnam had been achieved and called Diem 'the Churchill of Asia'. In Hue, his elder brother was the Archbishop who prohibited the Buddhist from displaying their flags during Vesak celebrations commemorating Buddha's birthday. A few days later, Catholics were allowed to fly their religious flags. This led to a massive protest led by Thich Tri Quang against the government, which was suppressed by Diem's forces. He undertook massive cleansing of 'demonic' elements in society with brothels and opium dens shut down. He made divorce and abortion illegal and enforced punitive judgements on those who committed adultery. Diem pitted himself against the Communists. He witchhunted the communists and was known for torturing and killing Communist suspects daily. Around 50,000 died, with 75,000 imprisoned. He initiated the Strategic Hamlet Program, the cornerstone of the counterinsurgency effort. This called for the consolidation of 14,000 villagers of South Vietnam into 11,000 hamlets. Every hamlet had designated residential areas, schools, wells and watchtowers. This was because the NLF (National Liberation Front) used the villages to recruit soldiers, distributed supplies and gather

information. The hamlet programme isolated the NLF and dismantled their supply chains. The first clashes with the Diem army and police took place in remote villages and mountain regions. In January 1960, in the Mekong River delta province of Ben Tre (檳知), the people's forces toppled the Diem administration in many localities and set up an autonomous people's power. The crisis had reached the cities and even Saigon. On December 20, 1960, these numerous anti-Diem organisations throughout the country gathered under the auspices of NLF with the aim of overthrowing the Diem regime. The Americans under the Kennedy administration launched a 'special war' strategy by adding more advisers and swelling its troops to 25,000. All the categories of puppet troops — regular, regional and local were reinforced to reach half a million men in 1964. The American airforce was augmented to 500 and they sent in more modern arms with a view to destroy Vietnam's liberation forces. With repeated failures in their operations, the Americans realised that Diem's civilian dictatorship could no longer stand against the situation.

US support began to wane in the wake of Buddhist demonstrations and self-immolations and the Kennedy administration were persuaded to counter a military coup by dissident army officers. On May 8, 1963, on Buddha's birthday, Buddhists in the Hue demonstrated against Diem's ban on the public display of religious flags. The government troops eventually fired on the protestors, killing nine and wounding 14. The incident triggered widespread protests against the government especially because Diem refused to accept responsibility and blamed the Viet Cong's instead. The US persuaded Diem to reconcile with the Buddhists and win back popular support in fear of massive political turmoil that would undermine the war effort. On the contrary, on August 21, special units loyal to Nhu looted pagodas all over the country detaining over 1,400 monks. The raids shattered any possibility of appeasing the Buddhists. The US tacitly approved a *coup d'état* to remove Diem. At 1.30 pm in November 1963, General Duong Van Minh led a CIA backed *coup d'état* in an assault of the Presidential Palace. On the morning of November 1963, Diem and his adviser, younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu were arrested after the Army of the Republic of Vietnam successfully sieged Gia Long Palace

in Saigon. The bloody coup ended nine years of nepotism in South Vietnam. Latent discontent with the Diem regime reached a tipping point when Buddhist protested against religious discrimination and government shooting of protesters. Diem and Nhu fled to the Cholon area of Saigon. They eventually surrendered but were murdered in the back of an armored personnel carrier. Diem's death brought continued turmoil as successive military governments failed to do any better against the Communist insurgency directed from the northern part of country.

## My Early Visits to Saigon

The first time I visited Vietnam was in 1963, when I led a small delegation to invite the Vietnamese cultural troupe to the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival organised in Singapore. At that time and the country was split into two parts — the Communist controlled north and the democratic south. We went to Saigon, which was then a beautiful and artistic city, shaded with green trees along the avenues like Paris. The city was then known as Saigon and not Ho Chi Minh. Saigon was then under President Ngo Dinh Diem and his sister-in-law Madam Nhu, the power behind the presidency.

The word *Saigon* was the phonetic transcription of an aboriginal Vietnamese, Chinese or Khmer word whose meaning was lost as time passed. Most historians would accept the explanation that 'Saigon' got its pronunciation from the name of the Vietnamese ceiba tree. The tree was called 'cay goong' or 'cay gon' in Vietnamese. Saigon was a word consisting of two parts: 'Sai' was a Chinese borrowing, meaning 'wood'; and 'gon' in Vietnamese means 'ceiba'. Some other people try to link the name 'Saigon' with the Khmer word 'Preikor'. One also wonders why the Southern Chinese had to transcribe 'Saigon' as 'Tay cong' if the reasons were purely phonetic. The word *Saigon* needs further study. In Vietnam, we called on the then Minister for Civic Action, Ngo Tong Hieu (吴东就). We were introduced to two beautiful Vietnamese films stars, Tham Thuy Hang (谭美月) and Li Kam Seng (黎金成), who met us in their Vietnamese outfit, *aodai*. We visited the Vietnamese theatre and the Minister



Tham Thuy Hang

gave us their programme which included a dance drama entitled '*Women in Wartime*' and a dance named '*Fairy in Love*'. Tham Thuy Hang was then the leading star in Vietnam. In August 1963, Vietnam sent a 50-member delegation to attend Singapore's Southeast Asian Cultural Festival. The Vietnamese drum dance was spectacular and it captivated the attention of the crowd. The Minister Ngo expressed to me his interest in studying our TV setup because he felt that Vietnam could learn a lot from us. Tham Thuy Hang was the main attraction because she was a well-known film star in Vietnam. In Saigon, here and there I saw American soldiers embracing the waists of Vietnamese ladies in their *aodai*. I was particularly impressed by the *aodai* which the Vietnamese ladies were wearing. It was the first time I had seen it. It was a kind of *cheongsam* (长衫) with a tight-fitted pants covering the legs. Most of them put on colourful hats and they looked charming when they rode bicycles with the tail of their *cheongsam* flowing in the winds, yet modestly covered from top to toe. We went to the Chinatown of Saigon called Cho

Lon where we saw nothing but Teochiu-speaking Chinese people. The Chinese originally settled down in Cu Lao Pho (古老埔) region, the site of the current town of Bien Hoa (棉华). The Cu lao Pho market, which the Chinese had built, was burnt down in 1777 when the Tay Son peasant forces fiercely fought against the Nguyen forces. The Chinese abandoned their Cu lao Pho market and settled down in Minh Huong village, the current site of the Cho Lon market. The Cho Lon was built by a group of Chinese in 1788 and it remains home to more than 500 Chinese. It gives an interesting glimpse of Sino-Vietnamese life, as it retains Chinese cultural traditions. Most of the residents in Cho Lon are *minh huongs*. The Chinese are known to set up markets for exchanging goods wherever they settle down. The Chinese built a new market on the site of the current Cho Lon post office. As the new market grew bigger, people began to call it Cho Lon which means ‘the big market’. Trinh Hoai Duc (郑怀德), a *minh huong* scholar, described Cho Lon in his book, *Monograph on Gia Dinh Town* as streets and house roofs that run continuously, shoulder to shoulder. Chinese and Vietnamese families live next to each other within a distance of three miles. People sell velvets, china-ware, paper, jewellery, books, medicines, tea and powder. All kinds of goods followed sea routes and rivers to reach them. Likewise, Le Van Phu (黎文步), the Governor of Gia Dinh-Bien, wrote that the ‘streets extend, the goods pile up, the rivers serpent, boats and carts line up like waves’.

Trading at Cho Lon became so attractive that many people poured into the neighbourhood to settle down. The area became congested. A Chinese merchant, Quach Dam, bought 25,000 sqm of marshland in Binh Tay (平西) hamlet and filled it up with earth. He proposed to the authority of Cho Lon Province that he would build a new market of reinforced concrete for the province and in return, the province should allow him to build some streets with houses for rental. The local authority agreed and Quach built the new Cho Lon market with houses. After seven decades, the Binh Tay market still looks beautiful. It remains one of the busiest markets in Saigon which has now become the Ho Chi Minh city.

## **Hanoi (河内)**

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam for almost 1,000 years, was an interesting sight. I noticed that street names express the Vietnamese world-view. The street names help foreign travelers to grasp the spirit and culture of the Vietnamese. Hanoi has 320 streets, 31% of which were named after different periods of foreign aggression, namely, 58 names against Chinese aggression, 61 names against French aggression and 2 names against US aggression. It was only natural that Chinese occupation which lasted more than 10 centuries, and French occupation which spanned 80 years together, took the lion's share of about 60 names each. American aggression, which happened only in recent years, took place at a time when all streets were already named. Liberation Road (解放), Duong Gai Phong and Victory over B52's Road (Duong Chien Thang B52) which later became Truong Chinh (长征路) Road.

The names of great personalities, besides those who distinguished themselves in struggles against foreign aggressions account for half of the total of 320 streets. There are also streets named after scholars and poets who were not resistance heroes. The longest street in Hanoi was named after Ly Thuong Kiet (李常杰) 1019–1105, a brilliant general in the 11th century who led an army of 100,000, men and resisted the invasion of China's Song army. The street was 2 km long, corresponding to the old Boulevard Carreau under the French colonial administration. As a young man, Ly showed a passion for literary studies and the martial arts. At the age of 23, he became a mandarin eunuch and served under three kings. At the age of 50, he commanded an expedition against the turbulent kingdom of Champa (1069) in order to establish peace along Vietnam's frontier. His reputation grew after his victories over the Chinese Song aggressors. The Ly Thuong Kiet Street could be found in every major city in Vietnam. The second most popular street name in Vietnam was Tran Hung Dao, a Vietnamese general who won one of the most illustrious military victory over the Mongol invaders in the 13th century. In 1252, Kublai Khan demanded that Vietnam allow his troops to pass through their country in order to penetrate

Southern China, but Tran Hung Dao refused, resulting in the Mongolian invasion. The Vietnamese King wanted to surrender hoping to spare the lives of his citizens, but Tran Hung Dao told the King, 'If such was your will then have me be beheaded first'. He succeeded in galvanising the people that provided stiff resistance, driving out the invaders after six months. The supply lines to the Mongolian troops were cut off and the harsh climate caused havoc to the invading troops resulting in their withdrawal. Another famous street Hai Ba Trung was named after the resistance heroes, the Trung sisters (徵姐妹) who lived in the first century. The first major Vietnamese insurrection against China was led by Trung Trac (徵侧), a titled lady who wanted to avenge the murder of her dissident husband. Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi (徵贰) mobilised other fractitious factions and their vassals. This included Ms Phung Thi Chinh, who in the midst of the battle supposedly gave birth to a baby, but persevered to fight with the infant strapped to her back. They subdued the Chinese forces in 40 AD and established an independent state that stretched from Hue into southern China. The Trung sisters were installed as queens. Their reign only lasted two years when the Chinese returned to defeat them. In shame, the Trung sisters threw themselves into a river. This was the aristocratic style of suicide in Vietnam. In Hanoi, the two sisters are venerated in temples and even a street is named after them.

Madam Ngo Dinh Nhu, sister-in-law of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem, erected a statue in Saigon in 1962 in her own image to commemorate the patriotism of the Trung sisters. She also claimed that she was the reincarnation of Trung Trac. Vietnam was saturated with women heroes. In 248 AD, another woman, Trieu Au (朝幼), often touted as the Joan of Arc of Vietnam, staged a revolt against China. Riding an elephant and clothed with armour, she led 1,000 men into battle. This came a generation after the collapse of the Han dynasty. Unfortunately, the challenge was crushed and she committed suicide at the age of 23 rather than suffer the shame of defeat. Like the Trung sisters, she was remembered in a temple with her words of defiance: 'I want to rail against the wind and the tide, kill the whales

in the sea, sweep the whole country to save the people from slavery, and I refuse to be abused'.<sup>2</sup>

Hanoi has many streets that commemorate military heroes who drove Chinese invaders away. In every dynasty from the Tang onwards, there was always a Vietnamese general who fought against the Chinese and the streets commemorate their names. In the Tang dynasty, there was a Vietnamese hero by the name of Ngo Quyen (吴权), a native of Duong Lam Village, renowned as the man who vanquished the Chinese from Vietnam. Another Vietnamese General Phung Hung (冯兴) was the first of a long line of great Vietnamese revolutionaries who led a rebellion against China during the Tang dynasty. Phung Hung and his troops advanced on the Tong Binh Citadel (now Hanoi Citadel), the Tang military stronghold, and overwhelmed its defenders. He claimed sovereignty and ruled until his death, seven years later. During the Sung dynasty, a Vietnamese Commander Tong Dan, one of the heroes of the Ly Dynasty, made a pre-emptive strike deep into Chinese territory. Sung Dynasty was known for its weak defenses. Tong's troops went as far as the capital of Guangxi, Nanning. They besieged the city for 42 days, destroying weapons, munitions and withdrew to Vietnam. Today, the Tong Dan Street provided refuge for people living on the other side of the dyke when they were displaced from their homes during the floods. At the southern end of Tong Dan Street, across from the back of Hanoi ornate Opera House, stands a stately museum that present Vietnam's revolutionary history. There was a street called Tran Binh Trong (陈平仲), named after the general whose army drove the Mongolians away. General Tran served during the Tran Dynasty in the 13th century. He intercepted and held off the Mongolian forces, thereby buying time for the Tran king to escape south to Thien Trong Palace. General Trong was captured by the Yuan and offered a high post in their feudal system if he would surrender his troops and cooperate. He refused and was beheaded. Another Vietnamese, General Tran Hung Dao succeeded in repelling the Mongolians during two

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<sup>2</sup>HTML document for the World Wide Web — VIETNAM VETERANS HOME PAGE. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.vietvet.org/visit/px/viethist.htm>



invasions in 1285 and 1288. A street was named after him. Yet another street was named after another General Tran Nhan Tong who fought against the Mongolians.

During the Ming dynasty, a Vietnamese general Dinh Le (丁黎), one of Le Loi's commanders revolted against Ming rule. His forces advanced north to Nghe An where their success inspired the local population to join them in overthrowing the Ming. They defeated the Ming forces and set the stage for a complete victory and consolidation of the Ly Dynasty.

## **The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**

I visited Hanoi again in recent years when I went there to discuss a business deal for the Vietnamese government. It was quite a different city compared to Ho Chi Minh. It was more beautiful and peaceful and has many lakes. I visited the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum in the city. It housed Ho's embalmed body and resembled Lenin's tomb in Moscow. Ho, incidentally, had specified in his will that he wanted his ashes placed in three ceramic urns, each was to be buried in unmarked hilltops in the north, centre and south of Vietnam. 'Cremation' he wrote 'is not only good from the point of view of hygiene, but it also saves farmland'.<sup>3</sup> But his Communist party heirs, sought to bask in his glory and conveniently ignored his wish, and in their gesture to honour him built a mausoleum that caused a sensation when his former secretary revealed the will in 1989. One official defended the action, however, telling his people that 'We put Uncle Ho on display because he belongs to the people'. There was a long queue of Vietnamese and foreigners waiting to view the face of Ho Chi Minh. Scores of them carried infants, and many wept as they gazed at the waxen corpse of their saviour. He was the first President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam when he was appointed in August 1945, replacing the former Emperor Bao Dai who self-exiled in Hong Kong.

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<sup>3</sup>Streaming Movies Available at Every Nook and Corner of Web (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.ideamarketers.com/?streaming\\_movies&articleid=1471327](http://www.ideamarketers.com/?streaming_movies&articleid=1471327).

## Vietnamese Independence and the Boat People

When the French withdrew from Vietnam and with the division of the country, some 45,000 Chinese quit the north for the south in 1954. However with Ngo Dinh Diem, a *minh huong*, as President of the South, he barred non-nationals from 11 trades, including rice milling and transportation. The administration tried to eliminate what was believed to have been the foreign control of the economy. To assimilate the Chinese, the Saigon Government decreed that children born to Chinese-Vietnamese couples were Vietnamese citizens, and that all Chinese born in Vietnam were Vietnamese citizens whether they liked it or not. It was the most drastic action taken by any government to absorb an alien minority. Being a *minh huong*, he was determined to make the Chinese follow what his ancestors did in the earlier years. While facing problems in the South, disasters also struck the Chinese in the north when in 1975, the Hanoi government stripped Chinese of their livelihood. They implemented currency reforms between 1975 to 1978 and staged a campaign against what they called an anti-comprador bourgeoisie, depriving wealthy Chinese of their properties and had many of them arrested. The Chinese lost about US\$2 billion. In mid-1975, with the unification of North and South Vietnam, the Hoa communities in both regions numbered an estimate 1.3 million. About 200,000 resided in the Saigon metropolitan area, especially in the Cholon district (Chinatown) in the South. The Hoa underwent persecution at the dawn of 1975, with the socialist transformation that took place in the South. Ethnic Chinese were forced to adopt Vietnamese citizenship. Those who detested the heavy taxes and discrimination had their daily food rations reduced or confiscated. Further in 1977, new laws were instituted to prevent enrolment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnamese civil service or employment in public enterprises. They could not even engage in retail or farming and could not relocate at will. Some who were distrusted, were forced to fill repatriation forms, had their properties confiscated and exiled from the country. Ethnic Chinese with Vietnamese citizenship suffered job discrimination and were denied voting rights. By April 1977, Vietnam began to expel both Chinese, the *minh huongs* and non-Vietnamese

minorities from Sino-Vietnamese border areas into China. Even as Vietnam began to escalate its border conflict with Kampuchea, the ethnic Chinese were constantly under surveillance and harassment. Given the trust deficit, massive expulsions of ethnic Chinese nationwide increased prior to the invasion. Distrust deepened in 1978, as China announced reforms as part of its Four Modernisations programme to protect its overseas citizens as well as re-establish relations with its diaspora to encourage foreign investment.

As early as 1978, Chinese in Ho Chi Minh protested against discrimination, confiscation of their properties, expulsions and nullification of their nationality. The communist government abolished private trade in 1978. About 30,000 police cordoned off the Cholon district on March 23, 1978. Massive search and destroy operations resulted in looting and confiscation in every house and shop in the district. About 50,000 retailers lost their goods and valuables in this operation. The operation escalated to other parts of the country and was systematically conducted with target quotas set for each area. About 30,000 businesses closed down when wholesale trade and large business transactions were outlawed on March 24, 1978. This forced businessmen to retreat to the countryside and become farmers. They joined the armed forces to fight at the Vietnam–Kampuchea border. Vietnamese currencies, old and foreign currencies in excess of US\$250 for urban households and US\$150 for rural households were confiscated.

A massive exodus of Hoa and *minh huongs* took place as a result of the above measures coupled with external disputes with Cambodia and China in 1978 and 1979, respectively. About 170,000 from the north fled into the province of Guangxi, China, and the rest fled by boat from the South. China witnessed daily influx of refugee arrivals numbering 4,000 to 5,000. Southeast Asian countries received some 5,000 boat people in their shores each month. While China attempted to evacuate ethnic Chinese refugees, they were challenged by the Vietnamese government, which denied persecution and terminated exit permits. About 250,000 Chinese who had applied for repatriation were stranded. A diplomatic tussle ensued as Vietnam responded negatively to China's advise to the former to change its policies towards ethnic Chinese in an attempt to stem the refugee flow

and nullify accusations that Beijing was instrumental in coaxing its citizens to emigrate. China eventually closed its land border in 1955. The number of boat people increased, with as many as 100,000 refugees who fled to other countries by the end of 1978. The Vietnamese instead charged five to ten taels of gold or an equivalent of US\$1,500 to \$3,000 per person if they wished to leave the country.

One of the factors contributing to the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979 was the expulsion and harassing of ethnic Chinese. The Sino-Vietnamese war exacerbated the refugee crises. The refugees arriving in Southeast Asia every month totaled 11,000 during the first quarter of 1979. It reached 28,000 in April, and 55,000 in June. More than 90,000 fled to China by boat. 260,000 refugees were stranded in China while 400,000 surviving boat refugees were in Southeast Asia. About 50–70% of the refugees died in the sea. The majority of the Hoa had fled or had been expelled from Vietnam by the end of 1980s. In China alone there were some 30,000 ethnic Vietnamese. About 300,000 of the Sino-Vietnamese population have been resettled in 194 refugee settlements in the provinces of Guangdong, Yunnan, Fujian, Hainan, Jiangxi and Guangxi. In the rural areas, most of the refugees live below the poverty line though about 85% of those who successfully fled to China had achieved economic independence. Many of them share the same rights as Chinese nationals including employment, education, housing and property ownership, pensions and health facilities. However they might not have been granted citizenship and continue to be regarded by the government as refugees. In 2007, the Chinese Government began drafting legislation to grant full Chinese citizenship to Indochina refugees. Men, women and children who fled from Vietnam for foreign havens increased by the month as they sought temporary refuge in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesian, Macao, Hong Kong and the Philippines. Only Hong Kong took in the boat people while the rest waited in refugee camps for repatriation to Australia, America, Canada, Europe and New Zealand. Most of them came from Haiphong, and many of them were entrepreneurs, shop owners, tailors and restaurateurs. Without exception, these were told they would have to move to rural labour camps or leave the country. For those who could afford, they paid taels of gold for a passage on a motorised boat or a sail boat, risking uncertain

fate on the high seas including the risk of death. The rich left quickly, while the poor took longer to raise the money. The boat people had to face insurmountable obstacles. There were pirates who robbed them of their cash and threw them into the sea. Some boats were drowned and consumed by the sharks. Out of the misery of the refugees fleeing the country, the Vietnam authorities made as much as two billion dollars by expelling their unwanted citizens. In late July 1979, a national conference was convened by the United Nations in Geneva to deal with the refugee problem of Indochina, refugees mainly from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The Philippines Government agreed to make a site available for the processing of 50,000 people. Earlier, President Jimmy Carter had said that the US 7th Fleet would be deployed to aid refugees in the troubled sea. Hong Kong took the brunt of having to accommodate the refugees. They put up massive, sinister pompadour of barbed wire fence for most of its length and it was difficult to visualise anyone getting over it. Till recent years, Hong Kong had a great deal of problems with the refugees.

## **Present-Day Chinese in Vietnam**

Today, however, large numbers of Chinese and *minh huongs* are returning to Vietnam as Vietnam has abandoned the communist-style controlled economy and moved towards a more open society. Doi Moi reforms have taken over and a new stage has begun for Vietnam's economic and political development. Since the late 1980s, the overseas Chinese who fled Vietnam have returned and have provided a major impetus for foreign investment in the country. Having roots in Vietnam, these Hoa and *minh huong* have returned to help boost the economy of the country because they love their motherland and want to contribute their part in the advancement of the country, despite the dark period of the 1970s when they were expelled by the communist regime. Through their influence, businessman from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, largely populated by ethnic Chinese have emerged as the most important investors in Vietnam. The Cholon district of Ho Chi Minh City would be as vibrant again. This bastion of Chinese enterprise, devastated during the crackdown on capitalists in 1978 had begun to rejuvenate.

The Cholon's largest business group was the Viet-Hoa (Vietnamese-Chinese Bank), established in 1992 by more than 50 shareholders, most of whom are ethnic Chinese. The Viet Hoa Bank (越华银行) with a market capitalisation of US\$5.5 million in 1994 had provided four-fifth of its deposits as a loan, mainly for construction projects. The new 20-storey commercial tower in Cholon, a market in the central highland city of Dalat, and a housing complex in Ho Chi Minh City are good examples. During the past few years, thousands of ethnic Chinese have returned to Vietnamese soil. With their roots in Vietnam, they have established workshops processing food, producing textiles and garments, or assembled electronic equipment. Researchers say Cholon's ethnic Chinese now control two-thirds of the small-scale industrial output and one-third of the trading activities in Ho Chi Minh City, although they account for less than 10% of the city's population. Vietnam has now more than one million ethnic Chinese. In Ho Chi Minh city alone there are about 500,000 with 30,000 in Hanoi. Since the beginning of 1990s, China and Vietnam have re-established ties, their quarrel made obsolete after the collapse of the former USSR. Now they concentrate on economic development. The political divisions which have split the Indochinese peninsula for decades are disappearing, and the time was ripe for reconstruction, cooperation and investment. The Chinese leader Jia Qinglin (贾庆林), member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee visited Hanoi in 2006. Jia, remarked that China-Vietnam relations had never been better all through history. Jia was on an official visit to Vietnam from 20 to 24 March 2006 and met with Nong Duc Manh, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Jia said that China was committed to work with Vietnam to enrich and expand the content of the agreement that both countries have reached.

## **Overcoming the Persecution Complex**

Throughout history, Vietnam had never experienced peace. They were colonised by China for 1,100 years; later the French came, followed by the Japanese and then the Americans. Because of the

bitter experiences with foreigners, they have acquired a persecution complex. The Vietnamese never trusted any foreigner. Vietnam had wanted foreign investment to help develop the country, but the older generation of leaders have not shed this complex which remains an obstacle to the influx of foreign investments. They do not believe that any foreign country would want to come to help them. They believe that the foreigners always have an axe to grind or what they want was profit and nothing else. They are afraid of allowing foreigners to make money and suspect their intentions. They are more familiar with fighting foreign invasions and do not have any experience dealing with foreign investments. It appears that the new Vietnamese leaders have to overcome such a complex in order to make headway in the country's economic development. Besides the smooth development of political relationship, the economic cooperation between Vietnam and China over the past few years have also blossomed. The two-way trade value increased from 1.318 billion US dollars in 1999 to 2.4 billion dollars in 2000, 2.8 billion dollars in 2001 and 3.65 billion dollars in 2002. In the first month of 2004 alone, the value of two-way trade was 3.169 million dollars, a year-on-year increase of 76.3%, according to local newspapers. Meanwhile, China's investment in Vietnam has increased. In the first three months of 2003, Vietnam granted licenses to five more new Chinese investment projects with a total registered capital of US\$16.65 million. Chinese-funded projects have reached Vietnam's 35 provinces which make China the 10th leading investor in Vietnam. China has helped to develop Vietnam's copper mine and other natural resources such as aluminum as well as hydroelectric power plants and electricity power plants. The Vietnamese leaders' decision to reinvent its economic planning from one of state control to that of the market economy has transformed the country. Even her most bitter enemy who instigated the Vietnam war, the US, has invested in billions of dollars to stimulate the Vietnamese economy. From the point of view of economic growth, Vietnam was fast becoming one of the most promising countries in Southeast Asia.

## Chapter Seven

# Sino-Laos and the Hmong (苗) in Laos

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The word ‘*Lao*’ means an elder or towering person, suggesting that Laotians were tall people. This word might have also been derived from the word ‘*Dao*’, which means the sky of the highest point, because Laotians preferred highlands to build their homes. The Laotian race was believed to have co-existed with the Chinese since the ancient times. However, Laos (老挝) is almost hermetically sealed from the outside world. It is a landlocked country, surrounded by lofty mountains, some as high as 2,800 m. Because of its topography, the rural character and the traditional way of life, more than 70 different tribes continued their existence. Laos was known as the land of a million elephants and the white parasol of Luang or *Somdet Prachao Lane Xang Hom Khao Luang Prabhan* in Laotian. One could trace their ancestry back to Khoun Borom, the first King of Laos, the legendary descendant of heaven who ruled an earthly kingdom near Meuang Then, or place of heavenly spirits, somewhere in Southern China. Unlike the literate Chinese, the ancient Laotians had no scribes to chronicle their history. Twenty-one kings followed Khun Lo, the first king, but it was not until the 14th century did history take note of one of the famous King Fa Ngum (1316–1393), who was exiled when he was young. He married a Khmer princess and later became a Buddhist. He was the grandson of Souvanna Khamphong, the Ruler of Khun Lo. He lived in exile in the court of Angkor with his father. Furnished with an army by his Cambodian father-in-law, Fa Ngum fought his way back and seized the throne. He then declared Buddhism the state religion of the kingdom.



Laos has always been a multi-ethnic society. About 40% of the population is composed of ethnic minorities. Distinguished by their own customs, beliefs, dressing, dialects and rituals, they were largely in remote areas where modernity had little influence and where they could preserve their traditional social structures and value systems. While the state religion of Laos is Buddhism, many of the inhabitants in the rural communes were animists. They identify themselves through their distinctive garments. It was believed that the Thais were Chinese descendents who began migrating southwards from China in the first millennium AD.

## **Ancient Sino-Laos Relations**

Laos established diplomatic relations with China since the Yuan dynasty (元朝). In 1338 AD, an envoy from Laos visited China and established administrative control of the military and civilians (军民总管府). Then, by 1353 AD, the Laotian hero Fa Ngum (法昂) united the whole country and named his Kingdom the 'Kingdom of Lan Cang' (澜沧王国). This kingdom's relation with the Ming rulers was cordial. According to Ming historical records, the Kingdom of Lan Xang (1400 AD to 1613 AD) paid tribute to the Ming Court 34 times, and the Ming Court sent envoys to China nine times. During the Qing dynasty, the Kingdom of Lan Xang paid tribute to the Qing Court 21 times. Among the most precious items of Laotian tribute to China emperors were huge elephants, especially those in white and fragrant timber (檀香木). The Chinese emperors in return provided Chinese silk, porcelain, ginseng, bronze, and red umbrellas, which the Laotians cherished. Chinese traders travelled deep into the Laotian jungle, sometimes accompanied by 200 to 300 horses and buffaloes loaded with such goods. It was a difficult and dangerous journey. From the time, the Ming Emperor Yung Lo sent Admiral Zheng He to Southeast Asia, there were already Chinese immigrants in Laos. By the end of the Ming dynasty and the beginning of Qing, it was estimated that there were 3,000 Chinese immigrants in Laos. By the 18th century, the Chinese dominated trade there. In Laos, it was easy to find traces of Chinese

influence in Laotian lifestyle, for example, in clothing, language, customs and traditions. The Laos referred to the Chinese Emperor as Tian Wang (天王), which means the Emperor of Heaven (天朝皇帝). The Tai tribe, like the Chinese divided the 12 months according to 12 types of animals. Laotian tribes, especially the Hmong (苗) and Yao (瑶) read Chinese and were acutely influenced by Chinese culture. A Japanese scholar (岩团庆治) pointed out that the basic culture of the Yao was based on the Chinese culture.

### **Intermarriages Between Chinese and Laotians**

Intermarriages between Chinese and Laotians were not as common as in other countries in Southeast Asia. The Chinese in Laos married Laotian girls when they migrated to Laos, but Laos, unlike its Southeast Asian neighbours, has not assigned unique names to Sino-Laotian offspring. In Laos, they were just referred to as 'Sino-Laos'. In Laos, the Chinese who took Lao girls as wives had been referred to as *Haw*. In such marriages, it was common for the male offspring to learn Chinese. It was also common for the men in such marriages to take Chinese wives and was easily made to believe as pure Chinese. The female offspring of mixed marriages on the other hand, were more likely to grow up speaking Laotian and marry into the Lao community so that the mixing of blood gets perpetuated through the matrilineal line. In the past, there were more intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and Laotian girls, as there were not too many Chinese women. The Chinese found Laotian girls mild in temperament, gentle and hospitable. The early Chinese migrants came to Lao as single men seeking a livelihood, and many married local girls. This opened the door for commercial ventures and to own property. Some of the successful merchants maintained shops in Laos and quite possibly wives and families on both sides, i.e. in China and in Laos.

Traditional Lao society preferred paternal filiations against maternal ones for citizenship rights. Hence a child fathered by a Chinese would be regarded a Chinese. Chinese fathers take their sons with them when they file a divorce and leave their daughters

with their mothers. In order to be naturalised, couples will require an uninterrupted residency of 10 years but it was reduced to five years for foreign-born or foreign-married Laotians with a mandatory requirement to speak the language. The upper Chinese classes very often abandoned their Chineseness and usually identified themselves with Laotians. For Chinese women married into a Laotian home, they embraced their husband's identity and eventually their descendants assimilated into the Lao society. When Pathet Lao assumed power, he feared Chinese subversion and hence introduced a more restrictive Naturalisation Act. This was slowly reversed in the 1990s with the normalisation of Sino-Laos relations. With that the paternal filiations were treated equally with maternal filiations. This opened the door for more children fathered by Chinese to obtain Lao nationality when they reached their legal age of maturity. Likewise, children with foreign parentage could exercise their option of obtaining Lao citizenship when they matured. Today, about two-thirds of the third and fourth generation of young adults who belong to the Association of Chinese in Vientiane have become Laotians.

Many second-generation Chinese who always lived in Laos had the opportunity to be naturalised with the change in laws. The remnant Chinese were not allowed to own real estate as they were treated as foreigners. Nevertheless, the naturalisation process remains difficult and only a few applications are successful. One Lao civil servant of Chinese origin narrated his paternal grandfather's view of not making an official application, but to cover up one's origins until eventually the administration inadvertently starts to consider them as Laotian. He cited the case of a first cousin who, instead of silent assimilation, had rigorously made official applications for several years without any success, although he was born and bred in Laos. Since 1990, 300 people in the province had acquired Lao nationality, 108 of them in 1996, according to the Association of Chinese in Vientiane. It appears that the well-to-do families who could meet the 'expenses' of this extensive application process and who had close connections with the bureaucracy had been more successful than those who could not fuel the rent-seeking behaviour of bureaucrats.

## **Cultural Characteristics of Chinese and Sino-Laotians**

There was a saying that the Chinese in Laos live in a fool's paradise as not many of them were highly educated. They were more pragmatic and materialistic and cared for money more than anything else. They believe that if you had money, everything would be alright. They shun politics and as Laos was isolated from the world, they were not aware of what was happening outside of Laos. Laos had 43 radio stations and 32 TV stations, with 9 daily newspapers and 90 magazines. The English language daily *Vientiane Times* and the French language weekly *Le Rénovateur* were the two foreign-language papers that were published by the government in addition to all local language papers. The local newspaper in Laotian language was *Pasaxon*. The National paper was *Vientiane Mail*. The country's official news agency, the *Khao San Pathet Lao*, published singed versions in English and French. Internet cafes proliferated in the major urban centres and were popular, especially with the younger generation. There was only one Chinese primary school in the whole of Laos. The name of the school was Liao Du Chinese School, with an enrolment of about 800 students providing classes from kindergarten to Secondary Two. There were 13 rooms and 17 teachers, including French-speaking teachers. The school adopts Chinese books published in Taiwan. I strongly believe that the authorities design a tightly scheduled curriculum in school to discourage students from getting interested or to be involved with politics. In Vientiane, the ordinary people were more knowledgeable about everyday matters like the price of food than they were about politics. The Laotians were polite, spoke with a soft voice, were known to be seldom riled up and generally adhered strictly to Buddhism. They were also easily contented and do not expect too much in life, having strong beliefs in destiny and fortune telling. They abhor killing. When Cambodia slaughtered millions of their own people during the 'cultural revolution', Laos did it differently; they went through a bloodless revolution. The Chinese, especially those who have had Laotian wives, had been very much influenced by this genteel disposition of the Laotians.

## Ethnic Diversity in Laos

The Chinese population in Laos was small compared to the other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Its mountainous, landlocked terrain had made Laos less attractive for commercial development. Hence, fewer Chinese traders flock to Lao compared to Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Laos was ethnically diverse. Half of the population who were ethnic Laotian was known locally as Lao Loum (老龙族), and were closely related to the Lao-speaking inhabitants of Thailand. These were the people of the Mekong lowlands who were found in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Thakhek, Savannakhet and Pakse. The Lao Loum began to move from the north into Southeast Asian peninsular about 1,000 years ago. All Lao Loum speak languages of the Tai-Kadai family. They practiced Hinayana Buddhism and encouraged their children to embrace monkhood once in their lifetime. They also practice monogamy, but encourage free love. Lao Loum and Lao Tai (老泰) make up 66% of the population, the Lao Theung (老听族) a further 31% and the Lao Soung (老松) the remainder. The Lao Tai constitute the sub-groups of *Tai Phuan* of Xinagkhoang province, the *Tai Neua*, or *Tai* of the north, the *Phu Tai*, *Black Tai* and the *Red Tai*. Both the latter names refer to the dress of the women. The Lao Tai could be found throughout the country but chiefly in upland areas, and their various dialects were mutually understood. In order to safeguard the Laotian monarchy, royalists such as the Lao Soung fought against the Communist Pathet Lao government in 1975. This triggered the migration of Laotians and Chinese to US and Australia from the 1960s to 1980s to escape from the communist government. The Lao Theung (Mon-Khmer) includes many groups of people scattered throughout Laos, northeastern Myanmar, northern Thailand and Southern China. They were sometimes referred to as *Khao*, meaning 'slave', which traditionally meant cheap labour. Midland Lao still has had a lower standard of living than other ethnic groups. Another tribe in Laos was called Lao Soung (老松族), which includes the Hmongs, the Yaos, the Ho and others. They constitute about 9% of the population. They live in the mountains as high as 900–2,000 m.

Most of them originated from China, especially Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. Their clothes were similar to their cousins in China. Amongst them, the most dynamic was the Hmongs. They were the indigenous people of Laos. They could be identified by their black and curly hair and broad noses. They have had no written language. Except for a minority who believed in Buddhism, most of them were animists. Three times a year, they organised a feast for spirit worship, when cows were slaughtered and hard drinks provided. They also practiced monogamy and secured a partner by just killing a cow and organising a feast. Then, they were allowed to stay together. Prior to the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, the Lao Loum people had a distinct pattern of culture and dress. Among the hill tribes, especially those who had migrated from Southern China, animism, Buddhism and Confucian ideas were often fused. Laos was also home to a sizeable and very significant ethnic Vietnamese who was referred to as Viet Kieu (华侨) and ethnic Chinese (Hua Kieu; 华侨) who were based in urban areas and engaged in commerce. The Vietnamese were brought in by the French colonialists and were mostly teachers and civil servants, serving at the lower rungs of government administration.

## **The Royal Half-Brothers**

In Laos, Prince Oupahat Bounkhong, son of Prince Souvanna Phomma, who was the last Uparaja of Luang Phrabang was granted the title of ChaoRatsaphakhinay in 1884 and became a member of the Government Council of French Indochina. His three sons by different wives held different political loyalties after his death. The eldest was Phetsarath, second Souvanna Phouma and the third, Souphanouvong. The eldest Prince Phetsarath's (1901–1959) was naturally pro-royal. The second half-brother Prince Souvanna Phouma (1901–1984) was Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Laos and led the neutralist faction; and the third Souphanouvong (1909–1995) was pro-Communist and leader of the Pathet Lao.

***Phetsarath Rattnavongsa — pro-royalty (1890–1959)***

Prince Phetsarath was Prime Minister of Laos from 1942 to 1945 and was the first and last Vice-King of the Kingdom of Laos. He was born on January 19, 1890, in Luang Phrabang, the second son of Prince Oupahat Bounkhong and his second wife, Princess Thongsay. He went to study at the colonial Lycee Chasseloup Laubat in Saigon and continued in the Lycee Montaigne and to Ecole colonial in Paris from 1905. He returned to Laos in 1912, and started working as an interpreter for his father. He was conferred the title of Somdeth Chao Ratsaphakhinay in 1919, one of the highest ranks in the country and a title once held by his father. He was named Director of Indigenous Affairs of Laos reporting to the French governor in the same year.

Later, he became a leading figure of modern Laos, establishing the system of ranks and titles of civil service, introducing promotion and pension plans and creating a Lao consultative assembly. He reorganised the King's Advisory Council and the administrative system of the Buddhist clergy. He later established a system of schools to educate monks in Pali language. Before and in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese occupation, Prince Phetsarath was acknowledged for having played a significant role in Lao politics, having led the Lao Issara movement. In 1946, when Japan occupied Lao, he led the Lao Issara government in exile from Thailand. In 1957, he returned to Vientiane, where he received a hero's welcome. In April the same year, they restored him as Oupahat of the Kingdom of Laos. Pathet Lao's two regrouped provinces were symbolically returned to the Kingdom of Laos by his son Souphanouvong. He retired and settled down in his own villa. In 1959, he suffered from a brain hemorrhage and died at the age of 69. Many Lao people frame his picture in their homes in respect for his popularity and perceived divine power.

***Prince Souvanna Phouma (1901–1984)***

Prince Souvanna Phouma was the nationalist leader of the neutral faction and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Laos from 1951–1952, 1956–1958, 1960 and 1962–1975. His mother was also of royal blood, like his half-brother Phetsarath. Souvanna Phouma was born in

October 1901, at Luang Phrabang and was the third son of Prince Bounkhong. He was educated in Hanoi and studied civil and electrical engineering in Paris and Grenoble. After his return to Laos in 1931, he married Monique Allard, daughter of a French father and Lao mother and began to work as an engineer in the Department of Public Works. He was later appointed Minister of Public Works and Planning. He became involved in politics before the return of the French rulers. He joined the movement in opposition to French rule and spent a short time in exile in Thailand, returning to Laos only after its independence in 1949. In November 1951 when he became Prime Minister, he negotiated for the full transfer of sovereignty from France. After the Geneva Agreement on Indochina in 1954, which failed to resolve the internal political division within Laos, he sought to engage the Pathet Lao in a coalition government. Success in the enterprise prompted the right wing military force to stage a coup in July 1958 which ousted him as Prime Minister. He was assigned to serve Lao as Ambassador to France. In August 1960, a coup staged by the neutralists put him back as Prime Minister, but he was forced into exile again at the end of the year. In July 1962, after the Geneva Agreement on Laos was announced, he was made the Head of Government of the National Union. Due to external intervention, he was never able to overcome the deep internal divisions among the different groups within the country. At the beginning, Souvanna's policy of neutralisation and internal reconciliation and compromise appeared to be working. However, powerful forces were at work. The suspension of US aid brought about the downfall of his government in 1958. He was later recalled as Prime Minister of a new Neutralist Government following the *coup d'état* of 1960. He and most of his government ministers withdrew to Khang Khai on the Plains of Jars. In June 1961, the US, under President John F. Kennedy, agreed with the Soviet Union to the formation of a neutral coalition government in Laos. For a decade from 1963 to 1973, Souvanna presided over a government nominally neutralist, but in reality dominated by the political right. On April 20, 1964, Souvanna handed over power to the National Army Revolutionary Committee under General Kouprasith Abhay as a result of an army coup. The revolutionary



committee, consisting of 76 members said the coup was necessitated by the coalition's inability to solve economic problems and disagreements between the three factions — right wing, neutralists and left wing. The Communist Pathet Lao radio called the coup a 'serious act of United States imperialists and lackeys' which would lead to the resumption of civil war. After the Paris Peace Agreements in January 1973, there was a corresponding accord on Laos and another Vientiane Agreement for the Restoration of Peace and Reconciliation on Laos that put him back as head of the yet another coalition government. This time, his role was merely a caretaker, one until his final resignation in December 1975. At the end of the day, he was appointed as Adviser to the new government and played no part in the political life of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. He died in Vientiane on January 10, 1984, aged 82.

### ***Prince Souphanouvong (1909–1995)***

Prince Phouma's brother Prince Souphanouvong was the leader of the Pathet Lao. Formed in the mid-20th century, the communist political movement succeeded in securing political power after Laotian Civil War. Pathet Lao was affiliated to the Vietnamese communists. During the civil war, the North Vietnamese army had provided leadership, organisational inputs and equipment. Pathet Lao, the equivalent of the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong, later became the generic name for Laotian communists. The key leaders were Prince Souphanouvong, Khamtay Siphandone, Kaysone Phomvihane, Phoumi Vongvichit and Nouhak Phoumsavanh. Prince Souphanouvong was born on July 13, 1909. Phetsarath and Souvanna Phouma, his half-brothers, were of royal birth. Unlike them, Prince Souphanouvong's mother Mom Kham Ouane was a commoner. Educated in France and Vietnam, he became a supporter of Ho Chi Minh and joined the Indo-Chinese communist movement. He was known as The Red Prince and became the figurehead leader of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party when it successfully seized power in 1975. Prince Souphanouvong was made the first President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Of all the princes, he was seen to be the most

talented of Bounkhong's sons. He mastered eight languages, including Greek and Latin. He led the political organisation in 1950 and joined the Viet Minh in a revolt against the colonial French authorities during the first Indo-China war. He spent seven years in Nha Trang. During his 16 years in Vietnam, he met Ho Chi Minh and married a Vietnamese wife, and it was there that he sought the help of the Viet Minh in founding a guerrilla force.

### **Pathet Lao Communists**

Despite international intervention and attempts to prevent Vietnam's interference in Laos, Pathet Lao continued to operate almost as a branch organisation of the Viet Minh which controlled and directed their movement in Laos. The Royal Lao Army withdrew from the conflict in 1968. They suffered heavy losses from the massive Vietnamese troops and heavy bombardment from Soviet and Chinese forces. With the Paris Peace Accord that ended US involvement in Vietnam, Pathet Lao signed a ceasefire agreement known as the Vientiane Treaty in February 1973 with the government of Laos. Even then, the coalition government did not last long. After the fall of the South Vietnamese government in April 1975, Pathet Lao took over Laos. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was established with the abolition of the monarchy.

### ***Laotian Communist Treatment of the Chinese***

When Pathet Lao took over power in 1975, the Chinese schools replaced their Taiwan teachers with teachers from Communist China, who wrote in Maoist-approved Mandarin script and led the class in revolutionary songs such as the 'Red Sun of the East'. However, when South Vietnam was defeated by North Vietnam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established, there was an exodus of some 300,000 Laotians. Among them were 5,000 to 6,000 who left the country between 1975 and 1982. This affected other sectors of the population drastically. For example, the Vientiane Chinese School had an enrolment of more than 5,000 students in 1970. This shrunk

to 1,000, of whom nearly 400 were children of Chinese descent and the rest were Laotian, Vietnamese and Thais. The school employed 69 staff of whom 40 were teachers, the remaining were administrative and general employees. And with the change in policy of the Laotian government, the Chinese businessmen replaced their Chinese sign-boards and kept a low profile, observing their festivities behind closed doors. They also avoided speaking Chinese or their dialects in front of strangers. The Chinese, before Pathet Lao took control, did their best to distance themselves from direct contact with China, which improved their relations with Taiwan. Taiwan had also taken the opportunity to strengthen their ties with the Chinese associations in Vientiane. But, when the Pathet Lao came into power, they made changes to society. The Communist ideologists saw language as one key to social change and tried to get rid of old languages as they were vestiges of the feudal past. They prohibited the ordinary Laotian and their children to use the words '*doi kanoi*' meaning 'Yes, lord', often used to pay respect to their elders. Instead they taught the people to use the word 'yeah'. Monks were forbidden to accept donations of food and they were forced to work in the farms. Unlike Cambodia, however, monks were not massacred.

## **Spartan Laos**

With a blend of moderate methods and revolutionary goals, the Communist rulers of Laos slowly and surely, transformed gentler Laotian society into one that was regimented and Spartan-like. They introduced Vietnamese communism into Laos. A series of re-education seminars and tight political controls created deep anxiety among Laotians who were afraid of talking openly in front of their children. The abolition of the coalition government and the slow collapse of the six-century-old monarchies frightened the ordinary, conservative Laotians. While the Pathet Lao outwardly pledged respect for the monarchy, reality was far from the truth. Almost everyone from peasants to Cabinet ministers was required to attend lengthy re-education classes, and former opponents were subjected to manual labour. None of the senior army officers, policemen or bureaucrats who were sent

to remote camps for their classes was known to have returned. The press had been reduced to two government papers, patterned on Hanoi's propaganda posters showing smiling peasants. All Western dress, songs and dances were banned as 'reactionary'. Vegetable gardens were spread all over Vientiane as the Pathet Lao tried to encourage self-sufficiency. In one of the most ambitious programmes, Pathet Lao tried to resettle the hill tribes to fixed areas. The tribesmen, who made up about half of Lao's population, were forced to return to a semi-nomadic way of life. The programme also called for the enforcement of a popular democratic dictatorship and the modernisation of the People's Security Forces. Small farms were gradually transformed into collectivised units and the few businesses left were nationalised. Unlike what happened in Cambodia and Vietnam, the Pathet Lao's revolution was accomplished with almost no outward violence like mass massacres, even though their methods were harsh and people seemed to have vanished into thin air. Laotians who opposed the government and had the financial means, simply fled across to Thailand. Among those remaining, the Communists generated real enthusiasm in some of the young people through their appeal to Laotian nationalism. The speed and finesse with which the Pathet Lao converted the young, reflected the Laotian capacity for social capital and tolerance, which made them different from the other Indo-Chinese communists.

## **The Chinese Migration to Laos**

Laos was not the most favoured destination of Chinese migrants as compared to Malaya, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. Owing to its landlocked position, Laos has, throughout history, held little attraction for migrants. Among those who moved to Laos, most were in fact secondary migrants from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. The only direct migrants were people from Yunnan and Guangxi, primarily because of proximity. Many of the supporters of the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国) from Guangxi settled down in Laos after they landed there. Until the 19th century, the Guangxi people, especially as a direct consequence of the Taiping rebellions,

were the only source of migration in Laos. Then, some Chinese traders from Vietnam and Thailand started to set up homes in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In his books entitled, *Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos 1858–1860*, Henri Mouhot, a French natural scientist, observed that there was very little commerce carried out in this part of Laos. The Chinese inhabiting Siam do not come as far, owing to the enormous expense of transporting all their merchandise on elephants. Nearly every year, a caravan arrives from Yunnan and Guangxi composed of about 100 persons and several hundred mules. Some go to Kenne Thao, others to M. Nane and Cieng Mai. They arrive in February and leave in March or April. The Chinese in Laos fall into two categories. In the north, particularly in the province of Phongsali, lived Chinese descendants of the Black Flags, opium smugglers and other immigrants from Yunnan who form a recognised minority known as the Ho (贺). They were the descendants of Chinese rebels of the Taiping rebellion who escaped to Laos after the rebellion had failed. They took Nanjing in 1851 but were defeated and driven into the mountains near the frontier of China and Laos. While retreating, these soldiers plundered and took advantage of the unsettled state of Tongking and the weak unarmed outposts of the Thai Kingdom. The Ho people were brave, fearless but ruthless. The Ho started to harass the fringes of Laos in 1872. In 1873, about 2,000 Ho attacked Muong Theng (Dien Bien Phu) and Xieng Khouang. The Governor of Xieng Khouang went to fight the Ho and was killed. The people of Xieng Khouang submitted to the Ho, but it did not save the town from being plundered, burnt and looted. The Ho comprised two groups: the Yellow Flag (黄旗) and the Black Flag (黑旗). The invaders formed three large groups, apart from the Black and Yellow Flag, there was the Red Flag. The Black Flag invaded Laos a second time. The Lao government troops could not suppress them. The government appealed for help from the Thai Government and yet the Black Flag was insurmountable. They captured Luang Prabang. The Hmong fled to Vientiane or along the Mekong River. Others fled into the jungle, where they lived for many years awaiting the defeat of the Ho's. When they invaded Laos, they killed two French warriors in 1883, Francis Garnier and Reviere.

It was at this juncture that the French colonialists intervened, not so much to help the Laotian fight the Ho, but to prevent Thailand from swallowing Laos. The new Siamese King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) sent expeditionary forces into Laos, which was her vassal state, to attack the Ho. From the viewpoint of the French, the Siamese campaign had somehow to be brought to an end as soon as possible, and their troops removed. By 1899, France had forced the withdrawal of Siam, and Laos became an autonomous protectorate under a French resident superior. The French initially left the ruling families with their titles, but their power was reduced to being more symbolic than real. The Chinese migrants came to the developed cities of central and southern Laos, looking for trading opportunities that were created by the French who occupied these territories. The new migrants quickly plugged into the economic life of the country and were embraced by French colonial authorities as they helped to expand the economy. The early migrants constituted Teochius, Fujianese, Cantonese and Hainanese. Like in all other migrations, successive waves resulted in the formation of social institutions built around schools and temples. This created a system of congregations. By the mid-1920s, a sizeable Chinese community began to emigrate from Laos. Of the 355,000 Chinese found in Indochina, only 5,000 were settled in Laos. Later, the depression of the 1930s saw a decline of Chinese to barely 3,000. Today, official estimates put the figures of the Chinese closer to about 40,000. The second wave of Chinese migration came in the wake of independence in 1954. The period spanning 1960s to 1970s was the ‘golden age’ of the Chinese in Laos. Fearful that Laos would fall into communist hands, the Americans poured in large amount of aid to Laos to shore up the royal Laos government against communist control of the North Vietnam allied Pathet Lao. Such aid activated commercial opportunities and trade with Thailand boomed. This encouraged many Chinese in Thailand to migrate to Laos especially to the towns along the Mekong River. They established a thriving business in Vientiane, Savannakhet and Pakse. In the 1970s the number of Chinese was estimated to be 45,000 to 50,000, nearly 2% of Lao’s population.

## **Pre-War and Post-War Chinese Migration in Laos**

Towards the tail end of 1930s and again during 1950s, waves of migration resulted in communities being formed around social institutions in Laos. These new migrants were the prime movers of the Laotian economy and were favourably regarded by the French colonisers. After independence in 1954, the Chinese managed to preserve their privileged position in Laotian society. Being active and enterprising, they maintained their control over major sectors of the local economy, namely banking, industry and trade. From 1959 onwards, the Chinese married Laotian wives to further entrench their business interests. The more affluent classes built matrimonial alliances with important and powerful Laotian families as it was the case with the Chinese in Thailand. The social recognition obviously necessitated an exchange of commercial and financial assets. These inter-ethnic marriages, however failed to assimilate the Chinese but instead gave birth to a mixed Sino-Lao identity, a hybrid with roots in both cultures. The elite class at the centre was complemented by many other identities.

By the 1960s, PLA troops arrived in large numbers to assist in vast road construction projects. This project which lasted many years, directly served China's strategic interests in the event of a regional conflict. Conversely, warmer Sino-Lao diplomatic relations at the dawn of the 1980s resulted in a slow withdrawal of some 5,000 to 15,000 Chinese military workers back to China. At the same time, the Laotian government tightened its control over the remaining Chinese population which it suspected of being the political fifth column of communist China. This led to a new wave of departures significantly, reducing the number of Sino-Laotians in Luang Prabang and other provinces.

## **Sino-Laos and the New Wave of Chinese Immigrants**

A re-awakened sense of Chinese identity was not incompatible with Lao nationality. A double allegiance was rather attractive given that

the Sino-Laotians were able to serve as interlocutors between the Lao and the new wave of Chinese businessmen.

### ***Chinese Community Institutions in Vientiane***

In 1975, persecution forced the migration of Chinese to Thailand, Taiwan and Australia while they continued to identify themselves as Sino-Laotians. In 1993, the returning and remnant Loatians cooperated and started a bank called the Vientiane Commercial Bank and also built a hotel called Lao Hotel Plaza. These Sino-Laotians had returned to Laos and were re-establishing their pre-1975 networks to mobilise financial support for local community and institutions. This aid was not exclusively philanthropic in nature, as it was meant to serve their own interests. Their efforts were directed towards the Chinese school in Vientiane, as evident in the commemorative album that was produced for the 55th anniversary of the Liao Du Chinese School. The commemorative was published in 1992, carrying testimonies, photographs as well as highlights of former students and the Chinese who migrated from Laos. The commemorative bespoke of the strength of this network.

They also raised funds for the renovation of the school. This group of Sino-Laotians distinguished themselves from Hakkas, Teochius, Cantonese and Hainanese. They expressed a sense of belonging to an integrated whole, transcending regional bias. In fact, the characteristics of Geo-dialectic groups represented by the Association before the revolution disappeared. With the exodus in 1975, the Hakka, Hainanese and Yunnanese were marginalised owing to their small numbers and were disqualified for full representation. In less than a century, the situation of the Chinese in Laos had changed from that of temporary migrants to a permanent hybrid ethnic group occupying a privileged economic position. The massive exodus in 1975 and the repression of remnant communities that followed could have led to the extinction of the Sino-Lao culture. Fortunately, a good proportion that fled to foreign countries acquired a trans-national identity. Today, this trans-nationality provides the Chinese in Laos with supplementary resources that have



re-established them more strongly in Laos. The cultural syncretism allowed the returning Chinese to co-exist in modern Lao society. We could now distinguish between the 'Chinese in Laos' from the 'new Chinese in Laos' by their lifestyle. The new arrivals had come, not so much to settle down but to earn a living.

### ***The Chinese in Laos: A dynamic and strategic concept***

In view of all that was at stake at being 'Chinese', they often identified themselves with their host communities through intermarriage and, in the case of Laos, they forged a Sino-Laotian identity. They all too often relegate their Chineseness in favour of a more integrated identity that transcends their geo-dialectic origins. Chinese families have had a tendency to re-invent themselves wherever they migrated and their identities converged when convenient. The common Chinese identity enabled them to ride on the economic boom of mainland China or its associates. They could now exploit their acquaintance and familiarity with the Lao society to become the interlocutor between the Laotian leaders and the investors for their own benefit and yet retain some relevant aspects of Chinese traditional values. The Teochius, however, were the exception, as they were more conservative; they continued to observe their own particular traditions and Chinese customs and continued to speak their own dialect.

### **Laotian Dance Troupe in Singapore**

Sometime in early 1963, I was instructed by the Minister of Culture R. Rajaratnam to visit several Southeast Asian countries, including Laos, to invite dancers for the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival in Singapore. It was meant for the opening ceremony of our National Theatre, which was then about to be completed and Minister Rajaratnam's idea of reviving the traditional culture of Southeast Asia.

Accompanied by two officials of the National Theatre Trust, Liew Yung Ho (刘用和), an editor with *Nanyang Siang Pau*, who was a committee member of the Singapore Theatre Trust, and the Superintendent of the Victoria Theatre Yap Yan Hong (叶炎洪), we

visited Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Laos. When we arrived in Vientiane, we paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma. We were received by the Minister of Sports Bounthong Srawang, who discussed with me the question of sending a delegation to our festival. We arrived at a critical time when the Prince was facing serious national problems. Laos was being drawn into the second Indo-China war, and the North Vietnamese were using the Ho Chi Minh trail passing through Laos to counter the earlier secret but later overt American bombing. The Prince's effort to maintain Lao neutrality had proved ineffective. With the collapse of the Second Coalition, he was facing the choice of either resigning or to continue as Prime Minister in the hope of retaining some semblance of Lao neutrality. In my conversation with him, I could sense that he was rather uneasy. However, he was very polite and accepted my proposal to send a Laotian dance troupe to participate in our Southeast Asian Cultural Festival. I told him that our Minister of Culture Rajaratnam was keen to revive Asian culture and would like to bring about an interchange of cultural performances for Southeast Asian nations. He seemed rather happy with the idea. He introduced his minister in charge of culture to us and left it to him to discuss details with us. As he was very busy, our meeting was brief. In 1963, after our meeting in Vientiane, the Laotian government sent a strong delegation of 30 people to participate in the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival, which kick-started on August 8, 1963. It was led by the Laotian Minister of Culture, a middle-aged scholar, a humble man who spoke only French and Laotian. It was the first time any Laotian even set foot in Singapore. On stage, the Laotian dancers performed Lao classical court dances, the first appearance in Singapore. The Laotian item included the You Ngit, a classical dance of Laos, The Rose of the Bedong, Dance of Lao Unity, Village Festival and the Lao-Singapore Friendship Dance, a creation by the Lao National Academy illustrating the mutual friendship which united the Kingdom of Laos and Singapore. There was also a Laotian version of the Ramayana. The Laotian dancers were graceful and dignified. Many movements of Laotian dances resemble the figures portrayed on the walls of Dunhuang of Silk Road. Their origin was Thai,

combined with the lifestyle of the Laotian people. They performed the *moladok*, depicting celebration of the Laotian New Year in Luang Prabang, the traditional dance performed to show the royal past, an unbroken tradition brought down from the ancestors to the present.

One important feature of the *moladok* was the ritual reflecting the domination of the Lao royal over the aboriginal inhabitants of the surrounding areas. It was the substitution of the performance of the royal ballet by the beauty contest, which now marked the very start of the celebrations. They also performed the dance *sourya*, which was the sun dance. It described the landscape at sunset along the river which underpins the Lao Loum culture just as the Nile does for the Egyptians. Another dance was the elephant steps mimicking the slow movements of elephants. The costumes of the dancers were simple and elegant. The Laotian delegates were a humble lot. They gave no trouble to organisers. They were obedient to their leader who seemed to hold sway over their behaviour. Although most of them did not speak English, they were quite sociable and mixed freely with other delegates.

## **Impressions of Vientiane (万象)**

Vientiane, the capital of Laos, was situated in the Mekong Valley. It was also the largest city in Laos. The city, for the first time in history, hosted the 25th Southeast Asian Games in December 2009, celebrating the 50 years of Games. Vientiane was a very small town, hardly a metropolis, when I arrived in 1963. It was comfortably small, without the chaotic bustle which generally typifies Asian cities. The streets were dusty and the air somewhat oppressive. But I could stroll around feeling at ease. I liked the quietness and serenity of the place. All sights of Vientiane were within walking distance. To view the town on the bicycle was sufficient, but I chose to take a ride on a '*tuk tuk*' (trishaw), the cheapest way to tour the capital, even though a car was offered officially to me. Away from the main thoroughfare, the streets seem more rural than urban, with their grass verge, shaded trees flanking the streets and a tranquil air disturbed only by the noise of the light traffic. Literally translated as 'Sandalwood City' (sandalwood

was a kind of tree highly valued in classical India for its fragrance), Vientiane was also the largest city in Laos. But the meaning of Vientiane was somewhat ambiguous today and was often mistakenly believed to mean ‘city of the moon’, because the Sanskrit word for the moon and sandalwood were similar, in both written form and the way the word was pronounced, hence the confusion. The romanised term Vientiane has French origins because the French simply could not master the ‘ch’ sound in the original form, Viangchan. The centre of the town was the so-called fountain circle — a lovely square surrounded by hotels, restaurants and banks. A few architectural extravagances told of a time when Lao leaders had aspired to achieve greatness. The main attraction was the Pha That Luang, also known as the Great Stupa. This gold-covered large Buddhist stupa on the eastern outskirts of Vientiane was regarded as the most important national monument in Laos and a national symbol.

## **Present-Day Sino-Laos Relations**

Sino-Laos relations were largely focussed on trade and aid with a major investment on road construction projects in the Northern provinces of Laos. Thailand and Vietnam had vested interests in the central and southern regions which remained unchallenged by Chinese investments. December 1978 was a turning point. Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia to unseat the then Prime Minister Pol Pot, invited a Chinese response, resulting in Chinese incursions into Vietnam. The Chinese in an attempt ‘to teach Vietnam a lesson’, went as far as 19 km into their territory. Laos was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, as it did not want to provoke China nor oppose its special neighbour Vietnam. The Laotian government responded with a slow distancing of diplomatic relations with China while stagnating its diplomatic support for Vietnam. Then again, reports of Chinese covert assistance and training of Hmong resistance forces in China’s Yunnan Province under the tutelage of General Vang Pao created new tensions for the Sino-Laotian relationship. Prime Minister Kaysone’s state visit to Beijing in 1980 gradually softened the animosity. Again in 1991, Kaysone opted to spend his

vacation in China instead of his customary visit to the Soviet Union. The impact was almost immediate with bilateral trade expansion from the sale of local consumer goods to the granting of 11 investment licenses, including an automotive assembly plant. In the same year, the Lao-Chinese Joint Border Committee was established and meetings were convened in 1992, resulting in an agreement to delineate their common border. The two countries expanded their trade investments in 1993 and 1994. Unlike its other neighbours, China has not historically dominated Laos. She became the most powerful communist state which Laos could turn to for support against Thai and Vietnamese hegemony. Apart from the 1975 bitter experience, China has maintained cordial relations with Laos. Since 1986, with the crumbling of the Soviet Union, relations between Laos and China warmed considerably. Chinese investments in Laos poured in with more than just Chinese aid. Chinese investments in mining, telecommunications and construction materials witnessed huge increases, with more than 140 mining concessions in gold, copper, iron, potassium and bauxite handed out to the Chinese. China, in return, helped to renovate the Victory Arch Park in 2004. A commemorative plaque, written in Chinese, English and the Laotian language, acknowledges the generous aid from the government and people of China. At the outskirts of Luang Prabang, a Sino-Lao Friendship Hospital was completed in 2003. It was known locally as 'the Chinese hospital'. Again, as a generous donation of equipment and medical facilities was offered by the Chinese government, there were now plans to expand the facility to include a sanatorium for senior Lao officials. The Vang Vieng cement works were built in 2002 with financial and technical aid from China. The Lao currency notes of 5,000 kip, its highest denomination, carried the image of the Vang Vieng cement works. Increased Sino-Lao interaction consequently reduced Laos's dependency on Thai imports.

From 1988 to 2000, Chinese aid was 2%, amounting to some US\$23 million, representing a fraction of the total international aid that the country received during that period. In the next four years, China provided an equivalent of US\$125 million in foreign aid, most of which was directed to infrastructure, health and education projects.

The Chinese Ambassador to Laos, Liu Yongxing said that the bilateral trade volume of China and Laos stood at US\$63.95 million in 2002 and the figure reached US\$110 million in 2003. Since 1990, several Chinese leaders visited Laos, including President Jiang Zemin (江泽民) in 2000 and Vice Premier Wu Yi (吴仪) in 2008. Chinese products were popular in Laos. About 97 percent of the motorcycles used by Laotian people were imported from China. Besides trade and economic cooperation, the two countries had also strengthened bilateral cooperation in national defence, public security, culture and education. Laotian teachers were sent to China to train the Chinese in the Laotian language since the 1960s. Two famous Laotian teachers were Maha Kham Phan Vilachit (马哈坎潘·维拉告) and Maha Kham Than Tippraboury (马哈坎丹·提帕布里法师). In November 2006, President Hu Jintao visited Laos.

### **The Hmongs (苗族) in Laos**

The most interesting minority in Laos were the 'Miaos', known in Laos as Hmongs who migrated from southern China in the late 18th century and the Lao Huay, who were of Chinese origin. Both Hmongs and Lao Huay were classified as minorities in China as well as in Laos. The Lao Huay (老华), the Hmong (苗), the Yao (瑶) and Ho (贺) came from China. Their origins were evident in their traditions, religion, language, calendar and beliefs. The Lao Huay still preserves the Chinese script. Old baskets were kept in each house of the Lao Huay containing documents, letters, contracts and ancient books of rituals written in Chinese by ancestors on bamboo paper. Among these books, a document relating to the ancestors were found in a Tafak village in Laos. In 1994, there were still 17 families which totalled 82 persons living in the Long district, Luang Namtha province. The Tafak village was situated in the Nam Ma valley at an altitude of 400 m. The elders in the village recalled from the scripts that they came from China, but had been in Laos for over three generations. The documents dealt with the signs of marriage and healing methods. It seems that in the history of their migration, the Lao Huay passed through Northern Vietnam before coming to Laos

over 100 years ago. Although only a trickle of Miaos migrated to Laos in ancient times, the mass exodus began in the 1840s, when the Chinese authorities tried to extend their control over the system of taxation. They were targetting the hill people in their southern provinces where most people were involved in opium cultivation and trade, namely the Miaos. From 1856, the Chinese began a new series of massacres similar but more widespread than 1840s of the Miaos. This caused mass migration over the mountain trails to the Red and Black river valleys. The older generation of Miaos sacrificed themselves fighting the Chinese intruders to enable the younger generation time to escape. Those who escaped settled in Siam, Vietnam and later Laos. The word '*Miao*' means 'barbarian' in the Chinese language.

In 1972, Dr. Yang Dao (杨道博士), who graduated from the French University with a PhD, returned to his country and demanded that the word '*Miao*' be discarded. He suggested the word '*Hmong*' which means 'a free person' to replace the word '*Miao*'. This new word '*Hmong*' has since been accepted by the government and worldwide. The word '*Miao*' was found in Chinese annals dating to the third century BC. These records focus on the Hmong's many uprisings against the Chinese states, which regarded them as barbarians in need of civilising influences of Chinese culture. The Hmongs were by nature rebellious. Between 403 and 561 BCE, the Chinese recorded some 40 Hmong uprisings against Chinese rule. The Chinese cracked down on them. The survivors fled to the rugged mountain ranges of Guizhou, Yunnan and Sichuan. Most Hmongs are still present there. Around 1800s onwards, the Hmong began to migrate to other Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam. Many settled down in the mountains of Laos as they found the hills very comfortable. The Laotians refer to the Hmongs as Lao Soung (老松, Lao of the mountain tops). They practice slash-and-burn agriculture, with opium as their principal cash crop. The Hmongs were the last significant group to migrate into Laos from southern China, beginning in the 1821 to 1830s and continuing into the 1850s. They settled mainly in Huaphan and Xiang Khuang provinces, extending later into Luang Prabang, Xainyaburi and farther afield.

Two great Hmong revolts occurred on the Quezhou, Hunan and Sichuan border regions in the 1730s and again from 1795–1806. As a result of vicious repression, the Hmong migrated south. It was in the 18th century that the Hmong started to cross the Lao borders in the north and northwest, having passed through Burma, fleeing the rebellions and plundering in Yunnan, Tibet and Himalayan slopes and Sichuan. From 1820s, the Hmong arrived in Laos through the northeast via Vietnam but mainly between 1850 and 1880. In 1853, a Hmong rebellion enlisted support of Muslim groups in Yunnan.

### **The Ly (李) and Lo (罗) Clans in Laos**

When the Hmong arrived in Laos, they chose to stay in the mountains and grow dry rice, wheat and barley and hunted in the rich jungles. They were practically self-sufficient. The only other necessary items they needed to purchase were metals. They also liked silver with which they produced necklaces, armbands and other solid silver jewelry with their special skill. They had little contact with the other people in Laos, except when they came down from the mountains to the markets in the valley to buy things. They were seen occasionally as a silent, almost ghostly group of people lined with packed ponies moving through the jungle and across the plains to sell herbs from the forests, the skins of animals, and opium which they grow in the mountains. The original Hmong settlers in Xieng Khouang accepted the tutelage of the Lao princes who had ruled the region. It appeared that the princes granted them local administrative rights where the immigrants had formed compact settlements. Thus Hmong Kaitong were 'elected' and placed at the head of the great Hmong families in the Nong Het region. It was an area given by the French for the Hmong to rule themselves as they did not participate in the revolt against the French. The Hmong were at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy in Indochina, bearing the brunt of an exorbitant system of taxes. Two major Hmong clans entered Laos: one led by Faydang Lo (known as the Lo clan) and the other by Lyfoung known as Ly clan). They were at first related by marriage. Unfortunately, a series of misadventures resulted in the dissolution of the marriage.



The happy alliance was reduced to a series of killing, betrayal and the destruction of each other's villagers. This bitter vendetta continues till the present-day. When the French conquered Laos, the Lo clan associated themselves with the French colonial masters while the Ly clan boycotted the French. During World War II, the Lo clan collaborated with the Japanese, while the Ly clan formed a resistance movement against the invaders. In recent history, when the Laotian political squabble between the rightist royal faction and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao occurred, the Lo clan joined the Communist and the Ly remained loyal to the Royal Lao Government.

### **Hmong's Connection with Drugs and Narcotics**

For centuries, the people of Laos had used drugs and narcotics for culinary and medicinal purposes. Marijuana was used in soups and flavouring, and was sold in most markets. Some Laotians also smoke marijuana mixed with tobacco for relaxation. Opium has traditionally been used to treat a variety of symptoms, from upset stomach to severe pain. Production was minimal, until demand for opium was stimulated by colonial policies in the 19th century. During the French period, though opium was legal, the government monopolised the sale. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Laos was discovered by Western hippies, opium was still legal and other drugs were freely available. What changed the drug scene in Laos was the advent of heroin produced in secret refineries in the Golden Triangle. With the advice of the Americans, the government banned opium consumption, but nothing could be done to stop the production of opium. During the second Indochina war, from 1965 to 1975, the 'politics of heroin' were intricately tied up with the war in Laos. Opium was the only cash crop of the Lao Sing of northern Laos, especially among the Hmong. As the CIA was recruiting the Hmongs into the 'secret army', it became involved not only in marketing Laotian opium, but also in transporting it and allowing it to be marketed. At first, most of the heroin found its way to the Republic of Vietnam to supply the growing demand of US troops there, but by the early 1970s, heroin was freely available in Vientiane and more and more young Laotians became addicted.

During the French era in Laos, the Hmongs opium farmers were allowed to grow opium for a living. The French, however, would impose an opium tax. A poor opium harvest meant an inability to generate income to pay taxes and a good harvest would translate into rewards for the Hmong peasant farmer because they would be able to pay taxes. The real beneficiaries were the opium brokers. In good or bad seasons, the Hmong peasants still had to pay grossly regressive personal tax and to supply forced or corvee labor on demand. Opium was an ideal crop in the local agro-economy. It was highly durable crop as it could be transported over rough mountains and it was grown when rice and corn were not cultivated. Also, poppy does not deplete the soil of its nutrients as rapidly as rice, corn or vegetables. Within the Hmong economy, opium was essential for the acquisition of two key metals, iron and silver. Silver was important to the Hmong as it was a medium for adornment, status or for use as currency. Before the war, the Hmongs were fairly rich. Hmong women would wear solid silver necklaces to show their status and wealth. Each necklace would weigh up to two kg each. During the period of resistance, opium was traded for weapons. Six kg of opium was enough to purchase a light machine gun with ammunition. A rifle cost two and a half kg. In the opium growing areas on the slopes of Palavek Mountain, there was a toothless Hmong king who claimed to be 106 years old. His name was Nau Her Tor in Hmong but better known as Phia Luang. In 1920, the Lao King Sisavangvong, bestowed Phia Luang huge acres of opium plantations. However, he was too old to cultivate the land. Phia Luang was one of the few Hmong leaders who sympathised with Pathet Lao. He was rewarded with the only brick house in the area and a Japanese jeep. He led his people to fight against the Japanese, the French and the Americans. He was sad to see his last battle when Laotians killed one another and the Hmong their own kin. When he was asked to kill the Pathet Lao, he refused and they killed his daughter before they shot him. Phia Luang became the hero of the Hmongs. Till the 19th century, there were insignificant Chinese settlements in Laos except for some Yunnan and Guangxi traders. Immigration to Laos was stimulated by new economic development initiatives under the imperialist rule.

Most of these immigrants were from Indochina and Siam. These were people brought in by the French colonialists to staff the administrative and military service in Laos. The French had offered incentives like land grant and tax concessions to encourage people to open up new lands to production and business. As a result, some Chinese earlier settled in Indochina, Cambodia and then moved to Laos. The number of Chinese in Laos at no time exceeded 2% of the total population.

## **The Secret War**

Following the 1954 French defeat in Indochina, the US became a major player in the region. This was born out of the fear that a communist takeover of Indochina would create a domino effect on all of Asia. Laos, strategically situated between the West-aligned Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam and, their neighbour communist China and North Vietnam, became a swing state in the Cold War. President Eisenhower had warned that if Laos fell to the communist, the rest of Southeast Asia would follow suit, opening the gateway into India. The US was, however prevented by the Geneva agreement to commit American troops in Laos. It therefore launched what later came to be known as ‘the secret war’, a 10-year air and ground campaign that cost an estimated US\$20 billion. Between 1968 and 1973, US Air Force planes flying out of bases in Thailand destroyed communist targets in Laos, dropping more than two million tons of explosives, making Laos join the ranks of some of the most heavily bombed nations in the world.

From a ragtag collection of a few hundred guerrillas, the CIA-run operation grew into an army of nearly 40,000. A legendary CIA man called Bill Lair began organising the Hmong into an armed force against the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao in the early 1960s. Lair, a former CIA operative, was one among many who lived on in Thailand long before the communist takeover of Indochina. Most of the soldiers in this secret war were Hmongs whom the Americans recruited because they possessed an aptitude for warfare that the easy-going lowland people lacked. The



Hmong Soldiers

Americans identified the Hmongs as ‘the Gurkhas’, the brave warriors used by the British when they conquered India. At the start, the French rulers had used Hmongs only to gather intelligence on North Vietnamese movements in Laos. By the 1960s, Hmong soldiers rescued downed American pilots who flew combat missions to fight the ground war. Mayor General Vang Pao provided the leadership. Again, the Hmongs were split in this war: the Ly clan joined hands with the Americans, whereas the Lo clan fought arm-in-arm with the Communist. During the Vietnam War, the Hmongs were trained by US and Thai authorities to defeat the North Vietnamese who were Chinese-Soviet backed forces in Laos. They sabotaged

war supplies; rescued American pilots who were shot down and gathered vital information on troop, tank and supply movements. The Ly clan Hmong joined the Americans as Touby Lyfoung was anti-communist and did not want his people to suffer the hegemony of Hanoi's Communist regime. He had also hoped that the Americans would help them attain a measure of self-rule when peace returned.

The decision to support the US cost the Hmong dearly. An estimated 30,000 people were killed in the war. This represented more than 10% of the Hmong population in Laos. About 100,000 men, women and children representing another 30% of the Hmong, became refugees in Laos. They either settled in resettlement centres or into existing towns. The resettlement centres naturally disrupted the otherwise isolated lifestyle the Hmong enjoyed. Larger settlements exposed the Hmongs to modern technology and market economy. Enterprising Hmongs built an ice factory while others opened restaurants. The less entrepreneurial became bakers, tailors, cobblers and radio technicians. What was interesting was the development of cottage industries revolving around the fabrication of brooms. These blossomed in the outlying villages, employing some 200 Hmong families. Hmong children learnt reading and writing in Lao and French. Graduates attended a six-month teacher's training programme; and others went on to secondary-level schools in Vientiane. Others managed to secure French, American, Canadian and Australian scholarships to pursue higher education.

### **The Plain of Jars (查尔平原)**

The rolling hills, high ridges and grassy flatlands was a diamond-shaped region extending some 500-square miles in northern Laos often referred to as the 'Plain of Jars'. Its altitude averaged about 3,000 feet. It derived its name from the 300 huge grey stone 'jars' that dotted the landscape. When I visited the Plains of the Jars, I was impressed by the massive huge stone jars scattered like pantry pots from a giant's kitchen which were not just dirty; they were not wide

enough to house even two people. Local legends claim that they were made of water-buffalo skin to be able to could store rice and *lao-lao* (Lao's rice whisky) for a giant who lived nearby. The Plains of Jars in northern Laos was shrouded in a 2,000-year-old mystery and myth laced with intrigue and tragedy. Scattered across the war-scarred countryside of northern Lao's Xieng Khuang province was this markedly unusual collection of ancient circular solid cylinders scattered measuring 5 feet high and half as broad. These cylinders were built by a people of a megalithic iron age. They were believed to have been built by travelling Indian tribes more than 2,000 years ago. They belonged to a people with assertive and powerful culture existing on the plain centuries ago. Today, few know the purpose of these jars. Some believe they served as burial urns, others think they were meant to preserve rice wine. Exactly who created them and why they built them continues to baffle historians. Even if the jars had been made for purely ceremonial purposes, it was hard to rationalise why these storage containers were abandoned by subsequent generations. I recall an old Khmu song, the 'Call of the Khmu Soul' which seemed to point to the existence of a great restaurant somewhere in Laos: 'O soul spirit, return and drink the beer of the great jar Eat the white egg, drink the strong beer, Eat the fat pork, eat the hard head, Eat the fatty brains'.<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars believe that these jars could be as old as China's Shang dynasty. During the Shang dynasty, the Chinese who wrote their characters on bamboo came to the Plains of Jars. The French archaeologist Madeleine Colani who worked in Indochina visited this plain in 1930. She established that most were crafted from sandstone and were probably used in ancient funeral ceremonies. She alluded to the Dong Son culture of Vietnam, where she found ancient crematoria, human remains, bronze and iron tools. She took photos of the jars which resemble present-day jars. It was in the Plain of Jars and Tham Hang that archaeologists unearthed the fossils of teeth of ancient

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<sup>1</sup>Translated from 라오스1-위영찬입국 :: 네이버 블로그. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=kocdu&clogNo=100106600262&redirect=Dlog&widgetTypeCall=true>

human beings who lived 100,000 years ago. A tour of the jars would provide a window into the so-called ‘Secret War’ of the 1960s and 1970s. This Plain of Jars became the target of the secret war launched by the Americans. The many campaigns in the Plain of Jars were fought in parallel with the bombing efforts against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The unintended consequence of the 14-year struggle for the Plain of Jars was the utter destruction of the Hmongs, a noble ally. They were left to the inevitable fate of blind American bombing even when they had fought in countless battles against the North Vietnamese forces. Young Hmong fighters were the obvious casualties, numbering some 30,000. They were about 300,000 Hmong in the mountainous region. Many of the Hmong families were forced to CIA-supported hilltop encampments, where they were fed by ‘soft rice drops’ and armed by ‘hard rice drops’. When the end came, those who could afford, fled to camps in Thailand. The remnants in Laos were unfortunately hunted down and killed by Laotian communists. A few Hmong, however, managed to relocate to the US.

Beginning with the 1968 bombing, half of which were dropped over North Vietnam, some 3 million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos. The northern regions alone suffered some 500,000 tons of bombs. The 14-year period of the repeated bombing of the Plain of Jars decimated the population, making its civilisation extinct. Few Hmongs could ever return to the plain to resume their daily lives. With the world distracted by the US–Vietnam conflict, the US bombarded Laos with more missiles than that fired on Germany and Japan put together during World War II. The US Congress and Senate were unaware of this otherwise dubbed Secret War, which was a blind attempt by Washington to halt the spread of communism, which consequently destroyed an otherwise peaceful nation.

## **Pathet Lao Action Against Hmongs**

The war officially ended in 1973 with the formation of the coalition government between the US-backed Royal Lao government and the North Vietnam-backed Pathet Lao. Van Pao, the Hmong military leader, fled to Thailand in May the same year. He airlifted some 1,000



to 3,000 of his followers from Long Tieng to Thailand. The Pathet Lao took reprisal measures against the Hmong given that their leaders had fled. Several thousand men, women and children ended up in makeshift refugee camps in northern Thailand after trekking across dangerous mountainous plains and through the jungle, working their way toward the Mekong River. Countless died during the journey, whilst others were killed in skirmishes with Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese soldiers. A great number were infected with diseases, suffered starvation or drowned while crossing the raging Mekong River. About 60,000 Hmongs retreated to the south of the Plain of Jars to a place called Phu Bia Massif. The CIA's secret armed forces that remained there organised themselves into a resistance movement, known as Chao Fa, or Lord of the Sky. Members of the movement attacked Pathet Lao soldiers, erected blockades, destroyed bridges and disrupted food convoys. They believed that they were immortal and immune to bullets. In 1978, with the help of the North Vietnamese air force, the Laotian government defeated the Phu Bia-based resistance. This ended the resistance once and for all. A small number of diehard rebels persisted through the 1980s and 1990s with little success. Not all Hmong who were United States allies opted to flee. Many quietly returned to their villages, seeking reconciliation with the new regime. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Hmongs were sent to re-education centres, known as *samana*, where political prisoners served three to five years term, laboured under rugged conditions with little or no access to healthcare, sanitation or food. The Hmongs of Xieng Khouang, though militarily undefeated, were abandoned by the Royal Laotian Government and by the Americans. Having ruthlessly fought the Pathet Lao for a decade, little did they know that they would be the first victims of the victorious Pathet Lao revolution. The combined Lao–Vietnamese offensive in 1976 and 1977, against Hmongs in Phou Bia and Phou Ta Mao mountains confirmed their worst fears. In 1978, groups of 500 Hmongs retreated to Thailand carrying their wounded with them. By 1979, Australia had accepted more than 6,000 Indochina refugees, of which some 2,750 were from Laos. As early as 1979, the Laotians represented almost 85 percent of refugees from Indochina who was



granted refugee status in Thailand. By 1981, there were up to 150,000 refugees from Laos were still living in Thai camps. Over the years, more than 145,000 Hmong refugees had resettled in the US — a transplanted people who found themselves plucked from their mountain vastness into a fast-paced world most of them did not even know existed. When the Hmongs became refugees in America, the cultural shock was enormous. Assimilation into American life proved problematic and disruptive. They had never seen automobiles, electricity or indoor plumbing. Concentrated in Minnesota, Wisconsin and California, the original refugees — most of them being former subsistence farmers — had produced a new generation of American Hmongs who knew little of their mountain heritage and cared less about a lost cause some of their elders had clung to religiously.

### **Cultural Characteristics of the Hmongs**

The Hmongs were divided into strictly exogenous patrilineal clans, which it owed its primary allegiance. Nevertheless, they possess a well-developed sense of ethnic identity, and many subscribed to a persistent Messianic belief that a Hmong leader would arise who would carve out an independent Hmong kingdom. This belief had led the Hmongs to follow charismatic leaders such as peace leader of the Hmong revolt of 1918–1922. In the early 1970s, the Hmong population of Laos was estimated at about 300,000, but a decade later this had been reduced by more than a third. While around 120,000 Hmongs fled Laos after the Pathet Lao seized power in 1975, others continued fighting the Lao People's Army. Those who did not succeed in resettling in other countries languished for years in Thai refugee camps. Hmong temperament contrasted with native Lao. The latter was laidback in attitude and apathetic. Hmong's ability and boldness served the counterinsurgency well but equally entangled the Hmongs in the intricate web of big power politics. Hmong men were romanticised as 'warriors'. The Hmong people who had existed for over 4,000 years and whose society was based predominantly upon agricultural pursuits, had suddenly taken on the persona of a warrior race. One should not understate the Hmong ability to

integrate and compromise as evidenced in the Hmong proverb 'hla Dec yauv hole Chou, receive ten shows Chou you hike Hau', meaning 'cross the river, take off your shoes, flee from your country, yield your status'. The Hmong language belongs to the Miao-Yao group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Most of the Miao people know the spoken and written Han language. Among all the Chinese minorities, the clothes and personal ornaments of the Hmongs were the most attractive in terms of workmanship and artistry. The women's clothes were made in a rainbow of colours. There were several dozen types of Hmong clothes embroidered with as many as a thousand different designs. The sight of them was rejuvenating during my visits to Guizhou. The Hmongs were generally good dancers. They had a dance called the Reed Pipe Dance performed during the New Year. The reed pipe was the principal instrument accompanying the dance. Other musical instruments in the band include the suona horn, vertical flute, brass drum, mouth organ, and *muye* (a percussion instrument). The dance was unrestrained in its movements and brisk in rhythm. It could be performed by any number of people. The Hmongs also like bullfights. Instead of the fight between bulls against the matador, it was a fight between two or more bulls. It was not only exciting and amusing but also a sacred religious sacrificial ceremony. Each well-to-do household contributes a bull. Ordinary households pool their resources to buy a bull. There have been usually as much as a hundred bulls taking part in the fight. The bulls were provoked with an awl till they roar in anger. With all the bulls encircled in the same area, they fight one another in a tangled fray. The spectacular atmosphere was amplified with spectators' shouts and applause. It was as exciting as a Spanish bullfight. After the fight, the bulls were sacrificed. The heads were offered to the ancestors and the meat to the spectators. Strangers and acquaintances all had a share of the meat. After the feast, they begin to sing folk songs and dance to the tune of reed pipes.

As life became more difficult in Laos, the Hmong rarely indulged in bull fights. As they were more concerned with growing opium, the men had no time to engage in bull-fights. To a certain extent, the Hmong in Laos retained the cultural characteristics resembling

that of the Miaos in China. In 1896, three years after Laos became a French protectorate, the Hmongs challenged the colonial order. Hmong kaitong for example did not collect taxes from residents who had not been informed of its increase. The Hmong engaged in an armed struggle which culminated in the negotiation for a new tax settlement, ensuing 25 years of peace. When abuses mounted to a point where Hmongs could no longer tolerate, they resorted to violence. From 1919–1921, a revolt known as *Guerre du Fou* or ‘Madman’s War’ engulfed all of northern Indochina, which damned Hmongs as it divided the Hmong people. The French, with more superior gunfire, drove the Hmongs from one stronghold to another, harassing them to the point of decimating them so swiftly that within a month all of Hmong units had been either held captive or destroyed.

## **Hmong Marital Culture**

After marriage, the wife retains the name of her clan but the children belong to the father’s clan. If the husband dies, the wife might not return to live with her parents, and should remain with her husband’s parents. She must consider them as her new parents and ask their permission to marry again. The second husband must then pay a dowry to the first husband’s parents. When the intention of marriage was declared and the signs were favourable, the tradition requires that the boy’s father, escorted with married women and the young man goes to the house of the girl’s parents with a dowry and tools such as knife, axe and sword. The tools were signs of protection and had become more symbolic in recent times. The marriage was negotiated between the parents. Traditionally, the girl’s parents would be compensated for the loss of a daughter by a minimum value of 2.6 pong at Tawan and 3.3 pong at Tafak. A pong was worth 5.500 kips (US\$8) in 1995, so the total value was approximately US\$340. If the boy and his parents cannot pay the sum, the new couple must theoretically remain for 12 years with the girl’s parents to assist them. Normally, the sum was paid by instalment in 2–3 years.

## **Funeral Rites**

When a Hmong dies, he was placed in his or her house and the members of the family must sit beside on the floor and not on a chair or on a bed, to preserve contact with him. A priest of the village or of the neighbouring village conducts the funeral rites. If the father or mother dies, a shirt and band of white cotton cloth were prepared to dress them up. The priest was equipped with a book written in Chinese characters to define which day the deceased would be buried. The burial date being fixed, the coffin was transported to the cemetery, the feet in the direction of the cemetery and the head towards the house. The cemetery was situated outside the village, always on the west, the downstream of the village, and river crossing was usually not considered as an obstacle.

## *Chapter Eight*

# **Baba (峇峇) and Nyonya (娘惹) in Malaysia**

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Intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and native Malay women occurred even before the arrival of the Europeans. It started as early as the Sri Vijaya (三佛齐) Buddhist era which was then the supreme power in the 12th century. Their territorial sovereignty included Pahang (known as 蓬丰), Trengganu (登牙依), Lengkasuka (凌牙斯加), Kelantan (吉兰丹), Bearnang (佛罗安), Langat (河上), Palembang (巴林冯), Sunda (新拖), Kampar (金宝), Lamuri (蓝无里) and Ceylon (细兰). Sri Vijaya had cordial relations with China, and many Chinese migrated to these states. During the reign of the Sung dynasty, Sri Vijaya paid tribute to the Chinese Court 28 times, and China sent envoys every six years to Sri Vijaya. The Kingdom made a big contribution to help repair an incinerated Buddhist temple in Guangdong known as Tian Qing Temple. This temple constructed during the Tang dynasty was known as Kai Yuan Si (开元寺) and later the name was changed to Tian Qing Temple. By 1178, the Kingdom of Sri Vijaya began to decline, and a Hindu-Buddhist empire under the South Indian Chola kingdom took over. The Buddhist influence resulted in intermarriages as there was no question of religious conversion as both the Chinese and the local natives were Buddhist. Intermarriages began on a larger scale during the Ming dynasty after Zheng He, the Chinese Admiral who was a Muslim, landed in Malacca and Java.

### **Chinese Migration to Malaya**

The earliest recorded Chinese settlement in Malaya was a small community established in Malacca around 1400 by Fujian (福建) traders

who came to engage in the thriving maritime trade of the sultanate, the region's busiest entrepot. This was before the arrival of the Portuguese. They were mostly Fujianese from Zhangzhou (漳州) and Quanzhou (泉州), who brought along with them porcelain, silks, cotton and gold in exchange for products from Nanyang such as pearls, glasses, precious stones, spices and medicine. The trade was further expanded by the visits of Admiral Zheng He, who made Melaka the Centre for Southeast Asia. In those days, there were several smaller kingdoms in Malaya such as Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan, which also paid tribute to the Ming Court separately. Sometimes these kingdoms sent envoys and at other times the Sultans themselves went personally to seek audiences from Ming emperors. By the early 1600s, the Chinese began to migrate to Malacca and they were welcomed by the Dutch rulers. Two prominent Chinese from Amoy, Zheng Fang Yang (郑方阳) and Lee Wei Chin (李维金), were appointed as Kapitan Cina (title for the representative of Chinese enclave) by the Dutch. They founded the Qing Yun Ting (青云亭), which was the earliest Chinese Club in Malaysia in 1613. They had used the words qing yun (青云) to refer to the rise of the Babas (步步青云), meaning 'easy footsteps of the clear blue cloud'. It was then the centre of activities for all Chinese immigrants. The British arrived and did away with the Kapitan Cina system and therefore the leadership of Qing Yuen Ting was recognised at the highest level. Both Zheng and Lee escaped to Malacca from China because they were involved in anti-Manchu activities. The Qing Yuen Ting encouraged the Chinese immigrants to pray to Guan Im, Goddess of Mercy. During that period, the Chinese traders and immigrants did not bring along their wives and had married local native Malay women. When they settled down in Malaysian soil, there were no Chinese women available for the immigrants to marry. So they had no choice but to take native wives. Their male offspring was called 'Babas' and female 'Nyonyas'. Together, they were known as the *Peranakans* and later as the Straits-born Chinese.

## **Baba (峇峇) and Nyonya (娘惹) in Malaysia**

When Islam took over Malaya, the Islamic custom required anyone who married a Muslim to be converted to Islam. But in those days,

Malacca was in the hands of the Dutch and later the British. The Malays were the only subjects of colonial rule and were not able to exert their Islamic practices over the new immigrants. Moreover, the Babas were able to retain their religion and yet married Malay women. Two things did prevail though, the Malay language and culture, because the Malay mothers were able to influence their children to speak Malay and embrace Malaya lifestyle. Despite marrying Malay women, the Babas continued to establish Chinese clubs such as the Qing Yuen Ting, the Heng San Ting (恒山亭), the Tian Fu Ting (天福亭) as well as the Qing Tech Hui (庆德会). The architectural styles and interior designs were very much influenced by China. The Qing Tech Hui even established two Chinese schools, one called the Chong Wen Ge (崇文阁) in 1849 and another school called Chooi Eng Su Yen (萃英书院) in 1854. However, the association also started two Malay schools to teach the Malay language and Islam.

## **The Babas**

The word Baba refers to the offspring of a married Chinese man and a Malay woman. It was introduced only after the European colonisation of Malacca and especially so during the British colonial period. Among this group of mixed-blood, some became completely assimilated and acculturated to represent a unique group of people referred to as Babas. They spoke only Malay. Linguistically, the Babas were Malays, but ethnically they remained Chinese. In the early days of Chinese settlement in Malacca, local Malays were taken as wives or concubines. This predated the Islamic era in Southeast Asia. It was also possible that Malay baby girls were adopted by members of the Chinese community, but brought up culturally Chinese or later as *Peranakans* in order to increase the 'reservoir' of marriageable women in the community. In the early days, people were simply not conscious of their ancestry nor were there strict ethnic boundaries. The consciousness of ethnic boundaries appeared only after the colonial era. Islamic influence in Southeast Asia began in the early 9th century (878 CE) but was disrupted soon after the Chola invasion up till 1136 CE, when Phra Ong Mahawangsa (King of Kedah) became a Muslim.

## **The Origin of Babas**

The origin of the word *Baba* was not clear. In the Fujian dialect, '*ba*' means numb. One theory suggests that the new arrival *sinkhek* (新客 or new immigrants) made fun of the Malay-speaking Chinese as *ba* for not speaking their mother tongue. In the eyes of these newcomers, the Malay-speaking Chinese were 'numbed' to their own Chinese languages and culture. The word *ba* later evolved to become *Baba*, the term for non-Chinese speaking Chinese. However, the term '*Baba*' was unlikely to be of Chinese origin. The Chinese characters for '*Baba*' was not found in most Chinese dictionaries, except in some modern editions. By the later part of the 19th century, the term '*Baba*' had already become popular and Western scholars used it to refer more broadly to the Straits-born Chinese from mixed marriages of Chinese to Malay or other ethnic parentage. In Malaysia, the term '*Baba*' refers to any Malay-speaking Chinese who wears a sarong, eats with his fingers and shows a significant level of assimilation with Malays. They need not necessarily represent someone who married a Malay.

## **The Babas (峇峇) and Sinkhek (新客)**

During the early colonial days, Chinese immigrants in Malaysia were generally divided into two categories: first the Babas and second the Sinkheks. Often the Babas were equated with the elite. The urban Babas who were more anglicised because of English education, and they represented the upper class in the social system of their community. Allied with the British government, they were the urban white-collar community. They eventually formed the trading elite as they had a good rapport with Europeans and imbibed westernised habits and business procedures. Babas took to British ways with ostentatious displays of their wealth, living in big houses, travelling in carriages and keeping a collection of antiques — all material possessions of the ruling class which could be acquired relatively easily.

## **Baba (峇峇) and Sinkhek (新客) in Malaysia**

The Babas opted for English education because of their business interests, not because they were being edged out by more industrious



Sinkheks. The Babas sent their children to English schools to learn modern western commercial and financial management as well as to obtain technical know-how. From around mid-18th century to the mid-19th century, the wealthy Baba elite and entrepreneurs were at their prime. Many of them were prominent leaders appointed by the Colonial government to help the British rule the country. Their ability to speak and write English made them first among equals. European entrepreneurs, together with Chinese merchants, became the *nouveau riche* of the time and their opulent mansions were social statements of status. Their wealth was acquired from trading profits, land speculation and revenues derived from taxes of farmers on behalf of the Straits government. They used their wealth to obtain tenders for liquor, opium and gambling farms. With their wealth, they demonstrated how different they were from the pure Chinese and started to distance themselves from them. They even formed exclusive clubs to exclude the Sinkheks. They became even more arrogant when the Straits Settlements became colonies of Britain in 1867 and when they became British subjects. In 1905, a quasi-political body called the Straits Settlement Society was formed, a London-based body to represent the interests of British subjects. The Babas' self-importance derived from their early arrival and they considered themselves equal to the aristocrats. The flowering of the Baba culture coincided with British rule of the Straits. By the end of the 19th century, they segregated themselves with their own network of social clubs. This was especially so with the Penang Babas. The Babas in Penang and Singapore were English speaking and westernised, although the Nyonyas were assimilated into Malay culture.

### **Bukit China (中國山) in Malacca**

The early Portuguese maps of Melaka point to the existence of a Kampong Cina (支那, Chinese village), as far back as the 16th century. There were various epigraphic and genealogical records of these early Chinese settlers. The Chinese appointed Captain Notchin after the Dutch conquest of Malacca in 1641. He lived on small merchandise and was the first Kapitan under the Dutch rule. However, there

was another source that claimed Tin Kap was the first Capitan appointed by the Portuguese. Tin Kap had another name Zheng Fang Yang (郑方阳). He was a Fujianese from Zhangzhou (漳州) and was a successful businessman in Malacca. He was born in 1572 in China and died in Malacca in 1617. In 1641, there were three to four hundred Chinese shopkeepers, craftsmen and farmers. The thousand or so farmers were cultivating rice and fruit trees and the Dutch viewed these agricultural activities as ‘very useful’. By 1678, there were 81 bricks and 51 *attap* houses which belonged to the Chinese. During the 18th century Dutch rule, there were about 2,000 Chinese in Malacca. The Dutch records of 1756 documented that the Chinese had served as soldiers in the Dutch regiments. By the middle of the century, Trengganu’s pepper plantations were in the hands of Chinese who, according to a Thai chronicle, had been encouraged to settle down there by the rulers. In Selangor, Fujian (福建) and Guangdong (广东) settlers worked in tin mines, and from 1777, the ruler of Perak and the Dutch collaborated in recruiting indentured Chinese labourers from Malacca to exploit the newly discovered tin mines. Towards the end of the Dutch rule, the Chinese population in the Malacca declined following the establishment of Penang and Singapore as British colonies. The Baba community congregated in the British Strait Settlements, Singapore, Penang and Malacca.

## **Zheng He’s (郑和) Expedition to Malacca**

After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the third Ming Emperor Zhu Di (朱棣) reversed China’s imperial policy and sent 63 treasure ships led by Admiral Zheng He, a Muslim eunuch to Malacca and made seven voyages to the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1431. According to the ‘*Sejarah Melayu*’ (or *Malay Annals* written about 1490–1530), it was recorded that the Chinese Emperor, on learning how great the ruler of Melaka was, sent his daughter, Princess Han Li Bao (汉丽宝公主), to marry Sultan Mansor Shah of Malacca (1459–1477). According to C.C. Brown’s translation of the *Malay Annals*, ‘five hundred youths of noble birth and several hundred beautiful women attendants accompanied her...’ The five hundred sons of Chinese

ministers took abode in Bukit China, which was named after them. The offspring of these beautiful women attendants could have been the outcome of the intermarriages between Chinese women and Malay rulers. They were the earliest Babas and Nyonyas. Zheng He, who visited Malacca in 1409 and 1411, was honoured with a shrine near Bukit Cina. This imperial admiral had also been deified elsewhere by Southeast Asian Chinese, entrusting supernatural powers upon him. According to a legend, the Sultan's well at the foot of Bukit Cina was the place where the Chinese admiral first drunk, causing the water flow to be perennial and pure.

### **China's Historic Links with Malaysia**

Historical evidence of trade between Malaysia and China goes back to the beginning of the Christian era prior to the Sri Vijaya period. Chinese coins and fragments of Han pottery had been discovered near the estuary of the Sarawak River, and China imported birds' nests from Brunei in the 7th century. During the Tang dynasty, China's famous monk Yi Jing Fa Shi (义净法师) visited Kedah and in his book entitled, *Biography of Tang High Priest's West journey* (大唐西域求法高僧传). He mentioned a place called 结突, meaning Kedah, where archaeologists had found green pieces of porcelain in Buyang Valley, confirming that the Chinese were in Kedah. In 1996, some scuba divers discovered a sunken China vessel off the coast of Trengganu loaded with Chinese porcelains, most of which dated back to 1400 AD and some Siamese swankalog (青瓷) or Celadon of Sukhothai period. This was evidence showing that the Chinese have been in Trengganu since the early Ming era. During the Sung dynasty, the Chinese knew Trengganu as Ting Ya Nong (登牙侬) or Ting Jia Nu (丁家庐). It was possible that Chinese migrants reached the shores of Trengganu during the Middle Ming period and settled down in a place called Tang Ren Po (唐人坡) before spreading to other towns. They planted sugarcane and pepper. According to a report by a British ship captain Alexander Hamilton (汉米尔顿), the Chinese immigrants were mainly from Fujian. There were about 500 families. Today, many relics of these families still remained as a

tourist attraction. Another state is named Pahang; originally known as 蓬丰 during the Sung dynasty, it was later changed to 彭亨 during the Yuan dynasty. It was referred to as the eight lands in Malaysia that paid tribute to the Chinese Imperial Court. In 1547 CE, Lin Chian Zi (林剪志), a Chinese sea merchant, led an expedition from Pahang with more than 70 vessels, teamed up with the Koh Brothers Commercial Syndicate (许兄弟商业集团) to attack the Yeow Sia (姚谢) group of pirates from Zhejiang Province because of their harassment. They succeeded in diminishing the strength of the Chinese pirates, enabling trading to resume smoothly between China and Malaya. Southeast Asian, Indian and Arab traders were already trading in Malaya before the Chinese came in big numbers during the Sung dynasty in the 11th century. By mid-13th century however, the Chinese dominated trade in the South China Sea. When the Mongolians (蒙古人) conquered China and established the Yuan dynasty, they continued the trading policy of the Hans (汉) and the Sung (宋) dynasty. Large numbers of Chinese ships began to visit the South Sea in the 14th century. During those days, most of the Malayan states came under the jurisdiction of Sri Vijaya, which was the strongest Buddhist country in Southeast Asia. Inter-marriages between the Chinese immigrants and their natives became common. During the Sri Vijaya period, the Malaccan King Parameswara (拜里迷苏刺) paid tribute to the Ming Emperor Yung Lo with his wife and children and 540 delegates in 1433. They were well received by the Chinese royal family. The three generations of the Sultans of the Malaccan Kingdom paid tribute to China five times and the Chinese Court bestowed on the delegations valuable gifts such as silk and golden scrolls written in Chinese. Direct Chinese participation in trading in Southeast Asia, coupled with the long-term jealousy of rival Southeast Asian countries brought about the demise of the Sri Vijaya kingdom.

## **The Kapitan Cina in Malaya**

The Kapitan Cinas in Malaya in the early days were shadowy figures, connected to secret societies. In Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy was the

famous Kapitan Cina. In Penang, it was Cheng Keng Quee (郑庆景) while in Perlis, Lee Lei Kam (李来金) was a household name for Sino–Malay brotherhood. By the end of 1869, Yap Ah Loy and the Fei Chew Clan supported Tengku Kudin (东姑古丁), who had successfully taken Kelang. Their rivals, the Kah Yeng Chew Clan, joined forces with Raja Mahdi’s supporters. Raja Mahdi (拉查马地) obtained financial support from Chinese merchants in Malacca while Tengku Kudin borrowed money from several Singapore financiers. Even the Singapore colonial government supported Tengku Kudin. By doing so, it had gone beyond London’s policy of non-intervention. The local British authorities, like the Dutch before them, had been drawn inexorably into Malay politics as they came to believe that only an amenable ruler could assure continued trade.

### **Chinese Secret Societies (私会党)**

During the colonial days, Chinese secret societies which originated from and were patronised by China were active, and many leaders were members of these secret societies. In 1825, there were at least three large societies in the Straits Settlements. They were the Ghee Hin (义兴), the Ho Seng (何成) and the Hai San (海山), the offshoots of the triads in China. Their membership mushroomed to thousands and even included Malays, Portuguese, Indians and Babas. There were different groups of secret societies or triads. Generally speaking, the Hai San group was made up of Cantonese and Teochiu and the Ghee Hin group by the Hakkas. Ghee Hin, literally translated, means ‘the rise of righteousness’ in Chinese, mainly dominated by the Cantonese, although Fujianese formed the majority by 1960. It fought against the Hakka who dominated Hai San group. The Ghee Hin was notorious for riots against Chinese Catholics in 1850, killing around 500 people.

The Hai San group originated in Southern China and its base in Penang was established in 1825. This group figured prominently in the Larut Wars of 1862–1873 as miners who belonged to this group fought bitterly against miners who were Ghee Hin members. The incessant warfare between the two groups brought tin mine production

to a standstill. The Triad (三合会) or Tian Di Hui (天地会), better known as the Society of Heaven and Earth, began as a resistance movement against the Manchu Emperor of the Qing dynasty. The purpose was to restore the Han Chinese rule and overthrow the Manchu. This organisation spread to different parts of China and overseas and it also branched off into many groups, one of which was the Triad which spread widely in Singapore and Malacca. An account in 1826 showed that the Triad in Malacca was able to muster 4,000 men from the different plantations and tin mines in the interior. By 1840 there were 7,000 members in the Straits Settlements. They took advantage of the lax attitude and the ignorance of the British. The colonial authorities were accommodating because these societies helped to maintain social control among the immigrants. When the Hong Kong authorities and the Dutch East Indies (荷属东印度群岛) outlawed the secret societies in 1845 and 1946, respectively, a number of them moved to the Straits Settlement to seek shelter. About 2,000 to 3,000 Triad members arrived in Singapore and Malaya. The numbers increased to 34,776 after the abortive uprising of the Taiping Rebellion which ended in 1864. The secret societies were engaged in extortion, shielding of criminals and the recruitment of new immigrants by force. Their rivalry frequently led to murder, arson, street fights and riots. The Penang riot (檳城爆动) of 1867 proved costly. It represented a bloody inter-ethnic fight between 30,000 Chinese and 4,000 Malays. This lasted for as long as a month. These riots dragged alliances between different clans and societies, reflecting the complexities of local Chinese politics. Most secret societies were organised on the model of the Triad in China. The ruling body generally consisted of a hierarchy of brotherhood, e.g. *tai ko* (大哥; an elder brother), *yi ko* (二哥; second brother) and *sam ko* (三哥; third brother), and *assin shang* (先生; a master), *pak shin* (伯仙 or 白扇; an instructor) and *hung kwan* (红军; an executioner or red soldier). In addition, there would be *yi shi* (义士; councillors), *kwai shi* (柜匙; a treasurer), literally translated, it means key of the safe; *sau kwai* (收柜; a receiver) and *Toi Sau Kwai* (代收柜; assistant receiver). The team would also consist of a number of *tso hai* or Grass Shoes (草鞋). This term was used to describe a detective (modern-day operative).

Of the positions, the most powerful were the Master, Executioner and the Treasurer, who virtually controlled the whole organisation. The main functions of these three top leaders were to keep the book of rules and records, the settling of disputes and management of funds. Perhaps, the most important element in the solidarity of the secret society was its brotherhood. All members were bound by an oath taken during an initiation ceremony that involved the drinking of one another's blood. The requirements of mutual help and loyalty were codified in the infamous 36 oaths and rules.

These Chinese secret societies gradually got involved with local politics that led to the decline of the Malay society as seen in the various civil wars which divided the states in the Malayan peninsula. Malay conflicts did not entail great loss of human life and were largely skirmishes rather than full-scale civil battles. The core of the civil wars was over the ownership and exploitation of Malaya's natural resources. In Negeri Sembilan (森美兰), for instance, it was a struggle between members of the Malay ruling class over tin mines. In Perak (霹靂), Selangor (雪兰莪) and Negeri Sembilan (森美兰), Malay chiefs fought for political control to ensure their prestige and revenue. Chinese mining groups and Straits Settlements alike were determined that the victorious Malay faction would favour their particular interests. Solicited by one or the other Malay leaders, the Chinese clans and societies contributed money, supplies, arms and fighting men, while in the Straits Settlements, both British and Chinese merchants gave financial backing. The supply of funds from the Straits and the pool of fighting men among the Chinese groups prolonged quarrels, which could have been abortive otherwise. Because of the numerous vested interests, many Malay disputes in the tin-producing states had ramifications stretching beyond the local issue itself. The core of the civil wars in the tin mining areas caused perpetual struggles between members of the Malay ruling class. The Chinese clans which supported the Malay ruling class were further divided into different factions and more often than not, they had bitter quarrels among themselves as well.

The Hakka community in Selangor, for instance, was split by bitter quarrels between two major clans, the Huizhou (惠州) and the

Kah Yeng Chew (嘉应州), each linked with separate secret societies. Chinese leaders in the interior parts of the Malay Peninsula (马来群岛) between 1830 and 1880 appeared to have been men of different types. In the highly risky and often tumultuous world of the gambier estates of Johore in the 1840s and 1850s, or in tin mining areas of various Malay states from the 1830s to 1880, leaders were often known more for their fighting skills and their organisational abilities than for their wealth. Those with fighting skills were appointed to official positions as Kapitan or *kangchu* (港主) by local Malay royalty. They served as strong men and served simultaneously as military leaders, mediators between the local Chinese and Malays and private entrepreneurs, who eventually amassed considerable wealth for themselves and their families. In the 1820s, Selangor's most flourishing tin district was Raja Jamaat's Lukut (拉查耶卖鲁古). This attracted an influx of Hakka (客家) miners and traders, who established themselves in Kuala Lumpur nearby. Malay chiefs appointed Kapitan based on their popularity with the Chinese miners.

### **Cheng Keng Quee (郑景贵)**

Cheng Keng Quee (1846–1901), the founder of Taiping, was born on December 13, 1846. He was known as a millionaire philanthropist and as the innovator in the mining of tin in Malaya. He had investments in agricultural industries, including farming, pawnbroking and logging. Both the Europeans and the local Chinese had great respect for him. He was the leader of the Hai San group (海山党), a Chinese secret society from China, and grew up during the Larut war (1862–1873). He led the group until early 1884. He served on the Commission for the Pacification of Larut as a member. He was simultaneously appointed by the British as a member of the Advisory Perak State Council.

Cheng was a Hakka from Xin Cun (新村), Cheng County (增城) of the Guangdong province. He came to Malaya from his hometown at the age of 16, in search of his father Cheng Hsing Fa (郑兴发), who migrated to Malaya as a labourer during the opium war. It was the Malay Chief Che Long Ja'afar, who offered Cheng a chance to



venture into mining. Ja'afar had borrowed some money from the Chinese to start his business and soon became close to him. He gave mining rights to Cheng when he was Head of the Four Hakka Associations — the Si Kuan (四馆) in Larut, as well as Leader of the Hai San secret society. During the Taiping Rebellion in China, many Hakkas escaped to help Cheng with his mining. Because Larut was richly endowed with tin the secret societies Ghee Hin Society (义兴) and the Hai San (海山) fought four major wars to possess the wealth. The war also involved two Clan associations, the Sikuan representing the Hakka and Tua Pek Kong Association (大伯公) representing the Fujianese. The first Larut war began in July 1861 over arguments on the control of the watercourse to their mining assets. The second war took place in 1865. This was sparked off by a gambling quarrel between two opposing secret society members. The third, which took place in 1872, was over a scandal involving two families connected with the two different secret societies, and the fourth in 1873 involved the Perak royal family and another Malay faction. Through the intervention of Singapore's famous secret society expert Pickering, the war came to an abrupt end in 1874, and Cheng signed the Pangkor Engagement, ending the dispute. For his effort in ending the war, the British bestowed on him the title of Kapitan Cina. He was also conferred the Second Degree Mandarin by the Qing Government. He was a philanthropist who donated large sums of money for charity and for the building of temples, including the famous Penang Kek Lok Si (极乐寺) and the Tua Pek Kong Temple (大伯公庙) in Tanjong Tokong and King's Street. He was virtually the founder of Taiping and in fact he gave the name of the Taiping Lake to commemorate the Taiping Rebellion. He died in Penang in 1901. A street was named after him in Penang near the city to recognise and commemorate his contributions.

### **Loke Yew (陆佑) (1845–1917)**

Loke Yew was born in 1845 in He Shan Village (鹤山县) of Guangdong Province and migrated to Malaya at the age of 11. He lived in Taiping for 15 years and later moved to Kuala Lumpur, where he took an



Loke Yew

interest in mining and flourished. At the turn of the century, he became the richest Chinese in the Malaysian Peninsular. In his earlier days, he developed a close relationship with the Chinese mining gangs and supplied them with food and weapons on the West coast. When the British took control of Malaya from 1874, he developed an open-cast tin mining empire, employing thousands of Chinese labourers whom he supplied with opium, liquor and gambling facilities under state revenue farm licenses. Loke Yew worked closely with secret societies as he was a member of the powerful Ghee Hin (义兴) Triad Society. The British residents in the key mining states relied on him, both to control the Chinese population and to contribute a large share of fiscal revenue to them. In turn, Loke Yew did his best to put his colonial counterparts at ease with a balance of power shared between them. As a Baba, he acquired English manners, developed a friendship with the first Resident General of the four Federated Malay

States, Frank Swettenham. He was one of the main sponsors of the English language school in Kuala Lumpur, the Victoria Institution (维多利亚学院). He entered into business with English and Scottish companies as well as Tamil (旦美尔) tycoons. He had a monopoly over the opium and liquor trade apart from mining pursuits. He was conferred Honorary Doctorate by the Hong Kong University in 1917 before his death. He came to know Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, and had donated some money for his revolutionary activities. He also contributed towards the establishment of a Chinese newspaper called Sin Chew Sun Pao (星洲晨报) which was established to propagate the Chinese revolution. He donated towards the setting up of Raffles Institution. He died in 1917. His son, Loke Wan Tho (陆运涛) became a cinema and entertainment magnet, establishing the Cathay Cinema. He was close to Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner for Southeast Asia. He met his death in a plane crash off Taipei in 1964.

### **Yap Ah Loy (叶亚来)**

Born on March 14, 1837, in Huizhou, Guangdong Province, Yap Ah Loy (1837–1885) left China via Macau for Malaya in 1854, during



Yap Ah Loy

the Taiping Rebellion. Due to the depredations of the Taiping Rebels, he realised as a young man that the only way to get ahead would be to become a bandit. He therefore decided to travel overseas to take his chances. He settled down in a flourishing tin mine in Lukut, Selangor, where he worked and saved enough money to start a pig trading business. This soon expanded from Lukut to include the nearby tin mining area of Sungei Ujong (双溪乌容) in Negri Sembilan. He joined the Hai San secret society and became its leader.

In the struggles between Malay chiefs over control of mining areas and the opium trade, Yap took the side of one against the other, and his association with the secret society provided the fighting men for him to help defeat the opposition. This won him favour and he was appointed Kapitan. Soon, he had his own police force, judicial courts and public administration. When he became Kapitan, Yap Ah Loy's most important contributions were in the economic and philanthropic fields. The Kapitan has personally held titles to approximately two-thirds of the urban property in Kuala Lumpur, east of the Klang Rivers including the main market, the gambling dens and brothels. In addition to controlling the market in tin, he was an enthusiastic supporter of new economic enterprises, installing Kuala Lumpur's first steam pump in his Ampang (安邦) mine, experimenting less successfully with plantation crops and operating a brickfield and kiln near the town. As a philanthropist, he built a refuge that offered food and shelter for the sick. He played a leading role in building Kuala Lumpur's first Chinese school.

By 1885, when he died, he was said to have controlled both a large area of mining land and two thirds of the real estate in Kuala Lumpur. After his death, the kapitanship was taken over by his headman Yao Kwan Seng. Yap was worshipped as an illustrious ancestor on the central altar of the Yap Clan Association (叶氏总会). Many consider Yap the founder of the nation's capital, Kuala Lumpur, although the history books regard Raja Abdullah of Klang as Kuala Lumpur's true founder. His notoriety notwithstanding, he had, after all, contributed significantly to the development of Kuala Lumpur as a metropolis. A street was named after him to acknowledge his contributions.

## **Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孙中山) in Penang (槟城)**

Before the arrival of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary leader who overthrew the feudal kingdom of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese were largely assimilated into the Baba culture. Very few could read Chinese and began to lose touch with their mother tongue. Dr. Sun, who grew up in Hawaii, was concerned about the gradual assimilation of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore when he visited these countries. He found that most of them did not speak the Chinese language and appeared to have had lost their Chinese identity in the way they behaved and lived. At the same time, he discovered that many Babas were rich and provide financial support to his campaign to overthrow the Manchu. Had it not been for Dr. Sun, the Chinese in Malaya would have been co-opted into the Baba society. Dr. Sun Yat-sen toured Southeast Asian states to seek support from overseas Chinese for his cause. In London, he was kidnapped by the Chinese Legation in 1896, but he survived to write a book about his experience which publicised the crisis in China to the English-speaking world. He bemoaned that China was labelled the 'Sick Man of the Far East (东亚病夫)', suffering the humiliation of being carved up by foreign powers.

In 1906, Dr. Sun headquartered his Southeast Asian division in Penang. He started the Penang So Pao Se (书报社, book and newspaper clubs) to propagate his political philosophy of the Three Principles (三民主义). He visited Penang each year until the success of his revolution in 1911. During his sojourns in Penang, he stayed at the home of many of his Chinese supporters. His main residence, however, was the former No. 400, Dato Keramat Road (四坎店), where he stayed together with his wife and two daughters. It was on the Dato Keramat Road that he held the famous Penang Conference to plan a large-scale uprising in Canton. The Dongmen Hui headquarters was set up in 120 Armenian Street, a building once owned by a Chinese merchant Heah Joo Seang (连裕祥), a trustee of Cheah Kongsí (谢公司) and a leader of the Straits Chinese Community in Penang. At Armenian Street was a Malay-speaking community who were aware of Dr. Sun's anti-Manchu revolutionary activities. Dr. Sun's group was referred to as *orang Sun Yat-sen yang potong thauchang*. Literally it meant people who cut off their pigtails.

## **The Rise of the Babas**

The liberalism of British colonialism contributed to the emergence of the Baba society. The British did give some status and privileges to the well-to-do Babas. Although the Baba had been acculturated before the British came, the label 'Baba' came into popular usage only during the British occupation. The British used the 'Baba' as brokers, shopkeepers, general merchants and civil servants. The Babas were either a race of quadroons, a cross between Chinese and Malays or Chinese marrying non-Chinese-speaking Chinese, giving rise to a sub-culture quite different from the original Chinese. They were more laid-back than the Sinkheks but certainly very at home within the local community. The emergence of the Baba was gradual. It was the close interaction between the Chinese immigrants and the local people leading to intermarriages that contributed to the development of this sub-culture that became more distinct by the 18th century. But a Baba might not be the product of mixed-blood even though the influence of the Malay culture was evident. It was right to say that the Baba society was a product of cultural syncretism and not necessarily of a biological origin. This made them different from the Chinese in Java who were completely Javanese, both culturally and biologically.

Chinese immigrants who arrived in Malaya used Chinese language in executing their practices of customs, religion, kinship and marriage. For instance, the Baba would refer to a monk as *hesio* (和尚), a Minnan dialect term for immigrants, especially their offspring, the Babas and Nyonyas. Over time, they were exposed to the influence of the West. The establishment of the Queen's Scholarship further enabled the more Straits Chinese to be educated in higher institutions in Britain. Thus, the English-educated Babas formed a dominant element of Malayan Chinese society.

## **The Baba Culture**

The Babas have had their own lifestyle. They had developed their own cuisine known as nyonya food. I remember all the names of nyonya deserts such as *kuih cang manis*, also called *kuih cang nyonya*, which

was very sweet in taste, a type of rice dumplings with a Baba twist. Gradually, a kind of rice-cake called *nyonya cang*, quite different from the traditional cang (糯) dumplings made by Chinese sinkheks. Although they were Babas, culturally they were Chinese. They observed most of the Chinese festivities and celebrated Chinese New Year according to the lunar calendar. They gave *angpows* (red packet with money inside) to their children and observed the Chang festival or the Festival of Dumplings, the Festival of Hungry Ghost (鬼节). They offered tropical fruits such as mangosteen, rambutans, cempadaks, duku, durian or langsat when they pray to the wandering souls in the streets or backyards. The Babas were superstitious and would not hold weddings during the month of the Ghost Festival. They also do not move residence or venture into any new business during this period. During the Zhong Wu Jie (中午节) in the seventh month, they would make a Baba version of the rice dumplings, the *nyonya chang* (娘惹糯). They would also observe the festivities of the eighth month or Zhong Qiu Jie (中秋节) and Dong Zhi (冬至). They might not know the history and significance of such festivals but they would still follow the Chinese customs and traditions. The Baba funeral was very much like any other Fujian funeral, except that the wailing would be in Malay language. Unlike the Fujianese who use either a Daoist priest or a Buddhist monk in a funeral, the Babas would employ a monk from a Mahayana Buddhist temple. When the dead enters a coffin, widely referred to as *masuk peti* (enter the box), the body was first dressed in a white suit and then in a few layers of his or her ordinary clothes. The Baba mourning dress also differs in colour from the Sinkheks. The sons, for instance, wear orange mourning dress, but the Sinkheks wear a coarse garment made of hempen cloth called *moapo* (麻布).

The Babas have had their own ceremonial wedding customs, quite different from the Chinese. They engage a *sang-ke-ng* (送家娘) (a lady who was well versed with marriage customs, much like a wedding advisor-cum-attendant) to handle the customary rituals from the start till the end of the wedding ceremony. The Baba marriage was distinctive in that the bridegroom had to undergo the age-old custom of *ciuthau* (梳头 or combing of the hair). Before the groom takes a



bride, he had to sit on the floor within a bamboo tray and the wedding advisor would invite a *ho-mia-lang* (好命人), a reputable, well-heeled man, to comb his hair and recite Chinese verses related to good matrimony. He was supposed to cry after his hair was combed to indicate that he had reached manhood and the tears were meant to gratefully thank his parents. The ceremony was meant as a mark of respect to his parents. The Baba bridegroom usually kneels down with his bride to pay respect to his elders on the wedding day.

In the early days, marriage rituals of the *Peranakans* included giving poultry to the bride's family. A pair of live duck and drake and a pair of hen and cock formed part of the gift to the bride. Each pair would have their legs tied together and bonded with strips of red paper to symbolise the marital knot. The families of the bride and the groom would exchange gifts, days before the wedding. In addition to the pair of poultry, there was also a leg of pork decorated with red paper-cuttings, four small boxes of preserved *mata kuching* (locally cultivated longan), lotus seeds and two pairs of dried deer tendon, four betel nuts painted to resemble gold ingots, a bunch of *pisang raja* (a variety of local banana) and a pair of pomegranates. These were symbols of fertility. I remember when I got married, I was asked to follow the custom. This old-fashioned ceremony had died out over time with further western modernisation.

### ***My Baba background***

I grew up in a Baba family. My mother, Yong Nyuk Yoon (杨玉运) came from a Teochew family. She would wear *sarong kebaya* with *kerongsang* (three linked bejewelled brooches). She spoke Malay and Hakka and as a Nyonya, she could not speak Mandarin nor read Chinese. To secure a jacket or blouse, two types of *kerongsang* were used. The first was a set of three brooches, almost always circular, used for the *baju panjang* (long dress) and *kerongsang bojong*, another kind of brooch. In the early days, the wealth of a Nyonya could be seen from the quality and quantity of the *kerongsang* she wore. As my father was one of the richest men in Butterworth, my mother possessed numerous *kerongsang*. She would set her hair in a coiffure or



*sanggul* (发型), with a jewelled hair ornament on top of her head. The *sanggul* was a fusion of the Burmese and Javanese hairstyles. The bun was located at the tip, above the head and not behind the head. To dress up the coiffure, the Malaccan Nyonyas use a set of three to five hairpins, while the Penang Nyonyas would use five or more. These hairpins were different from those used in China and were also different from those used by Malay women. Nyonya hairpins were developed from chopstick-like wooden implements. Some were copper sticks resembling ear buds, while others could be crafted ornaments of silver and gold. I have 11 brothers and sisters. I am the seventh in the family. All my older brothers and sisters were true to the Baba culture in refusing an entirely Chinese-medium education.

I am an exception as I chose to go to a Chinese school. I had my education in Chung Ling High School (钟灵中学) and developed a better affinity with the Chinese compared to my siblings. None of my brothers and sisters could speak Mandarin, neither were they able to read and write Chinese. We used to argue over our sense of loyalty. My elder brother Ah Bah used to proclaim, 'My country is England', and I would retort 'My country is China'. Later, I influenced my younger brothers to study Chinese. By the early 19th century, the term Baba had been already in use. For instance, Abdullah, the Malay writer mentioned that when Raffles visited Melaka in 1810, he stayed at a house in Bandar Hilir, Malacca, on an estate owned by Baba Cheng Lan (郑兰), son of a Chinese Kapitan. In those days, the term Baba was no doubt the honorific term for a respectful local-born Chinese. By the end of the 19th century, as the population of Baba increased, it became not only necessary to distinguish between the China-born Chinese and the local-born Chinese, but also the Chinese-speaking Chinese and Malay-speaking Chinese. Today, when we speak of the Babas, we mean locally born Chinese whose sole medium of communication was Malay and are unable to speak Chinese. The British employed Babas who attended English school as civil servants. The Chinese immigrants, especially traders and businessmen, realised the importance of the English language and sent their children to English school.

### ***The Babas and their ancestor worship and religion***

Ancestor worship was an important aspect of the Baba sub-culture. Without it, one would not be able to understand how the Babas look at the religious aspect of their lives. The worship of Chinese deities, it was perceived, gave access to the higher beings for consultation about human affairs as well as for healing the body. The worship of ancestors was also seen in the same light and as an expression of Baba kinship with the deceased. The Babas had two systems of ancestor worship. One was called *cia'abu*, inviting the grandmother and the other *cia a kong*, inviting the grandfather. The day for ancestor worship was called Cheng Beng (清明节) or All Souls Day. This normally falls on or around April 5. Cheng Beng was a festival to commemorate the ancestors by visiting their graves to pay respects. Babas who were Buddhists would go to the Guan Yin temples (观音, Goddess of Mercy) or Guan Gong (关公) temple and the Tua Peh Kong (大伯公, the King of the underworld). The temples were found in cities where there were Chinese immigrants. Very few Babas know the story of The Three Kingdoms (三国演义), but they still pay respects to Guan Kong and believe that he would bring them luck in business. Some Babas even pay respects to the *keramats* or Malay saints and visit places considered by the Malays as holy. The Chinese refer to them as the Malay God or as Dato Kong. The Babas in rural areas were influenced by Malay culture and customs. The Babas give reverence to the Malay spirits at the *keramat* using joss sticks and candles and ensure that their offerings had no pork or pork-related contents, as only *halal* food were allowed for the Malay spirits.

### **Racial Relations Between Malays and Chinese**

Today in Malaya, unlike Thailand, intermarriages between the two ethnic groups were a rare sight. The different ethnic groups live separately and in their own compartmentalised lives. The Malays consider themselves *bumiputra* (土族) or sons of the soil, treating the Chinese and Indians as *orang asing* (外人, outsiders). During the British colonial rule, the Malays were mostly farmers and fishermen, whilst the

Chinese and Indians were coolies imported by the British to work in plantations and factories, and the Babas served as civil servants in the British administration. Since the 1890s, most Chinese immigrants regarded themselves as *hua chiao* (华侨) or overseas Chinese, owing allegiance to China. A Chinese born in the Straits Settlements was a British subject. Many of them were Babas who lived in Malaya for centuries and were well assimilated in terms of language and appearance, if not in culture and customs. Although they lived separate lives, there was no reason to quarrel or fight because a struggle for power was not involved. The Babas were even friendlier to the Malays than the immigrant Chinese because they shared a common language and a similar culture. In the early 19th century, the Malay rulers dealt with the Chinese as a whole through the Kapitan Cina, a man of standing among both the Malays and his own people. For its part, the Chinese community had in the past recognised the right of the Malay Sultan in consultation with the Kapitan Cina to settle disputes. As the Chinese population expanded by the middle of the century, this allegiance gradually changed. The Kapitan Cina himself would become a leading member of a secret society and be subjected to loyalties and obligations to his own association or society (会). There was a major change in the nature and the position which only had previously functioned as an extension of the Malay court hierarchy. The growth and the increasing diversity within the Chinese population required more than one individual to represent their interests.

### **The Decline of the Babas and the Rise of Chinese Nationalism**

By the 1930s, with the economic depression, the Babas suffered. Many who owned extensive rubber estates became bankrupt. They did not have the stamina of the Sinkheks to endure and conquer the hardship. When World War II began and when the Japanese invaders arrived, they shared the wartime hardship with the Sinkheks. The Baba landowners had to abandon their homes and properties while the Nyonyas sold their jewelry to buy food.

The Sinkheks, being accustomed to hard work, managed to recover from the destruction of the war, while the Babas, who were too used to affluence, underwent a period of deprivation and decline. Some of them even sank into abject poverty. Many were not able to maintain their old lavish lifestyle and had to learn to live a frugal, simple life. The highly celebrated Baba culture began to disintegrate. The identity of the Baba culture became blurred, partly because of the changed social structure and partly because many of them converted to Christianity. Being a *Peranakan* was a distinguishing feature of the early Chinese. Later on, when more and more Sinkheks arrived and more Chinese women immigrants were permitted to enter the country, the Sinkheks married Chinese women and their offspring were no longer Babas.

## **Ethnic Clashes Between Malays and Chinese After the World War II**

There were no major clashes between Malays and Chinese during the British colonial period, because the divide and rule strategy delineated the role of Chinese in business and that of the Malays in agricultural production. They lived separate lives and there was no reason for them to clash. As soon as Japan surrendered, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) guerrillas moved in to replace the Japanese soldiers to maintain law and order. The MPAJA dressed in uniform, marched down the streets of various towns under triumphal arches erected by supporters who readily welcomed them. They were greeted by the Chinese population with enthusiasm. There was clearly Chinese admiration for their endurance in facing the rigours of jungle life and resisting the Japanese.

I witnessed such an event in the streets of Butterworth (北海). The soldiers were wearing the three-star caps and were in jungle uniform. As mentioned earlier, the greatest change brought about by the Japanese occupation was in the area of race relations. The pro-Malay policy of the Japanese created an undercurrent of resentment and distrust among Chinese towards the Malays. The Malays cooperated with their new Japanese masters and presented

themselves as chosen instruments. The largely Malay units — Heibo, Giyu Gun and Giyu Tai were, in fact, as racially divisive as the Chinese MPAJA. The Japanese had used the Malays in the Heibo and Giyu Gun against the MPAJA and by extension against the Chinese. After the Japanese surrendered, many of the MPAJA men began to settle old scores. They went after the *han jian* (汉奸; traitors) who had collaborated with the Japanese, including the Malays. The biggest mistake the MPAJA made was to include the Malays as their targets for revenge. Unlike the Chinese, the Malays had no ill-feelings for the Japanese since they were ignorant of the atrocities committed by them in China and thus collaborated with the Japanese when they arrived, mainly to maintain their own status quo. They did not know Chinese history. In Butterworth, I saw the MPAJA soldiers guarding the streets. Our neighbours were looking for a man who stayed near our house for revenge. He was a traitor who had worked for the Japanese Kempeitai (警备队). My brothers and I joined in the search. He was found under the bed of a house. He was pulled out and many people pounced on him, beating him and calling him a traitor. He was badly wounded and then handed over to the MPAJA who took him to the jungle headquarters and was later killed. The MPAJA men carried out a countrywide purge of traitors who had cooperated with the Japanese. In certain places in Selangor and Perak, the condemned dogs, as they were called, were put into pig cages, carried around the town, and then butchered before the crowds. The MPAJA were angry that the Kesatuan Melayu Muda or Young Malay Union members had cooperated with the Japanese. The local Chinese MPAJA members, accompanied by armed guerrillas entered Malay villages to torture Malay policemen, the *penghulu* (头人, district headmen), the *Ketua kampung* (乡长) (village headmen) and government officials. Some of them were killed. Wives and children were also shot along with the so-called traitors. Bodies of victims were said to have been mutilated beyond recognition, an act which offended the Islamic religion. Houses were burnt down. The MPAJA went as far as preventing the Malays from congregating and attending Friday prayers, for fear that the Malays were gathering to attack the Chinese.

Stories of lack of respect shown by such Chinese towards Malay customs and religion and the Malay women angered the Malay population. Once provoked, the Malays began to organise themselves to prepare for retaliation. This started the Malay revenge against the MPAJA. Racial riots flared up in North Johore and later spread to Port Swettenham, and Kampong Pulao Sabang and Batu Pahat, where the Javanese organised the *kiyai* or leaders of the local Sufi *tarekat* (组合), who were highly respected by the local Malay population. They were men of charisma and of higher learning in Islam who could perform miracles. In times of crisis and social turmoil, local Malays turned to their Islamic religion and their religious leaders. These *kiyais* (回教居士) started training Malays on how to fight and invoke supernatural powers for the cause of Islam. They called for a *jihad* (圣战), meaning holy war. The Malay fighters wore red bands and carried a long sword or machete known as *parang panjang* (巴郎刀). The Red Bands attacked only with their weapons and the MPAJA met them with guns and bullets. In Batu Pahat, they killed 30 Chinese and burnt their houses and shouted the slogan, Malaya for Malays. The Malays wielding only *parang panjang* and spears, attacked Chinese homes and settlements, screaming and killing men, women and children along the way, and pillaging Chinese houses setting them on fire. Massacres of this nature took place in Parit Gumong, Parit Kecil and Parit Kali. They were repeated in Muar.

The countryside was dotted with the charred ruins of hundreds of Chinese houses and Chinese corpses. Batu Pahat also witnessed terrible bloodshed when the Malay attacked and they were more ferocious than the Chinese. They fought with greater determination and with stronger religious fanaticism. The MPAJA could not stop them, and not being Muslims, they did not understand the fervency behind their aggression. The intensity of the Malay resistance was partly due to the Malay fears that the Chinese would seize political power in Johore and throughout the country. This was largely premised on unfounded rumours that the British were prepared to transfer political power to the Chinese and the MPAJA after the Japanese surrender. The Sultan of Johore was believed to have had turned to the *kiyai*

for help. When they met, *kiyai* kissed the hand of the Sultan and promised to guard the country. Later, a Malay leader Dato Onn bin Jaafar (拿督翁查花) became a peacemaker and brought representatives of the Chinese and Malay communities for peace talks. Even while the misunderstanding between the two races subsided, the scar of racial hatred remained for a long while.

## **The Political Vacuum After Japanese Defeat**

Malaya entered in a political vacuum with the unanticipated surrender of the Japanese on August 14, 1945. For the next few weeks, some factions of the MPAJA attempted to usurp power in places where the Japanese had left. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP), backed by the MPAJA soldiers, emerged as the strongest political force. They came out in full force, trying to maintain peace and order. Before the return of the British soldiers, sentries manned by MPAJA soldiers with three-star caps, and another beside by the other remnants of Japanese soldiers, was a common sight. The MPAJA forces seemed to be in control of all Malaya. The MPAJA had cooperated with the British during the Japanese occupation and had expected Britain to keep their promise of legalising the party. The MCP's supporters were mainly Chinese-educated members discriminated by the English-educated elite and the Babas during the British rule. Their major objective was to establish a Communist Malaya similar to the victorious Communist Party in China of 1949. Many did not regard Malaysia as their homeland and harboured a wish to return to China.

The MCP also had Malay and Indian representatives on their central committee and was, in principle, a multiracial party cutting across racial lines. They advocated violence as a method of achieving their outcomes. The second political force was the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) dominated by English-speaking Chinese and Eurasians, which had cooperated with left-wing Malay nationalists. They strived for self-government and independence through constitutional means and through the process of negotiations. The third political force which became dominant was organised along racial lines — the Malays who formed themselves into the United Malay National

Organisation (UMNO) and which later worked with the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) (印度国大党) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) (马华公会) to take the helm of power from the British. The fourth category was the Babas, who formed themselves into the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) (殖民地华英协会), trying to retain their status and privileges granted to them by the British for being loyal to Britain. The leaders were all Babas who did not speak Chinese and who regarded Britain as their motherland. The politics of the Babas were moribund during the period of British Military Administration. Their anti-Japanese hero was Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚), a rubber magnet, who was a diehard Chinaman, deeply devoted to serving only China and shunned local politics. In fact, during the Japanese occupation, he escaped to Indonesia, and after the war gave up his business and devoted his full energy to help start a Chinese University in Amoy (厦门大学) at his hometown. He returned to China for medical treatment, and after his visit became pro-Mao and anti-Chiang. He even started the *Nan Chiau Jit Poh*, (南侨日报) which was pro-Communist.

From the start, the SCBA party was doomed because it fell into the hands of wrong leadership. Supporters of the MCP came mainly from the Chinese-educated masses which put fear and suspicion in the minds of most Malays. It became a thorn in the flesh of the UMNO which later came into power.

### ***Chin Peng* (陈平)**

The most prominent Fujian figure of Malaya was Chin Peng or Ong Boon Hwa (王文华). He became the leader of the Malayan Communist Party and preached a utopian Communist Malaya. He eventually failed in his mission, and his Communist guerrillas sought rapprochement with Malaysian Government in 1989. Born in Sitiawan, Perak, in 1924, Chin Peng was a Hockchia (福兴人). The town was dominated by Communist supporters. His father ran a bicycle repair shop. Having a naturally pleasant face, though inclined to pimples on his fair skin, he was five feet seven inches tall and walked with a slight limp. He was a quiet and gentle man with a soft voice





Chin Peng

and spoke English and six other languages competently. He joined the Anglo-Chinese school when he was 15 and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) or Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) at 18, helping to cut stencils for the propaganda department. He appeared strange but courteous and bookish. He soon learned the art of guerrilla warfare in the jungles. He joined Force 136, an underground organisation formed by the British to fight the Japanese after the Japanese occupation of Malaya. Chin Peng organised the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, a group trained by the British in the use of modern weapons which were delivered regularly into Malaya. The British officers of Force 136 operating behind the Japanese lines had no illusions about Chin Peng and the Communist guerrillas. In fact, Spencer Chapman regarded Chin Peng as 'Britain's most trusted guerrilla'. In those days, Chin Peng wanted to establish a Communist Republic of Malaya and had already laid out most of his plans. The 5,000 members of the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army which had worked with Force 136 would become the Malayan Peoples' Anti-British Army once the war should end. He had his Min Yuen (民援) mass movement, which consisted of ostensibly normal, innocent citizens who would back up the army. Min Yuen was already

operating on virtually every level of Malayan life. The communists worked as waiters in British clubs, as clerks in government offices, as school teachers and newspaper reporters. Others operated among the squatters on the jungle fringe, tappers in the estates and in the rabbit warrens of big cities. Part-timers and volunteers would supply the army with food, money and information. Chin Peng was convinced that, as his successes mounted, the Min Yuen would grow even larger, and that the bulk of Chinese peasants who would support an uprising would be eager to help as couriers, spies, saboteurs or in the collection of subscriptions. When the war ended, Chin Peng was awarded the Burma Star by Lord Louis Mountbatten (蒙巴登爵士), and sent to represent the Malayan guerrillas in the Victory Parade. The British had promised MCP legal status after the war, but did not keep their promise, because the party became violent and propagated bloody revolution. MCP was easily the strongest political party in Malaya and Singapore because of the overwhelming support from the educated Chinese. Chin Peng's MCP almost ruled Malaya, as its anti-Japanese guerrillas patrolled almost every town and village with their three-star cap and guns in their hands.

When I was hiding in the jungle to escape arrest by the Japanese, a few MPAJA soldiers came to my uncle's house where I was staying to recruit me. They said, 'Since you are anti-Japanese during school days, why not join us to fight them'. I was then not interested in jungle warfare and more interested in farming and turned them down, but I promised to give them food supplies. After the Japanese surrendered, the MPAJA was practically in control of security all over Malaya. The MPAJA soldiers who were armed could be seen giving orders at every corner of the streets and there was no sign of a British soldier. Had the MCP declared independence then, they might have had taken control of Malaysia. They missed the opportunity of declaring independence when they were physically powerful. They did not do so because they waited for orders from the Comintern (Communist International) based in Moscow. Also within the MCP, there were two camps. One was in favour of a violent revolution and the other camp led by Loi Tek, a Vietnamese, preferred a peaceful takeover. He was later exposed as a double agent for the French and British.

During the Japanese occupation, Loi Tek even became an agent for the Japanese and sabotaged MCP top comrades, leading to their slaughter in the Batu Cave incident of 1943. The Vietnamese Communist Party leaders who knew about Loi Tek's notoriety caught up with him in Bangkok and strangled him to death. The party's failure was largely due to misjudgment. Chin Peng had thought that the majority of the peasants were Malays, the exploited class who must support the MCP. But he failed to realise the cultural allegiance of Malays with their religion and could not accept Communism. Most of the Communists were Chinese, and the Japanese occupation had caused irreparable rift in their relationship.

In 1966, the Malayan Government offered \$20,000 for Chin Peng's arrest if caught alive and \$10,000 if he was delivered dead. Chin Peng fled to the Thai–Malaysian border area with his army of about 1,500 to 2,000 guerrillas, when the 12-year-old Communist rebellion was crushed in 1960. In no time the award was increased to \$250,000 for bringing him back alive, and \$125,000 to his death. Sources later revealed that there was in-fighting within the party leadership on how to best topple the Kuala Lumpur Government. In 1989, MCP laid down its arms and reached a peace agreement with Malaysia and Thailand. Sometime in 2005, Chin Peng, under the invitation of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, gave a lecture on his Malayan experience. Unfortunately I was away in Indonesia and could not attend. I was told that both Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong had met with him for two hours. It was rumoured that Lee Kuan Yew perceived that Chin Peng was 'a reasonable man'. In 2007, in his speech at a gathering, Lee mentioned that it was he who initiated the meeting with Chin Peng. Chin Peng's appeal to the Malaysian Government to allow him to return to his place of birth was rejected. Speaking to the newspapers, he said he wanted to die in his birthplace but he refused to denounce communism.

### **Sir Cheng Lock Tan (陈祯禄, 1883–1960)**

In Malaya, the earliest Chinese leader who argued that the Chinese in Malaya needed to be weaned from a China-centred preoccupation to



Sir Cheng Lock Tan

inculcate a Malayan outlook was a Fujianese, Tan Cheng Lock. He was born on April 5, 1883, to a Baba family. He could not speak or read Chinese. Cheng Lock's ancestors were from Quanzhou, a famous seaport during the Ming dynasty. Tan was a fifth-generation *peranakan* from Heeren Street, Malacca. His ancestors lived in Malacca since 1771. Tan was educated in Malacca High School and won the Tan Teck Guan Scholarship which afforded him a stint at Raffles Institution, Singapore. He taught at the Institution thereafter, from 1902 to 1908. He relocated to Malaya to work for his cousin as an Assistant Manager of the Bukit Kajang Rubber Estate Ltd. Later, Tan started his own business. From 1923 to 1934, he participated in the Malacca City Council elections and the Colonial Legislative Assembly. In 1933, he was awarded the OBE and became known as Sir Cheng Lock Tan. He participated in the coronation ceremony of King George VI in London. During the Japanese occupation, Tan Cheng Lock and his family fled to India. He was inspired by the

independence struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Returning to Malaya after the Japanese surrender, he wanted to fight the same fight and therefore founded the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) alongside Tun Leong Yew Koh and Colonel H. S. Lee. Although he was already 66 when elected as Chairman, he was regarded as the only man respected by all the Chinese in Malaya.

Cheng Lock was keenly interested in Chinese history and philosophy by reading English text. I became close to Cheng Lock when he was President of the Malayan Chinese Association. He used to invite me to his Singapore residence for lunch. Cheng Lock accompanied Tengku Abdul Rahman to Singapore to attend the inauguration ceremony of the People's Action Party (人民行动党) on November 21, 1954, at the Victory Memorial Hall when Lee Kuan Yew was appointed Secretary General. He also participated in the Baling Talks (华林会议) when Tengku Abdul Rahman met Chin Peng in 1955. Cheng Lock's MCA was asked to perform a special role to assist the government effort to defeat the Communist insurgency. The most well-known MCA role in counterinsurgency was in relation to the squatter problem when Harold Briggs, Director of Operations started to resettle the villagers in his strategy to deprive the Communist of food supply. By the end of 1952, 470,509 villagers had been settled in 440 new villages throughout Malaya. The Government allowed the MCA to organise public lotteries to raise funds. At first, only MCA members were allowed to take part in gambling activities. The MCA was also able to spread its influence among the Chinese in the new villages as it was the only Chinese organisation helping the government. Consequentially, its leaders and supporters were branded as the 'running dogs' (走狗) of the government and became targets of terrorist attacks. The Malays were not the targets of Communist attacks, because they wanted to avoid resistance from the Malay community. By the time General Templer took over as High Commissioner, two-thirds of the guerrilla forces were eliminated. From 1951 to 1955, the strength of the guerrillas was reduced from 8,000 to less than 5,000. Chin Peng and the MCP were forced to retreat and found a new base in Hadyai in Southern Thailand. Towards the end of 1954, it appeared that the communist armed struggle against the British government

would end in failure. Sir Cheng Lock Tan did a great deal in helping the government decimate the threat of the Communist. When he died of a heart attack on December 16, 1960, he was the only Chinese in Malaya who received a National burial. His son Tan Siew Sin (陈修信) took over MCA as the Chairman and became the Finance Minister under Tengku's government for many years.

## **The Federation of Malaya Agreement**

The Babas or the Straits Chinese, who were proud of their British identity and connection with the British Empire, were however shocked by the Federation of Malaya agreement. They feared that this agreement might impair their legal status as British subjects. Heah Joo Siang (连如祥), President of the Penang Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), opposed the inclusion of the Penang and Malacca settlements into the Federation of Malaya. He expressed the fear that the Straits Chinese community would not get equal treatment with the Malays in the Federation. Under the banner of the Penang Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Town Hall, the Penang SCBA sent a petition to Creech Jones, Secretary of State of the Colonies in March 1947, protesting against the agreement and requested the appointment of a royal commission to examine local conditions and formulate a new constitution for Malaya. But their request was ignored. Leaders of other Straits Settlement also protested against the Federation. The President of the Malacca SCBA E. Yew Kim (尤金) and the President of the Singapore SCBA T. W. Ong joined in the protest. All the three SCBAs in the Straits Settlements — Singapore, Malacca and Penang — proposed the restoration of the Straits Settlements. When Britain ignored their proposals, the Penang SCBA was the first to suggest secession from the Federation. At a public meeting held at the Chinese Town Hall, the Penang and Province Wellesley (威省) a Committee was formally created. It made a resolution that the Settlement of Penang would adopt all constitutional means to obtain its separation from the Federation of Malaya and the reversion of the Colony to the Strait Settlements, which according to them would serve the best interests of Penang and Province Wellesley. The protest movement came at a time most unfortunate for the colonial government in Malaya.

## **Malayan Politics — MacMichael Treaty and the Emergence of UMNO**

After World War II, London sent Sir MacMichael, their plenipotentiary to negotiate with the Sultan of Malaya a new treaty of relationship. Sir MacMichael proposed a constitution known as MacMichael Treaty to give equal rights to all races — Chinese, Malay and Indians, and they should have had equal rights so long as they were born in Malaya. UMNO then proposed their own constitutional conditions for Malaya, overthrowing the principle of *jus soli*, and pronounced that only Malays born in Malaya and subjects of Malay rulers had the automatic right to become citizens. Chinese and Indians whose parents were born in Malaya and had resided in the country for 15 years could apply for citizenship. The British suddenly realised the popular strength of the Malays and as the Chinese were not interested in Malayan citizenship, accepted the UMNO proposal. Since then the Chinese had become second-class citizens. The MacMichael Treaty, however, stirred up hostile feelings among the Malays, who regarded themselves as bumiputra or son of the soil in Malaya and did not agree to giving the Chinese and Indians equal status. The Persatuan Melayu Johore (Johore Malay Association) held a strong protest meeting in Johore Bahru, accusing Sultan Ibrahim of selling the ‘rights’ of the Malays. They accused the Sultan of committing *derhaka* (treason) and demanded that he resigned from his post. At the meeting held in March 1946, the Malays decided to form the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). Dato Onn bin Jaffar, their leader shouted the slogan *hidup Melayu* (Long Live the Malays) to replace their former slogan ‘hidup raja raja Melayu’ (Long Live the Rajas). Dato Onn pronounced that ‘from now on, the will of the people is paramount’. This demonstration had a tremendous effect on other states and the Sultans claimed that they had signed the MacMichael Treaty under duress. The preparatory committee of UMNO even issued a warning to all Sultans to boycott the inauguration ceremony of the new British Governor Sir Edward Gent or they would not be recognised as Malay Sultans. All Sultans obeyed UMNO instructions.



### **Tengku Abdul Rahman (1903–1990)**

Tengku Abdul Rahman, known as Bapa Kemerdekaan (Father of Independence), was Chief Minister of Federation of Malaya from 1955, and the country's first Prime Minister since independence. He was Malaysia's Prime Minister after Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak became part of the federation in 1963. Tengku Abdul Rahman was born in Istana Pelamin, Alor Star, Kedah, the seventh son and 20th child of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah. His mother Luang Naraborirak (Kleb), was of Siamese heritage and born to a Thai district officer during the reign of King Rama V of Thailand. The Tengku married four times. His first wife was Meriam Chong, a Thai Chinese woman with two children, Tengku Khadijah and Tengku Ahmad Nerang. He secretly married another Chinese woman named Bibi Chong, who was converted to Islam after marriage. He had two daughters with her, Engku Noor Yauati and Tengku Mastura. Tengku Abdul Rahman's offspring has had Chinese blood. On his 80th birthday, Tengku stated in *The Star* newspaper on February 9, 1983 that 'Malaysia has a multiracial population with various beliefs and must continue as a secular State with Islam as the official religion.'

I came to know Tengku well when I accompanied his mission to London in 1956 for the Merdeka talks. He was a very jovial and friendly person who was always frank and open. I used to accompany him for his evening walks after dinner and I got many scoops from him about the conference. I first met him at the Baling talks in 1955 when I was on official duty. When he saw me again on the boat '*Asia*' which took us to Karachi, he remembered me. He told us interesting stories about his father and his uncle when the boat left the shores of Singapore. In 2003, his centennial birthday anniversary was commemorated with the issuance of stamps bearing the picture of Tengku Abdul Rahman as the first Prime Minister of Malaysia.

### **May 13 Riots in Kuala Lumpur**

The Chinese and Indians residents in Kuala Lumpur developed an acute persecution complex after 15 years of Alliance rule following



independence. Political policies in Malaysia discriminated against non-Malay ethnic groups and deprived them of employment, issuance of licenses and other privileges. The emotions between Malays and the other ethnic groups were rubbed raw and came dangerously close to breaking point. Inter-racial friction seemed almost inevitable as a result of racial insults which were bandied about indiscriminately and irresponsibly both by the opposition parties and the Alliance. A day before the elections on May 9, 1969, a funeral procession of a young Chinese man (allegedly Communist) killed by the police became the draw for a huge demonstration of around 10,000 people. Supporters of the Labour Party of Malaya which had boycotted the election was conducting the funeral displaying portraits of Mao Zedong and the Red Flag, shouting slogans such as 'The East is Red' (东方红). They paraded through the centre of Kuala Lumpur, creating traffic congestion. They provoked the Malay bystanders with shouts of *Malai si* (Death of the Malays) and 'Hutang darah dibayar darah' (以血还血, blood debts will be repaid with blood).

Polling results showed that the Alliance lost and MCA securing the lowest votes. UMNO wanted a more Malay-oriented Cabinet. Tengku Abdul Rahman's stance of multi-racial representation weakened. Victory parades of the DAP and Gerakan caused chaos in the city. This was countered by demonstrations by UMNO supporters, which finally resulted in the ugliest bloodshed in Malaysian history. The Malays and Chinese went on a killing spree and indulged in looting and burning. Kuala Lumpur became a city on fire. As a consequence of the riot, many lost their lives. It was the worst race riots in the Malayan history. The riots led to the ascendance of the Malay capitalist class, which controlled the National Operations Council. The new Malay state capitalists could not have carried out the coup without the cooperation of the army and police.

The racial bloodbaths and the state of emergency under military rule served as a deterrent to any formidable challenge against UMNO's post-1969 dominance. The climate of terror and repression legitimised discriminatory Malay-centric economic, educational and cultural policies. These policies were meant to garner the support of Malay masses and the new Malay ruling class. This facilitated the

accumulation of financial capital and assets by the Malay ruling elite. UMNO leaders constantly remind the society of the May 13 riots to entrench their privileged position.

## **Contradictions in Malay-Chinese Relationship**

One of the fundamental reasons for the racial conflict was the disparity of wealth between the Malays and Chinese. On the whole, the Chinese, being immigrants, were hard working, while the Malays took life more easily and simplistically. Although being the minority, the Chinese controlled the economy of the country. It was clear that the Chinese entrepreneurs had flourished under the government's *laissez-faire* policies, and that the income disparity between Malays and Chinese had worsened. Rural areas, where most Malays still lived, remained poor. Village youths left for the cities but the government appeared unresponsive. Class privileges seemed entrenched while the state religion was not given prominence. These issues became the focus of Malaya writers in the 1960s that produced novels depicting the harshness of rural life, the economic hold of the Chinese and the moral corruption of political leadership. In 1970, the government acknowledged that the riots were caused by ethnic polarisation and animosity which reinforced the Malay grievance of being economically disadvantaged as against the Chinese. In the immediate aftermath of the riots, there had been a complete breakdown of social and economic contact between the Chinese and the Malays. Few Chinese and Indians were willing to patronise Malay shops, stalls or hawkers. Non-Malays refused to ride in taxis driven by the Malays or buy batik cloth, and some even shunned durians which they considered a Malay fruit. Meanwhile, extremists within the UMNO were trying hard to assume control of the party and to prevent it from making any concession to the Chinese. An internal struggle for power was taking place in UMNO.

In August 1970, during the 13th anniversary of Merdeka (独立, Independence) celebrations, the Yang di Pertuan Agong formally promulgated the *Rukunegara* (国民基规条), which means fundamental doctrine. It encouraged interracial relations and called upon the different races to help each other without quarrel or strife. The third

principle of *Rukunegara* urged all races to uphold the constitution, making it clear that the Chinese would have to accept Malay as the national language and the sole official language, as well as accepting the special position of the *bumiputras* (土族, son of the soil). One section of *Rukunegara* was also in favour of the Chinese by stipulating that no citizen should question the loyalty of another citizen on the ground that he belonged to a particular community. After the promulgation of the Rukunegara, Tengku Abdul Rahman announced that he intended to retire from premiership which he had held since independence. On September 22, 1970, he formally submitted his resignation to the Yang di Pertuan Negara (国家元首) and Tun Abdul Razak took over.

## **The New Economic Policy (NEP) to Protect Malay Interests**

With the May 13 riots in Kuala Lumpur, Parliament was suspended and the government declared a national emergency. The Government formed a National Operations Council (NOC) led by Tun Razak. The implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) was one of the NOC's first decisions, and the plan had the stated goal of 'eventually eradicating poverty irrespective of race through a rapidly expanding economy'.<sup>1</sup> This would reduce the non-Malay share of economy in relative terms. Some specific requirements were introduced to achieve the 30% *bumiputra* equity target set by the NEP. As a result of the introduction of the NEP, wealth in the hands of the *bumiputra* went from 4% in 1970 to about 20% in 1997.

When Tun Razak took over power, he introduced a new economic development plan aiming at reducing the disparity of wealth between the Chinese and Malays and eventually eradicating poverty by raising income levels and employment opportunities for the Malays. The target was to achieve a more balanced pattern in the ownership of assets in all sectors of the economy within a period of 20 years. The aim was to get *bumiputra* own and manage at least 50%

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<sup>1</sup> Malaysian New Economic Policy — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian\\_New\\_Economic\\_Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian_New_Economic_Policy).

of the total commercial and industrial capacity of the economy. It was hoped to bring into being a Malay entrepreneurial community within one generation, and as an incentive, *bumiputra* contractors were assured of being granted at least a certain percentage of government and quasi-government contracts. UMNO had used its two-thirds majority to achieve its goals of providing better wealth and opportunities to the Malays through legislative means. When necessary, the Executive branch of the government was called upon to remove whatever obstacles that came in their way.

At the start of the NEP in 1970, there were only 40 Malay accountants, 79 Malay doctors and 33 Malay engineers. By 1997, the figures had changed dramatically to 1,766 accountants, 4,508 doctors and 11,481 engineers. A change in the fortunes of the Malays was evident in the numbers of higher education places available for them. In 1953, only 90 students enrolled in the University of Malaya were Malays. This was out of the total of 954 students who enrolled in the University. By 1997, the number of Malay Science students increased to 16,148, and in the Arts 43,616. The UMNO government also took measures to reserve a special quota of places within the institutions of higher learning for bumiputras as a means of redressing the ethnic imbalance in the professions. The intention was to reserve places for Malays and the indigenous people of the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak in certain areas of study, especially in the fields of sciences, medicine and engineering. This caused some hardship to non-Malays such as Chinese and Indians. It became a bitter pill for communities which had traditionally regarded education as a prerequisite for advancement and a mark of social status. Those who could afford sent their children abroad for university education, while others were forced to seek places in private institutions. Between 1980 and 1985, Malay students made up about 65% of the total enrollment in Malaysian universities, as against 27% Chinese and 6% Indian. During the 1970s and 1980s, the revival of the Chinese Education Movement and the pressure for a Chinese language university reflected a growing Chinese resentment fed by the persisting belief that Chinese rights were being denied.

The UMNO government also gave special priority to Malays in various business enterprises including taxi licenses and other licenses.

Many Chinese had been deprived of their livelihood as a result of it. The government also made Malay the national language, compelling Malaysian citizens to study Malay from primary school to university. All non-Malay Malaysian citizens had to pass the Malay language examination before they could be considered suitable for applying government jobs. Even taxi drivers had to go through a Malay language test. As a result of this policy, the Malay language became the major vehicle of communication everywhere. The government also assisted the Malays to compete with the Chinese in business. The new government bodies contributed to the NEP goal of increasing Malay ownership in the corporate sector by purchasing shares on behalf of the Malays through the Amanah Saham Nasional (National Unit Trust, founded in January 1981) run by Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Corporation). The number of *bumiputras* in the commercial sector in the 1970s was still disappointingly small and amounted to only around 24% of the total numbers of persons employed. A new organisation called the Sino-Malay Economic Cooperation Advisory Board was set up to encourage joint ventures between Chinese and Malay businessmen. It seemed that in joint Sino-Malay business ventures, the Malay partner was often inclined to assume the role of a 'sleeping partner' with his participation limited to obtaining licenses, quotas or tenders from the government and allowing his Chinese partner to run the business. This form of joint venture later became known as 'Ali Baba operation' (阿里爸爸), Ali stands for the Malay and Baba for the Chinese.

### **How Long would NEP Continue?**

The aim of NEP was to enable the Malays to possess corporate ownership to 30% by 1990, and to restrict foreign ownership including Chinese to no more than 30%. By 1990, according to University statistics, the Malay ownership of public company's shares had reached 20.3%, including *bumiputra* trust shares of 8.4%, the NEP target had almost been achieved. Yet in 1991, the NEP was succeeded by the National Development Plan. Some critics argue that the NEP strategy of the cementing *ketuanan Melayu* (马来人团结, Malay supremacy)

had turned non-Malays into second-class citizens. According to official figures, the NEP had helped to put the country's wealth in the hands of the *bumiputras* from 4% to 20%. By 2006, the country's poverty was reduced from 50% to 6.8%. Some critics also argue that the NEP had contributed to a brain drain. Those who migrated felt that they had been marginalised in a Malay-first society.

In his maiden speech in 2004 at UMNO Assembly, the former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi metaphorically alluded to the NEP as 'crutches for support all the time' as the 'knee will become weak'. Since his speech in October, he had not again referred to the same again. He must have had faced pressure from other pro-Malay leaders within the UMNO. Amiruddin, UMNO Deputy Permanent Chairman, in responding to the Prime Minister's speech waved a book on the May 13 incident, saying 'No other race has the right to question our privileges, our religion and our leaders. Otherwise it would be stirring up a hornet's nest'.<sup>2</sup> Malay leaders, persistent in using the NEP to protect Malay economic interest, had contributed to a decrease in foreign investment. In 2005, foreign investment fell by US\$4 billion or 14%. Despite all these measures, the UMNO Youth Chief Hishammuddin Hussein recently said that it would take Malays 120 years to achieve income parity with the Chinese.

## **The Stumbling Block to Assimilation**

In countries like Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, or any other country in Southeast Asia, the Chinese citizens, whether they were *peranakans*, *lokjins* or *mestizos*, had the right to choose their own religion. An Indonesian could be a Muslim, Buddhists, Christian, Daoist, or follow any other religion. The authorities do not intervene in such matters which were considered 'personal'. Religion was free and not connected to race.

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<sup>2</sup> Malaysian New Economic Policy — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian\\_New\\_Economic\\_Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian_New_Economic_Policy).

But Malaysia was an exception. Malays were strictly considered Muslims and society exacts no tolerance of conversions to other religions. In terms of intermarriage, any person, male or female who marries a Muslim must be converted to Islam. The imposition of these laws has discouraged intermarriages between Chinese and Malays, although there were a few leading Chinese figures who convert to Islam. In Batu Pahat, an odd-job worker who was mistakenly given to a Malay family at birth was christened Zulhadi Omar. In an attempt to reclaim his real identity, he denounced Islam and converted to Buddhism.

Zulhadi filed a suit in the High Court in Kuala Lumpur, asking the Director General of the National Registration Department to declare that he was a Buddhist and not a Muslim. He wanted to change his name to Eddie Teyo. His bid to have the word Islam on his identity card struck out generated objections from the Malay-Muslim community. At 29, Zulhadi felt that he had never been accepted by the Malay family who had brought him up. As a child, he was always ridiculed for his Chinese features. He did his own checks and found that his real father was Teyo Ma Liong (张马龙) and mother Lim Sik Hai (林锡海). With the help of his real parents, he had his DNA tested and it was confirmed that he was their lost son. He was born at the Batu Pahat district hospital on July 17, 1978, but was mistakenly registered as the son of Omar Saim and Hasnah Salleh. Thus his identity marked his religion as Islam.

Although Islam was the country's official religion, and freedom of religion was guaranteed under the Constitution. Unfortunately, this was not practised in real life. When this case was publicised, the Malacca Chief Minister Mohamed Ali came out to object to Zulhadi's court suit. He said, 'a Malay in Malaysia is automatically a Muslim' and 'this is Malay culture', which was necessary to unite the Malays. He said, 'Once Malay becomes a Muslim, he was always a Muslim, and there was no way he could get out of it'.<sup>3</sup> He said, this had been so since the establishment of the Islamic Kingdom of Malacca. Mohamed

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<sup>3</sup> Families Against Restraint and Seclusion. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://families-against-restraint-and-seclusion.blogspot.com/>

Ali was also Vice-Chairman of UMNO Malacca. He said if a Muslim wants to leave Islam, he had to obtain the permission of the country's highest Shariah Court (回教法庭), which was in charge of matters relating to Islam. Zulhadi's bid for a return to his real identity remains an uphill battle, because Malaysia's highest Shariah Court had turned down two applications to have Islam deleted from identity cards. By 1971, it appeared that there were three options for a Chinese in a Malay Malaysia. First, they could be assimilated into the Malay society by converting to Islam through marriage. But this would be a point of no-return. It would seem difficult because most Chinese were proud of being Chinese and their Chinese culture and civilisation. Even most of the Babas had not become Muslims. The second option was to be integrated into the Malaysian society by becoming a Chinese Malaysian instead of a Malaysian Chinese, i.e. learn the Malay language and try to behave like Malaysians. The third was to remain a Chinese ostracised from the mainstream of Malaysian life, which would lead to further racial friction and incite riots of the future. The prospect of assimilating Chinese in the Malay dominated Malaysia looks slim.

## **Abdullah Badawi**

Despite all the racial prejudices, one of the Prime Ministers of Malaysia, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, had Chinese Muslim blood. His maternal grandmother was Hah Su Chiang (马素香), a descendant of Hassan Salleh (哈山沙利), who grew up in the Muslim Enclave in Sanya, Southern Hainan Islands. Very little was known about how and when Badawi's mother Kailan bte Hassan settled in Malaysia. She married Badawi's father Ahmad Badawi, who became a prominent and well-respected religious leader in Malaysia and also an UMNO member. Under the guidance and tutelage of his father, Abdullah took an interest in Islamic studies. He pursued Islamic Studies at the University of Malaya and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1964. He immediately chanced on the Malaysian Administrative and Diplomatic Corps opportunity that availed. He had served as Director of Youth at the Ministry of Youth and Sport. One of the more significant appoints was his secretarial role in the National Emergency





Abdullah Badawi

Council. In 1978 he resigned to join politics and take over the constituency represented by his father. He became a Member of Parliament for Kepala Batas in northern Seberang Perai.

### **Penampang Chinese in Kadazan Village**

There were a considerable number of intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and Kadazan ladies in the Penampang village since pre-war days. The Chinese were mainly immigrants who have recruited to work on the railway at the turn of the century. Some had been recruited to work on the European-owned estates. Others came over from Labuan before the founding of Jesselon. Many had lived in the village for 40 years and had married Kadazan girls. The majority of them were from Hubei and the rest Fujian. They have had surnames such as Wang (黄), Wu (吴), Lee (李), Loh (罗), Lim (林), Tan (陈), Chong (钟), Loo (卢), Hu (胡), Yung (翁) and Woon (温).

The Kadazan women who married Northern Chinese soon learnt to speak the Northern Chinese dialect. During my visit to Ulu Kimanis in 1965, my first encounter was with some women who spoke the Northern Mandarin dialect. I discovered that they were Kadazan women married to Northern Chinese. I met an old couple, and the wife was a Kadazan speaking the Tianjin dialect. They told me that after their marriage they first spoke in Malay, and a year later, she spoke the Tianjin dialect fluently. Intermarriages have become more frequent since 1950, reflecting greater interaction between the Chinese and the indigenous people. However, the majority of the Northern Chinese still married within their community, although not necessarily with their fellow Clansmen. A knowledgeable informant estimated that about half of the Northern Chinese married Kadazans.

In April 1937, the mixed-blood suddenly received a summon by the Jesselton District Officer, J. E. Longfield, ordering them to leave the village within a month. This summon was issued with the hope of eradicating secret society elements in the village. The order banned hawker licenses to be issued to Chinese living in Kadazandusun and ordered those living there without a title deed to leave within a month. The authorities had discovered that there were many Chinese who settled in Penampang without the permission of the native Chief or headman and without the approval of the District Officer. He also found that many had no work and were living on the Kadazandusun. Others were hawkers or owners of unlicensed shops.

A total of 123 of the affected group jointly petitioned to the authorities, arguing that they had lived there for 30 years and they were not pure Chinese. They also claimed that they had nothing to do with the illegal Chinese residents. This resulted in a power struggle between the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Advisory Board. After investigations, the Governor of Sabah assured the petitioners that those married to a Kadazan wife would be unaffected by this new legislation. His decision meant that the authorities had recognised an advantage of those who had taken Kadazandusun wives over the pure Chinese with no mixed-blood.

The episode signalled to the Chinese immigrants that if they wanted protection, they should marry Kadazan girls. As many had intermarried with the Kadazans, and had children and grandchildren from such unions, the success of the petition in obtaining the governor's assurance showed that the authorities would tolerate the offspring of intermarriages. The petition also revealed the extent of intermarriage between Chinese and Kadazan in the Penampang area. The petitioners attempt to highlight the legacy of such unions, claiming a three-fifths of the population were the result of the Sino-Kadazan origin, lent support to an earlier report by A. H. Everett, Resident of Papar in the 1880s that there were already many families of Sino-native union in Putatan and its vicinity.

Despite intermarriages with the Kadazad and acculturating to Kadazan culture in language and wearing Kadazan clothings, these Chinese petitioners still turned to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce for help. This attitude however changed over time as they further assimilated into the Kadazandusun culture.

The governor's ruling on the Penampang affair had halted the influx of Chinese into Penampang area. This had helped shape the lifestyle of the Sino-Kadazan families in Penampang until at least after World War II, when such controls were no longer imposed.

## **The Early Kapitan Cina of Sabah**

Throughout Southeast Asia, the system of Kapitan Cina, introduced by the Portuguese in Melaka in the late 16th century, also became popularly used in Sabah. The first Kapitan Cina in Sandakan was appointed in 1887 and he was Fung Ming Shan (冯明山), a shop owner who was a Cantonese from the Dunguan district in Guangdong. Fung was the proprietor of Fung Ming Shan & Co (冯明山公司) in Sandakan. As Kapitan Cina, he was invited to sit on the North Borneo Council, the first legislative body for Sabah that was created in 1887. It was recognition by the Chartered Company of the contribution of the Chinese community. Fung was also a member of the Segama River Gold Committee, on which Chinese of various dialect groups were represented. Fung was granted exclusive concessionary rights to sell supplies

to the Cantonese. Through this committee, Fung looked after the interest of the Chinese community. Fung was obviously a man of financial means. He operated Sabah's biggest revenue farm. In 1890, he obtained the concession to operate an opium farm and the right to collect duties for the import and export of spirits, both in great demand from the Chinese community. He donated a large bronze bell to the San Sheng Kung (三圣公), the oldest temple in Sandakan established in 1887.

The San Sheng Kung was established as the religious centre for the Chinese from Guangdong province. Adjacent to the temple was the Yi Chi Ancestral Worship Hall (宇志祖先朝拜堂) and the congregation hall. The temple honours the three deities of Liu Bei, Guan Gong and Zhang Fei who were the heroes in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义); Fung's name was engraved on the bell which was the oldest surviving bronze bell in Sabah. When I visited Sandakan in 1963, I went to visit the temple which was endowed with many wooden plaques and ceremonial boards. They were inscribed with the first, second and third lists of names of donors to the temple. It was interesting to note that the Chinese characters engraved on the bell for Sandakan were 'Xian Da Gang' (仙大港), which means the harbour where deities alight.

Fung later became Chairman of the Chinese Advisory Board established in 1890. The Board consisted of elected representatives from the various dialect groups — three Cantonese, two Fujianese, two Teochews and three Hakkas. With the establishment of this board, the pre-eminent role of the Kapitan Cina suffered a setback as an alternative channel of communication between the community and the Company administrator was established. Fung returned to China and he was replaced by a Fujianese Koh Kim Hin (许金兴), an early trader in the east coast of North Borneo. Kapitan Cina in the past was also the office bearer of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The last Kapitan Cina was Lam Man Ching, a Hakka, who became the longest serving pre-war Kapitan Cina.

## **The Secret Societies in Sabah**

Like other Chinese dominate cities in Southeast Asia, Sabah also had secret societies. Many Hakkas were linked to the anti-Manchu secret

societies. The most prominent one was the Hong Men Hui (洪门会), commonly known as the Triad Society. They brought their organisation with them when they migrated to Sabah. However, the Chartered Company was very strict towards these secret societies and imposed severe punishment against active members. The punishment would include life sentence or 14 years of hard labour and banishment for life for the ringleaders and two years hard labour and a fine of \$500 for those who participated in such activities.

## **Education for Sabah Chinese**

The Hakkas started the first Chinese school in Kudat Sabah, in 1886. This was followed by the establishment of a common school at the premises of Sheng Kung Temple (仙宫亭) of Sandakan, built in 1887 through the efforts of the various clan associations formed by the Cantonese, Fujianese, Teochews and Hainanese. Chinese education in Sabah at the beginning of the 20th century remained rather diverse. It was mainly aimed at educating the younger generation for the purpose of preserving Chinese culture and tradition. All the sponsors were Chinese businessmen.

In 1911, the number of Chinese schools was small with 12 in Sandakan and one each in Jesselton and Kudat. In 1908, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce started the Chung Hwa School (中华学校) housed in two shoplots in Jalan Tiga (第三巷), making it the largest among the 12 Chinese schools operating in Sandakan at that time. In 1917, the Chung Hwa School had an enrolment of 30 students. Unlike its Sandakan counterpart where Cantonese was the medium of teaching, the Chung Hwa in Jesselton taught in Mandarin, as the Republic of China had already come into being. They also included the thoughts of Dr. Sun Yat-sen San Min Chu I (三民主义, the Three Principles) in school. The number of Chinese schools increased from 22 in 1917 to 37 in 1925. The total enrolment of students also increased from 470 in 1917 to 977 in 1925. All the Chinese schools were pro-China, and with them grew the rising tide of Chinese nationalism. The dependence of Sabah's Chinese schools on textbooks from China demonstrated the patriotism of schools in Sabah.

This caused concern among Chartered Company Administration officials. From 1932–1935, the Department of Education in North Borneo (北婆罗) began to take action against the contents of Chinese textbooks which they thought were undesirable. The authorities banned all books containing the spread of San Min Chu I.

There were also a significant number of Hakka Christians who started missionary schools to teach Bible and English education. In 1925, there were 39 missionary schools with a total enrolment of 1,472 students, of which 1,000 of them were Chinese. After the war, the British Military Administration (BMC) became more concerned about the impact of Chinese education on Sabah residents. The Acting Director of Education R. E. Parry resisted the Chinese Government's campaign to attract the overseas Chinese to return and rebuild post-war China. The Chinese from various dialect groups shifted emphasis to English education. Because of the Hakka's emphasis on English education for their clansmen, the Hakkas dominated the ranks of civil service and white-collar jobs in government and in the private sector.

## **The Japanese Occupation**

The Japanese invaders were less harsh towards the Chinese in Sabah, compared to those in Penang, Melaka and Kuala Lumpur. A group of Chinese youth, mainly Chinese educated, inspired by Chinese nationalism, organised a resistance movement against the Japanese. Led by a young man named Albert Kwok, the group called itself the Chinese National Salvation Association, also known as Kinabalu Guerrillas, consisting of about 150 armed men. They planned to launch a rebellion against the Japanese with support from the American–Filipino guerrillas operating in the southern Philippine islands of Tawi-Tawi. On the night of October 9, 1943, the Kinabalu guerrillas launched a swift operation and captured the Tuaran police station and the Jesselton police station. Initially, it was all Chinese. They then garnered support from Bajau Suluk of the islands off Kota Kinabalu, and some Dusun Murut and Sikh members of the Armed Constabulary, making the whole affair a truly multiracial effort. They killed 50

Japanese, including some civilians who worked on the estates along the Tuaran Road. The guerrillas then retreated to their main camp at Mensianag, Menggatal and celebrated the victory. The Japanese drew reinforcement from Kuching (古晋) and got most of those involved arrested. They threatened to kill all the residents of the Shandong Settlement (山东城) as well as the leading members of Jesselton. The leaders of 176 hardcore members of the guerrillas were brought to Petagas and executed. Those who were indirectly involved were imprisoned.

### **The Story of Sarawak (砂拉越)**

Sarawak's link with China goes back to the Tang dynasty. Archaeologists had unearthed a large number of porcelain in Sarawak, which dates back to the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. In the 18th century, a number of Chinese immigrants, mostly Hakkas, came to Sarawak to look for gold. A large quantity of gold was found along the rivers Bau (石龙门), Bidi (卑地), Paku (帽山) and Tundong (顿当). Some of the Hakka immigrants also indulged in agriculture. Bau was the centre of the gold mine and it was known as the Jin San (金山, Golden Mountain). The existence of gold attracted many Chinese immigrants, especially in Bau. They brought along their secret society connections from China and became influential. The Brooke administration took drastic action against such activities. The island of Borneo, of which Sarawak was a significant geographical mass, appears in early Chinese sources as Poni Poli, or Polo. Trade and tribute relations between the island and China go back to 1,500 years ago, but only with the arrival of pioneering Hakka gold-mining partnerships and brotherhood in the mid-18th century, could one speak of Chinese settlement. One of the most famous gold miners was Loh Fang Per, who established a republic in the Indonesian side of Borneo.

As Sarawak needed manpower for its coal mines, agents were appointed to recruit Chinese indentured labourers through Singapore. Many Cantonese and Hakkas, and a small number of Teochews and Hainanese, were recruited. The Hakkas predominated until 1880

when Fuzhouese surpassed them. The Fuzhouese spread fast in Miri, Bintulu, Marudi and Kuching. Fuzhouese interests were particularly well represented in banking, finance, import and export trade, hardware, and later timber business. Chinese settlers swarmed into Sarawak in the late 19th and 20th centuries. They became traders and set up bazaars along the rivers in the areas where Malays, Ibans, Kayans and Kenyahs were predominant. This inevitably brought about economic and demographic change as well as fostered positive interactions between different ethnic groups and within the ethnic Chinese themselves. The various Chinese groups competed with one another in business. In Kuching, dialect group rivalry was commonplace amongst the Chinese. Competition in trade between the Fujianese, their Teochew allies and Hakkas deepened group interests. The Fujianese and Teochews were separate communities that kept to their own, sponsoring, helping and employing members of their own group and looking after their own interests, even looking after the destitute. These did not transcend dialect boundaries. Group differences were often asserted through open fights in the river basins. In 1888, there was a big armed fight between Fujianese and Teochews. The fight resulted in regular patrols by the Iban rangers along the bazaars. While the relationship between the Chinese and Malays in West Malaysia was marred by tension, the Chinese and Ibans shared a more accommodating relationship.

The Chinese immigrants realised that in order to survive, they had to come to terms with the Ibans and other natives. The Chinese became hospitable and in fact built separate kitchens at the back of the shop houses to allow native people to use them. They even provided places for them to stay when the Ibans could not get back home in time. The majority of the Fujianese in Sarawak were from Zhao Aun (诏安) an aggressive, outspoken and rough tribe among the Fujianese, followed by the Heng Huas (兴化) who settled down in Sungai Apong and Bintawa fishing village. Since 1840, they have come in large numbers and encouraged their friends and relatives to settle with them. The Hakkas were mainly from He Boh (河婆), a village in Guangdong. The earliest pioneers in San Du Chiao (三渡桥) were from a place known as Wu Tien Zi (五条石). The prominent surnames of Chinese in



Sarawak were: Chong (张), Liu (刘), Chua (蔡), Wong (黄), Lee (李), Yong (杨), Woon (温), Teng (邓), Pui (贝), Hon (韩), Hiu (邱), Chin (陈) and Ng (吴). Sarawak was one of the few Malaysian states where Chinese words were printed on traffic and street signages.

## **The White Rajahs of Sarawak**

James Brooke's father, Thomas Brooke, was an employee of the East India Company (东印度公司). James joined the British army and was sent to Burma. In 1835, he inherited 30,000 pounds from his father and bought a ship and arrived in Kuching. At that time, the Brunei Sultans had difficulty coping with internal trouble within Sarawak and sought the help of Brooke. When James Brooke first took over Sarawak, there were many Chinese triads and they caused a great deal of trouble for him in administrating Sarawak. The Xi Long Men region, for example, had major problems with secret societies and gangsters. There were constant disputes between different gangs, and they were involved in violent clashes, resulting in bloodshed. Some of the gangsters were ambitious. They discovered that the local kingdom was weak and, in 1857, organised a force to try to overthrow the kingdom. The gangsters conspired with the Malay Sultan Sambas to stage a revolt.

The leader of the Chinese gang was Wang Xin (黄申), who occupied Kuching and declared Sarawak a republic. They later installed Wang as President. He then summoned the Europeans and Malays and declared Kuching as an independent state of Sarawak. His government however took a hostile stance towards the Malays. Later, the British sent in troops from Singapore and suppressed the movement. Wang Xin died in the battle. Thousands of Chinese were sacrificed while the rest fled. The reason for the failure of the coup attempt was that Wang Xin did not get the support of the *bumiputra* population as he was hostile towards the Malays. The international community was not ready to recognise the existence of his republic. After the collapse of the revolt, about 2,000 Chinese ran away and Sarawak suspended migration from China. Sarawak's economy was self-sufficient and as there were no big plantations or mines. Brooke depended

heavily on the monopolies that ran the opium, gambling, distilleries, and gambier and pepper cash crop trades. The Chinese, through their patronage, carried the main burden of generating revenue for the Brooke coffers. The monopolies, single or combined, were let out by tender, first for two years and later for three years. In the case of opium for instance, the successful tenderer had the right to distribute and sell opium throughout Sarawak. After James' death in 1868, his nephew, Charles Brooke, succeeded him as the second white rajah. He continued the work of his uncle. Writing almost 25 years later, Sir Charles Brooke said, 'Without the China man, we could do nothing. When not being allowed to form secret societies he was easily governed, and this he was forbidden to do on pain of death'.

## **Post-War Political Activities of the Chinese**

During Sarawak's early post-war period between the 1940s and 1950s, multi-racial cooperation existed within political parties like the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP, 沙罗越人民统一党) formed in 1959. Although the party was Chinese based and controlled by Chinese with strong Fujianese and Hakka support, it nevertheless had substantial native membership and support. It became identified as a Chinese party rather than one that was represented by native interests. Later on, the leadership of SUPP decided that it should align itself with the Malay or Muslim-led Parti Bumiputera. It was, however, a left-wing party dominated by Communist inspired Chinese leaders.

When I went to Sabah, I also went to Sarawak and discussed collaboration with SUPP's President Ong Kee Hui (王其辉). Ong was a moderate, but his Secretary-General Stephen Yong (杨国斯) was in favour of towing the left-wing line. Ong Kee Hui (1914–2000) was born in Kuching and educated at St. Thomas' School and later St. Andrews' School in Singapore before he obtained his Diploma in Agricultural Science from Serdang College. He entered Sarawak Government civil service in 1935. He left government service in 1946 and became a businessman, learning the ropes from Wee Kheng Chiang. Later he became the Mayor of Kuching, the Minister of Technology, Research and Local Government, then Local Government

and Housing and Minister of Science Technology & Environment in the Malaysian Cabinet from 1971 to 1981.

He was conferred the title of Datuk and later Dato Sri (PNBS), then Datuk Amar, by the Sarawak State Government, and finally he was given the title of Tan Sri by the Malaysian Government. Ong died in 2000, after an illustrious career as a businessman and politician. I went to the SUPP headquarters and found pamphlets condemning Tengku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew. It was during the time when both of them cooperated to form Malaysia, pulling Sarawak along. At one time, the Chinese in Sarawak were rather anti-Malaysia and were left-wing, hence the propagation through pamphlets.

In 1965, the People's Action Party (PAP) was leading the campaign against the UMNO's Malay Malaysia concept; the PAP organised a Malaysian Solidarity Convention to fight UMNO's dominance in politics and its racial stance. I was sent as Secretary of the Convention to meet Sabah political parties and leaders, including Donald Stephens, leader of the Kadazans. Donald took me to his party headquarters. My role was to find out whether PAP should enter into Sabah politics. I met many Chinese leaders, including a former General from the Guomintang Army who became a teacher in Sabah. I visited the HQ of the Sarawak United People's Party, and the chairman Ong Kee Hui (王其辉) explained to me the party's organisation. He told me that the party had been heavily infiltrated by Communist elements. They were against the establishment of Malaysia. I also met Stephen Yong (杨国斯), Secretary General of the UPP, who was strongly influenced by left-wing elements. He first became Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak and later became a Minister in the UMNO-Alliance Cabinet. He lost his election in 1974 in a constituency predominated by Chinese, expressing resentment against his decision to form the coalition government. Stephen Yong (1921–2001) was best remembered in giving the ordinary Chinese in Sarawak a political voice. The majority of the Chinese in Sarawak were against the formation of Malaysia in 1963. More than 2,000 frustrated left-wing Chinese youths escaped to Indonesia as a result of regular arrests and persecution of anti-state elements during the early stages of Malaysia's independence. They accepted training by the

Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, 印尼共产党) and joined President Sukarno's anti-Malaysia movement. In reality, the Chinese were not united. Some were members of the multi-ethnic Parti Bersatu Sabah (沙巴统一党), others joined the predominant Chinese Sabah Progressive Party (华人沙巴进步党, the Liberal Democratic Party (自由民主党) or the Malayan Chinese Association (马华公会).

## **Intermarriages Between Chinese and Ibans–Dayaks**

The Chinese immigrants came as single men and even if they had wives or children, their dependants were left behind in the villages of China. Like the Hakka miners who intermarried freely with Land Dayak women, many Chinese immigrants took wives from among the Ibans and other natives. The native women did not object to marrying Chinese men. Though mixed marriages were prevalent, there were official obstacles which prevented mixed communities from becoming a dominant political or economic force and disallowed changes in ethnic identities. The Brooke administration grew wary of Chinese traders living in Dayak long houses. They therefore discouraged intermarriages between Chinese and the natives. Some Dayaks were willing to live with Chinese husbands in bazaar shop houses or boats. Their offspring had to be classified either as Chinese or Dayak. The Brooke officials refused to accept them as Sino-Dayak.

Iban women had difficulties adjusting to the bazaar life and Chinese society. The world of longhouses and an economic and social life centred on swidden farming was very different from life in shop houses with chores like loading and unloading of goods, with buying and selling. There were many cases of broken marriages amongst them. Conflict between the Ibans and the Fuzhounese were inevitable as such. A particular incident involving large influx of Fuzhounese into Sarawak as planters was worthy of mention. The Ibans in Binatang were unhappy with the mass migration of Fuzhounese and their imperious behaviour. The Fuzhounese did not know the language of the Dayaks and Ibans, nor their customs. When they arrived, they cleared the forest without knowing how to distinguish between

ordinary trees and fruit trees. The Ibans in Bintanang could not tolerate their behaviour and started to attack the Fuzhounese. This escalated into a tense incident, which soured the relationship between the two groups.

### **Wong Nai Siong (黄乃裳) (1849–1924)**

Wong Nai Siong was born in Fuzhou in the Fujian province on July 25, 1849, at a time when the Qing dynasty was on the decline. He studied at a traditional Chinese village school and was baptised at the age of 18, becoming the earliest converts to Christianity in China under the Manchu rule. He took part in the Imperial examination and was awarded the rank of *Xiu Cai* (秀才) and later on became a *Juren* (举人). He was very much influenced by Kang You Wei's reformist ideas. China, under the rule of Empress Dowager, was signing away unequal treaties with the Western Powers. Wong was frustrated with the decadent Qing dynasty and wanted a change. He went to Beijing and got in touch with the reformist leader Kang You Wei, who was advocating a reform movement similar to the Japanese Meiji Reform (日本明治维新). Kang advised the young Guangxi Emperor to



Wong Nai Siong

introduce reform measures in the imperial administration. The Empress Dowager was against any reform and had six reform leaders associated with Wong assassinated. Through the help of Beijing friends, Wong escaped Fujian and had to run for his life. He longed to go abroad. He took a boat and arrived in Singapore and stayed with his brother-in-law Lim Boon Keng (林文庆), then a famous doctor who was also interested in initiating reform in China. Wong became interested in farming. He visited various countries in Southeast Asia looking for land but found nothing suitable. Then the ruler of North Borneo, Charles Brooke, told Lim Boon Keng about a piece of land in Sarawak which was then under the administration of North Borneo. Wong visited Sibu (西武) where the land was fertile and fell in love with it.

There were then only 20 Chinese families from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou. There were also some Hakkas and Cantonese. After two months of on-site surveying, he met Charles Brooks, and told him that he wanted to develop the country. Wong was asked to recruit his clansmen from Fuzhou, China to help develop Sarawak. In 1900, Wong went back to his hometown and recruited 72 of his clansmen, and went to Sibu with his entourage of labourers, their families and doctors.

In 1901, he brought another 535 Fujianese, mostly his clansmen, and a large majority of them were Christians like himself. In 1902, on his third trip, he brought 1,118 clansmen to Sibu. He saw to it that all the necessary professions were included, such as carpenters, masons, and barbers. For three years, he made them work in the rice fields, sugarcane fields, vegetables cultivation and other produce. He built schools, churches and other amenities for his clansmen. Wong formed a company called the New Fuzhou Company and designed a system of incentives for the workers. All that grew in the land would be transferred to the company in eight months. As the company became successful, he became interested in Chinese politics and decided to help Dr. Sun Yat-sen in his revolution. He went back to China and supported Dr. Sun. Wong was a Christian and was also involved with publishing a newspaper that condemned the Manchus. When Dr. Sun's revolution succeeded, Wong was appointed a Director

of Transport in the provisional assembly. When Wong Nai Siong established his own farm in Sarawak, he called it the New Fuzhou Farm and he prohibited the sale of opium. This affected the revenue of the Sarawak government. He devoted a great part of his life to preaching Christianity. All the Fuzhounese he brought to Sibü became Christians and there was now a large Christian community in Sibü.

In 1947, there were 41,946 Fuzhounese in Sarawak. By 1970, the number increased to 90,704, and in 1990, the Fuzhounese population had increased to 126,346. This was 32.8% of the entire Chinese population of 385,200. Within the Chinese population, the second largest clan was the Hakka comprising of 124,805 people, about 32.4% of the population; the third, the Fujianese with 51,617 or 8.6%, and the fourth, Teochews with 33,127 or 6.2%. Cantonese, 23,882, Henghua 13,097, and Hainanese, 7,704 were the others. There were other minorities as well.

### **Wee Kheng Chiang (黄庆江, 1890–1978)**

Wee Kheng Chiang was the father of Wee Cho Yaw (黄祖耀), Singapore's leading banker. The wife of Rajah Vyner Brooke, in her book *Queen of the Head Hunters* described the senior Wee as an 'uncrowned King of Sarawak', undeniably one of the richest men in the country. Born in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak in July 1890, Wee Kheng Chiang was the son of Wee Tee Yah, an immigrant from the village of Eng Khee in Quemoy off the coast of East China. Although he had a wife in Quemoy, he married a Hakka widow, Song Kim Keow (宋金娇) in Kuching. Wee Tee Yah died of illness in 1899, and Wee Kheng Chiang who was his second son, migrated to Kuching when a plague struck Quemoy. Kheng Chiang studied in St. English Thomas Secondary School. His knowledge of English helped him to establish contact with the palace of the White Rajah Brooke who was in control of Sarawak. As Wee was also educated in Chinese, he could get along well with the Chinese business community. Wee's intelligence and determination caught the attention of Sarawak's, then most powerful Kapitan Cina Ong Tiang Swee (王长水) who gave his

daughter away as his wife. Wee became the manager of the Sarawak Chinese Bank owned by Ong Tiang Swee. In 1914, Rajah Brooke set up the Sarawak Farms Syndicate, a joint venture between the government and the Chinese businessmen, to run the lucrative gambling and opium monopolies and the arak distilleries. As Kuching's richest man, Ong became Chairman of the new syndicate, and the bilingual Wee was made the manager. The job brought Wee in touch with the higher echelons of government and leading Chinese businessmen.

As the man in charge, Wee had insider information on shareholders who wanted to sell their shares. By purchasing such shares, Wee became a substantial shareholder of the syndicate. The syndicate had to close down because of the Geneva Convention in 1924. Wee also set up his own distillery in addition to running the Ciana Ciang Bank. He started an import and export business, a grocery company, a pig farm and operated a coconut oil mill. Slowly but surely he acquired some of the choicest properties in Kuching. In 1930, when the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce was established in Kuching, Wee became its Treasurer and, later on, its President. Wee was also the President of the Fujian Hui Guan (福建会馆), the representative organisation of the Fujians. In the same year, he extended his business to Singapore, and in 1935 started the United Chinese Bank, now the United Overseas Bank (大华银行). The next 40 years saw him travelling frequently between Sarawak and Singapore. In 1978, Wee died in his Kuching home, and he left the running of the UOB to Wee Cho Yaw, his eldest son.



## Chapter Nine

# Westernised Singaporeans

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According to the Singapore Tourism Board's 'Your Singapore' website, Singapore's Chinese constituted 77.2% of the island's resident population, the largest single ethnic group which is approximately three out of four Singaporeans.<sup>1</sup> Outside China, Singapore was the only country in the world where ethnic Chinese had dominated the political scene in a multi-cultural environment. Ethnic Chinese in Singapore identify themselves as Singaporeans first (新加坡人), and Chineseness is a secondary identity (华人). Years of the People's Action Party, educational policy and multi-racial and multi-lingual approach had succeeded in instilling in the new breed of young Chinese that they were first Singaporeans, then Chinese. They prefer to call themselves Singaporeans and *huaren* (华人) than *huayi* (华裔). No one would call himself as *hua chiau* (华侨), meaning overseas Chinese. Only those who had migrated to Singapore recently called themselves *hua chiau*, as most of them were previously citizens of the People's Republic of China or of Taiwan. Most of the Chinese were descendants of Chinese who migrated to Southeast Asia to look for jobs in the tin mines in Malaya or in factories in other parts of Southeast Asia. Singapore was then the centre for the barakoons who were engaging in trafficking of indentured labourers called 'coolies'. Labourers were in great demand by the colonial rulers. The majority of the Chinese immigrants were from Fujian (福建), Xiamen (厦门), Quanzhou (泉州), Zhangzhou (漳州), Tongan (同安), Nanan (南安),

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<sup>1</sup>About: Chinese Singaporean. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://dbpedia.org/page/Chinese\\_Singaporean](http://dbpedia.org/page/Chinese_Singaporean).

Anxi (安溪), Huian (惠安), Jinjiang (晋江), Yongchun (永春) or Longhai (龙海). The Teochews (潮州人) arrived mainly from Shantou (汕头) or Jieyang (揭阳). The Cantonese (广东人) made up the third group, mainly from Guangzhou (广州), Zhaoqing (肇庆), Shunde (顺德), Taishan (台山) or Heshan (鹤山). The Hakkas (客家人) came next, largely from Meixian (梅县), Dapu (大埔) or Huizhou (惠州); and the Hainanese (海南人) from Haikou (海口) or Wenchang (文昌).

## Babas and Nyonyas

The initial wave of Chinese immigrants who arrived in Singapore encountered other Chinese who did not speak either Mandarin or other dialects. Some of the early Chinese migrants had married Malay women. They were called Babas and the ladies Nyonyas. They were the local-born *peranakans*, some of whom had migrated to Singapore from Malacca and Penang, sometimes classified as a separate sub-culture of the Han Chinese. In other words, they embraced a fusion of Malay and Chinese cultures with their own distinct identity. They became useful intermediaries for businesses. Those who were fluent in English served the British colonialists and assisted the new Chinese immigrants who were regarded as Sinkheks (新客) or newcomers.

## Babas (峇峇) and Sinkheks (新客)

The Babas and the Sinkheks lived separately under the British administration. During the early colonial period, there were the Chinese immigrants, known as Sinkheks, who were non-political and interested only in making a living either through commerce or by offering their labour. This group constituted the large majority, some of whom accumulated huge capital and became towkays but others remained poor. The Babas, whether rich or poor, all claimed to be Malayan sons of the soil, and thus claimed equal rights as the Malays. The British colonial masters deployed their divide-and-rule colonial tactics on the Chinese community. As the British administrators were interested only in the economic benefits which they could gain from the colony,

they saw the Babas as useful only in their administration, while they socialised with the towkays (rich merchants), leaving the poorer Sinkheks to fend for themselves.

The Baba group was not entirely in favour of learning Chinese, and they promoted English education and westernisation instead. This latter group manifested their attitude strongly in Straits Chinese newspapers such as the *Bintang Timur*, *Kabar Slalu* and *Bintan Peranakan*. Ong Song Siang published the first Straits Chinese newspaper *Bintang Timur*, which means Eastern Star, with the objective of promoting social and political awareness among the Straits Chinese. The Babas and the Sinkheks organised different welfare associations to look after their own interests. The Baba mutual help associations were called Jingde Hui (敬德会) and the Sinkheks formed their own clans depending on which province they came from. They called them *bang* (邦). The Sinkhek businessmen established the Chinese Chamber of Commerce as instructed by the Qing government dominated by the Sinkheks. In business too, the Babas and Sinkheks were divided. In the earlier years of British administration, the Babas were mainly involved in shipping, banking and tin mining, whereas the Sinkheks dealt with local produce such as pepper, gambir, rubber and trading. The type of business was linked to their cultural background. As shipping and banking required the knowledge of English, the Babas were more equipped for the business. The Sinkheks pledged their loyalty to mother China. The most prominent leaders of this group were Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚) from Amoy, the rubber magnet, and Aw Boon Haw (胡文虎), a Chinese immigrant from Burma who became the Tiger Balm king. This group also consisted of many who wished to cut off their ties with China.

The third was the Malayan Communist Party, which was the first political party, formed as early as 1921, a left-wing organisation under the direct control of the Comintern (Communist International with headquarters in Moscow) but also linked to China and dominated by the Chinese educated Sinkheks. They were operating underground and their subversive activities were extended to Chinese schools, clubs and labour unions. There was then no other political party and the British did not encourage any because they never dreamt of giving up

power. The Babas were loyal to the British King but were interested in Chinese language and development in China. Prominent members of this group were Dr. Lim Boon Keng (林文庆) and Ong Song Siang (宋旺相) who formed the Singapore British Chinese Association with a view of uniting the Babas. In 1900, Dr. Lim Boon Keng founded the Bao Huang Hui (保皇会) or the Emperor Protection Society, a sort of a political body that supports the Qing Emperor. It was an organisation initiated by the Chinese reformist Kang You Wei (康有为) who visited Malaya and Singapore to spread Chinese nationalism against Dr. Sun Yat-sen's anti-Qing revolution. What was modern about the Pao Huang Hui was that it had a persuasive and coherent ideology and was backed by two Chinese newspapers sponsored by them: the Tian Nan Xin Pao (天南新报) and Jit Shin Pao (日升报). However, another group of businessmen led by Teo Eng Hock (张永福) supported Dr. Sun Yat-sen and was in favour of the revolutionary method, backed by their own newspaper *Tu Nan Ri bao* (or *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*) (图南日报) and later the Chong Shing Ri Pao (中兴日报).

### **Tan King Hee (陈钦喜) and Tan King Chin (陈钦真)**

The British colonial masters sourced the help of the Babas in their contact with China. They were sent to Hong Kong, Fujian and other Chinese cities to run errands for them. After the opium war, the Qing authorities arrested two Babas; one was Tan King Hee, and the other Tan King Chin, both born in Singapore, in connection with illegal activities in Amoy. King Hee was the alleged leader of the Triad Society and was involved in gangsterism, smuggling, extortion and armed robbery. He once stormed a rice shop and beat up the shop-keeper with a gang of 20 members. He was arrested and tried, but through the intervention of the British Consul, he was deported back to Singapore. When King Hee was deported, his brother King Sing who worked in the local British consulate as an interpreter was also advised by the British to leave Amoy. He was identified as the leader of another secret society, Hsiao Tao Hui (小刀会) or Small Dagger Society. Tan King Sing was arrested in connection with a secret society for the smuggling of opium. He also worked for a foreign agency

involved in coolie trade. As he was working as Secretary of Jardine, Matheson & Company, he obtained a fair trial through the intervention of the company. He was convicted and received the death sentence.

While he was detained, King Sing was beaten to death. His corpse was put in a sedan and sent to the British consulate. King Sing was born in Singapore of a Malay mother. He read and wrote English and was registered with the British consulate in Amoy in 1840 as a British subject. Many Babas from Singapore, Melaka and Penang had used the legal protection of the British to cover up their illegal activities. The Chinese officials in the ports, however, had several misgivings about the Babas. The Baba's sought foreign protection in defiance of imperial laws. This was interpreted as a challenge to the Chinese legal system and the political authority of the empire and not just the avoidance of punishment. Many of them felt extremely frustrated because they were compelled by circumstances to bend Chinese laws and to yield to foreigners if the law and foreign extra-territorial rights were in direct conflict. At times, they had to overrule some of their decisions because of foreign intervention. The fate of King Sing sparked off a diplomatic crisis between Britain and China. The British Consul, G. G. Sullivan made a strong protest and accused China of violating the treaty rights of British subjects.

The Qing authorities asserted that King Sing was a Chinese subject under Qing laws, as the Qing dynasty regarded all Chinese inside and outside China as their subjects since 1919. The dispute spilled over to the broader issue of the concept and definition of nationality, which became a hotly disputed subject between the two countries for many years. The Babas were useful to the British when they dealt with the Chinese authorities, but they were despised by the Chinese officials, because they looked like the Chinese but did not behave like one.

### **Huang Zun Xian (黄遵宪)**

During the early colonial days, there were few Chinese schools in the Colony as most Babas did not read Chinese nor speak Mandarin. Yet



Huang Zun Xian

they observed Chinese traditional customs faithfully. Had it not been for the effort of Huang Zun Xian (1848–1905), an extraordinarily brilliant diplomat, thinker, poet as well as historian, most Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia would have been acculturated to their native society. Huang's diplomatic career started in 1877 when he became Counsellor to the Imperial Chinese Legation or Embassy in Tokyo responsible for researching and drafting documents, among other duties was third in rank after the Ambassador. He stayed in Tokyo until 1882. Huang was a Hakka, born in Jiayingzhou Guangdong on May 29, 1848. His father Huang Hung Chow (黄鸿藻) was a Juren (举人) in the Qing Court. Huang learnt to recite the Jien Kia Zi (千家诗), a classic, at the age of three, and at nine he could memorise Tang Poems. At 12, he lost everything when the Taiping rebels stormed his house. At 28, he became a Juren, and was chosen among 140 Jurens, as potential Prime Minister. During his stay in Japan, he made an extensive study of how Japan was transformed from a

backward country into a mighty one through the Meiji Restoration (明治维新) and wrote a book entitled, *Treaties of Japan* (日本国志), which describes the reform movement in detail. This book was presented to Emperor Guangxu (光绪皇帝) who was so impressed that he gave audience to Huang Zun Xian to explain the Meiji Reform movement. After listening to Huang's explanation, with the help of Kang You Wei (康有为) he pursued a similar strategy of reforms in China.

After his assignment in Tokyo, he was appointed Consul-General in San Francisco in 1882. While in San Francisco, he discovered that the local Cantonese migrants had remitted an average of US\$1.2 million in Guangdong annually. This discovery led him to formulate his opinion of the economic importance of the Chinese living abroad. It was probably this experience in San Francisco that made him campaign for the abolition of the age-old immigration policy of the Qing Government to ban overseas Chinese from returning to their homeland. This ban was originally initiated from 1644 to 1722 during the reigns of Emperors Shun Zhi (顺治) and Kang Xi (康熙), when the Chinese patriot Zheng Cheng Gong (alias Koxinga, 郑成功), had fought the Manchu dynasty and retreated to Taiwan. From Taiwan, many Chinese had gone overseas to join Koxinga's movement and the Qing emperor issued a decree to prohibit the return of overseas Chinese. The prohibition was to prevent widespread unrest and the threat of the enemy in coastal areas. Many Fujianese who smuggled their way back to China in the past, were arrested and executed. Later in 1889, Huang returned to China, and the following year, he was installed as Counsellor to the Chinese Legation in London. In 1891, Huang was appointed as Consul-General of Singapore where he stayed until the end of 1894. Here, he discovered that many Chinese immigrants, particularly Fujianese and Teochews were rich and had generously donated large sums of money in aid of China's famine. Many still wore the traditional Chinese costumes, and continued to observe the Chinese rites in wedding, funerals and celebrating Chinese festivities such as New Year, Cheng Beng (清明), the Dragon Boat Festival (Duan Wu Jie, 端午节), Hungry Ghost Festival (鬼节), Mid-Autumn Festival (Zhong Qiu Jie, 中秋节) and

other festivities, as they were still very much influenced by Confucius and were emotionally attached to China. They refrained from returning to China because of the rampant corruption among Chinese officials who had obstructed them from returning to their homeland. Those who did return became victims of extortion and were deprived of their wealth. They were murdered and dumped into the sea. He wrote a petition to the Emperor advocating that the emigration ban on overseas Chinese be lifted. In his petition, Huang said: 'To drive fish into other people's nets or birds into other people's snares was not a clever policy, but this was what we have been doing'. The petition purported that the ban against overseas Chinese should be lifted as they could become a valuable contribution to the Chinese economic advancement.

Huang's petition was conveyed to the Emperor by his superior and his ideas were accepted. On January 29, 1894, Emperor Guangxu issued a decree lifting the ban on the return of the overseas Chinese. The translated version of the decree was published in *The Straits Times*, the following day on January 30, 1894, entitled 'An Imperial Decree for Their Protection'. The decree according to my records said the following: 'The other day, attention was drawn in the Straits Times to the oppression that befell Chinese immigrants returning to China from the Straits Settlement. Their grievances had been laid before the Emperor of China by the Chinese Consul General at Singapore with the result that the following Imperial proclamation had been issued to remedy these evils'. The proclamation explained in detail the circumstances and reasons behind the imposition of the ban on Chinese travelling abroad and then stated that, '... old prohibition against emigration had gradually become obsolete, manners and customs have become more enlightened, a brave spirit of charity holds sway and there are no distinctions of far and near'. The decree cited the Chinese Consul-General in Singapore who called attention to the fact that 70% of the traders in the islands of the Southern Sea were of Chinese nationality. In number they exceeded a million (Fujianese being the majority) and were considered very wealthy. Many did not return to China for fear of harassment and false accusations by



officials. The only successful remedy for these abuses, the Consul-General said, was to pronounce to the entire country that the old restrictions being in abeyance, new regulations would shortly be drawn up.

He asked for the protection of returning migrants and challenged to change the old law so that an end might be made to the exactions of officials and others. Every Consul could be authorised to issue a pass to all such returning emigrants. Immediately after this decree was issued, Consul-General Huang took the initiative to publicise the change of policy in Singapore through local newspapers and started issuing passports to those who wanted to return to China. The response was great. The passports which he issued had three categories: the first grade with a red rim was meant for top gentry merchants; the second grade with a purple rim was for the ordinary merchants and the third grade with a blue rim was meant for coolies. These passports were made available to all overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, for Huang's jurisdiction covered the whole area of the Nanyang (南洋), meaning Southeast Asia. Huang also arranged for those rich overseas Chinese who had donated generously to China to be bestowed with Mandarin titles in different ranks according to their contributions. In 1898, Emperor Guangxu intended to appoint him as Ambassador to Japan, but before that could happen, Guangxu's Hundred Days Reformation (百日革新) program was crushed by Empress Dowager who took over power, making her three-year-old grandson Emperor. She placed Guangxu under house arrest. This ended Huang's diplomatic career. While Kang You Wei (康有为) and Liang Qi Chao (梁启超) had to escape to Japan, Huang managed to avoid arrest and execution through the help of Narahara Nobumasa (1863–1900), a young Japanese diplomat who befriended Huang when he was studying Chinese at the Imperial Chinese Legation in Tokyo. Huang was asked to return to his native place Jiayingzhou and live in retirement until his death in 1905 at the age 58. Huang could be considered the first Chinese diplomat and scholar who had championed the cause of human rights for the early Chinese migrants.

## Impact of Chinese Emperor's Decree

Emperor Guangxu's decree to protect overseas Chinese by issuing passports had a tremendous impact on them. Many felt that their motherland had finally shown concern for their existence and well-being. The Qing authorities went further to claim that all Chinese throughout the world were Chinese citizens, because they carried Chinese blood in them, otherwise known as the Law of the *Jus Sanguinis* in Latin, meaning the right of blood relations. The Republic of China, established by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, not only followed the policy but took steps to establish Chinese schools all over the world to encourage overseas Chinese to study Chinese. When Dr. Sun went around the world propagating his revolutionary movements, he encouraged rich Chinese merchants to set up Chinese schools and supplied teachers from China. Similarly, Kang You Wei, the pro-Guangxu's Chinese scholar also competed with Dr. Sun in the movement to reawaken the overseas Chinese that they were Chinese and should be loyal to China. This movement was to awaken China consciousness in the minds of overseas Chinese reversed the trend of assimilation in their land of birth. However, there were many locally born Chinese who preferred to identify themselves with their host country, the local culture, tradition and lifestyles.

## The Impact of Huang Zun Xian (黄遵宪) on Singapore Chinese

When Huang Zun Xian arrived in Singapore in 1891, new immigrants or Sinkheks had no legal immigration documents. Among those he met locally, most could not speak Mandarin for there were no Chinese schools then. He would have had met successful businessmen like Gan Eng Seng (颜永成) and Cheang Hong Lim (章芳林) who were already millionaires. They wore Qing costumes, had long pigtails and were still loyal to their motherland. During his early days in Singapore, he stayed with a friend in North Boat Quay. He had found the erratic weather unbearable and contracted tuberculosis. He went to Penang and Malacca to recuperate, where he met Dr. Lim Boon Keng, who advised him to eat dog meat. This apparently helped

to cure him of his illness. His friendship with Dr. Lim Boon Keng had an effect on his desire to make the local Chinese study the Chinese language, which helped boost his campaign. Huang got in touch with Kang You Wei and Liang Qi Chao who were influenced by his book *Treaties of Japan on Meiji Restoration*. He helped them spread Confucianism in Singapore and Malaya, and trained them to set up Chinese schools. Huang established close relations with the various clan associations. In those days, the Hainan Association was quite strong and he had close relations with Hainanese leaders. One day, when he visited the Association, the Hainanese leaders asked him to pen a poem in remembrance of his visit. With the Chinese brush, he wrote a poem which described the glaring prosperity of the Chinese millionaires who spoke native tongues and Singapore's contribution to the Western world. The poem was in the form of a 28-word couplet in Chinese:

入耳尽方言, 听海客瀛谈, 越人乡语; 缠腰尽富豪, 有大秦金缕, 拂棘珠尘

Huang toured Malaya extensively as it was under his jurisdiction. He inspected the well being of the Chinese community. He liked Penang and Malacca. During his stay in these two towns, he composed many poems and described the living conditions and lifestyles of the Babas and Nyonyas, and noted they wore sarong and loved durians. He described his experiences meeting rich miners and opium smugglers who made their fortune in these lands. Huang described the difficult conditions the overseas Chinese faced.

On March 8, 2010, a representative of the Huang Zun Xian Foundation established in Hong Kong, Liang Tong (梁通) came to see me as he heard that I was writing about Huang Zun Xian. He presented me with two volumes of Huang's poem and a great deal of information about Huang, because he himself had done much research on this great man. He also presented me with a photograph of Huang being received by Emperor Guangxu. One of his main objectives was to see the couplet, which he knew was framed and displayed on the premises of the Hainanese Association. He remembered having seen the couplet when he was there before the war. I took him to the

association near Beach Road and we found the couplet, hanging in the main hall. Liang was really excited when he saw them. It was printed in gold on two wooden frames. Liang said that during the Cultural Revolution, some students went about digging the graves of ancient scholars, as they were regarded as 'decadent old feudalists' (臭老九). They found Huang's grave in Mei Xian and dug out the coffin, took away his Qing official headdress (官帽), his Mandarin gowns (官服), and the long chain of pearls around the neck (珠廉) and threw the body into the rubbish dump. They had expected to find some treasures Huang might have had brought along with him to heaven. Liang commented that till today, Huang's body was not found and his grave was completely damaged. One of the Foundation's objectives was to find the body and build a respectable tomb to commemorate this 'great diplomat and poet who helped to bring some protection for millions of overseas Chinese, so that his soul will be at peace'. Liang wrote a letter to Wen Jia Bao (温家宝), Premier of the People's Republic of China, drawing his attention to the plight of Huang and was still waiting for a reply. Liang came to see me hoping that my book would draw the attention of the Chinese throughout the world to this sad incident. It was really disheartening to learn that this brilliant diplomat who had done so much for overseas Chinese should end up so miserably.

In January 1991, in Canton, an exhibition was held to commemorate the contribution made by Huang Zun Xian. Featured were the works of 130 artists from Singapore, China, Taiwan, Hongkong, Macau and Australia on Huang's activities. The exhibitions captured Huang's life and work in colourful paintings and calligraphy. The exhibition was sponsored by Yew Mui Leong, Director of the Nan Yuan (Ying Fong) Group of Companies, a Hongkong-based business group. The exhibition took the viewer through key events in Chinese history from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century — a history of the Chinese intellectuals' fight against feudalism and their quest for literal and social reforms of which Huang played a pivotal role. This exhibition was later hosted in Shanghai before it moved to Singapore and staged at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. His efforts to sinicise the Chinese in Malaya, Singapore, and in a wider sense the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, were

commendable. Huang's efforts to establish Chinese schools had helped spread China-consciousness among the Chinese population.

### **Three Straits Heroes**

#### ***Dr. Lim Boon Keng (1869–1957)***

Among the Babas, Dr. Lim Boon Keng was very distinctive, for he showed interest in his ancestors' motherland, its language and culture and personally took an active part in serving China. He met Huang in Malacca and Penang and must have been influenced by him. In 1899, he started to pen issues pertaining to social reforms which covered cultural practices and styles of costume, education of children, religion, filial piety and funeral rites. He called upon Chinese men to remove their pigtails, which caused uproar. He defended his stance, stating that wearing a pigtail meant subjugation. In those days, nearly



Dr. Lim Boon Keng

every Chinese immigrant had a pigtail, and it was quite a sight to see many pigtails in opium dens. Dr. Lim was well-versed in matters concerning China and he considered the pigtail an insult to the Han race.

Born in Singapore on October 18, 1869, Dr. Lim Boon Keng was a third-generation Baba. His grandfather came from Denghai (澄海), Fujian Province. He grew up in a Straits Chinese family. His father was Lim Thean Geow who from Pahang had relocated to Singapore. His paternal grandmother was a Nyonya from Penang, and his mother a nyonya from Malacca. Orphaned at a young age, he was raised by his grandfather, Lim Mah Peng (林马炳), a Chinese scholar who named Lim Boon Keng (林文庆), hoping that he would pursue knowledge on Chinese culture and Confucianism. He started school with the outfit run by the Fujian Association. There, he studied Chinese classics. He was later transferred to Raffles Institution but was unable to complete his education because of financial difficulties following his father's demise. However, the headmaster of Raffles Institution provided financial assistance and moral support. In 1887, he obtained a Queen's scholarship and went to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine, graduating in medicine and surgery with first-class honours in 1892. Upon returning to Singapore in 1893, he actively responded to China's reformist cause started by Kang You Wei. Dr. Lim set up a clinic at Telok Ayer Street. When he had more time on his hands, he gave fortnightly lectures on 'First Aid in Ambulance' at the Chinese Christian Association. In 1895, he focussed his attention on education in China and analysed the reasons behind the stagnation of Chinese knowledge and stressed that China had to compete with the outside world. This required internal reforms. His contribution to the medical field went beyond Singapore shores. He was in touch with the Chinese Government and was asked to represent China at a medical conference held in Paris and Rome. He was also the Medical Director of the Chinese section of the International Hygiene Exhibition, Dresden. Back at home, he also helped raise funds for the founding of the King Edward VII Medical School in 1905. He took an interest in the welfare of his people and became co-founder of the Anti-Opium Society in 1906. He condemned the smoking of opium among the Chinese community. In

1912, he was made President of the Board of Health in the Republican Government at Nanking after the success of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution. Having known Dr. Lim Boon Keng, the Qing authorities' image of the Babas began to change. They began to respect Babas and did not regard them as traitors. In 1906, Dr. Lim helped to establish the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (中华总商会). He established three banks with other prominent Babas. The three banks were the Chinese Commercial Bank, the Ho Hong Bank (和丰银行) and the Overseas Chinese Bank (华侨银行). In 1896, he started the Chinese Philomath Society with the support of other prominent Chinese. The society's main focus was to study English literature, Western music and the Chinese language. Dr. Lim's keen interest in promoting Chinese education could have been influenced by his father-in-law Wong Nai Siong (黄乃裳), who was a strong supporter and close friend of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He migrated to Sarawak and continued to help spread Dr. Sun's philosophy. He helped found the Singapore Straits Chinese Girls' School because of the low level of literacy of Straits Chinese girls. He also helped popularise the learning of Mandarin by starting Mandarin classes, because he felt that all Babas should be able to converse in Mandarin. He always believed that a tree should never be severed from its roots; otherwise it would degenerate and wither away. He believed in bilingualism, so that the Chinese could retain their heritage while being able to contribute to the society economically by learning Western science. Dr. Lim was in favour of intermarriages.

Writing about intermarriages, Dr. Lim said that the native Malay wives were good housekeepers and saleswomen, keeping the shops going while their husbands returned to China for further shipments of goods. Up to the 19th century, the Malays were more tolerant of religious differences as far as intermarriages were concerned. They did not compel their partners to become Muslims, an act described by them as *masuk Melayu* (becoming a Malay). Today, things had become quite different. The Malay Muslims insist that their partners must be converted to Islam. In those days, Islam was not yet a state religion as Buddhism and Hinduism had a considerable following. Islam had

been a symbol of Malay identity and Malay unity. Another significant point about the Baba community was that the Baba girls called Nyonyas did not marry the natives, and this prevented any significant loss of the Chinese population to the locals. One of the significant dimensions of Dr Lim's personality was his interest in politics apart from education. At the turn of the century, he was intricately entangled in the politics of China as an overseas Chinese. When the Chinese reformer Kang You Wei was in exile in Singapore, Dr. Lim provided him refuge and protection. Later, he also assisted Dr. Sun Yat-sen to recruit supporters and raise funds for the campaign in Singapore. Dr. Lim identified with Kang You Wei's reformist career, commended his progressive spirit and monitored closely the successes and failures of the reformist movement. Admiring the political evolution of European countries and the reforms of Japan, Lim hoped that these countries could lend assistance to the Emperor to avoid bloodshed. In 1911, when he attended the coronation of King George V, he went to Dresden, Germany. An exhibition on Health and Hygiene was staged for which he was responsible for the Chinese pavilion. He immediately left for China when he heard about the Chinese revolution and stayed at Hankow with Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He witnessed the birth of the new Chinese republic. Dr. Sun appointed him as Medical Adviser to the Chinese Ministry of Interior as well as Inspector-General of Hospitals in Beijing. In 1912, Dr. Sun made him a confidential secretary and personal physician. He became one of the original principal officials of Singapore's Guomintang (国民党) branch. Dr. Lim's relationship with China did not stop there. In 1921, at the age of 52, he became the President of Xiamen University (厦门大学) and devoted the next 16 years of his time and energy to run the university. This was at the behest of Tan Kah Kee. Owing to a difference in philosophy, he could not get along with Lu Xun (鲁迅), and decided to quit his job later. Lu Xun later became China's leading modern writer.

Dr. Lim was a real Confucianist and Lu Xun was an anti-Confucianist. In 1942, at the age of 73, the retired Dr. Lim and his family were interned in a Japanese concentration camp in Arab Street. When he was later released, he was asked by the Japanese to become the leader of the OCA (Overseas Chinese Association). With the



Japanese approval, this association served the needs of the local Chinese community. The Japanese had presumably made his wife kneel down under the scorching sun for four continuous hours when he first refused to take up the Presidency. He was forced to accept the post and then ordered to raise a donation of 50 million dollars for Japanese, under the pretext of fundraising under the Malayan Chinese. He found life miserable, got drunk every night and wanted to commit suicide. Once while he was drunk, he cried and said that he should not have done the things he was forced to do. He was ashamed that he had collaborated with the Japanese. He should not have relented even though he was compelled. Dr. Lim was a prolific writer, having written many books about hygiene, the Chinese and Confucianism. Dr. Lim received many eminent awards during his lifetime. In 1918, he received the Order of the British Empire (OBE). He received the Albertus Medal of Saxony and was decorated Commander Crown of Italy. The Qing dynasty awarded him the Wen Wu Jiang (文武奖) and the Jia He Jiang (甲和奖). He received an honorary Doctor of Laws from the Hong Kong University. After the war, Dr. Lim lived his last 12 years as a recluse. He was known as The Sage of Singapore.

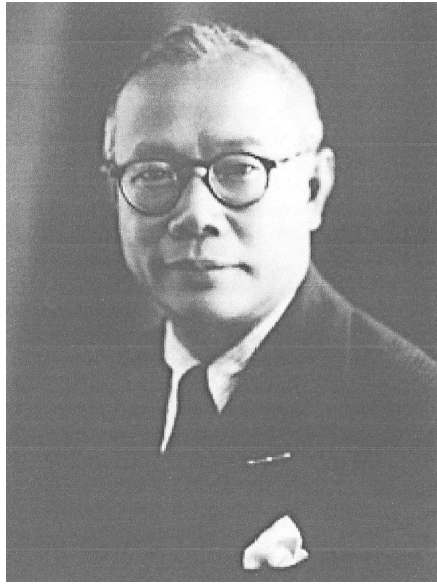
### ***Song Ong Siang (宋旺相)***

Sir Song Ong Siang was a lawyer by profession. A third-generation *Peranakan* Baba, he was an active citizen and the first Asian to be knighted. Born to a Song Hoot Kiam in Singapore on June 14, 1871, he became the founder of the Straits Chinese Church (now Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church). He studied at the Raffles Institution and was awarded a scholarship in 1888. He was the only Chinese Queen's Scholar to read law in England as at that time. He was an outstanding scholar at the Middle Temple and Downing College in Cambridge. Returning to Singapore, his notable work and contribution to society earned him a place as a Nominated Member of the Singapore Legislative Council in 1919. He served again from 1924–1927. He was conferred the OBE in 1927 and the KBE in 1936 by King George V for his outstanding work in the Colony.

Over and above the contributions of Sir Song was his monumental 600-page book, *One Hundred Years of the Chinese in Singapore*, published in 1923, which gained him significant recognition in Singapore. It is undeniably the most authoritative reference, especially for researchers on the history of the Chinese in Singapore. Song Ong Siang was a prominent Baba who worked closely with Dr. Lim Boon Keng. Together with Dr. Lim and Dr. Wu Lien Teh, the famous physician who went to help develop medicines in China, they were known as ‘The Three Straits Heroes (海峡三杰)’. After Sir Song’s Eastern Star was holed up for three years, he was employed as an editor to work on a report on the Straits Colonial Legal System. Later, together with Dr. Lim Boon Keng, he produced a publication called ‘*The Straits Chinese Magazine*’ which introduced oriental and occidental cultures. This lasted 11 years. In the early 1900s, the Straits Chinese Association and the Singapore Volunteer Corp combined to form the first self-defence troop led by Song Ong Siang, who was the first to receive the rank of a colonel. In 1907, he married the daughter of a timber merchant, Yang Bun Shen. They had a military-styled wedding ceremony, the first of its kind in Singapore.

### **Dr. Wu Lien Teh (伍连德) (1879–1960)**

Dr. Wu Lien Teh was a prominent doctor who devoted his time and energy helping China to modernise her medical services in the early 1900s. Born in Penang, Wu was the son of an immigrant from Taishan, China. His mother’s family also originated from China but were second-generation residents of Malaya. He was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1896, after winning a Queen’s Scholarship in Singapore. He did well in university and won several awards and scholarships. He spent his undergraduate clinical years at St. Mary’s Hospital, London. In 1903, after returning to Singapore, he went into private practice because there was no vacancy for him under the British two-tier medical system which allowed only British nationals to hold high positions. He spent four years of his medical career researching beriberi. He founded the Anti-Opium Association in Penang and emerged as a social activist. Inevitably, he bore the



Dr. Wu Lien Teh

wrath of powerful barons who profited from the lucrative trade of opium. He was framed by these barons. An ounce of tincture of illegal opium was found in Dr. Wu's clinic, leading to prosecution. As a fully qualified medical doctor, he reserved the right to buy opium to treat patients. His prosecution and the rejection of appeal attracted wide publicity. Yuan Shikai of the Chinese Government, the then Grand Councillor in Peking, offered him the position of Vice-Director of the Imperial Army Medical College in Tientsin.

In the winter of 1910, Dr. Wu was directed by the Foreign Office in Beijing to investigate an unknown disease which killed 99 percent of its victims in Harbin. This turned out to be the beginning of a large pneumonic plague, a pandemic that affected Manchuria and Mongolia which ultimately claimed 60,000 lives. Dr. Wu asked the imperial government for sanction to cremate plague victims. The cremation of infected victims became the turning point of the epidemic. It contained the pandemic. In April 1911, Dr. Wu chaired the International Plague Conference in Mukden (Shenyang). Scientists from the US, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Netherland,

Russia, Mexico and China attended the event. In August 1911, he presented a research paper at the International Congress of Medicine, London. This was published in the *Lancet* in the same month. Dr. Wu became the first president of the Chinese Medical Association (1916–1920) and directed the National Quarantine Service (1931–1937). In 1937, when Japan invaded China, Dr. Wu returned to Malaya, where he worked as a General Practitioner in Ipoh. He retired from medicine at the age of 80. A year later, he died on January 21, 1960.

### **The Straits Chinese Clubs (海峡华人公会)**

Unlike Dr. Lim Boon Keng, many other Babas pledged loyalty to the British and considered them British subjects, with no desire to study the Chinese language. Most of them wore a *sarong* at home, ate with their fingers and led a Baba lifestyle. Most of the Babas belonged to the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) and even formed a Volunteer Corps comprising volunteers in Singapore, Penang and Malacca in 1901 to fight for the Straits Settlement to reassure the British of their loyalty. When the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China in 1900, some Baba leaders suggested sending a contingent of Straits Chinese to volunteer their services to the British troops in fighting against the Boxers (太平军) and Manchus. The boxer rebels were a group of fanatic Chinese patriots who had gathered together to oust the European invaders, believing that they had immunity to bullets by wearing charm pendants. The SCBA plan however, did not materialise due to lack of preliminary military training. At the end of the 19th century, the English-educated Babas emerged from local and overseas educational institutions. The British Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith initiated a policy to encourage Babas to further their studies in England. The brightest students from English secondary school could be awarded Queen's scholarship to study in England. They were divided basically into two groups, one in favour of re-orientation towards China, the teaching of Chinese and an understanding of Chinese culture, whilst showing their loyalty to the British colonial government. In other words, they advocated a dual role and maintained dual loyalties which were rather ambiguous. For instance,

Dr. Lim Boon Keng, who was once President of the Straits Chinese British Association formed the Straits Chinese China Relief Fund Committee and was affiliated to the Singapore Chinese Relief Fund Council. The second group was not in favour of Babas learning Chinese and tried to promote English education and westernisation. This group manifested their attitude strongly in Straits Chinese newspapers such as the *Bintang Timur*, *Kabar Slalu* and *Bintan Peranakan*. Song Ong Siang published the first Straits Chinese newspaper, *Bintang Timor*, which means Eastern Star (东方之星), with the objective of promoting social and political awareness among the Straits Chinese. Unlike Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Song never took part in any activities which concerned the Chinese motherland. Although they might have had different views about China, together they formed the Straits Chinese Association with the following objectives:

- To promote among the members an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire and to encourage and maintain their loyalty as subjects of the Queen.
- To offer a platform for the discussion of questions relating to the moral, social and intellectual welfare of the Chinese who were British subjects in Malaya.
- To take lawful steps for the defence of the rights and privileges of British subjects.

The Association initially attracted 800 members. In October 1900, a branch was set up in Malacca and later Penang. The Association appeared as though they were loyal subjects of the Government and Britain. Their pro-British outlook met with good response from the British Government. Some of the leading members such as Dr. Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang of the Association were appointed by the government to sit on the Legislative Council. The Babas opted for English education, because they were leaders in the business world, not because they were being edged out by the industrious Sinkhek. The Babas sent their children to English schools to gain familiarity with modern western commercial and financial management skills as well as to obtain technical know-how. The

Babas' sense of self-importance derived from their early arrival and they considered themselves equal to the aristocrats. The flowering of the Baba culture coincided with British rule of the Straits. By the end of the 19th century, they segregated themselves with their own network of social clubs. This was especially so with the Penang Babas. The Babas in Penang and Singapore were by then English speaking and westernised, while the Nyonyas were assimilated into Malay culture. The Babas, through the SCBA, tried to assert their distinction from the Sinkheks. They claimed that whilst the Sinkheks were loyal to China, they were equally loyal to the British. This was so when the Manchu government passed a law in 1901 to say that every person with Chinese blood residing outside China was considered a Chinese citizen. The Babas objected to them being classified as Chinese subjects and were worried that the British might not trust their loyalty. The Babas, whether rich or poor, all claimed to be Malaysians. In fact, the SCBA group claimed that the Straits Chinese were 'sons of the soil' and thus entitled them to equal rights with the Malays. Some of them feared that independence might work against their interest. In 1948, when the British gave in to the Malays and declared the Federal Agreement which granted special privileges to the Malays, the three SCBAs in Malaya called for the secession of Penang from the Federation of Malaya so as to restore the former Straits Settlements. They saw this as a way of avoiding eventual Malay political domination and as a way of preserving their status as British subjects.

## **The Rise of Chinese Nationalism**

Towards the tail end of the Qing dynasty, Kang You Wei, leader of the Hundred Days' Reform in China, visited Singapore and Malaya to spread Chinese education with a view of reviving their interest in China. Kang escaped to Singapore when his Hundred Days' Reform failed because Empress Dowager went after him. He had earlier succeeded in persuading the new Emperor Guangxu to carry out a reform to inject some form of democracy into the Chinese feudal system in the same way Emperor Meiji had done for Japan. However, Empress Dowager did not want any change and had the emperor put

under house arrest and was about to detain Kang when he fled. Kang was a diehard royalist whose dream was to revitalise the Qing administration into a more dynamic feudal system similar to Meiji's Japan.

He did not like the idea of a revolution advocated by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He wanted China to have at least a constitutional monarchy like that of Japan or Britain. Traditionally, the Chinese always regarded the conferment of Mandarin titles through imperial examination as life's greatest honour, and now that they had money, the overseas towkays felt that they owed their loyalty to the Qing emperor who had conferred on them Mandarin titles without having to go through examinations. Except for a few Chinese like Teo Eng Hock (张永福) and Lim Nee Soon (林义顺) few Chinese were sincere in helping Dr. Sun's revolutionary efforts. Most of them only gave lip service. It was not until Dr. Sun succeeded as President of the Republic of China that the Singapore towkays shifted their stance and accorded him respect as a 'hero'.

### ***Teo Eng Hock (张永福) (1871–1957)***

Dr. Sun led many red-blooded Chinese men in the planning of several uprisings against the Qing rulers. In 1896, the bungalow Wan Qing Yuan (晚晴园) where these men met, was renamed Sun Yat-sen Nanyang Memorial Hall to recognise the contributions of the Nanyang Chinese towards the 1911 revolution. Teo was a prominent rubber merchant. In 1900, together with Tan Kah Kee, he monopolised the manufacture of rubber shoes and made a fortune. He spent his money helping Dr. Sun carry out the revolution. Teo became President of the Chamber of Commerce twice. Together with Tan Chor Nam, they started the *Tu Nan Ri bao* (or *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*) (图南日报), a Chinese newspaper to help propagate Dr. Sun's revolutionary ideas. He funded Dr. Sun's campaign. When Dr. Sun was elected President, he bestowed the highest title to Teo for his contribution to the development of China. In 1932, when he returned to China, Teo was appointed Chief of the Central Bank in Swatow as well as Mayor of the City. Due to disagreement with the Chinese Communist, Teo joined Wang Jing Wei (汪精卫), a strong supporter of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, but later turned traitor by cooperating with the



Japanese. His biggest mistake was to support Wang Jing Wei, a traitor who tried to set up a puppet government for the Japanese invader. Wang appointed Teo as his puppet government representative in Vietnam. After the collapse of Japan, Teo was put in prison. After his release, he returned to Singapore and became a Trustee of Ngee Ann Kongxi. He spent his last days in Hong Kong. Teo's daughter Teo Soon Ghim was a prominent lawyer in Singapore and his grand-nephew Teo Chee Hian had become the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore.

### **Lim Nee Soon (林义顺) (1869–1957)**

Another famous Teochew leader in Singapore who once helped Dr. Sun Yat-sen in his revolution was Lim Nee Soon. Today's Nee Soon village was named after him. Lim Nee Soon was born in



Lim Nee Soon



Singapore on November 12, 1879, in Kampong Glam. His father Lim Peng Guan (林炳源) came to Singapore in 1860 and opened a sundry shop in Beach Road. He died when Nee Soon was only eight years old. Lim Nee Soon was brought up by his maternal uncle Teo Eng Hock. He studied in the Anglo-Chinese School and began his career in a cloth shop owned by his uncle. He was a Baba and educated in an English school. But he studied the Chinese classics when he was very young and was influenced by people like Lim Boon Keng and others who propagated Confucianism. In the early 1900s, he was active in securing land for rubber plantation and acquired large pieces of land in Sembawang and Seletar, and formed the United Singapore Rubber Estate Company. In the wake of Singapore's declining fortunes with the downturn in the gambier plantation, Lim converted large tracts of gambier and pepper plantation into rubber estates. His business quickly flourished as there was a rubber boom. He also diversified to the pineapple industry and won himself the nickname of Pineapple King. After Lim made his fortune, he established a bank jointly with Tan Eng Khiam (陈永谦), father of Tan Tock San, a Director of Overseas Chinese Bank Corporation, and a personal friend of mine. Lim Nee Soon's biggest contribution was his activities supporting Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution. Although a Baba, he took an interest in Chinese politics and befriended Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cause bastioned by Dr. Sun and escorted him for eight visits to Singapore. He also acted as a courier for him. He was an influential figure during the colonial days and his words carried weight. He was concerned about the harmony of the various Chinese communities as there was frequent fighting between the Fujianese and Teochews. He facilitated a better understanding between the two communities and arbitrated many disputes. In 1905, he printed 500 copies of a pamphlet entitled *The Revolutionary Army* (人民革命军) written by Qiu Yong and distributed them to people in Swatow. Whenever Dr. Sun came to Singapore, he would stay in the house of Lim Nee Soon, and this house became the centre of activities for Dr. Sun. In 1907, together with others, he started *Chung Shing Jit Pao* (中兴日报), which became a propaganda newspaper for Dr. Sun. In 1913, many

prominent Chinese revolutionary leaders such as Hu Han Min (胡汉民) and Wang Jing Wei (汪精卫) lived in the Nee Soon Village. When Dr. Sun became President of the Republic of China, Lim Nee Soon was bestowed the first class medal for his contribution. The Guomindang also gave him honorary medals. Lim Nee Soon was also the founder of the Teochew Hui Kuan (潮州会馆) and became its first president. Because of his close connection, the Colonial Government was suspicious of him and did not appoint him as a nominated member of local councils. Albeit he served as a justice of peace (1918) and a member of the Welfare Board (1917). He also served as President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (1921–1922; 1925–1926). Lim died at the age of 57 in Shanghai Bao Loong Hospital (宝隆医院) in March 1936 on his way to a holiday trip. An arrangement was made to get his body embalmed and sent back to Singapore, but the Nanjing Government decided to give him a State Funeral and buried him in Nanjing, near the mausoleum of his old friend Dr. Sun Yat-sen instead.

### **Hoo Ah Kee (胡亚基) (1816–1880)**

There were other prominent Chinese businessmen who had supported Dr. Sun Yat-sen's effort to raise Chinese consciousness. Singapore's Whampoo town was named after Singapore's first appointed Chinese Consul Hoo Ah Kee, who migrated from Canton, Guangdong province. He was also known as Foo Nan Seng (胡南生). He established two companies: the first was known as Wang Po (黄埔) and the other Nan Seng (南生). With his Wang Po Company, he supplied food to the British navy and he was known to the British as Mr. Wang Po. Hoo made his fortune in Singapore and was a philanthropist, having donated large sums of money to temples, schools and hospitals. In 1860, he was appointed by the British Colonial Office as a Member of the Legislative Council, the first Chinese to hold that post. In 1877, the Manchu Government appointed him as consul representing China in Singapore. He was similarly appointed in Russia and Japan as a consul. When the Thai King Chulalongkorn visited Singapore, Hoo, who was the most senior Chinese leader, hosted a dinner in the King's honour at his house in Serangoon Gardens.

**Khoo Sook Yuen (邱菽园) (1874–1941)**

Khoo Sook Yuen was born in Chang Zhou Fujian, in 1874. In 1881, he arrived in Singapore when he was eight years old. He was the only one as at that time who had passed the Imperial examinations in Singapore and was trained in Confucian ethics. In 1896, he inherited his father's rice business and used the money he earned to support cultural, educational, religious and social activities. Khoo was known not only as a philanthropist, but also as a poet, journalist and a pro-Sun Yat-sen's revolutionist. In 1907, when Khoo's father died, the company went bankrupt as he had not imbibed the business acumen of his forefathers. He had to live on loans. He then worked as a journalist. Sook Yuen and Dr. Lim Boon Keng gave strong support to Kang You Wei during his visit to Singapore. In 1898, he started the *Tian Nan Xin Pao* (天南新报), then in 1912, the *Chin Nan Ri Bao* (振南日报), and in 1929, he became feature editor of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (星洲日报). Khoo had written 1,400 poems and published a series of poetry books. His poems described the lifestyle of various races in Singapore. He wrote his first poem *The Jade Flute* (玉笛) when he was only 15. He was easily one of the best poets in Singapore and played an important role in the history of Chinese poetry. He died in December 1941 at the age of 68.

**The Awakening of China Consciousness**

Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Kang You Wei's effort to spread China consciousness throughout Malaya and Singapore by establishing Chinese schools made a tremendous impact on the Chinese, many of whom were about to be assimilated to native culture and behaviour. The school I went to, the Chung Ling High School (钟灵中学) was one of them. In Singapore, the Chinese High School (华中) and Chong Cheng High School (中正) became two of the most popular Chinese secondary schools. For girls, the more famous ones were Nan Chiau (南侨) and Nan Yang (南洋). Thousands of teachers were brought here to teach the Chinese language and to infuse Chinese nationalism. Besides, there were a number of Chinese primary schools and also

night schools for coolies. The British tolerated these schools as its policy towards education was one of non-interference. They provided English schools for the Babas and Nyonyas, which gave them good jobs and left the Chinese to establish their own schools to fend for themselves. The British were largely interested in economic gains and political control to rule the country.

## **The Emergence of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP)**

Chinese education paved way for the easy propagation of Chinese Communism. The first Communist activity in Malaya was carried out by an Indonesian revolutionary called Alimin, who passed through Singapore en route to the Pan-Pacific Conference held in Canton in early 1924. At that time, Tan Malaka (陈马六甲), the chief Comintern representative for all Southeast Asia, was of the opinion that the Malays were not interested in politics and that the hope of any Communist expansion depended on the Chinese. He therefore persuaded the Chinese to infiltrate various organisations to spread Communism. After the war in 1945, the (MCP) was the most powerful political party with the support of at least 70,000 workers and 60 nationwide trade unions with a membership totalling 173,000. They had the support of the downtrodden Chinese coolies who led miserable lives and was attracted by communism. The MCP organisation spread to all Chinese schools throughout Malaya and Singapore.

When I was in school, I encountered many occasions when the Communist cadres tried to recruit me to fight British imperialism. But I was not interested. The British had recognised the MCP as a legal political organisation in 1945, because the party had helped the British fight the Japanese from underground under the supervision of Force 136. In 1948, I was in charge of general reporting in *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (星洲日报) which included political reporting. This was my first taste of Malayan politics and a glimpse of the communist network. For the purpose of official reporting, I had the opportunity to attend the funeral of a Communist leader Lim Ah Liang (林亚亮) alias Lim Hong Chew (林鸿洲), a member of the Malayan People's

Anti-Japanese Amy (MPAJA) and a staff of MCP headquarters. Just before the Japanese surrender, he was arrested and was due to be hanged. But he escaped death as he was released. Hailed as a hero upon his release, Lin defied a ban to instigate mass demonstration against the fall of Singapore to Japan. Fighting broke out with the arrival of the police, and Lim, injured in the head, was rearrested and sentenced to two years jail. He was released and arrangement was made for him to be banished to China. He was sent to the Tiger Balm garden for a rest. Three days after that, he was found dead. The communists alleged that he died of a poison injection and blamed the authorities for his death. His body was taken to the MCP headquarters and was given the grandest funeral I ever witnessed. When I visited the MCP headquarters on Queen Street, I saw a flag flying at half-mast over the building, a big banner hung over the entrance to the hall where the deceased was lying in state, a giant red flag draping the coffin. Thousands of people poured into the building weeping. Rows upon rows of wreaths spilled onto the streets that were congested with traffic.

About 10,000 mourners stretched the funeral procession over two miles, while a 3,000 strong choir sang dirges. The mourners comprised representatives from 200 organisations and ordinary folks from all walks of life. It was a spectacular show of strength for the MCP, which was legalised after the war. It was at the Queen Street MCP headquarters that a tea party was held by its City Committee on January 9, 1946, to honour the MPAJA heroes who were decorated by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. Two of the men were from the committee of MPAJA and the others were commanders of the eight independent regiments of the MPAJA. The MPAJA was the strongest and most effective guerrilla force during the Japanese occupation. It was known as the Three Star Army or Bintang Tiga (三星), as the guerrilla force wore a three-star cap which signified the three major races — Malays, Chinese and Indians. It was the armed faction of the Malayan Communist Party. Its most active regiment was the Fourth Independent Regiment, which took part in more than 20 skirmishes, killing some 600 Japanese military personnel. Throughout the period, the MPAJA claimed to have had eliminated 5,500 Japanese officers and men and about 2,500

traitors, which included members of the Overseas Chinese Association formed to raise \$50 million as a donation to the Japanese. The MPAJA itself suffered a total loss of 1,000 personnel who died in action. At the MCP HQ, I met Wu Tian Wang (吴天旺), then the Chairman of the Communist Party in Singapore who spoke in praise of those who received the awards. Wu was the MCP representative on the British convoked Singapore Advisory Council in 1945. Wu was born in Ipoh, a young and enterprising communist whom Victor Purcell (1896–1965) described as ‘an elegant young Communist intellectual with eyes gazing into the utopian space’. Purcell, whose full name was Victor William Saunders Purcell, was a prominent British colonial public servant, a historian who wrote many books on the role of the Chinese in Malaya. He was considered an authority on Chinese in Malaya. Wu Tian Wang said, ‘The Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army was now working for Malayan democracy and the Malayan people would fight shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, with the MPAJA’.

### **Lim Bo Seng (林谋盛)**

Bo Seng, also known as Choon Lim (春林), was made head of the Malayan Chinese section of Force 136. He and his officers infiltrated



Lim Bo Seng

Malaya by submarine from May 1943, transferring to a Chinese junk near Pangkor Islands, Perak. He was escorted to a Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) camp at Blantan by Chin Peng, leader of the Malayan Communist Party. He also participated in a negotiation which secured the MPAJA cooperation with the British operations. In March 1944, while carrying out his duties to raise funds in Ipoh, he was arrested and tortured by the Kempaitai (警备队) until he died at the Batu Gajah Prison on June 29, 1944. After his death, the British adopted him as a symbol of Force 136 heroism, and the Malayan Chinese embraced him as a Malayan patriot. Out of the battles he fought, emerged the spirit of Malayan nationalism which ultimately brought independence to Malaya. In December 1945, at his funeral, his remains were draped in the Chinese National Flag and displayed in Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur. The body was then returned to Singapore for memorial services at City Hall and the Singapore headquarters of the Guomindang. Finally on January 13, 1946, it was carried with a British military escort to a burial site overlooking the MacRitchie Reservoir. A white pagoda, 2.5 m high was erected in his memory at Esplanade on Connaught Drive, and the Lim Bo Seng Memorial was unveiled in June 1954 to commemorate him as a hero.

## Politics

In the early 20th century, the Chinese population, especially those Chinese educated, were pro-China, influenced by Chinese education which instilled in them a strong feeling of loyalty to China, their motherland. They considered themselves as guests (客) in Malaya and not masters (主) of the land. The leader they respected and worshipped was Tan Kah Kee (陈嘉庚), a rubber magnate who led them to fight against the Japanese. Tan was not interested in local politics and concerned himself only with providing relief to China's famine and associating himself with Chinese politics which was either pro-Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石) or pro-Mao Zedong (毛泽东). Tan felt closer to Mao Zedong and in fact travelled all the way to Yenan to pay his respects to the Chinese Communist leader and opposed Chiang Kai-shek. All Chinese newspapers carried their dates with

Chong Hua Ming Guo (中华民国), and the date, month and year according to the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Being educated in Chinese, I was also pro-China, but as a journalist, I began to understand the complexities of the Malayan political situation. The Chinese educated did not seem to be interested in the MacMichael Treaty, which was in fact related to their status and position in the Malayan society. It was a matter of misguided identification caused by the inflexibility of their leaders. The Babas, on the other hand, were not politically conscious and were not properly organised.

### ***Lee Kong Chian (李光前) and Hartal (1893–1967)***

Lee Kong Chian, the multi-millionaire philanthropist, was never involved with politics during his career except once, when he was approached to back a hartal during the time when he served as the President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (中华总商会). This was to demonstrate the unity of Singaporeans. The word ‘hartal’ came from a Hindi word and it was initiated by Gandhi during the anti-British pro-independence period. Gandhi’s method of non-cooperation and non-action instead of violent revolution left an indelible impression on Tan Cheng Lock (陈祯禄). He had stayed in India during the Japanese occupation. When he got involved with the anti-Federation of Malaya agreement movement, he introduced



Lee Kong Chian



the method of hartal (总罢市). The MDU and the MPAJA movements had very little contact with the business world but the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had a large business clientele. With Lee Kong Chian's appeal and the support of the CCC, the hartal was a great success. Singapore's transport system came to a standstill. Workers in all factories, shopkeepers, students and even cabaret girls went on strike. It was the most successful hartal in the history of Malaya. But London turned a deaf ear and went ahead to implement the Federation of Malaya Agreement on February 1, 1948. With the success of hartal, Eu Chooi Yip, Secretary of MDU met Dr. Goh Keng Swee (吴庆瑞), who congratulated Eu and said to him, 'You are emperor for one day, quite impressive'. Eu told him that it was through Lee Kong Chian's help that the hartal became successful. In fact, it was Lee Kong Chian who became Singapore's Emperor for one day because he succeeded in persuading the workers to stop work for a day. Lee Kong Chian died in 1975 at the age of 75. His son Lee Seng Gee (李成义) established a Lee Foundation (李氏基金) to commemorate him. A great deal of philanthropic work was done in the name of the foundation. Lee Kong Chian was a strong supporter of the University of Singapore and the Nanyang University, having donated more than one million dollars. Before his death he donated another million to Medical Research. He was also bestowed the Malaysian title of 'Dato and Tan Sri' by the Malaysian Agong (Chief Sultan) for his contribution to the educational development in Malaysia. Lee was a humble person who was liked by all his staff and the man-in-the-street in Singapore and Malaya. Although he was rich, he never showed his wealth and lived frugally. He dressed simply and did not have an elaborate taste for food or wealth. He never smoked nor drank and seldom gambled. He never threw his weight around and was willing to listen to advice.

## **The British Supported the United Malay National Organisation**

In the struggle for supremacy in Malaya and Singapore, the British Government supported the United Malay National Organisation

(UMNO) and accepted their proposal to change the MacMichael treaty into the Federation of Malaya Agreement, depriving the Chinese and Indians their automatic rights to citizenship. Despite the success of the hartal, which was a manifestation of the people's desire, the British stubbornly took the side of UMNO. In order to pacify the English-language population, they came out with the idea of allowing the electorate to elect a Legislative Assembly comprising six seats in 1948, which provided the electorate a say in the government. A new political party called the Progressive Party led by C. C. Tan and John Laycock contested and won three seats. The MDU boycotted the elections and called it fake. In the Legislative Council, the Progressive Party worked closely with the British Government. The SPP fought for equal treatment with both local and European civil servants. The Chinese-educated locals were resentful of SPP's Pro-British stance. SPP had the support of the Straits Chinese British Association and the Singapore Association as many of its members were from these two associations.

## **The Rendel Constitution**

In 1953, Britain sent Sir Rendel to Singapore with a view of proposing a constitution suitable for self-government with a Cabinet and fully elected Assembly except that Britain still controlled foreign affairs and defence. In 1955, the first general election in Singapore for self-government was held according to his proposals. By that time, the People's Action Party, was formed (PAP) and it knew that any government under the Rendel Constitution would be a puppet government with the British holding on to security, defence, foreign affairs, law and order. The British exercised their power through their colonial secretary, and other British officials in the Legislative Assembly. The ground was hostile with the left-wing trade Unionists and militant students following orders from the Malayan Communist Party to agitate strikes and student lockouts to discredit the government. However, the PAP nominated four candidates, Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀), Goh Chew Chua (吴秋泉), Devan Nair and Lim Chin Siong (林清祥). Lim, an energetic young man, represented the

Malayan Communist Party and was running the Singapore Shop and Workers Union with a membership of more than 30,000. As at that time, this had become the most powerful trade unions in Singapore. His popularity attracted the attention of Lee Kuan Yew. Except for Devan Nair, the other three candidates won the elections. By becoming an elected Member of Parliament, Lim projected an image of a promising leader.

### **Chinese-Educated Leaders and Local Politics**

It was during the introduction of the Rendel Constitution that Chinese leaders, who previously shunned local politics, suddenly realised that participation in local politics was the best way to protect their interest. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce, then under the leadership of a rubber magnate from Palembang, Ko Teck Kin (高德根), started to fight for the voting rights of Chinese residents. He led a delegation to Beijing and consulted China's Prime Minister Zhou Enlai who told him that Chinese citizens of Singapore should participate in politics to protect their own interest, because once they became Singapore citizens, China had no right to protect them. With Zhou's blessing, Ko went ahead to fight for citizenship rights for at least another 300,000 Singaporean Chinese. With such large numbers of electors, the Chamber leaders wanted to shape Singapore's destiny. They formed a political party called the Democratic Party (民主党), and its debut of 20 Chamber candidates was in 1955. The representatives of the Chamber had always treated themselves as the natural leaders of the Chinese-speaking masses and had always been highly regarded by the British officials. The Democratic Party had expected that at least 70% of the Chinese voters would vote for them. Ko Teik Kin was a rice merchant from Palembang. He made his fortune by obtaining a large piece of rubber estate in Johore Bahru. The Chamber had just successfully established the Nanyang University, a university with Chinese as the medium of instruction.

I was at the Victoria Memorial Hall on nomination day covering news of the elections for Sin Chew Jit Poh. I knew most of the Democratic Party candidates. Most of them were committee

members of the Chamber. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce later fielded a team of 20 businessmen who were politically inexperienced. The Labour Front, led by David Marshall, fielded 10 candidates. They comprised an Indian businessman J. M. Jumabhoy, a European Francis Thomas, an accountant Chew Swee Kee (周瑞琪), Marshall's clerk, Lim Yew Hock (林友福), a Eurasian Dr. Braga, another Indian A. R. Lazarou, an Afro-Asian Mak Pak Shee (麦柏士), and two other Chinese, Tan Theng Chiang (陈庭章) and Seah Peng Chuan (余炳泉). The Labour Front won 10 seats out of 25 seats and was asked to form the first elected government of Singapore. In the early 1950s, David Marshall managed to arouse the interest of the common men in elections, often mesmerising the crowd with his oratory skills. His speeches were delivered authoritatively with measured cadences and carefully chosen words, which sent the crowd into paroxysms of laughter. He was strong in ideas but poor on details and lacked proper administration. The Progressive Party led by C. C. Tan and the team consisted of principals and teachers like Thio Chan Bee (张赞美), Lim Choon Mong (林春梦) and Elizabeth Choy (蔡素梅), lawyers like Lim Koon Teck (林坤德) and Nazir Malal, John Laycock, and Peter Lim Seck Tiong (林锡忠) who challenged Lee Kuan Yew and Soh Ghee Soon (苏义顺), a European John Ede and an Indian Kualasingha. The Democratic Party flopped miserably, gaining two seats. The results of the election had shown that Singapore had entered a new phase of mass communication and political mobilisation.

## **David Marshall's Government**

David Marshall became the first Chief Minister, and almost immediately his Labour Front Government faced the brunt of the Hock Lee bus strike. The strike turned into an ugly, bloody riot. On April 23, 1955, workers who were members of the Singapore Bus Workers' Union (SBWU), working for the Hock Lee Amalgamated Bus Company and some Chinese students went on strike. They protested against poor working conditions, long working hours and low pay. They felt threatened by a rival union which was supported by the bus company to counter labour actions by SBWU. On May 12, 1955,

later known as 'Black Thursday', a major riot broke out in Alexandra Road and in Tiong Bahru. The police again tried to break up picketers, some 2,000 students and strikers, by using water cannons and tear gas, but this time, the crowd went crazy and retaliated by stoning the policemen and the buses. Two police officers and a journalist died as a result. Detective Corporal Yuen Yau Phang (袁耀邦) died when his car was set on fire by rioters. Andrew Teo, a Constable with the Volunteer Special Constabulary and Gene D. Symonds, an American press correspondent were severely beaten by the mob and succumbed to injuries and died. David Marshall was a proficient criminal lawyer, but a layman in politics. He lacked administrative experience, compounded by a lack of support from the colonial authorities. He had failed in his duty as Chief Minister in handling the riots. He gave in to the strikers and lost his credibility.

But he was a real democrat. After he quit politics, he returned to the political arena as Chief of the Workers' Party. It was during this time that the communist party infiltrated the unions, political parties and student groups, which created a lot of trouble for Marshall. Since the birth of the People's Republic of China, Chinese schools all over Malaya had shifted their allegiance to Communist China. Before the communist victory in 1949, schools raised the Guomintang flag of Qing Tian Bai Ri Man Di Hong (青天白日满地红) and sang the San Min Zhu I (三民主义), the National Anthem of Guomintang China, as I did during my school days. After Mao's Communist Party gained power in China, schools began to hoist the five-star red flag (五星红旗) and sang the Yi Yong Jun Jin Xing Qu (义勇军进行曲) — March of the Volunteers at the weekly assembly. The British authorities put a stop to the morning ceremonies, arrested some pro-Communist teachers and students. On May 31, 1950, hundreds of policemen raided the schools and detained 19 students and teachers for their pro-Communist activities. The authorities sacked blacklisted teachers and students. Schools were closed if they were not able to justify their operations. The MCP was banned in 1948 to prevent them from spreading the Communist ideology.

In April 1954, the British wanted to register people aged between 18 and 55 for national service. The Chinese Middle Schools students

strongly opposed the move as it was against the Chinese tradition to take up arms. There was a Chinese saying, 好铁不打钉, 好男不当兵, meaning good men should not become soldiers. Their fears were fanned by rumours that the British were forming a local garrison to collaborate with the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation, an anti-Communist international organisation based in Bangkok. Their contention was that they should not die for a country which had not protected them and one where they had no say. The student leaders of Chinese High School and Chong Cheng High School formed a committee to initiate a movement for exemption of Chinese Middle school students from conscription. The committee was called Chinese Students Anti-Conscription Committee. It staged a series of protest which culminated in the May 13 incident at King George V Park in Clemenceau Avenue (now part of Fort Canning Park). They marched to the Istana to demonstrate and were dispersed by the riot squad. Seven students were detained and convicted of obstructing the police during the May 13 incident. The President of the committee Soon Loh Boon (孙罗文) went to see Lee Kuan Yew at his home to employ him as their lawyer to rescue the students from going to jail. It was the first time Lee came in touch with the world of the Chinese educated. In a Chinese High School, the pro-Communist students had cold-bloodedly shot dead a member of the Chinese orchestra Lee Ta Lim (李达林) for betraying the movement. Lee was practising the Er Hu with the orchestra. He was challenged to face trial and was convicted by the sheer show of hands.

In another incident, the principal of Nanyang Girls' High (南洋女中), Liu Yoon Sian (刘韵仙) had acid splashed on her face because she too defied the students. She was the grandmother of the present Senior Minister of State Grace Fu Hai Yien (傅海燕). Other teachers who disobeyed the students were battered with rotten eggs or had their cars damaged. No management committee dared to antagonise the pro-Communist students. The MCPs directive was clear. If they do not have the wherewithal to fight their enemies, they would get the support from the schools. MCP also saw the PAP as a party worth cultivating and had sent their representative Fang Chuang Pi to contact Lee Kuan Yew.

## Struggle for Power Within PAP

Lee Kuan Yew was aware of the Communist strength in Singapore when he went into politics. He needed to tap the strength of the Communist and yet remained aloof in order to avoid being overwhelmed by them. At the beginning, a few pro-Communists like Devan Nair, Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan were elected as members of the central executive committee. When the PAP was formed, Lee knew that the party had no grassroots base, so he had to ride on the tiger's (MCP) back to gather popularity and strength. On May 26, 1959, when the first national general elections were convened, Lee Kuan Yew had warned at a pre-election rally at Clifford Pier that the PAP's eventual enemy would be the Communists. He recognised it as 'a battle of ideals and ideas'. He remarked that the side that recruits more able and talented individuals would be the side that wins. Twenty-five years later, on September 25, 1984, when Dr. Goh Keng Swee, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence retired from politics, he described the event of the formation of the PAP as 'an act of reckless folly. Mercifully for them and for Singapore, they did not receive the punishment they richly deserved'.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Goh said that they had misunderstood the situation then and failed to realise that the communists had a firm grip on the masses. This was led by the undercover operations of the Singapore Town Committee of the Malayan Communist Party. PAP struggled for nine years against the communists. It was a traumatic experience which tutored the PAP to value pragmatism.

My own takeaway of that period was that the long-term benefits should take precedence over short-term costs. We were willing to take unpopular steps if the long-term advantages to Singapore justified the policy. Second, faced with a nasty problem, we met it head on. The difficulties could not have been wished away. Procrastination in the hope that time would solve everything made one's predication worse. Thirdly, we worked as a close-knit team as we could not have survived

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<sup>2</sup> Basic page. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.preshigh.edu.sg/teachers/laick/Singapore/Speeches/Dr%20Goh%20Keng%20Swee,%2025%20September%201984%20-%20A%20holy%20order%20to%20scale%20new%20heights.aspx>.

our early travails. Leadership made the difference as Mr. Lee had outstanding qualities and when all seemed lost, he would devise an ingenious stratagem to confound the enemy.

In 1957, at a conference to elect the new leadership, the Communists packed the Jalan Besar Stadium with their own men. Non-members walked into the stadium with borrowed party membership cards and voted their own men, including a prominent Indian lawyer T. T. Rajah, to take over the party. The others were five Chinese CEC member leaders from various branches. Lee Kuan Yew decided to withdraw from the leadership and the Labour Front new Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock took action to detain the five men and banished them to China. That was the first attempt of the Communist to grab power from the PAP. As the MCP was banned, they needed a platform to gain popularity to achieve their purpose of creating a Communist Singapore. Realising the mistake, the MCP gave orders to their followers that they had to be patient with the PAP, and the cooperation continued until the victory of the PAP. When the PAP won a landslide victory, Lee Kuan Yew insisted that the British Governor Sir William Goode release the six detainees from Changi before the PAP Cabinet sworn in.

## **Lee Kuan Yew and Fang Chuang Pi**

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew met Fang Chuang Pi (方壮璧), the top man of the MCP branch in Singapore on several occasions. Lee had nicknamed him 'The Plen' (全权代表). Their meetings were often conducted in different places and in secrecy. Fang revealed his fear of the Internal Security Act and was worried about the merger of MCP and PAP. He wanted to gauge if PAP was sincere in working with the communists in a united front against the colonial masters. Lee stated his stand that he preferred to have PAP work alone and had never said or did anything to commit PAP.

## **Ong Eng Guan (王永元)**

PAP experienced a minor split with its Treasurer Ong Eng Guan, who was Mayor of Singapore for about two years. One year after



the PAP came into power, Ong Eng Guan rose to popularity and made an impact on the Chinese educated. Mayor Ong proved to be assertive, xenophobic and strongly anti-colonial. His capacity to ridicule western expatriates, his harsh criticism of City Council officials and their attitude towards the public became identified as the PAP approach. Ong hit the headlines frequently with his dramatics of putting down civil service personnel, ridiculing former authorities or slighting symbols of colonialism. He challenged civil servants, including PAP Members of Parliament, to toil with their hands to sweep the floor, lay bricks or work on roadside basements. The ordinary masses were drawn to his political theatrics rather than sound arguments and substance. However, in his bid for the premiership, he lost to Lee Kuan Yew. He was appointed as Minister of National Development, the number three instead. As Minister for National Development, Ong went to town with his \$400 million housing project without waiting for proper approval or plans. He announced the sale of Kim Kiat Road S.I.T. flats which were not yet allocated to the people and without consulting his colleagues, nor was it raised in the Cabinet. This was also against the S.I.T. Ordinance. When he discovered that he made a decision contrary to the law, he hastily withdrew his plan. Ong was subsequently dismissed from the party at a special meeting held at Canning Rise Cultural Centre. A by-election was held with Jek Yuen Thong as the PAP candidate who lost to Ong Eng Guan. Around the same time, Tengku Abdul Rahman suddenly announced the proposal to form Malaysia with the consent of PAP leaders, including Lee Kuan Yew. The pro-Communist leaders protested. As the PAP refused to listen to them, the communists supported David Marshall and decided to come back to politics. With the Communist support, Marshall won. Lee Kuan Yew did a cleansing operation of the pro-Communist within the party at a special session in Parliament, and it was discovered that five Parliamentary Secretaries and six other MPs were pro-Communist. They were sacked from the party. Together with their leader Lim Chin Siong, they formed the Barisan Socialis, a new party which became a forum for the Communist.

## **Pro-Communist Versus PAP**

Immediately after the pro-Communist faction broke away from the PAP, they created havoc at the party machinery. Within hours of the split, the Communists went out to destroy the branches they were controlling. Of the 51 branches, officials of 35 branches went over to the Barisan Socialis, and 19 of the 23 organising secretaries defected. These were people who were 'carefully' recruited and screened by Lee Kuan Yew, Toh Chin Chye and Ong Pang Boon. All over the island, rebels voted to change sides, took over PAP premises and scratched out the party symbol of a lightning flash in favour of Barisan. The pro-Communist office bearers took away the furniture and sewing machines, as well as bank deposits and signboards. They also looted branch properties. Lee Kuan Yew's branch in Tanjong Pagar had been pulled like a rug from under its feet. His branch secretary Chok Kor Thong (卓可棟) turned out to be the ringleader involved in mobilising all 51 PAP branches against the leadership. He was the Chairman of the Hong Lim by-election committee and had strong influence over PAP's 32 paid secretaries, all of whom quit the party. In my Bukit Panjang branch, except for a few old guards who stuck with me, all my office bearers quit. My Chairman had gone over to the Barisan Socialis as their Chairman. My organising secretary Koh Eng Hua (许荣华), formerly a taxi driver, had gone back to drive a taxi, for he too was scared of staying with the PAP. All my lady office bearers who were working at the Nanyang Shoe Factory left as well. I had to reorganise my branch and engaged the old traditional cadres who stood by the party as new office bearers. However, in my branch, nothing was stolen. The Rochor branch run by Dr. Toh Chin Chye was broken into and ransacked. The power supply was cut off and the wires disconnected. Dr. Toh had a tough time getting his branch reorganised. In Jalan Kayu, Chua Sian Chin (蔡善进) was asked to reorganise the branch and to meet the people in a rickety shelter next to a chicken coop and pig sty. It took less than a week for the Communist United Front leaders to dismantle the PAP party organisation. It showed how strong the Communist was in those days. One day, at his office in the Fullerton Building, Dr. Goh Keng Swee was sitting in

one of the armchairs used to receive guests. He was looking at the ceiling wondering what he could do, as the destruction of the PAP machinery had affected him badly. According to Lim Kim San, there were times when Goh Keng Swee was thinking of calling it quits and asking Lim Chin Siong to take over. On July 17, 1961, Lord Selkirk dispatched a note to London, indicating that Dr. Goh was a 'pretty broken man, extremely jumpy and uncertain of their political future'.

## **The 1963 General Elections**

The 1963 general elections were the most challenging. The Barisan Socialis mass rallies were fully packed with their supporters. With the backing of the Communists, their crowd frightened everyone. Although their leader Lim Chin Siong was imprisoned, they put up his poster and a show that Singaporeans had never seen before. Their candidates were mainly Nanyang University graduates openly supported by the multi-millionaire rubber magnate Tan Lark Sye (陈六使), the strongest supporter of Nanyang University and who was their chairman. Tan was quoted by Chinese newspapers appealing to voters to vote for Barisan. He went to the extent of asking my strong supporter Neo Kong Nam (梁光南), President of the Bukit Panjang Fujian Association, the Chairman of Bukit Panjang Citizens Consultative Committee, not to support me, because I was a PAP candidate. He was taking a political gamble. In 1957, when he supported the Democratic Party which fought general elections under Rendel Constitution, they lost miserably. He thought that this time with the help of Nantah graduates and with the weakening of the party with Barisan split, PAP would lose the elections. Nobody knew what his aim was, but he was getting politically ambitious and wanted the Chinese educated to come into power. Colleagues from the other three rural constituencies, Chor Yeok Eng (曹煜英, Bukit Timah), Ong Soo Chuan (王书泉, Jurong), Lim Kim Hian (林金贤), and I witnessed the counting of votes. We saw our piles of votes on the counting tables lower than those of Barisan. We knew that we were losing. The Barisan leader Chia Thye Poh (谢太宝), a Nantah graduate was beaming with smiles when he saw the four Barisan

constituencies winning. Chia suddenly gave instructions to his supporters with a stern face in Mandarin to block us from leaving the counting station. Some crude Barisan supporters shouted 'Close the door, Do not let them off, our revolution is succeeding, let's liquidate them'. I looked at their bloodthirsty faces, fierce and arrogant, as if they wanted to consume us. They stared at us and made threatening remarks. There was no way of getting out, and we decided to stay put. Outside the counting station, Barisan supporters were carrying *parangs* and knives ready for the action. I trembled and wondered what we should do in case these people became violent. I switched on the radio and listened to the results of other constituencies. At first, it was neck to neck and we were really excited. Then by about midnight, it was victory all the way for the PAP and we were sure that the PAP would form the next Government. We were jubilant and began to pick up courage, whereas the fierce Barisan supporters suddenly turned pale. They got cold feet and disappeared from the counting stations with their supporters through the back door.

If the Barisan had won the general elections that night, we would have been beaten up by the crowd and Singapore could have experienced a Barisan version of the Cultural Revolution with bloodshed and violence throughout the island. After the PAP's victory on September 26, 1963, Lee Kuan Yew gave the Plen notice to leave, as his identity would be known to the Central Government which now came under the control of the Malaysian Internal Security. The Prime Minister had led his government back from the brink of collapse after two years of struggle to undisputed victory. Never before had any party been given a second mandate. At about 2.35 a.m. Lee Kuan Yew addressed the people through Radio Singapore. He said, 'This morning, a vote of confidence had been registered in Singapore which would resound throughout Malaysia. It was more than just an act of faith that we had this general election at this moment with the Communist out in the open. We knew that they were the real enemy. The others did not count and our problem was to convince you that this was the real enemy and the others were just confusing the issue, clouding the sharp difficulties of issues in all the main towns in

Malaysia. And we are proud in Singapore, long abandoned by many professional political commentators as the lost city, lost to the Communists. Tonight, they were exposed by you’.

### **Tan Lark Sye Loses His Citizenship (陈六使)**

After the 1963 general elections, the government took away the citizenship of Tan Lark Sye, the millionaire rubber magnate who had financed the Barisan Socialis. On the deprivation of citizenship of Tan Lark Sye, Lee Kuan Yew had this to say, ‘The Government has decided that no man whatever his wealth, status and standing, should play stooge to the Communists and jeopardise the peace and prosperity of Singapore, and bring the enmity of the races in Malaysia’. It was pitiful that although he had made an enormous contribution to Chinese education, he died a fateful death because of his political ambition and lost his citizenship. He gambled away not only his business future and his citizenship status, but also the future of the Nanyang University, for he had tarnished the name and image of the University and its graduates. His interference in Singapore politics had influenced Lee Kuan Yew greatly. He subsequently grew suspicious of Nanyang University as well as the misguided growth of Chinese private entrepreneurship.

### **PAP Wins Three Malay-Dominated Seats**

The most significant victory for the PAP in the 1963 general elections were the three Malay-dominated seats in Geylang Serai, Kampong Kembangan and the Southern Islands. These seats were originally the strongholds of the UMNO. The PAP candidate Rahmat bin Kenap beat the UMNO candidate Ahmad bin Haji Taff in Geylang Serai, and Mohammed Yaacob beat Ahmad Jabari bin Akib. The relationship between the PAP and UMNO took a turn with unintended consequences. UMNO could not accept the fact that the three Malay constituencies which previously swore allegiance to them were lost to the PAP candidates. They feared that if this was the trend, then Malay voters in Singapore would support a truly multi-racial party. If the

PAP could do this in Singapore, it could also do it in Malaysia. There was the general fear in the minds of UMNO leaders. Tengku was shocked as he had visited the three constituencies to address the crowds and had thought that Singapore Malays were staunchly behind him and UMNO. The PAP Malay candidates won instead and turned out to be men of steel who remained unswervingly loyal to the party and completely immune to UMNO's threat. Not a single Malay MP had traded their loyalty during the various crises they faced later. They adhered to the PAP ideals of meritocracy and multi-racialism, and refused to go along with UMNO's notion of Malay political supremacy and Malay special rights, even though they would have been the largest beneficiary of such a political ideology.

They were stuck to the PAP despite the fact that they were labelled *Parti Anak Peking* (child of Peking) by segments of the Malay community. Later, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew pronounced a roll call of these heroic Malay Parliamentarians, including Othman Wok, who later became Minister for Social Affairs and succeeded me as Ambassador to Indonesia. Rahim Ishak, Minister of State Education, Yacob Mohamed, Parliamentary Secretary to Ministry of National Development and later Ambassador to the Philippines and India, Buang Omar Junid, and Mahmud Awang both trade Unionists and Mohamed Ariff Suradi were amongst those who Lee Kuan Yew decorated. Most of them were UMNO members before and quit to join the PAP in 1959. The exodus was led by Yacob Mohamed, a barber-turned-teacher who made his mark as a charismatic Malay speaker. The entry of a devout Muslim like Yaacob helped to change the perception of the Malay community towards the PAP and opened the gates for more Malay supporters. The victory over three Malay seats incited PAP leaders to attempt a similar strategy to win Malay votes in Malaya.

## **Racial Riots in Singapore**

In 1964, the PAP fought the Malaysian general elections with a token size of only nine candidates with the hope that UMNO would cooperate with them. Devan Nair in Bungsar was the only one who won

the seat for PAP. It was a total flop, but it was enough for UMNO to stir controversy that led to racial riots in Singapore resulting in bloodshed. At the meeting in Pasir Panjang, Syed Jaafar Albar incited the Malays against the PAP Government, which resulted in racial riots, one of the worst of its kind in the history of Singapore. The extremists created a tensed situation so that Martial Law could be invoked, creating an excuse to take over the Government. The acting Prime Minister Tun Razak came to Singapore and appealed through the radio for calm, referring to the Indonesian aggressors as the common enemy. The PAP Members of Parliament immediately got down to work. We got hold of elders and traditional leaders on the ground and formed Goodwill Committees. Cabinet members and Members of Parliament held daily meetings at the City Hall to review the situation and the work of their Goodwill Committees. We toured all constituencies and got the Chinese to protect the Malays in places where the Malays were a minority. The Goodwill Committees which we organised throughout the island helped to calm the situation and restored law and order. The riots reminded me of the Maria Hertogh riots, and I became conscious of the Malay racial and religious undercurrents which could always be exploited by extremists.

On July 31, 1964, Lee Kuan Yew communicated to members of the PPCC (People's Propaganda Consultative Committee), asking them to comment on the riots; what triggered off the riots; and the reactions of the people towards the PAP Government and towards the Central Government. In his opening remarks, Lee said that July 21, 1964, marked a mutation in the texture of Singapore society. It would never be the same again in Singapore, and it would take a long time for the Chinese to forget what happened on July 21, 1964. The Malays rudely awakened to the fact that they were really imprisoned to the circumstances over which they had no control and the reasons for which they were responsible. They could no longer summon the ferocity of the hell they unleashed upon the Christians during the Maria Hertogh case where the Malays started to kill Europeans over a Muslim girl who was kept in a Christian church. It was no longer the British they were fighting, and they were now outnumbered. Unlike history, it was not a foreign power; they were fighting against

and in that sense they were confronted with the 88% non-Malays in Singapore.

The July riot was an organised affair in which leaflets were distributed, urging the Malays, including some Malays from Johore Bahru, to kill the Chinese. These leaflets were marked 'Singapore Malay Action Committee'. It was no doubt the work of Syed Jaafar Albar. Both the Singaporean and Malaysian Central Governments quietly recognised the threat to Malaysia posed by the racial clashes. So, in mid-October, both Tengku and Mr Lee had agreed to a two-year moratorium on the discussion of sensitive communal issues and party politics. The PAP agreed not to politically expand further into Malaya. But on October 27, a Minister of the Central Government who was also appointed Head of Singapore UMNO, was talking about preparations for the next general elections in Singapore which was brought forward by a year. The PAP was perplexed by the activities and statements made by the Allied leaders after the riots. Khir Johari had come to Singapore and called upon the Singapore Alliance to reorganise itself to oust the PAP in the next general election in 1967.

### **Malaysian Malaysia Solidarity Convention**

Meanwhile, the PAP had organised a Malaysian Malaysia Solidarity Convention of opposition parties of the Malaysian Parliament in Singapore on May 8, 1965. The purpose was to unite against the hegemony of UMNO politics in Malaysia. Those attended included Dr. Lim Chong Eu, representing the United Democratic Party of Penang, the Seenavasagam brothers, representing the People's Progressive Party of Ipoh, Stephen Yong and Ong Kee Hui representing the United People's Party of Sarawak, Donald Stephen and Mujuntin representing the UPKO of Sabah, as well as a small party called Machinda in Sabah represented by M Buma. The convention was held at the National Theatre on River Valley Road and its slogan was to fight for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' and not a 'Malay Malaysia'. It was a successful convention when representatives of every party spoke, and they passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a 'Malaysian Malaysia'. As Organisation Secretary



of the PAP, I was in charge and was sent to Penang to arrange for a similar convention. Before this could take place, Singapore was kicked out of Malaysia and I had to return to an independent Singapore.

## **The Secession of Singapore from Malaysia**

Tengku Abdul Rahman had long deliberated and finally decided that Singapore ought to be ousted from the Federation of Malaysia, as the political leadership of Singapore refused to keep their promise of not expanding their activities into Malaysia. The Malaysian Malaysia Solidarity Convention convened by PAP was enough evidence of renegeing on their promise. The PAP participation in the Malaysian General Elections with nine candidates in 1964 did not improve matters and only showed the political ambition of the PAP leadership. At the other extreme was the constant call of some UMNO members like Syed Jaabar Albar to take over Singapore by military force. The Singapore leadership was forced to accept that a separation was the most amicable solution for them, a decision which separated Singapore from Malaysia forever on August 9, 1965. This made Singapore the only independent Chinese-dominant yet multi-cultural nation in the world outside of China.

## **Challenges after Independence**

Singapore was a small island without natural resources. With Singapore being ousted from the Federation of Malaysia, it meant that Singapore's strategy for survival had to be re-examined. The leaders decided on a complete makeover of Singapore to turn her from a Malaysia-dependent island into a vibrant, independent global city, constantly on the move to adapt, nimble enough to keep up with the fast-changing world. Singapore began to draw capital investments from America, Japan, Europe and other countries and offer her manufactured products to the world market. The world became her hinterland and market. I remember Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is

calling on representatives of all trade unions in the Cabinet room soon after independence to convince them in no uncertain terms that strikes or dissensions would jeopardise the economic development of Singapore. He needed political stability in order to attract foreign investment, without which Singapore could not survive. Meantime, Dr. Lee Siew Choh (1917–2002) and his Barisan party cadres went to Havana in 1966 to attend the Tri-Continental Conference in an effort to discredit Malaysia and the PAP government. Unfortunately for him, his plan was ill-timed and it backfired. While they were away, by-elections were held in 13 constituencies and the PAP candidates swept in. Singapore became a one-party parliament securing 49 out of the 51 seats as PAP won seats through a contest, and through walkovers. Dr. Lee tried to take his struggle to the streets and withdrew from Parliament but his efforts failed. His parliamentary withdrawal resulted in his party being isolated from his voters. This marked the end of the Barisan party in Singapore.

## **The Westernised Singaporeans**

I arranged a meeting between Lee Kuan Yew and the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang in 1979. The People's Republic of China was keen to establish cordial relations with ASEAN, but Lee explained that PRC's continued support of the communist parties created trouble for these legally established governments which was a major obstacle. Lee's assessment of the ASEAN situation was conveyed to Deng Xiaoping privately, and as a result, PRC withdrew support for the communist parties in ASEAN. Lee Kuan Yew could be considered the only leader in Southeast Asia who rode on the communist tiger. Most nationalist leaders were consumed by the Communists. He was a gifted strategist and he had the courage to utilise the strength of the Communists. He used their 'cadre' system to weed the very people who worked with him, making use of the might of established authority, similar to how the Lim Yew Hock Government, the Malaysian government and the British handled them. And finally, he even succeeded in persuading the Chinese Communist leaders to withdraw support for their followers. The MCP was doomed to fail with the wrong leader, Loi Teck,

whose only loyalty was to himself. The party lacked a leadership that could fight the constitutional battle. When I visited Fang Chuang Pi, the ‘Plen’ in Hadyai, he admitted that the MCP was no match to the PAP. There was no proper strategic planning for the country as a whole. When China withdrew their support, they collapsed.

## **Singapore’s Relations with China after Independence**

The official relationship between Singapore and China was discontinued after the Communist took over in 1949. The British banned all immigration from China for fear of communist infiltration. Many Chinese educated who were loyal to China went back to their motherland. My brother Lee Liong Hon was one of them, so were hundreds of thousands of overseas Chinese from Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. When the Cultural Revolution in China was at its zenith, China sent red guards to various Southeast Asian countries to spread their activities. The PAP Government confiscated large quantities of Mao red books and Chinese stamps bearing ‘the thoughts of Mao’ imported by Chinese-language bookshops. People who distributed the red books were arrested and charged in Court. Relations between the PAP government and the PRC were at its lowest. Then by 1974, the Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Razak visited China and established diplomatic relations with the PRC, because he was convinced that China had changed its policy towards the so-called overseas Chinese. China had abolished the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, and its leaders had convinced Razak that China would discourage the overseas Chinese from returning to China and she would not interfere with the internal policy towards the Chinese even if they should decide to ban Chinese newspapers and close down Chinese schools. At that time, I had just finished my assignment in Jakarta and was the Senior Minister of State. Mr Rajaratnam, then the Foreign Minister asked me to arrange a visit to China. In 1975, I arranged a small delegation led by Rajaratnam with Howe Yoon Chong (侯永昌) and F. Tang (邓怡芳) to visit China. We met Zhou Enlai, the Prime Minister, and re-established relations with

China. Zhou was happy to see Singapore playing a useful role in the third world. He also explained that China would encourage overseas Chinese to become local citizens and abide by the laws of the country. He invited Lee Kuan Yew to visit China. Again in 1975, he repeated his invitation to Lee to visit China through Thailand's Premier Kukrit Pramoj when the latter visited Beijing. China then had a dispute with Russia and was afraid that Russia might win over the support of Singapore businessmen. In 1976, when I arranged for Mr Lee Kuan Yew to visit China, Zhou had passed away and we saw Mao Zedong who was already mentally and physically frail. Lee's delegation consisted of 17 members. Other than Mr Rajaratnam and me, the group included a Malay Parliamentary Secretary Ahmad Mattar. It was to show that the visit was not meant to be a 'kinsmen Chinese' visit of Singapore Ministers. The mixed group served to allay fears or suspicion by Singapore's neighbours. During the 1976 visit, Deng Xiaoping had been rusticated and Lee's mission was received by Hua Guofeng (华国峰), the interim Chinese leader explained to Lee that China encouraged the overseas Chinese to take up the nationality of their country of residence and would automatically lose their Chinese citizenship. Still he valued the 'traditional friendship and kinship that Singaporeans share with China'. Hua also stated that China would not interfere in the internal affairs of Singapore and how she dealt with the communists there was a matter for the Singapore Government to decide. Before the visit, the PAP government had been strict in refusing Singaporeans under the age of 30 to visit China. After his first China visit, Lee Kuan Yew began to change his policy and on his return to Singapore, he instructed that this ruling be reviewed. Lee said in his Memoirs, *'From Third World to First'* that the best way to eradicate romantic ideas about the great fatherland was to send them on long visit. He added that both his daughter and Mr Lee found the Chinese and their manners alien. He had discovered that many young Singaporean Chinese students who went back to China in the 1950s to contribute to the revolution were never accepted into the Chinese society. They had in fact petitioned to be allowed to return to Singapore. The Internal Security Department (ISD) strongly recommended against this, suspecting

plants by MCP who would create trouble. In his memo, Lee said the ISD's assessment appeared to be a 'total misreading of the true position. These people had been thoroughly disillusioned with China and communism and would have been our best inoculation against the virus of Maoism.... We are so different in our outlook and view of the world and of our place in the world'.

The restriction was removed soon after his return. Lee told the press that when the Singapore youths returned from China, they would kiss the soil and say how lucky they were. Lee however added, 'No Chinese doubts their ultimate destiny after they have restored their civilisation, the oldest in the world with 4,000 years of unbroken history. We the migrants, who have cut our roots and transplanted ourselves on a different soil of a very different climate, lack the self-confidence. We have serious doubts about our future, always wondering what fate had installed for us in an uncertain and fast-changing world'.<sup>3</sup> This sums up the mentality of most English-educated Singaporeans, descendants of Chinese immigrants influenced by the soil. During the 1980 visit mentioned earlier, Lee Kuan Yew discussed with Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaopin about the principle of non-interference in ASEAN and the peace and stability that ensued. Deng agreed to give the matter serious consideration. Before the banquet, Lee handed his speech to the host, and they found that it included his suggestion on China's severing relations with Communist parties in ASEAN. They suggested that Lee delete that portion of his speech. Lee stood firm and said he must mention this important point. He was then requested not to give a speech. Several weeks later, Deng cut off China's links with Communist Parties in Southeast Asia, resulting in the demise of these parties. Lee's delegation toured various parts of China including Yanan, the Mecca of the Chinese Communist Party. Lee visited China again in 1985 and 1988 and thereafter almost once a year to better understand the country and their leaders who were embarking on the transformation of the economy and society.

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.1stenglish.com/eng/237984.html>

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore after regaining control of China. Deng was a practical and pragmatic leader whose famous saying was 'Whether black cat or white cat, it is a good cat if it catches the mouse'. He valued expertise more than ideology, just the reverse of Mao Zedong. He was accused of being a 'capitalist roader'. His purpose of visiting Singapore was to find out for himself why Singapore had prospered despite the fact that it had no natural resources. I happened to accompany him on a visit. I took him to an ordinary HDB flat. He opened the fridge in the home and found it loaded with fresh eggs, fresh fruits, meat, vegetables and other things. He was taken by surprise and asked me to explain why Singapore, whose population was 70% Chinese, could become so rich, and yet China's 1.2 billion Chinese were poor. Before I told him anything, I apologised in advance for giving my own personal assessment. I said there must be something wrong with the 'system' in China. All Chinese throughout the world prospered because they had an environment which allowed them to earn and gain from their individual efforts and make a profit without restraint. I said, given the same environment, the 1.2 billion Chinese in China could also become rich. I told him that, on the whole, Chinese everywhere were innovative, hardworking and productive. He was silent but he nodded in agreement. At Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's banquet, the same message was conveyed to him. Lee said, 'We, the Singapore Chinese were the descendants of illiterate, landless peasants from Guangdong and Fujian in south China, whereas the scholars, mandarins and literati had stayed behind and left their progeny there. There was nothing that Singapore had done, that China could not do and do better'. Deng again remained silent.

In February 1992, Deng went on a well-publicised tour of Shenzhen, southern tip of China, and said that Guangdong should catch up with Asia's Dragons such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan in 20 years, not only in economics but also in social order and social climate. He mentioned Singapore as an example and commented that there was a good social order in Singapore which is governed with discipline. He encouraged the Chinese to draw from Singapore's experience and do better. In China, such words were

considered the ultimate order from their supreme leader. After Deng's endorsement, several hundred delegations came to Singapore to learn the secret of Singapore's success. They brought with them tape recorders, video cameras and notebooks. They scrutinised Singapore and studied the things they considered vital. They wanted the 'hardware', the buildings, roads, infrastructure which Singapore could build and the high-value investments and reputation. They also sent teams to other developed countries, East and West, to learn how they had progressed. Deng invited prominent overseas Chinese to Beijing and sought their assistance in getting foreign investments to boost China's economy. Deng was right in what he did. Within a few decades, China had progressed beyond recognition. They had produced goods so cheap, transforming into the factory of the world and have become a threat to others. They had attracted so much foreign investments that they had to put a stop on some. Their national savings topped the world and the national growth was now, among the highest in the world. During the last few decades, the time and energy which the 1.2 billion Chinese previously spent on arguing about ideology could have been better used for more tangible and productive economic development. When a country is focussed on more constructive endeavours, it becomes rich, and the people benefit. Lee Kuan Yew had more than once reiterated that China had the potential to realise its goal of becoming a modern economy by 2050. He also had referred to China as an equal and responsible partner in trade and finance and was poised to steer growth through education and economic development. He was confident that China would leapfrog Japan to be the second largest, if not the largest trading nation in the world. With it, China would have a strong international voice.

### **Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀) — The Man Who Tamed the Tiger**

Modern Singapore was founded by Lee Kuan Yew, a Hakka, who was a Baba born in Singapore in 1923. Lee Kuan Yew led the island for 30 years as Prime Minister and then as a Minister Mentor way past retirement age. Born in Singapore in 1923, Lee was the fourth generation of



Lee Kuan Yew

Straits Chinese. His great grandfather Lee Bok Boon (李木文) came to Singapore from Dabu, a poor village in the Guangdong province in 1863. Like most Chinese, his great grandfather Lee returned to China and managed to obtain a seventh-grade Mandarin title and died in Dabu. His son Lee Hoon Leong (李云良) worked for the shipping company owned by Oei Tiong Ham (黄仲涵), the richest Chinese in Indonesia. Hoon Leong's eldest son Chin Khoon (振坤), Kuan Yew's father worked for the Shell Petroleum and his wife Chua Kim Neo (蔡金娘), gave birth to Kuan Yew when she was only 16. Lee Kuan Yew was educated at the Raffles Institution and then secured a scholarship to study law at Cambridge University. He was a high flyer, scoring higher marks than the British when he was in Cambridge. He also took an active part in campaigning for the Labour Party of Britain. On his return to Singapore, he started the People's Action Party, and the party took part in elections, winning 37 seats in 1959. He became Prime Minister when he was 37. He went through a tough time fighting colonialism, then communism, and then race politics, leading to Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965. Singapore had grown into a nation with the second highest GNP in Asia under Lee's leadership.

Singapore's Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's dream for Singapore was to develop the nation as a cosmopolitan city connected to the



world and not just limited as an Asian city. On September 18, 2010, he introduced the notion of what some would consider the ‘Westernised Oriental Gentlemen’ or WOG society. He was in the Russian capital, attending the International Advisory Board meeting of the Skolkovo Moscow School of Management when he broached this in his dialogue with students from the school. Mr. Lee believed that Singapore would gradually but almost relentlessly become cosmopolitan and international. On Singapore’s strategy, especially in relation with China, Lee reckoned that China was interested in the Singapore model because we had embraced modern management methods and engaged Western intellectuals and their ideas have been adapted to the local context.

The former Prime Minister Lee had helped shape an ethos of clean government that was efficient, making Singapore a corruption-free society under his leadership. Singapore had also overcome racial and religious disparities, making her a safe and secure place to live in. However, in terms of language and culture, Lee admitted that Singapore had still a long way to become a ‘graceful society’. Young Singaporeans had forgotten how to speak their own mother tongue and the Chinese language had taken a backseat in favour of English for the Chinese population. Lee had not visited Dabu, and had always insisted that he was a Singaporean. I had been to his ancestors’ hometown in Sanheba, and visited the old house his grandfather had lived in and met his cousin. He asked me to persuade Lee to return to his father’s hometown ‘to glorify his ancestors’. I told him of the visit, and he said it was too sensitive for him to visit his ancestor’s hometown for fear of misunderstanding by our neighbours. Lee started learning Chinese seriously only when he became Prime Minister. He still does not speak Hakka.

### **Dr. Goh Keng Swee (吴庆瑞)**

Dr Goh Keng Swee was born on October 6, 1918 to Mr Goh Leng Inn who managed a rubber plantation, while his mother Tan Swee Eng came from the family of Tun Tan Cheng Lock and his Son Tun Tan Siew Sin. He came from a Baba family in Malacca. Mr Goh was often touted as the ‘Economic Architect’ of Singapore as he



Dr. Goh Keng Swee

contributed significantly in moulding Singapore into a prosperous nation. He served as the first Finance Minister in 1959 and later the Defence Minister, Minister for Education and retired as Deputy Prime Minister. The Tan ancestors came from Fujian. At the age of two, Goh's family moved from Malacca to Singapore. He studied at the Anglo-Chinese School, then later at Raffles Institution and went for further studies in the UK. He was recruited in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. During the Japanese occupation, he was captured and made prisoner of war, but was released by virtue of his race. All the European and Eurasians were immediately incarcerated, as the Japanese viewed those with Western origin as a threat as compared to the locals. After the war, Dr. Goh became a civil servant and worked for the Social Welfare Department. He was instrumental in setting up the People's Restaurant, as food was scarce and rice still rationed. The lowly paid office workers could ill-afford a proper nutritious lunch. During the days of Malayan Democratic Union, Dr. Goh was prudent not to get himself involved, although he knew most of the MDU leaders. In 1948, he went to London for his doctoral studies. It was there that I met Dr. Goh, when he started the Malayan Union together with Abdul Razak, a Malay leader who later became Prime Minister of Malaysia. In London, he started the Malayan Forum, which included Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Toh Chin Chye and other students. Dr. Goh

was one of the key founders of the People's Action Party but was absent during the inauguration of the party, because he was away in London. After the 1959 general elections, he was sworn in as Singapore's first Finance Minister. I remember accompanying him to Jurong, which was still a jungle and he chopped a tree in a ceremony to launch his industrial campaign. I had served as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Culture then. He was instrumental in setting up the Jurong industrial estate of 9,000 acres of land. At that time, the estate was nicknamed 'Goh's folly', for many Singaporeans were not convinced of its feasibility. But he succeeded in turning Singapore from a sleepy backwater village into a thriving economic giant. Dr. Goh actively took part in the exchanges and the negotiations from behind the scenes which led to Singapore being ousted from Malaya. After the separation, he was appointed Minister of Defence during which time I had greater opportunity to spend time with him, particularly when I was Ambassador to Indonesia. From time to time, he consulted me on various matters and we worked very closely. My job was to persuade President Suharto to invite Lee Kuan Yew to visit Indonesia. After two years, I still made no headway, and on one occasion during consultation, he said to me, 'KC better come back, you will not make it'. I told him that I would complete whatever job I was given. When I succeeded, he both of us went to see President Suharto and he officially invited Suharto to visit Singapore. Instead Suharto extended an invitation to Prime Minister Lee to visit him first. That was the Javanese form of diplomacy and hospitality, extending an invitation so that it could be reciprocated. We toured the areas where Lee Kuan Yew was supposed to visit, including Lake Toba, the Batak land of Sumatra.

One would not easily identify Dr. Goh with politics. He was always sober and in deep thought, not a baby-carrying politician, nor one who would tap his voters on their shoulders. When he decided on something, he wanted it done very quickly. I presented my report to him about our trip to Indonesia in 1973 the very next morning when we returned to Singapore. He was pleasantly surprised. Dr. Goh was a man of action. In 1985, he was decorated with the prestigious Order of Temasek (First

Class) on National Day for his contributions to the development of Singapore. He died on May 14, 2010, and was accorded a state funeral. Dr. Goh's wife, Phua Swee Liang, had set up a private foundation in his name. The foundation provides financial assistance, which included grants, bursaries and scholarships and medical care support for the disadvantaged members of society. In an interview with the press, Dr. Phua said, 'In my pensive moments, because of my love, admiration and respect for Dr. Goh, I decided to do this for him. Also, as a Singaporean, I feel I should follow in his footsteps to do what I could for Singapore'.<sup>4</sup> The foundation drew on their savings and personal investment gains supplemented by voluntary contributions of his friends.

As early as 1972, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, who was acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, had warned that the time had 'come to stop the practice among brainless young Singaporeans of mindlessly aping certain Western fashions'. He warned that this trend, if unchecked would eventually turn Singapore into a nation of WOGs, a derogatory term for the English-educated Indians by the British during colonial India. Dr. Goh often remarked that a WOG society would have had limited survival opportunities in Southeast Asia and one would have to embrace a set of sound basic values to develop a wholesome, well-integrated personality. An understanding of one's own cultural heritage and the knowledge of one's own history and people would help to give a man some cultural ballast. Dr. Goh had warned against the danger of an education exclusively in the English language, the end product of which was often a Caribbean-type of person with no roots in the past. Goh said he already saw 'some ghastly evidence of this process' going on in Singapore. Dr. Goh was afraid that Singaporeans would forget their roots and forsake their culture. He started the Kreta Ayer Theatre to stage various kinds of Chinese operas to get the youth acquainted with Chinese culture. Unfortunately, most of the young people could not appreciate the opera, because they could not comprehend Chinese dialects. He also initiated the Institute of Eastern Philosophy to get scholars to

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<sup>4</sup>Think Positive: Goh Keng Swee. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://guanyu9.blogspot.com/2009/02/goh-keng-swee.html>.

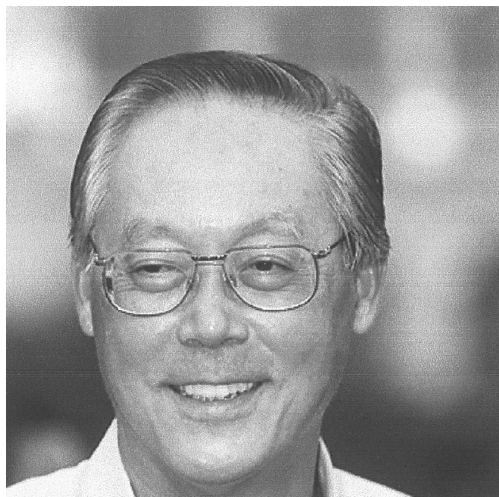
do research on Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Daoism and other studies. He was a Baba who had a heart to promote Chinese culture. I last met Dr. Goh in 1984 when both of us had quit politics. He took me to Fraser's Hill for a holiday at the government bungalow. We went to play golf and upon our return to the bungalow, he could not find one of his golf sticks. We went looking for it and found it. He was beginning to be forgetful as early as 1984.

## **Second-Generation PAP Leaders**

Of the second-generation PAP leaders, two became prominent — Goh Chok Tong, who became Prime Minister for ten years, and Dr. Tony Tan, elected President of Singapore in August 2011. Both of them were English-educated Babas.

### ***Goh Chok Tong* (吴作栋)**

Goh Chok Tong was Prime Minister from 1990 to 2004 for 14 years. Born on May 20, 1941, in Singapore, his father was from the Yongchun county of Fujian province in China. As a student at Raffles Institution



Goh Chok Tong

from 1955–1960, he was a good swimmer and had the nickname ‘*pan-jang*’. He earned a first-class honours in Economics from the National University of Singapore, a Master of Arts in Development Economics from Williams College in the United States in 1967. From 1969, Goh was seconded as a civil servant to the Neptune Orient Lines (NOL) as Planning and Projects Manager. He rose fast and became Managing Director and led NOL to greater heights during his tenure. In 1976, at 35, he was elected as Member of Parliament for Marine Parade constituency under the PAP ticket. Together with 11 other newly elected MPs, he was trained by a Task Force formed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. I was involved in this task force.

**Dr. Tony Tan Keng Yam (陈庆炎)**

Dr. Tony Tan, another Baba leader in the PAP, was elected President of Singapore with a razor-thin margin of votes in August 2011. In this 7th presidential election, he became a candidate and fought a bitter battle against three other candidates. Dr. Tan was born on February 7, 1940, in Singapore. His primary and secondary education was



President Tony Tan Keng Yam

from St. Patrick's School and St. Joseph's Institution, respectively. He earned a first-class honours degree in Physics from the University of Singapore, and topped his class under government scholarship. He completed his Master of Science in Operation Research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the Asian Foundation scholarship. With a PhD in Applied Mathematics from the University of Adelaide, he taught Mathematics at the National University of Singapore. In 1969, Dr. Tan left the University to begin his banking career with Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation, where his uncle Tan Chin Tuan was Chairman. He rose to become General Manager, before leaving the bank to take up his political career in 1979. From 1980 to 1981, he was the first Vice-Chancellor of the new National University of Singapore.

In 2005, Dr. Tan was conferred the NUS Eminent Alumni Award. This was in recognition of his visionary leadership of the university sector. In 2010, the Australian Alumni Singapore (AAS) conferred the Distinguished Australian Alumnus Award at its 55th anniversary dinner. This was in recognition of his contribution to the Australian Alumni community. In 1979, Dr. Tan became a Member of Parliament and was entrusted with the portfolio of Senior Minister of State, Education Ministry, and then joined the Cabinet as Minister of Education. He was later transferred to Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Health. Before 1984 general elections, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Goh Keng Swee had pursued an experimentation of eugenics in Singapore, which included a policy that gave placement priority for children of more well-educated women in primary schools. Dr. Tan, as the new Minister of Education, recommended to scrap the elite scheme and announced the Cabinet decision. Dr. Tan stepped down from the Cabinet in 1991 to return to the private sector. Between 1992 and 1995, he rejoined the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation as its Chairman cum Chief Executive Officer, while retaining his seat in Parliament as representative for the Sembawang Group Representative Constituency. In 1992 and 1993, after Ong Teng Cheong and Lee Hsien Loong were diagnosed with cancer, Dr. Tan was asked to return to the Cabinet. In August 1995, he was appointed as Minister for Defence and Deputy



Prime Minister. August 2003 saw him relinquish the defence portfolio and became the Co-ordinating Minister for Security and Defence and Deputy Prime Minister. He then convinced the Minister for National Development Mah Bow Tan to relinquish URA plans to pull down an old mosque in his constituency. Dubbed the ‘last Kampong Mosque in Singapore’, it was later designated as a heritage site. Dr. Tan stepped down as Deputy Prime Minister in 2005 and became Chairman of the National Research Foundation, and Deputy Chairman of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council. He also served as the Chairman of Singapore Press Holdings Ltd and Executive Director of the Government of Singapore Investment (GIC).



## Chapter Ten

# Brunei: Land of the Smiling People

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### Ong Sun Ping (黄森屏) and the Royal Family

In Brunei, one could locate a street named after Ong Sun Ping, a Chinese top official sent by the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuan Zhang (朱元璋) in 1375. His name suggested that he was a native of Fujian and was likely known as Ng Som Ping. Few people, including prominent scholars, know the identity of this Chinese official, as there was very little written in Chinese historical records about him. There were various theories about his identity. These were largely premised on a combination of speculative interpretation of Chinese sources and local legends. According to a Taiwan published book entitled ‘*Dong Nan Ya Hua Chian, Hua Ren He Hua Yi*’ (东南亚华侨, 华人和华裔), or ‘Overseas Chinese, Chinese and Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia’, written by Chen Liefu (陈烈甫), it was recorded that, in 1292, Mongolia sent an expedition to Brunei led by an officer called Ong Sun Ping. He was sent to supervise the camphor trade in Brunei and also to administer the Sulu Islands. The books say that he was so influential that Sultan Mohamed allowed him to marry his only daughter, and their offspring, Sultan Ahmed, took over the throne. According to another book entitled *The Philippine Islands* written by H. Clark Company in 1903, Ong Sum Ping escaped from Fujian with his siblings during the Mongolian invasion of China and went to East Kalimantan. When they landed in the river mouth of Kalimantan, they faced a shipping crisis and lost their armaments. Because of that, the Malay-Indonesian named the river Sungai Kinabatangan — which meant the place where the Chinese lost their arms. Ong and his sister helped develop the area of Sungai

Kinabatangan, and their influence grew. As he prospered, the Malay-Indonesian named him 'Chung Ping' meaning 'General', as he was apparently controlling the Chinese military power in Eastern Kalimantan. When Sultan Muhammad Shah ascended the Brunei throne, he asked General Ong for help to avert the invasion from Sulu. As a result, Brunei did not collapse. Sultan Muhammad offered his daughter to Ong as wife and he was given the title of Maharaja Lela. Sultan Muhammad also convinced his brother to marry Ong's sister and conferred the title of Puteri Kinabatangan. After Ong consolidated his power, he sent his representative with an army to China, and landed on the coastal region of Fujian during Emperor Yongli's reign. Ong's wife was buried in Brunei and thus the Malay-Indonesian named that burial ground Bukit Cina. Ong's sister gave birth to a daughter who later married Sultan Sharif Ali from the Arabian Peninsula, descendant of Nabi Muhammad. The book said that because of Ong Sun Ping's influence, the Bruneian believed that Ong was the ancestor of Brunei Royalties. The History Museum of Brunei had preserved the artefacts of Ong Sun Ping.

Other prominent scholars well-versed in Southeast Asian affairs had said that Ong Sun Ping was the Deputy Commander of Zheng He's expedition, who happened to be known as Wang Jing Hong (王景弘). My visit to Brunei was also a result of my desire to verify the information I came across, especially the name of Ong Sun Ping when I wrote this chapter. I consulted the Archives Department with the help of Bairai Singh, my business partner and Kamaruddin, the Chairman of Sino-Brunei Friendship Association. I also met Dr. Karim Bin Pg Hj. Osman of the Brunei Museum Department, an expert in Brunei archeology and Head of the Archives. He was kind enough to help me trace the identity of Ong Sun Ping. He produced many historical documents and articles written in both English and Malay. We finally discovered that Ong Sun Ping came from China in 1375, not 1292. This fact was proven by the record of Silsilah Raja Sulu. Nor was Wang Qing Hong the assistant of Zheng He who only came to Brunei in 1403, 30 years after the arrival of Ong Sun Ping. Another mistake was the Chinese character for Ong was not (王), but (黄). When translated into English both could be Ong.

According to the records of Silsilah Raja Sulu, Ong Sun Ping arrived in Brunei in 1375. Ong Sum Ping's daughter was married to the Sultan, and this accorded him the relationship of the Sultan's father-in-law. Bruneian royal houses adopted a succession system based on maternal parentage and hence his maternal granddaughter became Queen of Sultan Sharif Ali. With the kingship handed down 20 times, Sultan Sharif Ali came to the throne marrying the daughter of Sultan Ahmad. He was widely accepted as the ancestor of today's Sultan Haji Hassanali. During the reign of the third Sultan called Sultan Barkat Ali, the Chinese built a stone city in honour of him as he was by Hashiemite descent or from Prophet Muhammad's direct lineage. This city was called Kota Batu.

### **Ong Sun Ping and the Dragon Pearl**

Why did Ong visit Brunei? A book published in China mentioned that the Emperor had ordered him to look for the dragon pearl. When Ong first arrived, he was in Kinabalu, Sabah near the Lung Shan (龙山, Dragon Mountain). This town Kinabalu was associated with dragons. In those days, Sabah was part of the Brunei territory as the Brunei kingdom included the northern part of Borneo and the southern Philippines. A legend claimed that he had an assistant named Wang Kong (黄光) who was muscular and physically strong. When they arrived in Sabah, there has been already a fairly large Chinese population. They were given the task of taming a dragon which was terrorising to the population. The dragon was ferocious and ate people almost every day. Ong was the brains but Wang Kong was the brawn. Ong thought of a way to trap the dragon. When the dragon sprouted the pearl, he took away the pearl. He then substituted it with a lighted bottle to make it look like a pearl. The dragon was deceived by the fire in the bottle, thinking that the pearl was still there. Ong took the dragon pearl back to China to present it to the Emperor when Wang Kong grabbed it away from him. There was a struggle and Wang won. He took the pearl back to claim credit for himself. Ong was so disgusted that he decided to stay on in Brunei. People in Brunei said that, from time to time, a big storm would

sweep the sky and they claimed that it was the dragon from Sabah, returning to look for the lost pearl. The Ming Emperor had a second mission for Ong and it was to monopolise the camphor trade flourishing in Borneo. China has been already aware that Brunei was rich in camphor from reports of Chau Ju-Kua (赵如适) of the Sung dynasty in the Chu Fan Chi (诸蕃志). During the Yuen dynasty, China was already building huge ships, and camphor tree trunks were valuable material for shipbuilding. Camphor also fetched high prices in the international market.

### **The Tomb of Ong Sun Ping**

A prominent Chinese businessman in Brunei, Woon Xiong Quen, claimed that in 1942, a Cantonese trader, Huang Qhuo Qi (黄作基), who came to Brunei to trade, chanced on Ong Sun Ping's tomb. He was engaged in various mega-projects in Brunei. Once, his visit coincided with the Cheng Beng (清明节) festival and when he visited the Sultan, he was invited to witness a ceremony in honour of his royal ancestors. The Sultan was clothed in half-Chinese style topped with a traditional Chinese hat. They climbed a hill where the tomb was situated. The ceremony was performed according to the Chinese customs. The tomb was simplex. The tomb bore five, fast fading characters — Ong Sun Ping Zhi Mu (黄森屏之墓), meaning the grave of Ong Sun Ping. Huang was convinced that the Sultan was the descendent of Ong Sun Ping. Later, Woon went to inspect the tomb and confirmed that it was Ong's tomb. Another source came from an early 20th century Chinese trader Huang Zhuoru (黄卓如), who claimed that he discovered the tomb of Ong Sun Ping, located on a hill about half a kilometre from the Brunei capital. Both claims, if genuine, showed that Ong Sun Ping lived and died in Brunei.

### **Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah**

The man responsible for the smiling people in Brunei was Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, the 29th descendant of



Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah

the monarchy. Born on July 15, 1946, young Hassanal did not expect to succeed to the throne. His uncle Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin was in his early 30s, when he died suddenly in 1950 and left no heir. The succession fell on Sultan Omar Ali, Hassanal Bolkiah's father. Prince Hassanal attended the Victoria Institution, which was regarded as the premier school of Malaya. He stayed at the Brunei Palace in Kuala Lumpur and was driven to school in a limousine, discreetly protected by a bodyguard at all times. In school, he mixed with all commoners and became rather popular. On August 14, 1961, in an official ceremony in Brunei, he was proclaimed Crown Prince. In December 1962, when they flew home to Brunei for their holidays, the plane was diverted to Kuching because of the Azahari revolt. In 1963, when tensions developed between Malaya and Brunei over the formation of Malaysia, the Prince was withdrawn from Victoria Institution and registered with the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin College in Brunei before he proceeded to London to join the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. In July 1965, he married his cousin, Pengiran Anak Saleha, eldest daughter of the Pengiran Pemandcha Haji Muhammad Alam.

At the age of 21, Prince Hassanal became Sultan. He ruled the country, with his father Sir Omar backing him. On August 1, 1968, a grand coronation ceremony which glorified Brunei's monarchy took place. The coronation saw elaborate ceremonial rites which demonstrated Brunei's ancient history and traditions. It was of great significance to the Brunei people, and the ceremony was designed to instil pride, loyalty, a sense of national belonging and unity. The presence of heads of states and distinguished visitors had helped establish the monarchy as the centre of Bruneian national life. In the early years, when he became a Sultan, his father was the driving force as he was still young and had little experience governing the country. He gradually learned the intricacies of power and began exercising it. As an absolute monarch of Brunei, he had often been ranked as the richest in the world. His wealth and that of Brunei come from oil which was found in 1929. The export of oil started in 1932 and by 1935, became the third largest oil producer in the British Commonwealth. In 1984, the most ostentatious celebration to mark Brunei's independence took place, cited as the largest in the world. The Declaration of Independence read by the Sultan on the night of December 31, 1983, proclaimed Brunei to be a 'sovereign, democratic and independent Malay Muslim monarchy'. The year 1985 saw the start of greater emphasis given to the schools and colleges to the role of both Islam and the monarchy, and in the process democracy took a back seat. In July 1990, on the occasion of his 44th birthday, the Sultan officially enunciated the concept of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) or the Malay Islamic Monarchy. This concept had been in force for a long time to create a Brunei identity with Islam as the main force and loyalty to the monarchy. Prosperity was often accompanied by corruption and the misuse of government funds. Some years ago, the Sultan's younger brother Prince Jefri, the Finance Minister, was accused of misappropriating as much as \$2 billion public funds through the Amedeo Corporation which declared bankrupt at the height of the financial crisis. In all, 71 people, including Prince Jefri's son Prince Hankeen, were involved.

Sultan Hassanal's style of governance was said to be feudalistic, that of a one-man show. Although he had gathered a group of

advisors, he makes the final decision. He picked his Ministers and Deputy Ministers after careful consideration. Take the case of Lim So Yeo (林苏扬) who panicked when he was appointed Deputy Minister for Education. The appointment was announced over the radio even before he received the official letter of appointment. Lim called his friend Dato Timothy for advice and was told that he should accept the position without question, because when the Sultan gives an order, it was called '*Tita*' and it was mandatory to accept it. Lim, a Melbourne educated, non-Chinese speaking Baba became the most senior minister in the Cabinet. The Sultan does not believe in Western democracy. Ruling with autocratic power meant the Seri Begawan exercised this power. Overt political activity had largely ceased. The State of Emergency was renewed each year, and the Constitution remained suspended. Brunei was, in 2007, the only country in the world not holding elections. There was no elected legislative body as the country does not allow political parties to take part in elections.

### **Prominent Chinese in Brunei**

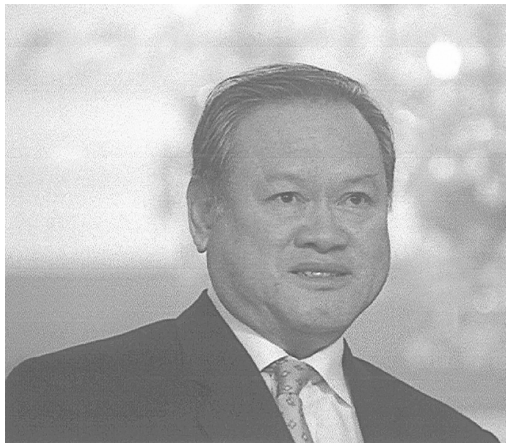
Dato Timothy Ong Teck Mong held many business roles. He held the position of independent director of Singapore Petroleum Company, Deputy Chairman of National Insurance Company of Brunei Dasussalam, Co-Chairman of The Edge Asia Inc., Chairman of BruCapital Holdings, Chairman of Asia Inc. Forum and Chairman of Hotel Associates. Dato Ong was honoured by the state with the Most Honourable Order of the Seri Paduka Mahkota Brunei (DPMB) with the title of Dato Paduka. In 2006, the President of Chile conferred on him the Grand Cross of the Order of Bernardo O'Higgins (the highest civilian award) for his contribution to regional economic cooperation. Dato Ong read Economics and Political Science and graduated in 1976 with a B.A. (Honours) from the Australian National University. He topped the class. He obtained an M.Sc in International Relations from the London School of Economics in 1982 and was one of the richest men in Brunei. Another Chinese appointed to a high position was Lau Ah Meng (刘亚明), whose



Malay name was Dato Ahmad Duyu. He was made Chairman of Brunei Investment Board, similar to the Singapore Investment Board (GIC). The Permanent Secretary of a Ministry, Hamid Jaafar, was also a Chinese who had a Malay wife.

### **Dato Seri Paduka Lim Jock Seng (拿督林玉成)**

The most prominent Chinese closest to the Sultan was Pehin Dato Lim Jock Seng, born on January 22, 1944, the Second Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was born and brought up in Brunei and entered the civil service in 1969. He started his career in the Museum Department where he was a curator. Later, he became a Director of Politics of the Foreign Ministry. He rose from being a lecturer at the Education Ministry in 1977, then Principal of the Ministry in 1985, Assistant Director of Education, Director of International Relations and Trade Department in the Ministry of Industrial Resources in 1996 and then Director General, Trade Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and subsequently promoted to Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry. In 2004, he was bestowed with the title Pehin Orang Kaya Pekerman Dewa. In 2006, Jock Seng was



Dato Seri Paduka Lim Jock Seng



bestowed another title by the Sultan, Dato Paduka of Ciri (equivalent to the title of Lord in the British monarchy). This made history, as never in the history of Brunei, had a Chinese been given such a title reserved for Cabinet Ministers. The Sultan considered Jock Seng a 'loyal Chinese subject'. Jock Seng was effectively bilingual. Dato Jock Seng studied in the University of Swansea, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Anthropology. From the London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom, he earned his Masters Degree in Philosophy and Social Anthropology. In 2003, he was appointed by Sultan Bolkiah as a member of the Privy Council and in 2004 he was appointed an official member of the Legislative Council. When he was Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs about 20 years, he invited me to Brunei to give a lecture on diplomacy. That was the first time I visited the country. Jock Seng was a humble, knowledgeable and wise man, very soft spoken and well-respected in Brunei. In 2008, Jock Seng was appointed Chairman of Brunei Shell Petroleum Group of Companies Sendirian Berhad, which included Brunei LNG Sendirian Berhad. As Second Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jock Seng attended most of the international meetings including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders Meeting (AELM) in Sydney in 2007 and the Singapore APEC Meeting in 2009.

## **The Chinese Community and Chinese Middle School**

The Chung Hwa Middle School, established since 1922, was the only Chinese middle school in Bandar Seri Begawan. The founder of this school was Timothy Ong's father, Dato Ong Boon Pang (王文邦). The students had to learn English, Malay and Chinese and adhered to national education policy. The school had three divisions — the Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary levels. It had approximately 3,500 students, with a teaching staff of around 200. The school's main financial resource comes from student's school fees, and some other fixed income and donations from the Chinese community. The Chairman of the Board of Directors was Awang Ang Swee Chuan (洪瑞泉), a prominent businessman in Brunei. I visited the

Chung Hwa Middle School when I was there. The campus comprised three block school buildings, with more than 60 classrooms, science laboratories, kindergarten halls, a co-operative, school canteen, music rooms, cyber and multimedia rooms, a conference room, and a dental clinic. A large Gymnasium-cum-Assembly Room with the 2,000 seating capacity served the multiple uses of indoor sports and games, concerts and school assemblies. There was a 300-seat library with more than 40,000 books. Sporting fields include soccer, volleyball, and basketball tournaments. There was also teacher and student residential quarters on the campus. The school faced financial difficulties since 1969 when the Brunei Government decided to withdraw its financial grants to Chinese and mission schools. The reasons were that Brunei was a Muslim state and there was no reason to support non-Islamic schools. The Government had cut off government grant of \$1 million. During that year, 14 teachers resigned from the Chung Hwa Middle School, because they did not get their annual increments to pay. These teachers were from Hong Kong. The school also increased school fees for students in order to survive.

The year 2002 was the epoch-making as Sultan Bolkiah joined the Board of Directors to celebrate the school's 80th anniversary celebration. The Chairman Dato Awang Ang Swee Chuan accompanied the Sultan on his official visit to various departments of the school. The Sultan was also accompanied by the Prince and the Minister for Education. The Sultan delivered a speech and presented medals to each of the directors. There was a show of Lion dances, Chinese classical orchestra of a team of young students playing the Chinese harp (古筝) and other Chinese instruments, and acrobatic dances. The Sultan was particularly impressed with the kindergarten classes, as many of the pupils were Malays and had put on their *songkok*, and the girls had scarves. A group photo was taken. It was a moment of glory for the school for it was the first time the Sultan had officially visited the school. There were eight Chinese schools in Brunei and Chung Hwa was the largest. There was also a small Brunei Association of Chinese writers comprising only eight members, which published a monthly magazine containing articles written by members of the Chinese-language society who harnessed help from Singapore's Lian

He Ri Bao (联合日报), and a small Chinese newspaper published in Brunei called Shi Hua Ri Bao (诗华日报).

The Chairman of this association, Soon Teck Ann (孙德安) had, in 2006, liaised with Amoy University and held a seminar on Southeast Asian Chinese literary studies. There were about 40 Chinese associations, ranging from a handful to some 300 to 400 members. The associations promoted Chinese language, culture, sports, entertainment and interaction. Goh Chun (吴尊), born in Brunei on October 10, 1979, also helped to put Brunei on the world map in show business. He studied at Chung Hwa Middle School and pursued a higher degree at RMIT Australia. He worked as a physical instructor initially and later become a famous Taiwanese film actor. His ancestors were Fujians from Kin Meng (金门).

## **Brunei–China Business Cooperation**

China had taken the initiative to provide assistance to Brunei through technology that could help speed up the paddy planting process and increase productivity. Brunei had set up the Brunei–China Agriculture Technology Sdn Bhd in Labi, and the Brunei Government had provided 500 acres of paddy fields for the Chinese technological experiment. This operation started in November 2009. Ang Swee Chuan, the Director of the Brunei–China Agricultural Technology Sdn Bhd, said that Yulin Wang Wang Group, a Chinese company, was a joint venture partner of this venture. Ang said that over 10 different types of paddies had been planted to see which one would suit Brunei. Ang added that the project would provide greater benefit to the 100 paddy farmers in Brunei. It would significantly cut production time as opposed to regular paddy production that takes one year, and would double or triple the amount of production because of the technology. Ang suggested cooperation between Malay and Chinese community in sharing the profits. He said BCFA should be used as a platform for Brunei businessmen to invest in China and also import products from China. Another business potential in Brunei was halal food business. A Brunei Chinese halal food company established since 1992 was doing good business by importing halal food from China, Malaysia

and Thailand. This company was called Feng Yuan Koon Qi (丰源坤记), and the boss was a Brunei Chinese named Lim Swee Tian (林瑞典). He was optimistic that his business would boom, because halal food was accepted not only by Muslims but also by non-Muslims in the region. A company producing halal goods in Brunei, Lo International Sdn Bhd, was also the Brunei coordinator for ASEAN China Youth Entrepreneurs Association. Its Managing Director M. C. Lo said that cottage industries producing halal food should make products that were uniquely Bruneian and then figure out ways to use them in different applications.

## **Ministry of Religion**

In Brunei, the most powerful ministry of all was the Ministry of Religion. The Ministry was set up to deal with religious matters and to settle all religious disputes. It was constantly keeping an eye on the behaviour of their Muslim citizens, and endeavours to make Brunei a truly Islamic country. Many agents were employed to keep the behaviour of all Muslims in check. If they do not fast during Ramadan, punishment would be severe. Nor were the Muslims allowed to drink alcohol or gamble. They should also pray five times a day. The lifestyle should be completely Islamic. Brunei assumed the role of an Islamic state, spreading and reinforcing Islamic practices as far as the Philippines since 1511 when it became Muslim state. An engineer friend of mine Philip Loo was transferred to Brunei Public Works Department from Singapore a decade ago. When he reported for duty, his boss advised him never to hold the hand of a Malay girl in public. If one was caught doing so, the courts would sanction a marriage. According to Islamic rules, man and woman were not supposed to get too close in public. Holding hands meant that they were in love and they have had to marry. There were many foreigners who get caught and would have to face the consequences. Another friend of mine called Henry became a Muslim, because he found life easier as a Muslim, considering the benefits he could get. There were other Chinese who became Muslim, commonly referred to as masok Islam or enter Islam, because they found Islam a sensible religion which

helped simplify their lifestyle. I met another manager of a printing company, Peter Chan (陈子亮). He was about 50 years old then and could speak Cantonese, English and Malay fluently. He narrated his conversion story. Some years ago, he had a sudden heart attack and doctors had declared him as dead. His wife, also a Cantonese, insisted that they try to resuscitate him. He said he had prayed to Allah several times before he became unconscious. He regained consciousness and attributed the miracle to the strength of Allah.

## **Brunei–China History and Chinese Migration**

Brunei comes from the word '*barunah*', an exclamation expressed by early settlers when they set their foot on the country. They said that *barunah* means 'oh yeah', from the Sanskrit word *varuna*, meaning a nation of seafarers and traders. There was evidence that Brunei traded with China from the beginning of the Christian era. Chinese coins and fragments of Han pottery had been discovered near the estuary of the Sarawak River. They imported birds' nests from Brunei in the seventh century. The decentralisation of Melaka's former trade profited not only Aceh but also Brunei. The Chinese christened Poni (勃泥 or 佛泥) or later Brunei as early as the 19th century, and a large Chinese community was settled in Brunei by the time Zheng He's treasure ships arrived. The name Poni had already appeared in the Man Shu by Tan Ch'o written in about 860 AD. It remained in use by the Chinese until replaced by Bun-lai in the 17th century. From the position of a small vassal state in the sixth century AD, Brunei rose to a great empire in the 16th and 17th centuries. According to Chinese historical records, Poni sent its last ambassador to China in 630 AD and 692 AD. One of the most important books about Poni was called Chu Fan Chi (诸蕃志) written by Chau Ju-Ku a (赵汝适) of the Sung dynasty. He noted the wealth of Poni — camphor, the large fleet, a form of pearl worship, and that the religion of the Poni people was Daoism in the very early days. Poni was then the principal source of pearls and Ma'I (the Arab Mayd). Early in the ninth century, there might have been a Chinese military occupation in parts of Northern Borneo to control the trade in camphor. The Sultans of Brunei have paid tribute

to the Chinese Court since the Tang dynasty. The famous Tang court painter Yan Lik Bun (严力本) in 631 AD painted scenery of three envoys from three Southeast Asian countries including Brunei (Poni), presenting credentials to the Tang Emperor. This painting is now a treasured piece of art and historical work kept at the National Museum of Taipei (台北国家博物院). It was taken by Chiang Kai-shek's curator from the Beijing National Museum to Taiwan National Museum when Chiang fled to Taiwan. Archaeologists had unearthed many porcelains and articles from China belonging to the Tang and Sung dynasties in Bukit Maras (武吉马拉), Mongkisam (望基山), Sungei Jaong (宋加查旺) and Sungei Buah (宋加武儿) in the territory of Brunei. They had also found many Chinese graves in Tanjong Kuba and Tanjong Tegok.

Trade between China and Poni was at its height during the Sung dynasty when Chinese ship building and navigation made a breakthrough, and Chinese ships carried silk, bronze, porcelain and little ivory boxes made in Fujian, coveted by the people of Borneo. In 1225 AD the Chinese Inspector of Foreign Trade at Canton, Chau Ju-kua, made mention of the fleet of over 100 war vessels which Poni commanded. A prominent German archaeologist and a Professor in German language in Beijing University named Wolfgang Franke (傅吾, 1912–2007) was an expert on Chinese history of the Ming and Qing dynasty and Southeast Asian archaeology. He found a Muslim tomb near Edinburgh Bridge of Bandar Seri Begawan in 1972. This tomb was from the Sung dynasty around 1264. It measured 38.5 inches in length, 16 inches in width and 4.5 inches thick, and was inscribed with the Chinese words '*You Song Quanzhou Pan Yuan Pu Kung Zi Mu* (有宋泉州判院蒲公之墓)', meaning the tomb of Pu Kung from Quanzhou in the Song Dynasty, dated 1264 written in Arabic. The Pu Kung's Arabic name was Maharaja Bruni. Archaeologists were curious to know who Pu Kung was, why he had gone to Brunei and why he was buried there. Was he an envoy or was he a resident? During the Sung dynasty, Quanzhou was the main flourishing port in China and many Chinese Muslims, especially traders, visited Brunei. This tomb was evidence of close relations between Brunei and China. In 1292 AD, the Mongolian conquerors, at the request of a Javanese

king, sent 20,000 troops to Java and helped settle an internal dispute between two rival kingdoms. The troops also passed through Brunei. There was a dispute between two factions, one led by Jayakatwang and the other by strategist who made use of the Mongolians. He caused the killing and wounding of about 3,000 Mongolians who had to withdraw and left the country. But a number of the Mongolians deserted their masters and stayed back. They married Javanese women and became assimilated, and were the first wave of javanised Chinese. Some of them also settled down in Brunei. According to an article entitled '*Orang Cina di Brunei*' or Chinese in Brunei, written by Haji Muhammad Hadi bin Abdullah, a British author Robert Nicholl, argued that sometime before the Sumatra absorption of Northwest Borneo about 835 AD, the Chinese captured the west coast of Sabah and parts of Brunei to gain control of the camphor trade. The Chinese settlement was comparatively small and largely military. Another record of the existence of Chinese was written by another European, John Hunt, who said in 1520 AD that large land masses were cleared to cultivate pepper, manicured gardens, erect houses, fell the timber and steered large and solid trunks to China. During the 15th and 16th century, the Sultan of Brunei recruited a large number of Chinese labourers to help develop the pepper industry. This was the earliest period when Chinese labourers went to Brunei in large numbers. In the first half of the 16th century, which was considered the golden period of Brunei, teeming Chinese businessmen conducted trading between China and Southeast Asia.

By the 17th century, because of political upheaval in China, the number of Chinese ships that came by dwindled, resulting in lower immigration. In the 18th century, when life normalised, Chinese came to build ships and develop pepper plantations which became a good source of income for the Brunei Sultans. According to the population census of 1911, there were only 736 Chinese, about 5.1% of the population. By 1920, the Chinese population doubled. Between 1931 and 1947, the Chinese population increased two fold. After World War II, the infrastructure projects in Brunei encouraged more Chinese immigration. Between 1947 and 1981, the ratio of the Chinese population increased by one-fifth of the total population. A majority



of the Chinese residents stay in Brunei Muara district, which was the commercial and administrative area of the town. Another district which attracted the Chinese immigrants was Belai District, where oil was discovered. In the city of Bandar Seri Bagawan, Chinese population constituted about 82%. Most of the Chinese were Fujianese, especially those of Kim Meng, the rest were Cantonese, Hakkas, Hainanese and Teochews. The population Census of 1996 published by the United Nations showed that the total population of Brunei was 305,100, of which Malays constitute 222,100, Chinese 46,800 and the others 36,700.

The Chinese had to apply for citizenship, but were usually denied even for those who had lived in Brunei for many years. There was no citizenship by right of birth in Brunei, and the applicants had to pass a test on the Malay language. This test was made difficult by the inclusion of questions on flora and fauna which even native Bruneians would find it difficult to answer. Thus, by 1984 when Brunei gained independence, less than 10 percent of the Chinese residents were citizens. In the past, the Chinese were doubtless a community that kept aloof. They educated their children in Chinese, and through their connections in Brunei and Southeast Asia, had channelled trade and business into their own hands. The Brunei Government made no special concessions for them, and therefore the Chinese did not regard Brunei as their homeland or felt it necessary to demonstrate loyalty to the Sultan or the government. My research showed that the majority of the Chinese in Brunei was from an island of Taiwan called Kim Meng as most of them carried the surname Lim (林). I interviewed the descendant of the Lim family, who told me the story of their migration to Brunei. Louis Lim (林金发) does not read nor write Chinese, but could speak a little Fujian dialect. He had many wives, 18 children and grandchildren, but he keeps very much to himself, so it was quite difficult to draw very much from him. Even Timothy Ong came to know him only during my visit there. Yet, Lim said to Timothy: 'Oh, I know your grandfather and father'. I had been to Kim Meng and found the surroundings very similar to Brunei, surrounded by the sea and trees abound. Kim Meng Chinese would find Brunei a suitable place to settle down. Life in Kim Meng



was really difficult in the early days and abject poverty had compelled them to migrate.

## **The Brunei King Who Died in Nanjing**

During the Ming dynasty, the exchange of visits between the Imperial Court and the Brunei kingdom became more frequent. Brunei sent envoys to China nine times and China responded four times. When the Brunei Sultan visited Beijing during the Ming dynasty, the Chinese emperor gave a princess to the Sultan as a gift. In 1407 when Zheng He's expedition arrived in Brunei, the people were still Buddhists. Meat consumption was strictly prohibited and offenders would be beheaded. Zheng He's treasure ships had to anchor off the sea facing the Water Village where the Brunei Sultanate was situated. The Water Village was a cluster of wooden houses with nipah roofs built on stilts above the salt water from the sea. According to historical records, the Sultan wore long hair with a knot above his head. He wore clothing made of gold, double swords tucked in his waist, and he walked around barefooted, surrounded by 200 bodyguards. When he stopped to pray, he would use articles made of precious stones. The Sultan carried a golden seal written in an old Chinese classic language, the handle of the seal had the head of an animal. It could have been bestowed by the Ming Emperor. This seal was used later to stamp the back of the newlyweds and they were highly honoured by it. Records also claimed that the Sultan was once chased into the jungle by Frenchmen. The Sultan put poison into the water and many Frenchmen were poisoned to death while some escaped to Luzon in the Philippines.

In 1405, Poni sent a mission to China. The envoy who headed the tribute mission and returned with the Chinese envoys was named 'szu ma', or Ismail. The ruler was then named Maharaja Karna. He came with his wife, children, relatives and businessmen totalling over 150 people. Maharaja Karna stayed in China for a long period, and in 1408 was received by Emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang (朱元璋). The Chinese Emperor treated the Poni delegation with high honour and presented them with valuable gifts. The guests were served with non-halal food, suggesting that they might not have become Muslims.

Islam came to Brunei only in 1436 when the Brunei Sultan married the daughter of the Malacca Imperial family and the King converted to Islam. Maharaja Karna and his mission enjoyed themselves during the trip but was suddenly struck by incurable sickness and died in Nanjing. Based on the inscription on the tombstone erected for King Karna, the Chinese Emperor ordered physicians to treat the Poni King with the best medicine and sent court attendants to nurse the King day and night. This was according to the Ming imperial records. When he was about to die, he told his wife and attendants that he would be honoured to be buried in China so that he would not become a barbarian ghost. History had it that Emperor Zhu was so grieved that he ordered the seizure of work for three days in order to pay respect to the Maharaja. He decreed that the burial would be in a special tomb on the outskirt of Nanjing, in a hill called Xi Zi Shan (石子山, little stone hill) near Aun Teck Men (安德门). This tomb was discovered in 1958 and it had since become a national monument to commemorate China–Brunei relations. When the Maharaja's four-year-old son who accompanied him to China, Hsia Wang (厦王), possibly a Chinese rendering of Suri Wangsa (苏利王沙) ascended the throne, he came with his mother to thank the Chinese Government in 1412, for the kindness bestowed on his father and to pay respects to the tomb. The Chinese Emperor gave him a stone tablet to be placed on the Poni state mountain, an honour given only to four countries: Japan, Malacca, Poni and Cochin. The mountain was to be known as the Mountain of Lasting Tranquility. Suri Wangsa also received gifts of caps, suits, belts, saddles, various vessels and other regalia, gold, silver brocades and cash, while members of his entourage received gifts according to their ranks. Emperor Zhu however did not follow up his early attempt to revive the tributary system.

## **Customs and Habits of Poni People**

Chinese historical records revealed many interesting information about the customs and habits of the Poni people. Liang dynasty (502–557 AD) recorded that the Poni king wore beautifully dyed brocade with strings of pearls and jade all over. The golden crown on

his head was more than one foot in length, and decorated with the seven treasures, looking like the leather hat worn by a Chinese nobleman. With a gold-ornamented sword at his waist, the King was seated on the high throne of gold with his feet resting on a stool of silver. All the maidservants wore various precious ornaments such as gold flowers, and some held a duster made of white feathers or a fan made of peacock feathers. The king sat in a carriage, on the back of an elephant. The carriage, made of various kinds of aromatic wood, was decorated with pearl curtains and covered with a feather canopy. A retinue of guides and servants blow conchs and beat drums as part of the royal procession. Sui dynasty official records that Poni people were trained to throw wheel swords. These were similar in size to bronze mirrors with a hole in the centre and a sharp blade like that of a saw. With this they could hit any target from a distance. Murderers and thieves suffer punitive judgements like that of hands being chopped off. Rapists would be locked in fetters for a year. Another record talks about the coral-rich sea of Poni. There was a bird called Sari that could understand and speak human languages.

## **Chinese Ties with Dusuns**

The Chinese were the predominant group among the foreign residents in Brunei. A majority of the immigrants arrived in the 20th century, especially after the introduction of the Residential System in 1906. The Chinese pullulated not directly from China, but through Singapore and the Federal Malay states. The main dialect groups were the Hakkas, Fujianese and Teochews. Britain had, on several occasions, tried to influence the Brunei authorities to relax citizenship requirements for the Chinese, but failed. As a result, many Chinese considered leaving the country including those born in Brunei. When they travel, they were issued with International Certificates of identity. The Bruneian attitude towards the Chinese was the fear that they might dominate the economy permanently. There were memories of how the Chinese had acquired a stranglehold on the economy, and as non-Malays and non-Muslims; they could not be really loyal. The other fear was that they might be fifth

columnists communists or susceptible to the influence of foreign powers. The Brunei authorities recognise that the Chinese had contributed towards enhancing the high standard of living in the country, but played down their share in developing that prosperity. The Brunei Government's policy maintained that the majority Malay Bruneians should hold all the top posts in the country no matter how skilled a Chinese Bruneian could be. They would not be promoted above a certain level. The few Chinese who had been appointed to high positions were on account of their conversion to Islam through marriage. According to prominent elderly Chinese in Brunei, the Dusuns (杜逊人) who constitute a large proportion of the Brunei population were of Chinese descent. The earlier arrivals of Chinese immigrants first settled in the Klias River, engaging in pepper plantation. They married Dusun girls and their offspring spoke the Dusun language, and adopted the Dusun customs and traditions. Later when flood devastated the Klias River because of the constant intrusion of the Muruts, they moved to the highlands in Bundu and their descendants became the present day Dusun. These Dusuns still observe some Chinese traditional customs such as using joss sticks to pray to their ancestors and celebrating the Chinese New Year. The costumes and the jewellery worn by the ladies were similar to the Chinese. Every Dusun family would have Chinese porcelain, some of which were precious, and they pass on to their descendants as heirlooms. The ancestral custom or practice of burying their dead on boats continues to date. Even at present, those who live in the interior, such as Putantan, had kept their hair long, like the Manchus and Mongolians. When the Taiping Rebellion collapsed, many Christian Chinese related to the Taiping leaders escaped to Borneo and some of them stay in Brunei.

### **Kapitan Cina in Brunei**

There were several prominent Kapitan Cinas who were leaders of the Chinese community in Brunei. One of the most famous Kapitan Cinas was Ong Boon Pang (王文邦) who came from Kim Meng. He was the grandfather of Timothy Ong. He was appointed Kapitan Cina by Sultan Hashim when the British Consul Malcolm Steward Hannibal

MacArthur arrived in 1904. The Ong family came from a staunch Anglican Christian family, as their ancestors migrated from Kim Meng. He emphasised that it was from the little Kim Meng (小金门) that they came. Timothy's grandfather became the richest Chinese landowner in Brunei and his father obtained the sole agency selling 555 cigarettes in the whole of Borneo and made a fortune from the venture. He was a philanthropist and founder of the Chung Hwa Middle School in Seri-Begawan eight decades ago. During the difficult days before oil was found, life was quite tough for the Sultans. They had to borrow money from Chinese merchants to make ends meet. When they were unable to pay their debts, they gave away land. That is how Timothy's family became the richest landowner. Timothy explained that in the past, certain rules and regulations related to land prevented him from making proper use of them. As the rules were relaxed more recently he had made plans to fully utilise his land bank.

The most prominent Kapitan Cina today was Yang Mulia Awang Dato Lau Ghim Kok (刘金福). The 80-year-old known as Lau Ah Kok owns a chain of supermarkets in several towns of Brunei. He was also from Kim Meng. The second well-known Kapitan Cina was Dato Goh King Chin (吴景进), aged 70 and born in Brunei. He was the Managing Director of GHK Motors Bhd. He drew close to the Sultan as the latter likes fast cars and Dato Goh possessed a fleet. The third Kapitan Cina was Dato Onn Siew Siong (温瑞祥), who was a prominent businessman. Dato Lim Beng Tai (林明泰) was Deputy Foreign Minister and an advisor to the Sultan. His father Lim Teck Fu (林德富) was also a Kapitan Cina. The other Kapitan Cinas were Dato Chan Swee Kiat, Dato Ang Hung Chuan, Dato Fang Boon Ting, Dato Ng Ti Hock and Dato Lim Geok Seng. One of the richest Cantonese in Brunei was Ng Kim Chuan (黄金泉) who owns a sundry shop. Lau Kim Tai (刘建泰) was one of the richest among the Hakkas.

## **Sultan Hassanal's Relations with the Chinese Community**

Despite the obvious disparities that the Chinese face in Brunei, they do respect the Sultan and consider him a benevolent king who cares for the people. I met the Treasurer of the Brunei-China Friendship

Association, Kam Fook Seng and his Deputy Lim Kee Soon at the Empire Hotel when I was there. Lim said, every year whenever the leading Chinese associations celebrate their festivals, they would invite the Sultan to attend and he always obliged. Lim gave me a magazine with pictures of the Sultan's visit to the 80th anniversary celebration of the Chung Hwa Middle School on October 2, 2002. Awang Ang Swee Chuan in venerating the Majesty's visit as a manifestation of the Ruler's love for the loyal subjects, regardless of their social origins. The Sultan was accompanied by the new Prince and five ministers in charge of Education, Religion, Youth and Sports, National Development and Health. The visit reached the crescendo when the Sultan placed a 'dragon pearl' on the golden fire bowl. He also presented a long-service plaque to the Board of Directors. The success of the Islamisation policy was evident in the number of Muslim Chinese students who greeted him at the school. For the last four years, almost every year the Sultan graced the Chinese New Year function organised by the Chinese community in Brunei. In August 1999, the Sultan granted the 15% Chinese population a publishing and distribution license for a Chinese-language newspaper.

### **Louis Lim**

In Brunei, I had an interesting and yet an unusual encounter with a Louis Lim. Louis told me that his ancestor Lim Bee Gan (林美颜) came to Brunei in 1881 with his three brothers to look for greener pastures. One of them migrated elsewhere, while the other two stayed behind in Brunei. They were Lim Sheng Poh (林森宝) and Lim Sheng Siang (林森祥). The Lims in Brunei today were mostly their descendents. Nearly half of the Chinese population there were Lims. The rest were Ong, Tan, Lau or Ng. Louis' grandfather was a Kapitan Cina during the reign of Sultan Hsahim Jalilul Alam Aqamaddin (1885–1906), head of the Chinese community. Louis had become a wealthy man because of his family ties with Prince Jeffrey, brother of Sultan Hassanal, known for his lavish lifestyle. Louis' house which was in the suburb had 39 rooms, a huge garden and even a zoo. He runs the zoo, the only one in Brunei. It was his hobby to rear animals and

travel around the world looking for strange animals. He had a few rare orangutans and kois. I was surprised when he told me that he had koi served for dinner as the taste was excellent. Not many people would eat koi because it was expensive. The price of one koi could easily run into a few thousands. He simultaneously manages an engineering company just for fun as he believes in enjoyment more than work.

### **Present-Day China's Relation with Brunei**

At present, Brunei had diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The diplomatic ties were officially established in 1991. China was once regarded with suspicion because of the fear of subversion by the Chinese. But today Brunei had taken a pragmatic approach *vis-à-vis* foreign policy towards China, as she was now a potential market for petroleum exports and a source of revenue for tourism and infrastructural investment. For her part, China too had gained a new supply source for petroleum. The Oil Agreement signed between Brunei Shell and China International United Petroleum Company provided for 10,000 barrels per day of crude oil. China's 1991 import of crude oil stood at B\$6.1 million, while in 1992, its value increased to B\$7.5 million. In recent years, China had been slowly building up its interest in Brunei. In September 1994, China sent 200 Chinese workers to work in the cement factory in Muara. These men, consisting of engineers, technicians and workers, were contracted with Tian Jun Cement Design and Development Works of China. They were there to complete the cement plant within a year. In November 2000, President Jiang Zemin visited Brunei and signed a memorandum of understanding on oil sale and mutual protection of investments. The State shows the pragmatism of Brunei's foreign policy. It was followed by the Sultan's visits to China in November 1993 and August 1999. On January 2003, China's Defense Minister Cao Gang Chuan visited Brunei and called on the Sultan. The high-level exchange of military visits by both countries resulted in the signing of a military cooperation agreement on September 2003. In 2004 Sino-Brunei relations were further strengthened when the Sultan met President

Hu Jintao in Beijing. Hu, in turn, visited Brunei in April 2005 and made a six-point proposal for mutual cooperation between the two countries on economy, energy, tourism and defence matters.

## **Malcolm Steward Hannibal McArthur**

There was a time when Brunei was facing problems from Sarawak's Charles Brooke the nephew of James Brooke, following the latter's death. Britain sent a hand-picked colonial officer by the name of Malcolm Steward Hannibal McArthur to report conditions in Brunei. McArthur, an Oxford-trained civil servant held administrative posts in Penang, Selangor and Singapore. In early 1904, he was appointed acting consul for the British Borneo territories. He later became the first Resident of Brunei from January 1906 to April 1908. McArthur's first visit to Brunei in May 1904 shocked Sarawak. Brunei was seen to be an easy prey for the Sarawak Rajah, but with the arrival of McArthur, Charles Brooke's dream of extending his territory was dashed. Before he arrived, Brunei was painted as a dying kingdom at the point of collapse. People were alleged to be living from hand to mouth, hunting for food in rivers and jungles, with beggars everywhere. The Chinese trading community of 500 was registered as British subjects. They made profits out of the incompetence and extravagance of Brunei's titular rulers. McArthur spoke to as many people as he could, especially the Chinese and realised the treacherous politics of the Brooke's regime. He discovered that the rulers virtually came to depend on foreign traders, especially Chinese traders who acted as mini-bankers. The Chinese money lenders obtained mortgages on the revenues of Brunei for many years ahead. At the beginning of 1906, most of Brunei's revenues were in the hands of monopolists who had rights to collect payments of advance cash to the Sultan. As a result of letting and sub-letting, retail prices ballooned in Brunei. There was no treasury; everything earned went into the pockets of those in charge. The Chinese traders Chua Cheng Hee (蔡清喜) and Cheok Yu (石裕) were two well-known monopoly traders who enjoyed an additional privilege of importing their own goods free of tax. While admitting the Chinese for their thrift and industry,



the Sultan referred to them as aliens and not real inhabitants of the country. Chua Cheng Hee was the uncle of Chua Boon Peng and Chua Boon Unn, two prominent owners of Cycle and Carriage Co, which was officially opened in July 1899 in Kuala Lumpur. As a result of McArthur's recommendation, Britain signed a Protectorate Treaty with Brunei promising protection. Under British protection of the Residency System, the Brunei monarch's ostensible authority over his subjects began to consolidate itself. The British agreed to reserve the Brunei throne for the descendants of Sultan Hashim's line. The Sultan did not like to see a repetition of old politics. The age-old problem of unstable succession to the Brunei throne became a matter of the past after the British had agreed to Hashim's request. The principal objective of the British rule was to create a stable government which would be efficient, impersonal and self-perpetuating. Brunei became a protectorate of the British Government in 1888. It retained internal independence but the external affairs were controlled by the British. This was further entrenched with executive control transferred to the British in 1906. In 1959, Brunei was granted self-governance, except for foreign affairs, defence and security, which remained under United Kingdom. In 1946, Charles Brooke surrendered the State of Sarawak to the British Government, thereby ending more than 100 years of the White Rajahs' rule. McArthur wanted a town on dry land. He allocated large parcels of land for shops and houses to be built on the mainland. The centre then was at Kampong Ayer at a place called Bakut China. '*Bakut*' means 'sand bank' in English and China refers to the many Chinese merchants making a living in that area. In 1910, Chinese shops were transferred to Brunei Town from Kampong Ayer. Brunei witnessed the commencement of land settlement, during which time, more was initiated and more than half was completed. The British authorities noted that the people of Brunei had by then accepted the British flag.

### **Tan Kim Chooi (陈金水)**

In 1881, Brunei had signed an agreement with Britain for protection. A Chinese by the name of Tan Kim Chooi, who was then the

Temenggong of Brunei, witnessed the signing ceremony. For the first time in the history of sovereign diplomacy, a Chinese was assigned to witness the sovereign agreement. Tan Kim Chooi was a Fujianese whose ancestors were probably also from Kim Meng, and evidently the most influential Chinese within the Brunei Palace. As Kapitan Temenggong, he was in charge of finance. But that was all the information I could find about this man and even the national archives had no further information about this man.

## **Brunei Chinese Under Japanese Occupation**

Unlike their counterpart in Malaya, the Chinese in Brunei had not been overtly anti-Japanese before the war, because they were isolated from political persecution. Japan invaded Brunei in the early morning of December 16, 1941, when some 10,000 men of the Japanese Kawaguchi Detachment landed in Kuala Belait and thereafter occupied the oil fields at Seria. The Japanese were already eyeing the oil reserves in Brunei in their strategy for the invasion of Southeast Asia. After they had occupied the oil fields in Brunei, they interned the British Government officials at the Batu Lintang camp in Kuching, Sarawak. The Japanese soldiers met with little resistance from the British forces because of their small numbers. During the Japanese occupation, people living in Kuala Belait were forced to work in the oil fields at Seria. The Japanese managed to extract some 1,594,000 tons of oil. They also recruited some educated Malays to assist in the administration, and they sent some of them to Japan and Indonesia for training. The Japanese occupation had contributed towards the emergence of nationalism in Brunei. In 1943, the Allied Forces attacked the Japanese shipping in the harbor, which brought about a standstill in trade. Japanese banana notes were not replenished and by 1945 there was a serious shortage of Japanese money, and the people had to do all sorts of work to survive, like making cloth from bark in the traditional way. The population of the town dwindled and more people escaped to the countryside to grow food and to avoid the oppressive Japanese soldiers. The Allied forces carried out a campaign to re-conquer Borneo called Operation Oboe, followed by Operation

Zipper which was a wider, offensive campaign to regain Malaya. The campaign to reoccupy Brunei was called Operation Six. Australian soldiers supported by the American air force and navy landed in Brunei in June 1945. The Japanese withdrew into the interior where they were intercepted by indigenous guerrilla forces organised by the Allied Forces. Some 2,530 Japanese soldiers were killed or captured, whilst 79 Australians and Allied forces lost their lives. In June 1945, the Japanese forces were busy destroying installations and setting fire to the oil fields at Seria. However, they surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Forces. The British Military Administration (BMA) then took over control of Brunei. In 1946, Sir Harold MacMichael, the British envoy who was sent to re-negotiate treaties with the rulers of Malay states, was unable to visit Brunei and thus Brunei was not affected.

### **Azahari's Revolt in 1962**

Brunei nationalism in the modern sense started in 1938 when the Brunei Youth Movement was founded by Pengiran Yusof, Inche Salleh and Haji Jamil who formed other similar organisations in the Malay States. The movement was revived after the Japanese occupation. In 1956, Sheik Ahmad M. Azahari, as a left-leaning politician formed the Party Rakyat Brunei (PRB) which won all 16 elected seats in the 33-member legislative council. Azahari objected to the Sultan's idea of Brunei's membership in the Federation along with British North Borneo and Sabah. Tengku Abdul Rahman was hoping that Brunei would become a member of Malaysia, as it had rich oil resources and would be good for Malaysia. In those days, the Sarawak People's Party was led by Ong Kee Hui and the leader of Sabah, Donald Stephens. They were against the formation of Malaysia. The revolt broke out on December 8, a Saturday morning when Azahari was away in Manila. The rebels took over the power station and telecommunication control stations of the Town. The Sultan of Brunei made a broadcast disassociating the crown from the rebels and called upon the people to be loyal to him and his government. This broadcast immediately undermined the rank and file, most

of who believed that they had been fighting for the Sultan. Many rebels who were poorly armed surrendered. The Brunei Sultan with the help of highlanders, Gurkhas and British soldiers squashed the revolt. About 40 rebels were killed, 1,897 detained and some 1,500 permitted to return home. The Gurkhas were the Sultan's most trusted men. They guarded the oil, strategic facilities as well as other installations such as the satellite receiving stations. The revolt was condemned by the political parties of Sarawak and North Borneo, including the anti-Malaysia Sarawak United People's Party. No practical assistance came from Indonesia as originally planned. While in Singapore, Azahari came to know left-wing leaders like Lim Chin Siong (林清祥) through a Malay journalist Zaid Zahari. Azahari sought the support of the Barisan Socialists which Lim had formed after splitting away from the PAP. The Barisan Socialists which stood against the formation of Malaysia had backed Azahari's revolt with the hope that the establishment of the Negara Kesuatan Kalimantan Utara would prevent the Federation. In the aftermath of the failed revolt, Barisan Socialists also lost their hope of squashing Malaysia and exposed Azahari for supporting Indonesia's confrontation policies. Thereafter Azahari remained in exile.

## **Why Brunei Did Not Join Malaysia**

The discovery of oil in the 1920s had transformed Brunei completely. The oil export income that rolled in from the 1930s swelled the Brunei coffers. In 1936, the last remaining loan owed to the Federated Malay States (FMS) was paid off, freeing Brunei from all national debts. From 1932 to 1959, the Seria oil fields alone contributed about \$340 million to Brunei's treasury. In 1935, Brunei was the third largest oil producer in the Commonwealth. When Malaysia was formed, there was an intention to bring Brunei into the fold. A series of negotiations took place in Kuala Lumpur between Tengku Abdul Rahman and the Sultan of Brunei in January 1963. The Malayan delegation was led by Tun Razak and assisted by the Finance Minister Tan Siew Sin (陈修信). The Brunei delegation was represented by Dato Setia Pengiran Haji Ali bin Daud, the Deputy Mentri Besar.

The negotiations appeared to favour the Malaysian Federation more than Brunei. The Sultan was not willing to give in to the Malaysian demand or even to British pressure. He responded by declaring that Brunei would join Malaysia only if it resulted from the voluntary desire of its members agreeing on terms freely negotiated and Brunei's interests were duly protected. On July 8, 1963, the Sultan led a delegation to London but did not sign the agreement. He insisted that the oil of Brunei remains untouched indefinitely and to accept an annual voluntary contribution to the Federal Treasury. Tengku Abdul Rahman never forgave the Sultan for his intransigence and early in 1964 recalled hundreds of teachers and government officials seconded to Brunei. This caused inconvenience and confusion to Brunei as she lacked teachers and trained civil servants. Malaysia also terminated the Board of Commissioners of Currency which had issued a common currency for Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo territories. Brunei took its own path and remained a small but rich country.

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