

Chinese Politics and Political Parties
in Colonial Malaya, 1920-1940

A Study of the Kuomintang and
the Malayan Communist Party

by

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PETIKAN DALAM BAHASA MALAYSIA

Kajian ini menumpukan kepada asal-usul, perkembangan dan peranan kedua-dua parti politik orang Cina iaitu Kuomintang dan Parti Komunis Malaya dalam konteks kebangkitan kesedaran politik pendatang-pendatang Cina di Tanah Melayu di zaman penjajahan di antara tahun 1920 dan 1940. Kajian ini dibahagikan kepada lima bab utama dimana tiap-tiap satunya mengutarakan satu aspek perkembangan dan aktiviti-aktiviti parti politik orang-orang Cina, di samping memberi perhatian kepada isu-isu yang menggerakkan perkembangan parti-parti, strategi-strategi yang terlibat, bentuk tindakbalas orang-orang Cina dan tekanan kerajaan penjajah yang membantut perkembangan parti.

Bab pertama memberikan kedudukan di Tanah Melayu yang membawakan asal-usul kesedaran politik orang-orang Cina seberang laut. Satu tinjauan yang ringkas di buat mengenai struktur politik penjajah, evolusi ekonomi penjajah yang berasaskan eksport yang telah membawa kemasukan buruh-buruh Cina secara besar-besaran, sifat-sifat utama masyarakat pendatang-pendatang Cina dan kemunculan kumpulan-kumpulan politik Cina yang pertama yang bermula dengan kemasukan ahli-ahli politik Cina pada dekad pertama abad kedua puluh.

Dalam bab kedua tema utamanya ialah perkembangan politik sayap kiri yang mirip kepada Cina, pada tahun 1920an. Kebangkitan semangat kebangsaan yang berasaskan Cina telah memperkenalkan ideologi-ideologi dan kumpulan-kumpulan politik yang lebih radikal yang telah melibatkan hanya segolongan minoriti kaum pendatang-pendatang Cina. Isu-isu utama yang dibincangkan adalah: pergerakan anarhist, pengaruh pimpinan politik Sun Yat-sen di

Canton; perkembangan cawangan-cawangan parti sayap kiri KMT dan akhirnya kemunculan satu kumpulan komunis dari orang-orang Cina tempatan dalam tahun 1928. Politik sayap kiri ini secara utamanya berpusat kepada kumpulan Cina berbahasa Hailam, yang segulongan besarnya terdiri dari guru-guru sekolah malam yang berminat mengelolakan buroh-buroh.

Bab tiga adalah satu tinjauan yang mendalam mengenai KMT dan MCP di antara tahun 1928 dan 1936. Perbincangan mengenai KMT adalah berpusat kepada dua aspek. Pertamanya ialah penubuhan semula cawangan-cawangan KMT yang sederhana berikutan dari perpecahan KMT-CCP di Cina dalam tahun 1927 dan masaalah berikutannya berhubung dengan pengiktirafan secara rasmi dan kewujudannya yang diakibatkan oleh hubungan di antara cawangan-cawangan parti dengan kerajaan penjajah. Keduanya, pengaruh kerajaan Nasionalis KMT di Nanking keatas institusi-institusi socio-ekonomi orang-orang Cina sebarang laut di Tanah Melayu. Perbincangan mengenai MCP adalah berpusat kepada kemunculan parti tersebut dalam tahun 1930; pembentokan pertubohan-pertubohan barisan hadapan komunis; perlaksanaan dasar berbilang kaum untuk meluaskan asasnya supaya menjadi sebuah parti seluruh Semanjung Tanah Melayu, dan akhirnya masaalah-masaalah pertubohan-pertubohan dan kelemahannya yang dihadapi oleh parti itu.

Dalam bab empat, pergerakan menentang Jepun oleh orang-orang Cina di sebarang laut di antara tahun 1937 dan 1940 merupakan satu jangkamasa yang penting di mana KMT di Cina dan ahli-ahli serta penyokong-penyokongnya di Tanah Melayu telah menggunakan keadaan ini untuk menubuhkan kempen-kempen tabung bantuan dan menggerakkan pandangan-pandangan orang-orang Cina

seberang laut dalam menyokong Cina dalam peperangannya menentang Jepun. MCP juga telah ujud sebagai pemenang pergerakan perasaan kebangsaan orang-orang Cina seberang laut dan telah mula membentok aspirasi kebangsaan pada mereka mengenai kepentingan politik parti dengan menubuhkan pertubohan-pertubohan menentang Jepun di Tanah Melayu. Bab tersebut memberikan kesimpulannya dengan satu perbincangan ringkas mengenai pergerakan MCP menentang British dan juga menentang Jepun, sebagai satu penunjuk kepada strategi parti yang mudah berubah.

Dalam bab yang akhir, perhatian ditumpukan kepada satu perbincangan mengenai politik buruh-buruh di Tanah Melayu sebelum Perang Dunia Kedua. Kedudukan socio-ekonomi buruh-buruh Cina sebelum timbulnya zaman meleset pada tahun 1930, adalah dikajikan secara ringkas sebagai satu latarbelakang kepada permulaan kesedaran buruh dalam tahun 1920an apabila pengaruh politik Cina mula memberi kesan kepada kelas buruh-buruh Cina terutamanya di dalam bandar. Zaman meleset yang dianggap sebagai peringkat perubahan, telah menyebabkan perubahan dalam kedudukan buruh-buruh Cina dan di sini MCP telah dengan segera menggunakan kedudukan ini untuk memperkenalkan aktibiti-aktibiti menghasutnya dan meluaskan hubungan dengan buruh-buruh Cina. Dalam masa selepas zaman meleset, apabila buruh-buruh Cina ini mula menyatukan diri menentang majikan-majikan mereka, titek perbincangan yang penting adalah berpusat kepada aktibiti-aktibiti menghasut oleh komunis dalam dua kejadian kekacauan buruh-buruh Cina. Pertamanya ialah mogok oleh penoreh-penoreh getah di Selangor dan Negri Sembilan dan mogok pekerja-pekerja lombong arang batu di Batu Arang dalam bulan Mac 1937. Keduanya, mogok oleh buruh-buruh di

Singapura yang melibatkan sebahagian besarnya pekerja-pekerja mahir dan buroh-buroh kilang-kilang getah menjelang masa serangan Jepun keatas Tanah Melayu.

ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

The study concentrates on the origins, development and the role of two Chinese political parties - the Kuomintang and the Malayan Communist Party- within the context of the rising political consciousness of the immigrant Chinese in colonial Malaya between 1920 and 1940. Divided into main five chapters, each highlights a facet of Chinese political party developments and activities while giving attention also to the issues that stimulated the development of the parties, the strategies involved, the nature of the local Chinese response and the constraints of the colonial government that impeded party growth.

Chapter one gives the setting in colonial Malaya for the genesis of overseas Chinese political consciousness. A brief outline survey is made on the colonial political structure, the evolution of a colonial export economy which led to the influx of Chinese labourers on a large scale, the main characteristics of the Chinese immigrant society and the appearance of the first organised Chinese political groups that came with the arrival of Chinese political expatriates during the first decade of the 20th century.

In chapter two, the main theme is the development of China-oriented left-wing politics in the 1920's. The rise of a China-oriented nationalism had stimulated the introduction of a more radical kind of political groups and ideologies which affected a small minority of the immigrant Chinese population. The main issues discussed are: the anarchist movement, the

influence of Sun Yat-sen's political leadership in Canton, the proliferation of left-wing KMT branches and finally, the emergence of the nucleus of a local Chinese communist group in 1928. Left-wing politics in the main, was centred among the Hailam Chinese speech-group, the majority of whom were night school teachers interested in organising the labouring class.

Chapter three is a detailed survey of the KMT and the MCP between 1928 and 1936. The discussion on the KMT is centred on two main aspects. Firstly, the reorganisation of moderate KMT branches following the KMT-CCP split in China in 1927 and the subsequent problems of official recognition and existence that resulted from the relationship between party branches and the colonial government. Secondly, the influence of the KMT Nationalist Government in Nanking on the socio-economic institutions of the overseas Chinese in Malaya. On the MCP, the discussion is centred on the emergence of the party in 1930, the formation of communist front organisations, the implementation of a multi-racial policy to broaden its base to a pan-Malayan party and finally, the organisational problems and weaknesses that confronted the party.

In chapter four, the overseas Chinese anti-Japanese national salvation movement between 1937 and 1940 constituted an important period during which the KMT in China and its members and supporters in Malaya made use of the occasion to organise relief fund campaigns and to mobilise overseas Chinese opinion in support of China's war-efforts against Japan. The MCP also emerged as the champion of overseas Chinese nationalism and sought to blend the nationalistic aspirations of the overseas Chinese with the political interests of the party by organising anti-Japanese societies in Malaya.

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the MCP's anti-Japanese movement as an indication of the flexibility of its party strategy.

In the last chapter, attention is shifted to a discussion of labour politics in pre-World War Two Malaya. The socio-economic position of Chinese labour before the onset of the depression in 1930 is examined briefly as a background to the beginning of labour consciousness in the 1920's when Chinese political influences began to impinge on the Chinese labouring class especially in the urban areas. The depression period, considered as a transitional phase, saw a change in the position of Chinese labour and the MCP was quick to utilise the occasion to intensify its agitational work and to widen its contacts with Chinese labourers. In the post-slump period when Chinese labourers began to organise themselves against their employers, the focal point of discussion is centred on the work of communist agitation in two main areas of Chinese labour unrest. These were, the rubber tappers' strike in Selangor and Negri Sembilan, and the coal-workers' strike at Batu Arang in 1937; and the labour strikes in Singapore that involved largely the skilled workers and the rubber factory labourers on the eve of the Japanese invasion of Malaya.

P R E F A C E

During the central years of British colonial rule from 1900 to 1940 the development of nationalism in China and its eventual polarisation between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party generated a response in the overseas Chinese community in Malaya. Within this context, the main object of this study is to examine the major political developments that occurred among the Chinese ethnic group in Malaya's plural society between 1920 and 1940 and more particularly, to focus our attention on the formation and activities of organised Chinese political groups that were represented by the KMT branches in Malaya and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The overseas Chinese, although transient and migratory in nature, were gradually taking on the image of a politically conscious community and, in this respect, the study of the two Chinese political parties is intended to highlight particularly the manifestations of a more articulate and organised kind of Chinese political expression in colonial Malaya.

The main difficulty in the treatment of this subject lies in the fact that the study draws heavily on Colonial Office Records especially the publications and reports of the Chinese Protectorate and the Special Branch. Other than these official sources, there is a grave paucity of information. Chinese language sources in the form of KMT records and the MCP papers are either not available or not within my immediate reach. This is not an unexpected problem as both political parties being extra-legal and prohibited by the colonial government, information on their organisations

and activities is not freely available. It is obvious that without the use of other sources, the study will reflect two serious limitations in the nature of verifying the accuracy of the information in the official records and in the difficulty of presenting a balanced account on many of the crucial issues discussed.

The main source of information on the KMT and the MCP is the CO273 series of despatches between the Governor and the Colonial Office. The enclosures to the despatches, particularly the Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI), the reports of the Chinese Protectorate between 1926 and 1928 and the Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs (MRCA), contain material of importance not available elsewhere. The MBPI, a publication of the Political Intelligence Bureau, is important for the light it sheds on early Bolshevik influence and Chinese political developments in the early 1920's. It also contains summary accounts of contemporary political affairs in China, India, Indonesia and Indo-China. Unfortunately, its usefulness is limited by the fact that several of the issues are still not available for our perusal. For the crucial period between 1926 and 1928 the reports of the Chinese Protectorate are an invaluable source of information on developments of left-wing KMT branches in Malaya and the coming of a communist movement in 1928. The main source of information on the KMT in Malaya and the communist movement in the 1930's is the MRCA, a publication of the Chinese Secretariat. The MRCA, in this respect, contains a useful collection of materials on affairs in China, summary Chinese translations of KMT correspondence intercepted by the colonial censor, translations of

MCP documents and notifications recovered by the police showing the various communist organisations and activities of the party, Chinese education in Malaya, labour developments, extracts of editorials from Chinese newspapers and other miscellaneous matters concerning local Chinese affairs.

In addition to the CO273 series, the CO717 series of despatches (1920-1940) relating to the Malay States, and the Selangor Secretariat Files (1936 and 1937) are also consulted. The CO717 series are particularly important for the light it throws on the anarchist movement in Malaya in the early 1920's and on the KMT interference in Chinese schools while the Selangor Secretariat Files are very useful for the study of Chinese labour unrests in Selangor in late 1936 and early 1937. An attempt was made to look into the Chinese newspapers (especially the Sin Kuo Min Pao) but whatever bits and pieces of information gathered were largely official releases from the government for which the official records, in this instance, were by far more informative and complete.

The study, without doubt, contains many flaws in the way of subject presentation and interpretation of source materials primarily because of two reasons: firstly, the difficulty of getting into the feel of history writing after nearly fourteen years away from the university and secondly, the lack of opportunity for full-time research and consultation. Nevertheless, the completion of this piece of work is itself a fascinating experience in that it has greatly introduced me into the intricacies of history writing. It is an experience which I consider a joy and well worth the determination, endurance and sacrifice of time.

At this juncture, it would be relevant to mention the use of Chinese names and terms in the text. Strictly speaking, the romanisation of Chinese names and terms should follow a standard form of spelling in Mandarin. But Chinese names as they appeared in the official records are based on various speech-group pronounciations such as Hailam, Cantonese, Hakka and Hokkien and an attempt to adopt uniformity in the Mandarin pronounciation is not only difficult but may also cause miscomprehension and confusion. Therefore, I have decided to adhere to the spelling of names as they are found in the records and wherever possible, to provide the Chinese character equivalents to add to the clarity of the romanised Chinese names and terms. However, there are many cases in which it is extremely difficult to determine what the Chinese characters are unless we have an expert knowledge of the various speech-groups. In many of these cases, I have deliberately left out the Chinese characters.

This study is a thesis written for the degree of the Master of Arts at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia. I would like to thank all who have in one way or another contributed to the completion of this study. In particular, I am indebted to Dr. Lim Teck Ghee, my supervisor, whose interest in the subject and whose many criticisms and suggestions have been invaluable; Mrs. Loke Liok Ee and Mr. Stephen Dabydeen for reading certain draft chapters at the initial stage of the work; Prof. Khoo Kay Kim, Dr. Stephen Leong and Dr. Png Poh Seng for their guidance and advice and Miss N. Maheswari for typing out the manuscript. I also wish to thank the staff of the Arkib Negara, Malaya, the University of Malaya

Library, the University of Singapore Library, the National Library, Singapore and the Universiti Sains Malaysia Library. Finally, I would like to give a special tribute to my wife Jenny Leong and my children, Meng Ling and Meng Wei for their forbearance and tolerance and without whose co-operation, this thesis would not have been completed.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEBUS	-	Anti Enemy Backing-up Society
CCP	-	Chinese Communist Party
CEC	-	Central Executive Committee
CO	-	Colonial Office
COD	-	Central Organisation Department
CY	-	Communist Youth
FMS	-	Federated Malay States
<u>JMBRAS</u>	-	<u>Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society</u>
<u>JSEAH</u>	-	<u>Journal of Southeast Asian History</u>
<u>JSEAS</u>	-	<u>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</u>
<u>JSSS</u>	-	<u>Journal of Southseas Society</u>
KMT	-	Kuomintang
<u>MBPI</u>	-	<u>Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence</u>
MCP	-	✓ Malayan Communist Party
MGLU	-	Malayan General Labour Union
<u>MRCA</u>	-	<u>Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs</u>
NCP	-	✓ Nanyang Communist Party
NEI	-	Netherlands East Indies
OAG	-	Officer Administering Government
SCCC	-	Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce
SRFC	-	Singapore Relief Fund Committee
SS	-	Straits Settlements
UFS	-	Unfederated Malay States

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Political Background

The Malay Peninsula, located astride the strategic sea-routes between India and China, came under British political influence in several stages. The first stage, between 1786 and 1824, saw the British acquisition of strategic and commercial points of vantage along the Straits of Malacca-Penāng, Singapore and Malacca. The acquisition of these points not only adequately satisfied imperial interests but also provided local economic and political groups in the port centres with the essential bases for projection of commercial and political influence into the Malay Peninsula. For the next five decades, local interests were however subordinated to that of imperial policies of non-intervention and it was not until 1874 that the second stage of the British forward movement began. Between 1874 and 1895 Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang became British Protected States. Johore by virtue of geographical proximity to Singapore was also drawn into closer relation with the colonial government during this period. The final stage of British intervention between 1895 and 1914 saw the consolidation of British influence in the Protected Malay States where a "Federation" was formed, and the extension of British political influence in the four Northern Malay States of Perlis, Kedah,

Kelantan and Trengganu. Johore, which had for long resisted colonial intervention, finally succumbed in 1914, thus completing the evolution of British Malaya.

Colonial Malaya, by 1914 was made up of three political segments: the Straits Settlements; the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States.¹ The Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca, assimilated into the crown-colony system of government, were directly controlled by the Colonial Office through its representative, the Governor who was the highest executive officer in the Straits Settlements. The Federated Malay States (FMS) which politically constituted a single entity were constitutionally protectorates in which sovereign authority legally belonged to the Malay rulers. The British theoretically, had no basis of legal jurisdiction over these Protected States beyond that provided by negotiated treaty instruments concluded between the British and the individual Malay rulers since 1874.² Nevertheless, the British by virtue of influence and occupation swept aside all the legalities of the situation and transformed the protectorates into directly administered colonies under the often repeated fictitious claim that the British were at all times upholding the sovereignty

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- 1 For a detailed discussion of the constitutional structure of each of the political segments that made up British Malaya, see Rupert Emerson, Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule, Kuala Lumpur, 1970.
 - 2 The earliest of these treaty instruments was the 1874 Pangkor Agreement relating to Perak. It provided for the appointment of a British Resident to advise the Sultan on all matters of importance other than those affecting the Muslim religion.

of the Malay rulers. The retention of the traditional sovereignty of the Malay royalty became a mere facade behind which British administrators highly skilled in the art of colonial government executed political authority in the name of the Malay rulers. The Unfederated Malay States (UMS) a term loosely used to define the position of the remaining Malay States outside the "Federation" consisted of the five "independent" political units of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Johore. Politically, the position of these Malay States was almost the same as that of the FMS in that Malay rulers while holding on to their sovereign rights were subordinated to British advisers who were armed with the same plenitude of powers as their counterparts in the FMS. The only difference was in the spirit behind the application of the concept of protection. While residents in the FMS in the interests of fostering the development of a colonial economy transformed protection into domination, advisers in the UMS were wont to look upon protection as the retention of the Malay character of administration as a bulwark against the intrusion of non-Malay immigrants.

Colonial Economic Development and its Implications in the Federated Malay States

To the colonial government, an accelerated economic development of Malaya was vitally important for the proper functioning of the governmental machinery. Revenue had to be generated to support the increasing complexity

of bureaucratic establishments and to gain the political acquiescence of the traditional Malay ruling class through pensions and allowances. The Malay peasant economy based on subsistence agricultural activity was definitely out of tune with the political changes that were taking place in colonial Malaya and economic innovations had to be sought in order to buttress the new political foundations.

The colonial government did not have to look afar for the raw ingredients to make up a viable new economic system which to the Malays, would be completely alien in terms of capital, entrepreneurship and labour. Well before British political influence was extended into the Malay Peninsula, Chinese and European merchant-entrepreneurs from the Straits Settlements had started commercial ventures in the Malay States. In response to the international demand for products such as tin, pepper, gambier and tapioca, mining and agricultural enterprises were started on a commercial scale in various parts of the Malay States. Chinese entrepreneurs were especially successful in these pioneer ventures because of their ability to recruit a sufficiently cheap labour force from China and to organise a flexible system of capital arrangements between the merchant-capitalists in the Straits ports and the pioneers in the Malay States.³

The agricultural and mining activities of the Chinese and to a lesser extent the European entrepreneurs provided the colonial government with the

3 Two useful works on early agricultural and mining enterprises in Malaya are J.C. Jackson, Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921, Kuala Lumpur, 1968 and Wong Lin Ken, The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914, Tucson, Arizona, 1965.

precedent and the necessary direction for the development of a colonial economy. All that it needed for the colonial government to do was to provide the necessary stimulus for large scale economic expansion. To generate the capital and labour so required, the colonial government implemented liberal policies in such matters as taxation, immigration, and land alienation as well as embarked on a large scale programme of communication works.⁴ The colonial government pursued these matters efficiently and by the first decade of the 20th century, a colonial type of economy based on tin-mining and rubber had taken shape in British Malaya.

From the very beginning, the emergence of a colonial economy brought along with it far reaching changes in the Malay States. Forested lands were opened up for mineral and agricultural exploitation; potential agricultural lands were turned into plantation and mining lands; new settlements and townships sprang up in conjunction with the establishment of a net-work of road and railway communications. But above all, the most significant change was the remarkable increase in population in which the small existing Malay population was almost swamped by a flood of Chinese immigrants identified largely with the mining industry and later by waves of Indian immigrants associated with the growing rubber industry in the

4 An interesting discussion on the colonial government's attempt to stimulate the development of an export-centred economy in the FMS is found in Emily Sadka, The Protected Malay States, 1874-1895, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, pp. 324-363.

first decade of the 20th century.⁵ These immigrants belonging to the labouring class, were generally found in localities away from Malay populated areas. At the same time the proliferation of new townships also attracted a host of Chinese immigrants of an entirely different category from the labouring class. These were mostly shop-keepers, skilled and semi-skilled artisans who supplied the needs of the labouring population.

The Chinese in Malaya

The Straits Settlements provided the early Chinese immigrants in search of trading and occupational opportunities with the first footholds from which successful merchants subsequently established trading relations with the ruling chiefs of Malay States. As the Straits ports became major centres of Chinese commerce, merchant-capitalists saw in the Malay States new opportunities for financial investments and through arrangements with the rulers, they began to undertake the financing of production in tin-mining and plantation crops. Both these enterprises being labour intensive, production-financing, as a result led to a phenomenal influx of Chinese immigrant labourers into the Malay States.

Chinese immigrants in Malaya, largely drawn from Southern China were by no means homogenous but were instead very much divided by speech-group differences. The five major speech-groups of numerical importance

5 See Appendices A1 and A2 on population growth in British Malaya.

were Hokkiens, Cantonese, Hakkas, Teochius and Hailams.⁶ Within each group there were further sub-divisions based on speech-group variations arising from locality differences in China. On a broad basis, the five major speech-groups were also characterised by distinctive occupational differences.⁷ Hokkiens being the earliest immigrants were identified with the import and export business of the Straits ports, wholesale trade and manufacturing activities. The Cantonese were known to have the aptitude for crafts, productive manufacturing in food industries, tin-mining, service and entertainment activities. The Teochius, more akin to the Hokkiens, were found in business especially in fresh foods and salted fish, ownership of rice-mills and producers of hard-drinks. Hakkas, like the Cantonese, were found in the crafts and mining; they were also centred in the pawnbroking business and the running of Chinese medicinal-shops. The Hailams with the least capital were identified with domestic service especially in European households, rubber-tapping, food-catering and working as house-boys in hotels.

Perpetuating the differences among the Chinese speech-groups were the numerous institutions of Chinese organisational life which in one way or another reflected the diverse socio-economic origins of the Chinese. Chief

6 See appendix B2 for the numerical growth of the five major speech-groups in the FMS between 1891-1931.

7 A useful discussion on the occupational differences of speech-groups is found in T. Suyama "Pang Society: The Economy of Chinese Immigrants" Papers on Malayan History (ed.) K.G. Tregonning, Singapore, 1962.

among these institutions were the secret societies and the vast plethora of voluntary community associations. Secret societies which originated from the anti-Manchu Triad organisation in South China fulfilled in effect three important functions.⁸ Politically, they were powerful instruments of group control in which men who had attained economic success could raise themselves to positions of political power over their own fellowmen. Socially, they were sworn brotherhoods providing the immigrant Chinese who were cut off from their traditional social and family ties, a sense of belonging.⁷ Economically, they united the employers and employees into a single organisation. The existence of secret societies had been a matter of concern to the colonial government but for lack of any effective means of governing the Chinese community, they were allowed to operate openly until their suppression in 1890. In the FMS where secret societies were involved in warfare over the control of tin-fields, their existence was prohibited from the very beginning of colonial rule.

Chinese community associations in the main consisted of group, district, kinship, occupational and business organisations with the Chambers of Commerce at the apex of the whole structure.⁹ In general,

8 For a graphic account of secret societies in Malaya, see M.L. Wynne, Triad and Tabut: A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula A.D. 1800-1935, Singapore, 1941.

9 An interesting discussion on the historical role and significance of Chinese voluntary associations is found in Maurice Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth century Singapore" Comparative Studies in Society and History London, No. 3, 1960-1961.

the associations were important in shaping the development of Chinese society in Malaya in the following ways. Firstly, they perpetuated the force of Chinese traditions through the preservation of social and economic ties with their homeland. Secondly, they helped to mould Chinese public opinion and attitude on vital issues that affected them. Thirdly, they contributed to the social development of the Chinese community in areas where the colonial government was rather unwilling to provide as in the case of education and the provision of charitable services.

Within the context of a commercially oriented overseas Chinese society in which broad class divisions based on wealth and occupational roles could be discerned,¹⁰ the numerous organisations provided the channels through which economically successful persons could project themselves into positions of authority and prestige. The acquisition of wealth was the main determinant of social prestige and community leadership and the associations became the main arena in which the wealthy could demonstrate their initiative and leadership. It is clear that this social pattern was not a transplant from China but a hybrid arising out of conditions in the colonial economic environment and the prevailing influence of Chinese traditional forces.

It would be relevant here to mention briefly the attitude of the colonial government towards the overseas Chinese and the agencies employed to regulate

10 See appendix B5 for table showing the socio-economic classification of Chinese population in Malaya in 1931.

their activities. Until the 1920's when both immigrant and settled Chinese were beginning to thrust themselves onto the political stage, colonial administrators were wont to allow the Chinese greater freedom in the organisation of their own internal affairs. The British were politically supreme in Malaya and looked upon the Chinese as an economic asset. In fact it was common for colonial administrators to sing high praises of the value of the Chinese immigrant.¹¹ Restrictive measures were only taken when the activities of the Chinese tended to undermine the law and order of the country as in the case of the secret societies which were suppressed in 1890. Other than these occasional measures, interference was kept to a minimum and the Chinese as a result were able to evolve their own unique pattern of organised life.

The main method that was devised to keep the government informed of Chinese opinion and activities was embodied in the organisation of the Chinese Protectorate.¹² The Protectorate, first established in 1877 in

11 Sir Frank Swettenham, a leading architect of colonial Malaya, made an interesting comparison between the Malays and the Chinese. The Chinese were described as "the bone and sinew of the Malay States" and the "heaven-sent toiler" while the Malays were described as having "no stomach for really hard and continuous work, either of the brains or the hands". Frank Swettenham, The Real Malay, London 1900, pp. 39-40; and British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya, London, 1906, p. 137 and p. 292.

12 Studies on the Chinese Protectorate are found in Eunice Thio, "The Singapore Chinese Protectorate: Events and Conditions Leading to its Establishment, 1823-1877, JSSS, Vol. XVI: 1-2, Singapore, 1960 and Ng Siew-yong, "The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877-1890, JSEAS, Vol. II, No. 1, Singapore, 1961.

Singapore, was intended to curb the secret societies and the abuses connected with the Chinese coolie trade. As a government agency legally concerned with the protection of the Chinese, the Protectorate developed into an advisory body to the government in helping to devise solutions for Chinese social problems. The institution was eventually extended to the FMS where by force of enactment, it was given wider powers of jurisdiction over the Chinese. Nevertheless the greater jurisdictional powers were rendered ineffectual by the greater complexity of Chinese problems in the Malay States and also by the fact that the Protectorate with its limited personnel, was bogged down by its multifarious functions and duties which ranged from control of labour, protection of women and girls, supervision of societies and schools, arbitration in labour disputes to such matters as settling family and property relationships.

Genesis of Overseas Chinese Nationalism

Within a permissive colonial environment which allowed the Chinese a large measure of freedom to manage their own affairs, the history of the Chinese in Malaya would have continued to centre on the development of their socio-economic institutions to satisfy their changing needs, had it not been for political developments in China which directly impinged on Chinese society in Malaya. These developments connected with the political disintegration of the Imperial Manchu polity in the 19th century and the resurgence of China under the Republican regime, released a chain of forces that affected the thinking and activities of various Chinese

groups in Malaya. In other words, the beginning of Chinese political awakening in Malaya, was not self-generated or associated with the desire to have a share in the colonial power structure. It was not in any way characterised by Chinese political groups organised for the purpose of challenging either British or Malay sovereignty but rather a response to political developments in China. It was a China-oriented kind of nationalism conditioned by strong emotional attachments that the overseas Chinese had with their homeland.

In identifying the forces that led to the beginning of China-oriented nationalism, the increasing tempo of Manchu interests in the potentialities of overseas Chinese during the last two decades of the 19th century was an important factor in paving the way for a greater appreciation of politics in China. The Manchu Government which had previously disclaimed all responsibility for overseas Chinese was becoming more concerned with the overseas Chinese communities as a potential source of wealth, and symbolic of this change of attitude and interest was the appointment of Chinese consuls in Singapore and Penang.¹³ The role of the Chinese consuls was theoretically to give protection to all Chinese immigrants irrespective of whether they were locally born or China-born. In practice, Chinese consular roles reflected the interests of the Manchu Government in cultivating the political allegiance of the overseas Chinese and of greater importance, in the channelling of financial resources into China. Manchu

13 See John Chan Cheung, "The Establishment of Chinese Consulates in Singapore and Penang, 1877-1911", Jernal Sejarah, Universiti Malaya, Vol. IX, 1970-71.

influence in this respect was directed towards the overseas Chinese merchant-capitalists whose resources and leadership could be utilised for the implementation of the Manchu reform programme especially in railroad building and in the financing of mining operations.¹⁴

Overseas Chinese merchants and to a certain extent, the locally born Straits Chinese merchants and professionals (who were British subjects) were in this way stimulated into a greater awareness of Chinese politics. Newspapers were started.¹⁵ Cultural and literary bodies were created to influence and to generate public opinion pertaining to the regeneration of overseas Chinese society. The Straits Chinese, in this respect, were also leading the China-born Chinese in social reforms such as the eradication of opium-smoking, the building of schools and the eradication of superstitious beliefs and practices. Overseas Chinese response, as a whole, was an emotive kind of nationalism interpreted through what they could do to enhance their own image within a colonial society.

A more profound effect on the development of overseas Chinese

14 An example was Chang Pi-shih (張碧士) a Nanyang Chinese multi-millionaire, whose business interests were found in Java, Sumatra, the Malay States and China. The Manchu Government appointed him vice-consul in Penang in 1903 and eventually promoted him to Consul-General in Singapore. He was also given directorship of China's government railroads and the Imperial Bank of China. Michael R. Godley, "Chang Pi-shih and Nanyang Chinese Involvement in South China's Railroads, 1896-1911," JSEAS, Vol. IV, No. 11, March 1973.

15 See Chen Mong Hock, The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore, 1881-1912, Singapore, 1967.

nationalism was the impact of Reformists and Revolutionary political expatriates on the overseas Chinese during the first decade of the 20th century.¹⁶ The Reformists and Revolutionaries saw in Singapore a useful base for propaganda work and for raising the financial resources necessary for their respective political causes in China. Through their propaganda, both the Reformists and the Revolutionaries introduced to the overseas Chinese in Malaya for the first time political ideas that were borrowed from the West. The Reformists advocated the replacement of the archaic and absolute monarchy in China with a system of constitutional monarchy - a system that had worked successfully in Japan. The Revolutionaries on the other hand advocated the elimination of the Manchu Monarchy and the establishment of a Republican regime. Ingrained in these two political ideologies was the concept of the political party that could bind a group of people sharing the same political ideals and that could translate them eventually into action and reality. Thus the significance of the Reformist and Revolutionary impact in Malaya was not only in accelerating the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism but also in transmitting to the overseas Chinese the concept of organised support for Chinese politics.

In fostering the idea of organised overseas Chinese support for political causes in China, the Reformists concentrated their efforts on

16 Prominent among these political expatriates in Singapore were Kang Yu-wei, the leader of the Reform Movement in China and Sun Yat-sen, the central figure behind the Revolutionary Movement against the Manchus.

the upper class of Chinese merchants.¹⁷ The Pao Huang Hui (Protection of Emperor Society) was started in Singapore in 1900 to gather financial and moral support for the Manchu Emperor, Kuang Hsu, but its influence was however, relatively small. The Revolutionaries, on the other hand, worked among the middle and lower social strata of the Chinese population. Yu Liat, (尤烈),¹⁸ for example, an expatriate revolutionary of doubtful integrity, successfully manoeuvred himself among Triad societies, gambling houses and opium-dens. Quasi-political associations masquerading under the guise of literary and educational societies were formed in Singapore and in the other Chinese populated towns in the Malay States to spread the message of revolution in China.

17 For a detailed and analytical survey of the influence and activities of Chinese political expatriates in Malaya, see Yen Ching-hwang, The Chinese Revolutionary Movement in Malaya 1900-1911, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Australian National University, 1968.

18 Yu Liat arrived in Singapore in 1900, practised as a physician and before long founded the Chung Woh Tong (中和堂). In 1904 he moved to Kuala Lumpur where he organised his party in the guise of a lecturing hall under the name of Chung Woh Kong Tong (中和講堂). Although the objects of the party were to provide popular education there was little doubt that its aim was to spread revolutionary propaganda. About 1906 Yu Liat went to Ipoh where he received funds to begin a Chung Wo Yuk Shu She (中和閱書社), an educational book supply society. He then returned to Singapore and organised two schools as a cloak for Chung Woh Tong activities. With the approach of the Chinese Revolution many branches of the party sprang up in Malaya. These were usually disguised as schools. After the Revolution, Yu Liat returned to China where he supported Yuan Shih-kai, (袁世凱) and upon the latter's death in 1916 he retired to Hong Kong.

A step forward in the development of organised Chinese politics in Malaya was the formation of a branch of the Tung Meng Hui (同盟會) in 1906 in Singapore by Sun Yat-sen and a small group of Chinese merchants.¹⁹ The Singapore branch linked to its parent organisation in Tokyo was in 1908 made into the Nanyang Communication Centre to co-ordinate Tung Meng Hui branches in the Malay States²⁰ and also in other parts of Southeast Asia. As a political organisation geared towards the accomplishment of the Chinese Revolution, the Tung Meng Hui was opened to all Chinese in Malaya irrespective of speech-group, occupational or class origins. It was the first overseas Chinese political party with an ambitious programme designed to stir up mass overseas Chinese patriotism and to unlock their purses for the realisation of a new China.

Overseas Chinese nationalism reached a higher stage of intensity with the outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising in 1911 and the consequent foundation of the Republican regime. The Tung Meng Hui became the focal point for rallying the overseas Chinese. Merchants who had been doubtful of the Revolutionary cause abandoned the Reformists and began to launch fund-raising campaigns to support the Revolution in China. There were even Chinese groups who returned to China to participate in the Revolution.

¹⁹ 黃福奎: 華僑與中國革命 (The Overseas Chinese and the Revolution), Hong Kong, 1954, p. 64. See also Png Poh Seng, "The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912-1941," JSEAH, Singapore, 1961, pp. 4-7.

²⁰ Tung Meng Hui branches between 1906 and 1912 were found in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Seremban, Malacca and Kuala Pilah.

Support for the Chinese Republic was becoming a matter of national pride and patriotism. When the Tung Meng Hui in China merged with other political parties to become the Kuomintang, branches of the Kuomintang immediately mushroomed all over the Chinese towns in Malaya while reading societies were organised to disseminate Chinese propaganda.²¹

The increasing tempo of overseas Chinese patriotism, however, could not be sustained for long when political developments in China dampened their spirit. No sooner had the Republic been proclaimed when China was once again thrown into political chaos. Yuan Shih-kai, the strongest military man in China at that time, proscribed the Kuomintang in 1913 and Sun Yat-sen was forced to reorganise his party overseas. The colonial government was at the same time becoming more concerned over Chinese patriotic activities in Malaya and was keeping a watchful eye over Chinese political associations.²² As a result, in the years preceding 1920 many of the KMT branches became moribund while Chinese enthusiasm and finance were being channelled instead into the building of more Chinese schools to teach the younger Chinese generation, national pride and the glorious heritage of China. This situation remained until the 1920's when overseas Chinese political consciousness in Malaya was rekindled by a new chain of events in China.

21 KMT branches between 1912 and 1920 were mainly found in Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan.

22 See "Historical Notes on Chinese Political Societies," MRCA, No. 45, May, 1934, CO273/596.

CHAPTER TWO

Development of Left-Wing Chinese Politics in Malaya (1920-1928)

The political axiom that success in the art of colonial government lies in the willing consent of the governed remained the fundamental principle of British administrators after the World War of 1914 to 1918. In the FMS British political supremacy was unchanged and there was no indication that the British were willing to share their power with indigenous rulers. On the contrary, the British position was even more deeply entrenched with the sharpening of the political weapon of conciliation and compromise as reflected in the attempt to win Malay ruling support through a policy which came to be known as "Decentralization". In the UMS British political presence appeared to strengthen itself on the justification of protecting the Malay character of administration and Malay economic interests against the tide of alien immigration. In the Straits Settlements, British influence was not only politically strengthened but also militarily enhanced by the decision to build a naval base in Singapore.

(On the subject of Chinese matters, colonial administrators after the World War were becoming more and more cautious and critical of the development of overseas Chinese nationalism.) The influence of Chinese politics and the subsequent emergence of Chinese groups susceptible to radical political ideologies from outside Malaya were issues beyond the

colonial government's tolerance. The Chinese were no longer politically passive as they used to be in the 19th century. (They had become more settled in Malaya, more educated as a result of the establishment of modern vernacular schools and more nationalistic in their outlook.) The Chinese population in Malaya had become a problem to the colonial government. (Political enthusiasm had to be checked not with conciliation but with suppression of all politically "subversive" Chinese activities.) The maintenance of the colonial power structure in a plural society therefore necessitated a double standard of conciliation and suppression, and nowhere was this more clearly shown (in the 1920's when groups of Chinese involving themselves in the politics of anti-imperialism were suppressed vigorously.)

(Chinese politics in Malaya in the 1920's was in many ways an extension of the development of left-wing politics in China.) The various anti-imperialist manifestations were not directed at the continuance of British rule in Malaya but in general directed against British imperialism in China.¹ (They were repercussions of a chain of events that started with the May Fourth Movement, the resurgence of the KMT in Canton in 1920, Sun Yat-sen's rapprochement with Soviet Russia and the Chinese Communist Party, the national reunification of China and the rise of the KMT Government in Nanking in 1928. These were events that generated a lot of political discussion among students and politicians in China where the political climate was receptive to new ideas and thoughts. Invariably some of these ideas - militant nationalism, anarchism and communism - found their way into overseas Chinese societies and Malaya was no exception.)

The Anarchist Movement in Malaya

One of the earliest forms of political propaganda that appeared in Malaya was anarchism. In China, anarchism found ready reception among student groups and intellectuals especially in Peking where anarchist publications were secretly circulated among them.¹ In 1919, when nationalist feelings against Japan were high, an anarchist organisation in Canton, the Mo Ching Fu Tong (The No Government Party) with its headquarters known as San She or New Society, was found to have its influence felt in Malaya and Indonesia. Anarchist activities in these two countries were directed by the overseas branch of the Canton anarchist organisation, known by the name of Chan She or Truth Society with its headquarters in Manila.²

In Malaya, at the time of the outbreak of the anti-Japanese disturbances in June 1919 in Singapore, an Anarchist Federation was known to have been formed. The Federation did not appear to have permanent headquarters in Malaya. It was an amorphous organisation consisting of small groups of anarchist members in the main towns. The aims of the Federation were described as follows:

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Community
of Goods, Co-operation; each does what
he can and take what he needs: no

1 Chow Tse-tsung, The May Fourth Movement, Cambridge, 1967, p. 97.

2 Memo. on "Anarchism among Chinese in British Malaya, 26th Jan. 1925, by Sec. of Chinese Affairs, SS.encl.in Guillemard to Amery, 23rd April 1925, CO717/41.

government, laws or military forces, no land-lords, capitalists or leisure class. No money, religion, politics, prison or leaders.

No representation, heads of families, no person uneducated or not working: no rules of marriage, no degrees of high or low, rich or poor, and the method to be adopted is given by organisation of comrades by means of communication centres, by propaganda in pamphlets, speeches and education, by passive resistance to those in power, do not pay taxes, cease work, cease trade; by the method of direct action, assassinate and spread disorder. Anarchy is the great Revolution". 3

Resort to violence and terrorism was not ruled out in the promotion and organisation of the Anarchist Federation in Malaya. In carrying out the ultimate aim of eliminating the constituted authority of the state, the anarchists attempted to influence the labouring class and the Chinese schools through the organisation of communication centres and the dissemination of anarchist propaganda in the form of pamphlets and speeches. The driving force behind the anarchist movement in Malaya came from a group of Chinese school teachers and journalists who worked in close liason with a few other skilled artisans. In Ipoh, for example, the promoters were teachers of the Hon Man School in Lahat and Lau Hak Fi who was at one time editor of Yik Khwan Po, a Chinese newspaper, in Kuala Lumpur. In Kuala Lumpur, the anarchist movement came into existence after the Nanyang Critique,⁴ an

3 Ibid.

4 Copies of this Nanyang Critique could not be traced.

anarchist publication, and the Nam Ning Night School at 40 Pudu Road were started in March 1923.

Anarchist propaganda, on the whole, appeared to be printed on the premises of the Yik Khwan Po in Kuala Lumpur. The use of the Yik Khwan Po premises was probably because some of the anarchist members were also members of the Printers' Guild in Kuala Lumpur. In 1924 about a thousand copies of an anarchist publication known as Kwong Ming or Bright⁵ were printed and distributed to labour guilds, schools and other Chinese organisations in Malaya. The most prominent promoter of the organ was a certain Chan Taat Chen alias To Shang who was a teacher of the Kuo Man Night School. He was also a regular contributor of articles on anarchism among which were "Six Years of First May Movement in the South Seas" and "Liberty and Blood". The Bright also contained Chinese translations of articles in anarchist publications of other parts of the world such as the La Revue Anarchists in France, Freedom in Britain, Le Reveil in Sweden and Sennacica in Italy.

The Anarchist Federation was an amorphous organisation without a regular base to operate. This was probably in keeping with the professed aims of anarchism. The anarchists in fact, had stressed the importance of individual freedom and accordingly laid down a guiding principle that organisation was not necessary for the realisation of anarchism. There did not appear to be

5 See appendix C for an extract entitled "Liberty and Blood", taken from Bright, No. 1, dated 1st May 1924, encl. in Gulliemard to Amery, 23rd April 1925, CO717/41.

any preconceived plan of activity in carrying out the aims. Meetings were held irregularly and at different places on different occasions. Instructions given to members were very general and did not point to any overall strategy. This may be gathered from one of the reports of an anarchist meeting held in Penang. It stated that:

"... every opportunity must be taken to spread their principles. At meetings of guilds and societies when invited to speak as guests they must do so. Those who work in factories must preach to their fellow workers. School managers and school boys must be converted. Use must be made of strikes and eventually they would refrain from paying taxes and so Government must come to an end". 6

Throughout the reported existence of anarchism in Malaya, the Chinese Protectorate singled out the Chinese school teachers as the group most susceptible to anarchism. The Secretary of Chinese Affairs categorically pointed out that Chinese school teachers were most inclined to regard any "contented Chinese living in a foreign country as a tool of imperialism".⁷ The Secretary's assessment of the anarchist influence in Malaya was probably not far from wrong as anarchism in China itself was particularly strong among the intellectual class and moreover Chinese school teachers in Malaya at that time were staging a very vigorous protest against the attempts of the colonial government to control Chinese schools. Nevertheless, it should

6 Memo. on "Anarchism among Chinese in British Malaya", 26th Jan. 1925 by Secretary of Chinese Affairs, SS.

7 Ibid.

be noted that anarchism was not widespread among the teacher class because apart from the fact that a handful of teachers were reported to be activists, there was no evidence of anarchist activities in Chinese schools. The only reported case of anarchist activity in the period preceding the appearance of left-wing KMT activities was the attempt to assassinate Protectorate officers in Kuala Lumpur in January 1925.⁸ This was an isolated case of anarchist violence and did not in any way reflect a flourishing trend of anarchism in Malaya.

Three reasons were put forward by the Chinese Protectorate to explain why anarchism had considerably declined in the period prior to the resurgence of the KMT in Malaya in 1924. Firstly, anarchism in Malaya lacked any organisational frame-work and as such the small group of anarchist members steadily lost ground before the more organised KMT nationalists and communists. Secondly, anarchism did not present itself as a distinct political ideology to the overseas Chinese. In the 1920's anarchists tended to associate themselves with the KMT and the two streams of political activity tended to fuse together in their anti-imperialist activities. Thirdly, the declining momentum of anarchist developments in China no longer provided any stimulus to the Anarchist Federation in Malaya.

8 The perpetrator was a woman, Wong Sau Ying, an anarchist by conviction and acquainted with the names of anarchists in China and Chinese anarchist publications. In 1919, she was living in Ayer Itam, Penang with a Chinese anarchist, Mak Peng Choo who evaded arrest by the police and in whose house pamphlets pertaining to Chan She Society were found. Guillemard to Amery, 23rd April 1925, CO717/41.