

Introduction

The Chinese in Southeast Asia, with their economic clout, have been attracting attention from politicians, scholars, and observers alike. As the rise of China as an economic powerhouse and its influence looms large over Southeast Asia, the role of Southeast Asian Chinese in the region's economic relations with China receives further attention from the outside world.

What made Southeast Asian Chinese an important economic force and their growing importance to China are, to a certain extent, determined by the nature and development of their communities. A multifaceted approach is needed to unravel the forces that propelled the communities ahead. This book places its focus on social, economic and political aspects of the communities with special emphasis on the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore. It contains 17 papers, the majority of which had not been in the English language, written in a period of 6½ years from January 2000 to April 2006. Some of these papers are based on public lectures and keynote speeches delivered at various international conferences in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China.

This book is divided into two major parts: Part I focuses on Malaysia and Singapore, while Part II covers others parts of Southeast Asia and beyond. The importance of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia among the Southeast Asian Chinese can be assessed from both historical and current perspectives. Not only were they most numerous, but they also formed the strongest socioeconomic and cultural entity. Numerical strength and their special position enabled them to play a pivotal role in the socioeconomic, political, and cultural developments among Southeast Asian Chinese: setting the scene and standards for other ethnic Chinese to follow, and extending their influence beyond

Southeast Asia. The founding of the Nanyang University in Singapore in 1953 as the highest Chinese educational institution in Southeast Asia, and the hosting of the first convention of Chinese entrepreneurs worldwide by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in August 1991 are two good examples.

The first two chapters, “Malaysian Chinese Society in Transition (1903–2003)” and “A Century of Chinese Business in Malaysia (1904–2004)” provide a survey of Malaysian Chinese society and business between early 20th and early 21st centuries with a developmental perspective. The chapters analyze the socioeconomic forces for change, evaluate success or failure, and point out future directions. The performance of the Ethnic Chinese there was conditioned by their history and the nature of their societies.

The Chinese societies in Malaysia and Singapore had been divided by the existence of dialects and geographically based *huiguan* (dialect association), and kinship-based *zongqinhui* (clan association). Dialect and kinship connections, though in decline as time goes on, still exert some influence on the performance of the Chinese in the social and economic arenas. Chapter 3, “The Roles of Hokkiens in the History of Malaysia and Singapore” is written from this perspective. The Hokkiens are a major dialect group in Malaysia and Singapore, and they formed into a powerful *bang* (a combined dialect and geographical entity). They are extremely influential in the Chinese societies and have commanded considerable economic clout; and their economic performance has enormous impact on the economies of Malaysia and Singapore as a whole. With a historical perspective, this chapter assesses especially the roles of the Hokkiens in the Malaysian economy and the development of modern Chinese education in Malaysia. It also examines the patterns of Hokkien entrepreneurship and evaluates the contributions of the Hokkien entrepreneurs in the transformation of modern Malaysian economy.

Traditionally, *huiguan* and *zongqinhui* formed the two important pillars of Chinese societies in Singapore and Malaya, and the majority of the Chinese lived under their influence. As time passed by and the changes in political and economic environments took place in Southeast Asia and China, their roles in the Chinese societies

diminished and their influence on the Chinese declined. However, since the 1980s, these two traditional social institutions undertook reforms and went through a process of rejuvenation, and they found new meanings and new roles in the Chinese societies. Chapter 4, “Kinship and Organization: The History of the Gan (Yan or Yen) Clansmen in Singapore and Malaysia (1850–1993)” provides a case study of this transformation process. This study has challenged a popular belief that *zongqinhui* is becoming less and less relevant as a social institution, and it will fade away in oblivion. This study shows that it can survive and even prosper under the conditions of having an aspiring and far-sighted leadership, a reform in its traditional functions, and a changing role in an ever-changing domestic and international environment.

Both Chapters 5 and 6 add to the substance of social dimension of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia. Chapter 5, “The Development and Future of the Chinese Kinship Associations in Singapore and Malaysia” of which the Chinese version was written in 1991, compares separate developments of clan organizations in Singapore and Malaysia. With different political and cultural environments, they appeared to have taken different routes. The clan associations in Singapore were integrated into an umbrella organization under the government’s guidance with new socioeconomic and cultural roles, while their counterparts in Malaysia were left alone by the government to find their own way and new direction. Chapter 6, “Reflections on My Study of Ethnic Chinese History in Singapore and Malaysia” takes a critical look at certain socioeconomic and political issues of the Chinese in history, corrects a Western colonial bias, and provides a more balanced view on these issues.

The following three chapters are concerned with some important aspects of Chinese political life in Singapore and Malaysia. Chapter 7, “Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya (1900–1911)” and Chapter 8 “Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen, and the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya: A Revisit” deal with Dr Sun Yat-sen’s activities in the region. Sun, the founding father of the Chinese Republic, carried out a dynamic revolutionary movement in Singapore and Malaya

in an attempt to topple the Manchu government in China. Due to the numbers and wealth of the local Chinese, Singapore and Malaya became the key centers of Sun's revolutionary party — Tongmenghui (The Alliance), and they were integrated into a global network of Chinese revolutionary movement. Chapter 7 examines Sun Yat-sen's close and cordial relationship with the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya through his frequent visits and his personal bond with the local Chinese revolutionary leaders. With his romantic view on revolution, Sun allocated the financial role to the Overseas Chinese, and expected them to contribute to the utmost to finance the on going revolutionary uprisings. It also assesses the response of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya to Sun's calls for donations and other supporting actions. Chapter 8 reaffirms the importance of Singapore and Malaya as key Tongmenghui regional centers in Southeast Asia, and assesses the mutual relationship between Sun Yat-sen and Tongmenghui on the one hand, and the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya on the other. The Chinese reformist and revolutionary movements in Singapore and Malaya were important in the early political life of the Chinese. The Chinese not only learned the political skill that was helpful in their later political actions, but also brought the communities closer to China in political and economic terms. Many of them at this time looked to China to pay their loyalty and rested their hope on a rich and powerful Chinese Republic to protect their interests overseas.

Chapter 9, "Lim Lian Geok and His Struggle for the Chinese Education in Malaysia (1949–1961)" is a unique aspect of Chinese political life in the pre- and post-independent Malaya. Lim Lian Geok (Lin Lianyu) was an ordinary Chinese high school teacher until 1952 when the survival of Chinese education in Malaya became a political issue. With his eloquence, a sharp tongue, a strong combative spirit, and a fearless determination to defend Chinese education at all costs, he was elected as the leader of the United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association of Malaya (UCSTA) in December 1953. Using UCSTA as his power base, he mobilized the support of the entire Chinese community to fight for the legitimate status of Chinese education. Lim's 8 years at the helm of UCSTA (from December 1953 to December 1961)

placed this teachers' union at the forefront of the struggle. Despite setbacks and personal sacrifices, Lim managed to hold the line of Malayan Chinese education. Lim was not a professional politician, nor was he inspired to become one. His political activity was a means to achieve his educational aims. He did not fit into any of the three categories of the Chinese political leadership in Malaya, classified by Professor Wang Gungwu, but belonged to a new type of Chinese leadership — modern trade union leader.

Part II of this book focuses on socioeconomic and political aspects of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and beyond. Chapter 10 provides a broad overview of the social change in the Ethnic Chinese (Overseas Chinese) communities worldwide. It examines the factors and stages of the change, elucidates its characteristics and problems, and points out its future directions. This chapter is based on a keynote speech in Chinese delivered at the *International Symposium on Post-War Transformation of Ethnic Chinese* held in Xiamen (Amoy), China in May 1989. The concerns for the development of Ethnic Chinese communities after World War II and their future relationship with emerging China, underpinned the organizing of this symposium.

Chapters 11 and 12 examine the economic life of the Chinese in Southeast and East Asia. Chapter 11, “A Preliminary Study of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia (1842–1941)” is an attempt to search for historical roots of modern-day Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia so as to explain its dynamics and vitality. First, it examines the characteristics of the Chinese capitalism: strong commercial capital, transnationalism, mobility, flexibility, and adaptability. It continues to investigate the process of accumulation of Chinese capital in that long period of time that involved reinvestment, currency reserve, and real estate. It also scrutinizes the efforts of the Chinese capitalists who had invariably contributed to the rise of Chinese capitalism. Then it turns its attention to the role of the Chinese capitalist institutions and the stages of development of Chinese capitalism in that century. Chapter 12, “Confucianism and the Ethnic Chinese Business in East and Southeast Asia” adds a cultural dimension in the economic life of the Chinese in the regions. Is the dynamism of the Chinese business in these regions purely the result of interactions of socioeconomic

and political forces? or does it have other ingredients such as cultural and religious factors? This chapter emphasizes the importance of unique cultural factors — Confucian values and traditional Chinese social practices — in the rise of Chinese business. It examines the nature of Chinese business such as family ownership, strong business networking, strong cultural input in business organizations, and management practices. It also argues that Confucian basic tenets such as filial piety, loyalty, familism, and respect for age and authority formed the basis of the Chinese business ideology, while Confucian concepts of harmony, reciprocity (mutual obligations), hierarchy and paternalism, innovation and progress have profound impact on the Ethnic Chinese management practices.

The last five chapters are related to the political life of the Ethnic Chinese and Chinese in general. Chapter 13, “The Overseas Chinese Nationalism: A Historical Study” takes a broad historical perspective on the Overseas Chinese nationalism, the most important political life of the Overseas Chinese, examining its evolution and development, and assessing its importance in the history of the Overseas Chinese. Chapter 14, “Nanyang Chinese and the 1911 Revolution” is a revisit of my early work, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution* published in 1976. The 1911 revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia was momentous in the early political life of Southeast Asian Chinese. Their involvement in the revolutionary process and their financial contribution to the revolution were well documented in my book. However, the Revisionist historians in the United States in 1980s attempted to marginalize Sun Yat-sen and the Overseas Chinese in the revolution. This chapter, written in 1986, was to refute the views held by the Revisionists, and to reaffirm the important roles of Sun and the Overseas Chinese in the 1911 Revolution. It re-examined the response of the Southeast Asian Chinese to Sun Yat-sen’s and Tongmenghui’s calls, and re-asserted their important financial contributions.

The last two chapters “Hong Kong, China, and the Overseas Chinese” and “Dr Sun Yat-sen and 21st Century China” have contemporary relevance. Both were written at the times when uncertainties loomed over Hong Kong and China. The former was written in

the wake of Tiananmen Crackdown on 4 June 1989, when Hong Kong was shrouded in political mist, and many of the residents of the colony were thinking of migrating overseas. It was presented as the inaugural lecture by the Chair of History of the University of Hong Kong. The latter was written in an uncertain political climate facing China amid growing tension between China and the United States in the aftermath of the Hainan Incident in April 2000 where an American spy aircraft was shot down by the Chinese. It was presented as a keynote speech delivered in Chinese for a major international conference on “*Sun Yat-sen and 21st Century China*” held in Hong Kong in November 2001. The conference was designed to re-evaluate Sun’s legacies and their implications for the new century. I pointed out that Sun Yat-sen’s “unfinished revolution” was partially realized by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping on the mainland, and Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) and Jiang Jinguo in Taiwan, and Sun’s vision for a powerful and righteous China has been gradually fulfilled by China’s peaceful rise and its greater role in international affairs.