

# THE THIRD CHINA

The Chinese Communities in South-East Asia

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C. P. FitzGerald

PROFESSOR OF FAR EASTERN HISTORY  
IN THE INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES  
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ANGUS AND ROBERTSON  
for the Australian Institute of International Affairs

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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

This is the second volume in a series of background books, sponsored by the Australian Institute of International Affairs, on countries and peoples linked geographically, economically or strategically, if not also historically, with Australia and New Zealand. As with the first book in the series, Professor K. G. Tregonning's *Malaysia*, the form as well as the content of *The Third China* has been designed to meet the needs of young students about to leave secondary school, as well as to attract general readers interested in international relations.

In a very special sense, *The Third China* is a complementary volume to *Malaysia*. Professor Tregonning was of necessity much concerned with the position of the Chinese as one of the most significant groups within the new, large, political entity, the multiracial experiment of Malaysia. His interest in the several Chinese communities within Malaysia nevertheless began and ended at this point. Professor FitzGerald, by contrast, is interested in these Chinese within at once a much wider yet a narrower content. His approach is wider, because he sees them not only as part of 'The Third China', the Chinese communities scattered throughout all parts of South-East Asia, but also as groups retaining throughout their history there a continuing association of kinship, civilization and political contact with mainland Chinese. His view is more restricted, because he is not concerned with an historical survey or critical analysis of the evolution of any of the countries of South-East Asia or of their several wartime and postwar nationalist movements.

This last point is worth emphasizing. While the story told in *The Third China* is self-contained, even to the

point of some repetition of facts noted in different context in the *Malaysia* volume, Professor FitzGerald does not pretend to cover the history of any of the countries within which these South-East Asian Chinese communities live and work. The reader who seeks such a historical, economic or social analysis of the countries in question should look elsewhere. In the series in which the present volume appears he may be referred, in particular, for the history of the countries comprised in the new federation of Malaysia, to the first volume by Professor Tregonning. More specific analysis of the past, present and future of the most densely populated of all the countries of South-East Asia, the Republic of Indonesia, with its significant Chinese minority, will be provided in a subsequent volume in the series. This has been planned deliberately for later publication in order to serve the additional purpose of testing, in the light of history, some of the hopes and expectations expressed in the pages of Professors Tregonning and FitzGerald respectively.

That these forecasts of the authors of *Malaysia* and *The Third China* diverge somewhat calls for no editorial apology. Nor is this a matter of concern to the sponsoring Institute, which aims not to indoctrinate readers but to stimulate discussion, based on factual accuracy, scholarly presentation and rational interpretation.

A word should be added on the title of Professor FitzGerald's contribution to this series of monographs. Such geographically descriptive short titles as 'The Overseas Chinese' or 'The Chinese in South-East Asia' having been rejected to avoid possible confusion with Dr Purcell's many contributions to the earlier history of those people and that region, *The Third China* was eventually selected, as much for the challenge it presents regarding the future relations between, as for its succinct reminder of the exist-

ing separate political organization of those sections of the Chinese people now living respectively under Communist rule on the mainland of China, under American protection on Taiwan (Formosa) and in South-East Asia. The author has already acknowledged elsewhere\* his appreciation of the felicitous use of this name by Professor Paul Linebarger to cover the Chinese of Malaya and Singapore.

In presenting, within the short compass of this little book, a concise but comprehensive historical and analytical survey of the Chinese communities in the post-war countries of South-East Asia, the Australian Institute of International Affairs counts itself most fortunate in having been able to enlist the services of one whose published work in the field of Chinese history has deservedly won him an international reputation for profound scholarship and forthright presentation of considered convictions.

The editor is indebted to West Australian Newspapers Pty. Ltd. for making the two maps, which are reproduced in the endpapers, during the author's absence overseas.

F.A.

\* FitzGerald, C. P., *Flood Tide in China* (London, 1958), p. 205.

## CONTENTS

FRONT ENDPAPER: *South-East Asia and its Neighbours*

Editor's Foreword v

1: History to 1939-41 1

2: The Second World War 35

3: Communism in the 'Third China' 60

4: The Future of the Chinese Communities 81

Reading List 109

BACK ENDPAPER: *The Chinese in South-East Asia*

## 1 : *HISTORY TO 1939-41*

From the earliest age of which there is a historical record the Chinese have had contacts with South-East Asia. It is from Chinese sources that we first learn of the countries which now form the group, from Burma to the Philippines, which are usually comprised within the term 'South-East Asia'. The period, about the second century A.D., when South-East Asia began to come under Hindu cultural influence was also the same period in which the dynastic records of the Chinese Han dynasty first give some factual information about the region. It is clear that this information was gathered by ambassadors of the Han empire, for it is official information, not such as traders could have easily collected. The Chinese records mention the kingdoms of what is now the Indo-China peninsula, and a little later, those of Malaya and Sumatra. As yet it cannot be said that the Chinese did more than visit these countries, to impress their rulers with the power of the Han Emperor, and perhaps to return with gifts which would be represented as tribute. There is certainly no evidence that in the Han period any Chinese settled in the lands beyond the seas, although it is at least possible that traders began to move on seasonal expeditions, sailing south in the winter, and returning to China with the South-West Monsoon in the summer.

It is certain that this type of voyage had become a regular trade route before the end of the Han period (221 A.D.). Late in the Han dynasty voyagers, who were probably Greeks, came to China claiming to be ambassadors

of the Roman Emperor. The Chinese doubted this claim because the gifts offered were recognized as the products of the tropical countries of South-East Asia. It is therefore clear that the Chinese Court was well aware of what such products were, and knew them. We have no evidence of who were the main carriers in the trade between China and the lands to the south at this period, but it is probable that they were south Chinese from the ports along the coasts of the provinces of Kuangtung and Fukien, places such as Canton and Chuanchou, which retained importance as ports for many centuries, and in some cases still do.

In the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., a new type of traveller, neither merchant nor ambassador, began to use this trade route as part of the way to India. The introduction of Buddhism into China in the 3rd century A.D. led within a century or two to a growing pilgrim trade. The Chinese monks who wished to visit India, the sacred land of their faith, often went by land, across Central Asia and down into India through modern Afghanistan. But this route was long and hard: those who came from south China preferred the sea route, sailing down to Sumatra, where they changed ships and went on to south Indian ports. The Buddhist pilgrims were educated men and more than one of them has left an account of their travels. From these it is plain that some of the port cities of Sumatra had become active centres of Sanskrit learning, where Chinese monks would stay for a year to learn this language before going on to India. It is also clear that the shipping in which they travelled to Sumatra (although probably not beyond this country) was Chinese.

It is thus most probable that by the 6th century A.D. there was a transient Chinese community living in the principal ports of Sumatra, and possibly in Java and some



of the Malayan west coast ports. These were not at that time so important as those of Sumatra. The pilgrims who stayed to learn Sanskrit were probably not so numerous; the merchants who came down with one monsoon and returned with the next to China, would normally spend some months in the southern countries, selling their goods and buying local products before returning to China. But there is no certainty that any of these visitors established themselves in the country as permanent residents. Meanwhile Chinese accounts of other parts of the region, South Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaya, show that these countries were well known to the Chinese, and frequently visited by official embassies as well as by traders.

It is not until some centuries later that we have positive evidence of Chinese settlers, or permanent residents, in any part of South-East Asia. In 1295 A.D. a Chinese embassy was sent to Cambodia. One of the ambassador's staff, named Chou Ta-kuan, wrote an account of the city of Angkor, then the capital of that country, which remains the only full account of the city when it was still inhabited. Chou Ta-kuan also remarks that there were many Chinese living in this country, who were 'men of the sea', that is, travelling merchants, and that some of them settled down, married Cambodian wives, and never returned to China. This account shows that by the later 13th century the Chinese had begun to make their homes in the countries of South-East Asia, and that then, as later, where religion made no barrier, they freely intermarried with the people of the land and no doubt were absorbed into the local population.

At the time of the embassy to Cambodia, which is recorded by Chou Ta-kuan, the Chinese empire was under the rule of the Mongol conquerors, the Emperor being Kublai Khan. Two years earlier he had sent a fleet and

### THE THIRD CHINA

army (the fleet being Chinese manned, the army Mongol) to conquer Java. This attempt was not successful, and after having raided the country and induced the local rulers to make a show of allegiance, the Mongol forces withdrew. Passing mentions connected with this expedition show that by this time there would appear to have been resident Chinese communities in both Java and Sumatra. It is probable that such groups, not yet very numerous, and mainly consisting of merchants, were to be found in all the trading ports of the Straits of Malacca.

Just about one hundred years later, early in the 15th century, the newly established Ming dynasty in China undertook a series of large-scale maritime expeditions to the southern seas, and further, across the Indian Ocean, which for a time gave China the supremacy in these waters. Seven major expeditions were sent out from south China ports, the main base being (Foochow). They were roughly spaced through the twenty-eight years between 1405 and 1433. Carrying a large force of men, some 37,000 in all, and a great fleet of 62 specially built ships, apparently of much greater size than those normally used by traders, these expeditions were not primarily military, but intended to combine the functions of a demonstration in force, a diplomatic mission, and, to some extent, a trading venture and a voyage of exploration. They were commanded by a Court Eunuch, named (Cheng Ho) who was also a Chinese Moslem. This somewhat strange choice of commander for such a mission proved to be most fortunate. Cheng Ho was a man of great intelligence, resource, and enterprise. He was also, it is clear, a very skilful navigator.

On reaching the southern regions—which the Chinese then, as now, called 'Nanyang'—the 'southern ocean'—the Chinese made the city of Malacca their base. The local

king was ready to co-operate, send tribute to Peking, and acknowledge himself the vassal of the Ming Emperor. He and his successors for half a century remained on good terms with China, frequently travelling to Peking to pay respects in person. The Chinese fleet and detached squadrons cruised around the whole of the coasts of what are now the Indonesian Islands, Malaya, Indo-China, Burma and the Philippines. Major expeditions were sent along the coasts of India, to Ceylon, up the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, and across the Ocean to the east coast of Africa. It was from the latter region, probably the modern Kenya or Tanganyika, that the Chinese managed to bring a live giraffe all the way back to Peking, where it was presented to the Emperor. The monarch had the animal's portrait painted, and the picture is still in existence.

During the long sojourn of this Chinese fleet in South-East Asian waters it is clear that a considerable shore establishment grew up, mainly in Malacca. The oldest Chinese temple in that city is dedicated to Cheng Ho, although it is not clear that the buildings, or any previous buildings on the site, date back to the early fifteenth century. The records of the expedition mention resident Chinese in many of these countries, principally Java, Sumatra and Malaya. Apart from the settlement of Chinese in Indo-China, who could come largely by the land route along the coast, there seems to be no doubt that these countries were the first in which permanent resident Chinese communities took root. Such communities had begun to establish themselves from about the 13th century onward; by the early 15th century they are accepted as well recognized features in the ports of South-East Asia. It can be said that from this period onward there already existed Overseas Chinese, who had made their homes in these countries. Thus the Chinese in South-

### THE THIRD CHINA

East Asia were already there, as yet in modest numbers, before the arrival of Western voyagers and colonizers. As will be shown, the foundation of the European colonial empires caused a great increase in the migration of Chinese to South-East Asia, but it was not the first cause. The Chinese migration, beginning with the transient merchants and the pilgrims, had been slowly building up for more than one thousand years.

If the migration is considered from the angle of Chinese history, and in the light of historical facts, it is clear that the projection of this movement into the region beyond the South China Sea was only the later phase of an activity which had been in progress for many centuries, and from a period far earlier than that in which the first Chinese reached South-East Asia. Archaeological as well as historical evidence exists to show that from the end of the first millennium B.C., if not earlier, the Chinese had been pushing down the south-east coast of modern China, absorbing or partly expelling earlier inhabitants. At the same time, a pressure directed towards the south-west of what is today China was penetrating the mountainous areas of modern Kueichou, Kuangsi and Yunnan, originally lands occupied by non-Chinese peoples. These provinces still contain considerable numbers of such peoples, now known as 'National Minorities'. There is also strong reason to think that the first overseas territory occupied and settled by the Chinese was the island of Hainan, off the coast of Kuangtung province, of which today it forms a part. The people of Hainan speak their own peculiar dialect, and this is not closely related to the dialect of the adjacent mainland (Cantonese); on the contrary, it has affinities with the dialect of Fukien (Hokkien), the province which lies further up the east coast. Fukien, by reason of its lack of good rice lands, and the overcrowding

of its population upon the narrow fertile coastal plains, has always been a major source of migrants seeking land and fortune overseas.

The Chinese migration across the sea to South-East Asia is therefore complementary to the similar migration by the land route which occupied first south China itself, then south-west China, and at the same time followed the coast onward into Vietnam. In all this region there is little in the nature of natural boundaries to halt the migration. Mountain ranges may be obstacles, but the essential fact is that the climate and methods of cultivation to which the Chinese had become accustomed are similar in all the lands which they have entered. Central China, the Yangtze valley, is as much a rice country as Java or Thailand: it is, in summer, even hotter than the tropics. No farmer raised in the Yangtze valley would find any difficulty in pioneering in the south of China, in Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaya or Indonesia. In practice, it is not from so far north that the migrants have come in historical times. No doubt it was from the Yangtze valley that south China, and south-west China, were originally settled: but it was from these settlements, in time becoming as overcrowded as the original home, that the flow of migrants has gone forth over the past several centuries to the lands beyond the seas. The main sources of the Chinese in South-East Asia are the provinces of Fukien and Kuang-tung. Since the occupation of Yunnan from the north by the land route, the flow of land migration has largely come to a stop. It is, in fact, in modern times easier to go to Burma by sea from south China than to travel there overland. Consequently, in recent centuries, the main flow of Chinese migration, originally land borne, has become sea borne, and has been directed to the countries of South-East Asia which were easily accessible by sea voyages.

### THE THIRD CHINA

It cannot be known with any certainty whether the early Chinese settlers in Java, Sumatra and Malaya were mainly from Fukien or from Kuangtung. By the time the European colonizers began to take control of these countries it would appear that Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochiu settlers were already present among the Chinese communities. These three groups are still among the most numerous in the overseas Chinese. They come respectively from the delta of the Pearl River, the rich lands below the city of Canton; from the part of Fukien province which is served by the modern port of Amoy and centres on the older city of Chuanchou; and from the Ch'angchou area in Northern Kuangtung, close to the Fukien border, served by the modern port of Swatow. 'Teochiu' is in fact the local pronunciation of the name Ch'angchou, the prefectural city of the district. Smaller groups from parts of Fukien to the north of Amoy are found in various parts of South-East Asia, the largest being those from the city of Foochow itself, the provincial capital. In addition to the three largest groups are the people of Hainan island, and the people known as Hakka. Hakka (Mandarin K'e Chia) means 'Guest Families' which is the ordinary Chinese term for 'immigrant'. The Hakka are known to be descended from refugees who came to the south to escape the Mongol invasions in the 13th century. Their point of origin was thus probably north China, not the Yangtze valley, and their dialect still retains recognizable affinities with the speech of north China. Established in poorer districts and hill country, since they could not drive the older settlers off the better land, the Hakka in time mingled with the hill tribes, of 'non-Chinese' (that is, unassimilated) people, and gave them their own dialect. Hakka today are thus at least in part descended from Yao and other hill tribes.

After the last of the Ming sea borne expeditions to the south seas, in 1433, there was a change of policy in Peking. For reasons of internal politics the Chinese Court abandoned these ventures and before long allowed the great fleets to fall into decay. Cheng Ho was dead, and he had no successor who commanded the same influence at Court. The regular Civil Service disliked enterprises which were both costly, and managed, not by them, but by the Court eunuchs, a group traditionally the opponents of the Civil Service. The Crown revenues derived from waste-lands resettled by the Ming after the expulsion of the Mongol dynasty, were no longer providing the large surplus revenue of the earlier years. There was no regular ministry of the Navy in the Chinese governmental system. The Board of War was concerned with land forces, and there had never been a corresponding ministry in charge of naval forces. So no normal Civil Service interest was in existence to maintain naval affairs and claim a share in government expenditure. The maritime expeditions thus were discontinued and the important position acquired by the Ming government in the South Seas declined and disappeared.

The consequences of this change of policy, ultimately disastrous for China, have often been overlooked. Malacca had been the Chinese base: it remained under its own Sultans, but these rulers were the willing and friendly vassals of the Chinese Emperor. The city was then the key to the Straits of Malacca, and thus to communications between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Little more than eighty years after the last Ming fleet had been withdrawn, the Portuguese under Albuquerque were to capture Malacca and make it the first European colonial base in the Far East. From what is recorded of the strength of the Ming fleets in the South Seas in the first third of the

15th century it would seem unlikely that, if this power had been maintained, the Portuguese could have established themselves east of the Bay of Bengal. The Chinese fleets had also touched at the Philippines and it is clear from their accounts that there was already a trading community of Chinese in those islands. Only the southern Philippine islands had come under Moslem influence. The main islands, including Luzon, were not yet organized into coherent or powerful states. It would have been as easy for the Chinese as, a few decades later, it was for the Spaniards, to take control over the whole archipelago. It would, indeed, appear possible that the Chinese had had such a plan in mind, for in the period of the Ming expeditions, Chinese officials had been appointed as governors and administrators of some part of the Philippine islands. This projected colony was also abandoned when the Ming fleets were withdrawn.

The failure of the Ming Court to continue to develop a policy which had had such promising beginnings had a fundamental consequence for the whole future history of Chinese migration to the countries of South-East Asia. Whereas the settled and established countries of Java, Sumatra, and Ceylon were brought into alliance or tributary relations with the Ming Court, though Chinese authority was necessarily indirect and supervisory, the greater part of Malaya, Borneo and almost all the Philippines were at that time either controlled by small and weak Malay sultanates, no match for Chinese power, or still in the tribal stage of society. Chinese authority could easily have been introduced and Chinese settlement would certainly have followed. The pattern already familiar from the spread of Chinese settlement in the continental area of what is now south China could have been reproduced in these island and overseas territories. Large parts of



South-East Asia would have become part of the Chinese Empire, and in those countries beyond the direct authority of the Throne, the Chinese communities would have been supported and their standing determined by the fact that adjacent regions were outlying provinces of the Empire.

The position of the Chinese in South-East Asia would have been in many respects much closer to that which the European colonialists were soon to enjoy in the succeeding centuries. The strength of the Europeans in the Far East was not at that time so much dependent on the power of their distant home countries—who often left the colonists in dire want of supplies and men—but lay in the bases which the Europeans had established in the Far East and other parts of Asia. As time passed, it became apparent that the mere possession of such port fortresses was not enough; the control of the hinterland was essential to security and expansion. It was the failure of the Portuguese to expand their holdings in this way that forced them to yield to the Dutch; it was the expansion of the power of the Dutch into Java and neighbouring islands which established their domination of the region. Later, British expansion, based on India, followed the same pattern. Spanish control of the Philippines was maintained by local forces under Spanish command: the number of Spanish soldiers in the whole archipelago was extremely small. In the first century of Spanish rule (1570-1662) the Spanish Governor-General had no more than three or four hundred Spanish troops at his disposal. Even by 1707 there were only some two thousand. The Dutch in the Indonesian islands, and the British in India, were using the same means to maintain and expand their conquests—sepoy armies led by European officers. It is thus apparent that, had China accepted the role of the metro-