

5026543



*A Short History
of the
Nanyang Chinese*

WANG GUNGWU



BACKGROUND TO
MALAYA SERIES

No. 13

R3308

Z601

5026543

外文书库

001658

2406

A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese



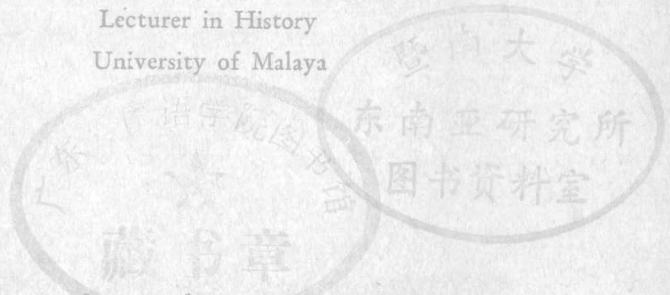
外文书库

外文书库

WANG GUNGWU M.A., Ph.D.

1534

Lecturer in History
University of Malaya



A Background to Malaya Book



Published by DONALD MOORE for



EASTERN UNIVERSITIES PRESS LTD.

SINGAPORE

1959

First Published 1959
by DONALD MOORE for
EASTERN UNIVERSITIES PRESS LTD.
SINGAPORE

© *by* WANG GUNGWU
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Composed in Caledonian type, and printed by the
Malaya Publishing House Limited, Singapore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This short history of the Chinese in South-east Asia was originally broadcast early in 1958 as a series of radio talks and the author wishes to thank Radio Sarawak for granting permission to publish them.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Chapter I Introduction & Early Times	1
II Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries	7
III Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries	13
IV 1785 — 1842	18
V 1842 — 1911	23
VI Twentieth Century, 1911 — 1941	28
VII „ „, 1911 — 1941 (Continued)	33
VIII Conclusion: The Story after 1941	38

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NANYANG CHINESE

I

THERE is no need to justify the writing of a history of the Nanyang Chinese. In fact, the chief problem has been to compress this history into these chapters without too many important omissions. For in the past centuries, every corner of South-east Asia has seen the rise of Chinese commercial and political influence.

How did this Chinese influence come about? Considering how close China is to the region, why did this Chinese influence appear as late as it did? Also, how far was this influence based on conscious Chinese efforts to establish commercial empires cutting across national boundaries? And most important of all, what has been the role of the Chinese in the Nanyang?

In this series, the word "Nanyang", the "Southern Ocean", is used as an equivalent of the more recent coinage, "South-east Asia". But there is an important difference. There is implied in the word "Nanyang" territories which have been reached by sea, by the South China Sea, and consequently, the areas which specially concern the Nanyang Chinese have been the key coastal strips of mainland South-east Asia and most of the islands of the Philippines and Indonesia. Thus, those Chinese who had at various stages of history entered Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Siam by land are not included here. Also, there will be many references to the "Nanyang trade", which means the trade of the Chinese with the countries of the Nanyang.

This chapter will deal briefly with the early contacts the Chinese had with the Nanyang. The subject is obscure but nonetheless intriguing. There is no point in asking the anachronistic question why the Chinese did not colonise South-east Asia, but

it is important to outline the early stages of Chinese interest in the region. This outline will be taken up to the voyages of the great eunuch Cheng Ho in the first half of the fifteenth century, that is to say, the century before the arrival of the Portuguese at Malacca.

There is evidence that Chinese merchants reached the coast of South China at least three centuries before the Christian era. They entered Tongking in Northern Vietnam, some of them by sea along the Kwangtung coast. Eventually, military conquest followed the traders and the native Yueh people of South China and Tongking became the subjects of the Chinese empire.

Official relations were soon established with trading centres in the Nanyang, but the Chinese did not control the trade in any way. It is not even known if Chinese merchants, as distinct from the native Yueh traders of the southern coast, ever crossed the South China Sea during this early period. The only landmark was the Chinese mission of the third century A.D. sent to observe and report on the countries of the Nanyang. This mission is important for it produced the earliest Chinese writings about the region, but the parts of these writings which are extant give us no information about Chinese activities there.

In fact, it was not until Chinese Buddhist pilgrims began to use the sea route to India that there were again records of Chinese visitors to the Nanyang. The visits were in sharp contrast to trading voyages. These Chinese pilgrims had not come to buy and sell among inferior peoples. They came to visit places of learning in the Indonesian empire of Srivijaya, and the Nanyang was not only a stopping-place on their way to India but also a haven where many, no doubt, had memorable spiritual and intellectual experiences.

The period of the pilgrimages, a period of about four centuries from the fifth to the eighth centuries, is an important one. It is unfortunate that we do not know more about it because it was a time when the Chinese shared a way of life with some of the people of the Nanyang and when a stronger bond existed between them than was possible before or ever after. The period is important in another way. It was not until the late

nineteenth century before we find Chinese of comparable learning and intellect in the Nanyang again.

After the eighth century, fewer pilgrims went to the Nanyang and to the Chinese the region was again primarily the storehouse of spices, aromatics and rare medicines that it had been before. An efficient carrying trade was developed by the Moslems of Persia and Arabia between China and the Nanyang, and for another three centuries, the Chinese merchants remained content to play a passive role. The Chinese knew the routes to the Nanyang but there is no evidence of regular voyages to the region, nor of Chinese settlement in the commercial centres there.

It is not until we come to the records of the eleventh century, about five hundred years before the coming of the Europeans, that we read of Chinese merchants going to the Nanyang in significant numbers. These traders borrowed money to finance their voyages and sometimes stayed abroad for over ten years before they returned to repay their debts. Their creditors were apparently confident that the interest on the borrowed capital of one hundred per cent would eventually be paid; this confidence suggests that the Nanyang trade was not only profitable but also well-established.

Under the Sung dynasty from 960 to 1279, there were important coastal and naval developments in South China. These developments prepared the Chinese for the control of the carrying trade of the South China Sea which they clearly assumed by the middle of the thirteenth century. The famous book the *Record of Foreign Nations*, written just before this time, was partly based on accounts the author had received from various Chinese visitors to the Nanyang.

The Sung policy of encouraging the Nanyang trade was adopted by the Mongols after their conquest of China. Chinese and other traders were given official loans to finance their trade, of which seventy per cent of the profits went to the government. The trade was so profitable that the revenue collected from these loans and from taxes on the import of Nanyang merchandise could pay for a large part of Mongol administrative expenses

in coastal China.

Through this state-sponsored trading, the Chinese went to the Nanyang in greater numbers. By the end of the thirteenth century, the trade was so extended in scope and volume that it was found necessary to prohibit the trade in some goods, for example, the export of rice from China to Champa in Indo-China, and the trade in male and female Chinese slaves.

There is an eye-witness account of Chinese settlement about this time in one part of the Nanyang. The Chinese official who accompanied the Mongol mission to Chen-la in Cambodia reported that there were many Chinese there who had married local women and whose trading ability was greatly respected. As these settlements were on the coast of South Vietnam, at that time part of the Cambodian kingdom, it is clear that the Chinese had gone there by sea.

From what we know of the Nanyang trade in the thirteenth century, it can be seen that the Chinese were in a position to undertake a naval expedition to the Nanyang. The Mongol rulers of China considered such an expedition necessary. In 1293, after only a year's preparation, a fleet of a thousand vessels was sent to Java. It carried 20,000 men and enough provisions to last the men for a year.

It is well known that the expedition achieved nothing. It is even doubtful if, among the survivors, those who were left behind in Java did, in fact, establish settlements in that country. But the expedition was a momentous event in at least one respect. It was the first time that such a large number of Chinese had at the same time visited a country in the Nanyang.

The failure of the Java expedition did not affect the Nanyang trade for long. Chinese traders and travellers were active in the first half of the fourteenth century and from this half-century, came the first private record of travels in the Nanyang we know of. Although this traveller, Wang Ta-yuan, says little about Chinese activities in the Nanyang, he speaks of Chinese traders in several of the places he visited. In fact, from later accounts, it is clear that at the time of his travels, the Chinese had begun to take an active part in the local trade of the area.

However, with the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368, some twenty years after Wang Ta-yuan's travel record was written, there was a sharp reversal of imperial policy concerning the Nanyang trade. The founder of the Ming dynasty was led to suspect that this Mongol-sponsored trade might prove to be a threat to the new empire and decided to impose severe restrictions on trading relations with the Nanyang. Private trade was forbidden and the tributary system of trading, that is, trading through nominally diplomatic missions, was revived and elaborated.

For forty years, the Nanyang Chinese faced the dilemma of either giving up the trade and returning to China or maintaining it at the risk of the most severe punishments if they ever went home. Many of them chose the latter way, some by making themselves useful to the native rulers and others by establishing centres of piracy, notably the pirate lair at Palembang.

But when the emperor Yung-lo came to the Ming throne in 1402, the policy of trade by tribute was modified and an unprecedented series of official voyages were made. These voyages marked the climax of Chinese relations with the Nanyang. They had such an impact that the eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho who commanded several of the ocean-going fleets between 1405 and 1433 was to become a legendary figure to the Chinese and natives of the region.

More will be said later about these great voyages. So far, it can be seen how Chinese relations had developed in the thousand years from the first Buddhist pilgrims to the "Treasure Ships" of Cheng Ho. The most significant feature was the long time the Chinese took to realise that the South China Sea was a great highway. The reasons for this are not hard to find. The economic self-sufficiency of a vast empire is one; the administrative stagnation and the outmoded political ideas produced by this very vastness are two facets of another. But perhaps more interesting is the direct relation between the time taken to colonise and "sinicise" South China and the time needed for Chinese pressure to be exerted on the countries of the Nanyang. It is known that South China was largely "sinicised" during the

T'ang dynasty but the region was still sparsely populated in the ninth century. During the tenth century following the break-up of the T'ang empire, however, independent kingdoms flourished in areas which are now modern Kwangtung, Fukien and North Vietnam. This was followed by the growth of a large class of traders and seamen who began to specialise in the Nanyang trade. By the end of the Southern Sung dynasty in the thirteenth century, these men had gained control of the carrying trade in the South China Sea. It was ultimately these men who made Cheng Ho's voyages possible.

II

The period from the early fifteenth century when Cheng Ho set out on his voyages, to the middle of the seventeenth century when the Ming empire was conquered by the Manchus, is significant because it was the time when various groups of Europeans followed each other to the Nanyang.

The voyages of Cheng Ho represented a policy of state trading. This policy was grafted on to the restrictive policy revived by the Ming founder in 1367 of trading only through tribute missions sent by Nanyang countries. Evidently, the Chinese court found this form of trading inadequate for its needs and decided that it would be worth while to send officials out to the Nanyang in order to buy the products in demand at the source. This did not mean that tributary trade was stopped. It only meant that the Chinese court could now more appropriately regard the missions from the Nanyang as tribute-bearers because it no longer depended on them for the goods it wanted.

For almost thirty years from 1405 to 1433, the Ming court paid directly for Nanyang produce. This form of state trading, however, was not the same as that pursued by the kings of Portugal a century afterwards. The merchandise brought to China by Cheng Ho and his men were not for an international market. There were no profits for the state or the imperial coffers because the trade was largely based on the export of cash and silks in exchange for luxury goods for imperial consumption.

In what way then did this official trade affect the Chinese who were already in the Nanyang? The naval manoeuvres which Cheng Ho performed off the coasts of several Nanyang countries may have raised the status of the Chinese abroad for a time. But those Chinese who had defied the earlier edicts of the Ming founder and continued their private trade merely

found the voyages embarrassing. Some were dubbed pirates and taken home for punishment. Others had to subject their private trading to official supervision and intermittent control.

There is no evidence that the voyages led directly to any increase in the number of Chinese in the Nanyang. They must however, have opened the eyes of many Chinese to the possibilities of the Nanyang trade. When the voyages were discontinued because they proved to be too expensive and wasteful to the Chinese empire, they had educated many more Chinese about the Nanyang and increased the demand for its products — in rather a similar way as the Crusades of Europe had taught the Europeans the use of eastern spices.

Once the voyages had been made and tens of thousands of Chinese had sailed south and returned to tell the tale, there was no turning back. Official policy returned to the restrictive one insisted on before the great voyages of Cheng Ho and tributary trade again became the only legitimate form of trade. But the authorities at Peking could not resist the demands of the coastal people for an expanding trade. Thus for almost a century after 1433, the year the last Cheng Ho voyage returned to China, travel and commercial restrictions were not strictly enforced and were, in fact, frequently ignored altogether. Private trading, sometimes sponsored and financed by wealthy bureaucrat families, became the chief means of procuring Nanyang products, and Chinese traders continued to visit and even settle in Nanyang countries.

In the fifteenth century, the Chinese were specially active in three regions of the Nanyang. Firstly, the region of Siam, Champa and Patani on the mainland and the northern coast of Borneo, then known as Brunei; secondly, the more distant coasts of Malacca, Sumatra and Java; and finally, the region of the "eastern ocean" which consisted largely of the northern islands of the Philippines. The first two regions in "Western Nanyang" were related and were frequented by merchants from both Kwangtung and Fukien. The third, however, was, as it still is in many ways, a special region and the preserve of the traders of Fukien province.

For information about this early period, there are the two important records of the Cheng Ho voyages, the *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* of Ma Huan and the *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan* of Fei Hsin. The first work, the *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, says that in two states of East Java, "many people from Kwangtung and Chang-chou in Fukien are staying there", and continues to describe three types of people in another part of Java, the second type being the Chinese. It then says,

"(these) Chinese are all people from Kwangtung and Chang-ch'uan (districts in Fukien) who stay in exile here. In their food and living, they are very clean. Many of them follow the teachings of Islam and have been initiated (into the religion) and observe its rules about food."

This description follows one about Moslem settlers who had come from the west and is followed by one on the non-Moslem natives of Java. The author, Ma Huan, who was himself a Moslem, was no doubt favourably impressed by these pious Chinese and may have exaggerated the number of Moslem Chinese there. Nevertheless, the description is significant. We know that in the previous century, the fourteenth, the Moslem religion spread widely in China under the Mongols and the Moslem Chinese were given trading and other privileges denied to ordinary Chinese. Thus, this passage by Ma Huan suggests that Moslem Chinese were still playing an important role in this period of Nanyang Chinese history. This is particularly interesting because of the historical irony underlying the curious fact that Chinese who were Moslems should have been residing in parts of the Nanyang before the native peoples of those parts had themselves been converted to Islam.

About this time, the Europeans came to the Indian Ocean. In 1511, the Portuguese captured Malacca, their first station in the Nanyang. With their coming, we can see the beginnings of a new phase in the history of the Nanyang Chinese.

The Portuguese domination of the Straits of Malacca turned the Chinese away from that area. For several years afterwards, the Chinese concentrated on the Indo-Chinese peninsula and the eastern coast of the Malay peninsula. But not for long, because

the Portuguese advance into the South China Sea affected the Nanyang trade in another way. For years the Chinese imperial government had been perturbed by Japanese pirates on the coasts of China. This had led to a strict imperial ban on all trade with Japan. Now the activities of the Portuguese confirmed imperial suspicions that the Nanyang trade could also be a source of trouble to the empire. Thus in 1522, the imperial ban was extended to the Nanyang trade.

For forty years, this ban remained relatively effective. Few Chinese could travel to the Nanyang and the Chinese sailors already there who were afraid to return were made to live precariously either as smugglers or as pirates. Under these circumstances, the Portuguese seized the initiative in the trade in Nanyang products along the Chinese coast.

The Chinese of Kwangtung and Fukien provinces resented these impositions from Peking. They saw the trade they had built up over the centuries falling into the hands of the Portuguese, especially after the founding of Macao in 1557. Eventually, their complaints were heard and after 1566, imperial restrictions on Chinese voyages to the Nanyang were once more relaxed. They were, in fact, so relaxed that the leaders of a rebellion which had troubled three provinces for more than three years about this time found it possible to escape to Palembang.

By this time, however, the Chinese had lost much of the advantage they previously had. Only in one area did they retain their early influence, that is, in Siam. About this time, a Chinese traveller could still record that there was a street for the Chinese at the Siamese capital and that the Siamese treated the Chinese well. But he makes it clear that the Chinese community was a fluid one. Apart from those who were mere visitors, there were the settlers who had been absorbed into the Siamese community within two generations. In the 1570's in Patani, just south of Siam, we hear not only of Chinese pirates on the coast, but also of a Chinese dato who had considerable influence in the local economy.

In the course of the sixteenth century, economic developments in China led many wealthy Chinese to invest in industries

in the towns and forced many more poor Chinese to leave their villages in order to find work in the urban workshops. These developments were independent of the fluctuations in the Nanyang trade, but in time were to stimulate the growth of an export trade. The industries provided the Chinese traders with goods to exchange for tropical products and reduced the flow overseas of cash and precious metals. This pleased the imperial authorities and the Nanyang traders were able to find official sympathy for their voyages.

So quickly did the Chinese recover their trade with areas like the Philippines and Java (especially on the island of Luzon and at Bantam), that the Spanish and later the Dutch both found the Chinese ubiquitous but useful. This was at the turn of the seventeenth century, the time of one of the best-known Chinese trading manuals concerning the Nanyang, the *Tung-hsiyang Kao* by Chang Hsieh. In this manual there is recorded Chinese activity in just about every trading centre in the Nanyang.

It is no wonder that both the Spanish and the Dutch found that they needed the help of the Chinese while they were building up their trade. By this time, the Chinese had regained so much of their trade with the Philippines that a special revenue centre was set up in Fukien province just to deal with these traders. The Spanish found the traders strongly entrenched in Luzon island and met with great resistance from one group when they occupied the island. But the Chinese were poorly organised and far from united, and the Spanish soon defeated them. Within twenty years, the Chinese who remained in Luzon had accepted Spanish domination and it is known that they actually took part in a Spanish naval campaign in the Moluccas.

It was not long before the Spanish again found the Chinese population in the Philippines irksome and even dangerous. Their fear that the Chinese would challenge their authority led to the first massacre of the Chinese people in Luzon island in 1602. At this time, the Ming government was already too far on the decline to do more than regret the fact that its subjects had been killed. Its weakness reassured the Spanish and when

there came another occasion to do so, about forty years later in 1639, they massacred the Chinese again.

The massacres at Luzon were appropriate events to mark the eve of the downfall of the Ming dynasty. Within five years of the second massacre, the Manchus had taken Peking. The Manchu campaigns in South China which followed soon afterwards were to unsettle the Chinese of the southern coasts for almost half a century.

The immediate consequences of the Manchu conquest will be dealt with later. The significant feature of the history of the Nanyang Chinese about this time is that the Ming emperors after 1566 had recognised too late the growing importance of the trade with the Nanyang. Ironically, imperial authority waned almost as fast as the Nanyang trade recovered, and when the trade was reaching new heights and meeting new challenges, the imperial government became wholly ineffective and could not provide even the least support for a trade which could have played an important part in the Chinese economy.