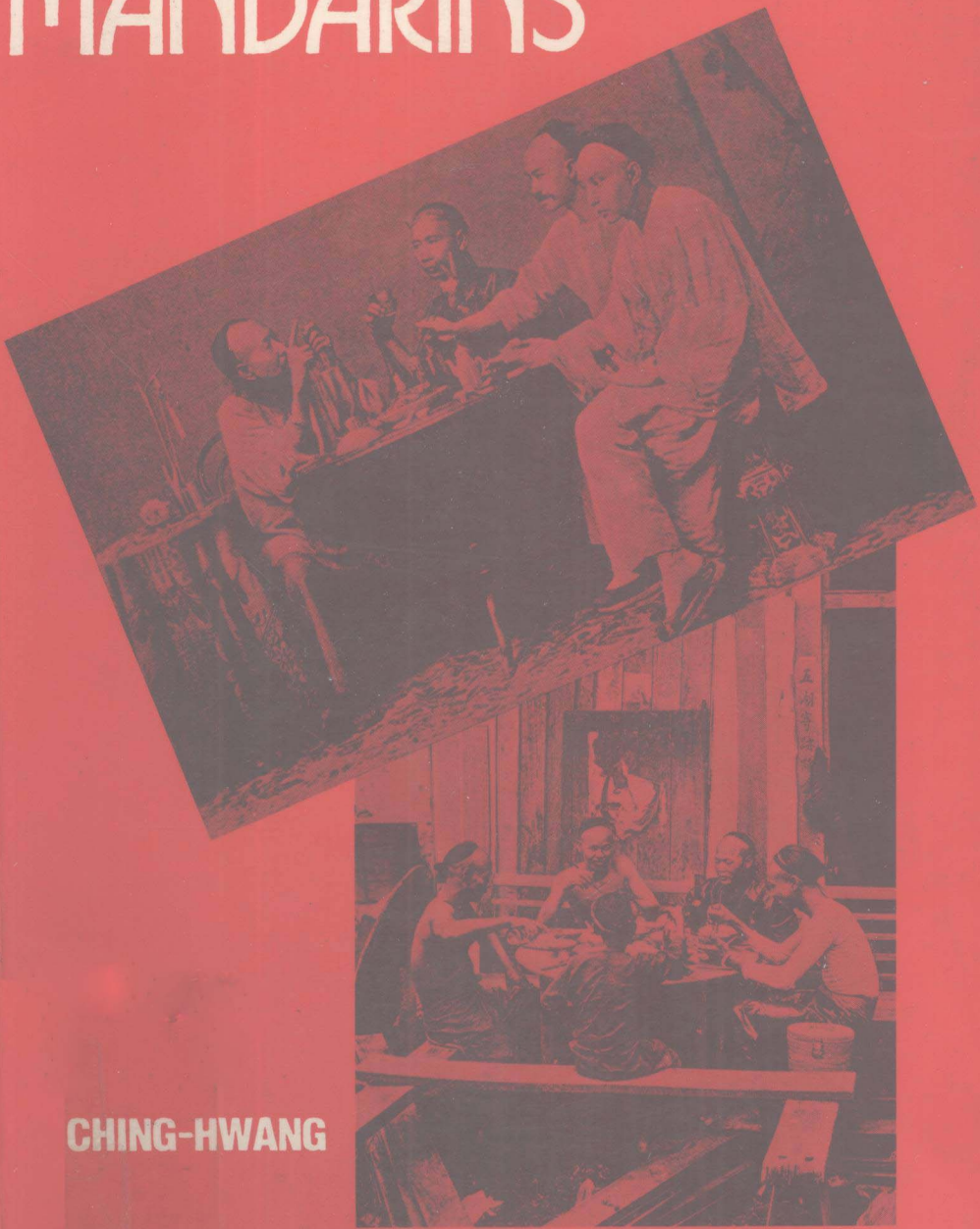
COOLIES AND MANDARINS



CHING-HWANG

Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851–1911)

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Foreword

The study of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia has been bedevilled by some still largely unanswered questions. One that has engaged many scholars has been the slow response of the Ch'ing government to the demand among the Chinese in the southern provinces for increased trading abroad. Less attention, however, has been given to a related question: why did the Ch'ing government appear insensitive to the large-scale population movements out of South China during the middle of the nineteenth century? These movements were dramatic. And the qualitative change in the nature of some Chinese communities abroad, from communities of resident traders, artisans and their local families, to ones dominated by contract labourers meeting the needs of rapidly expanding economies, was in the end equally dramatic. Dr Yen examines the historical and diplomatic background to this question in his study of Ch'ing policy towards the Chinese overseas. He offers no simple answers but provides a scholarly presentation of the main issues that emerged, especially with regard to China's policies during the last decades of the Ch'ing dynasty. In this way, he challenges the picture of official insensitivity which modern Chinese historians sympathetic to overseas Chinese have tended to present.

Dr Yen is particularly well qualified to tackle this controversial subject. His reputation as a fine scholar has been established by his comprehensive and authoritative study of the role of overseas Chinese in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States in support of the 1911 Revolution. That book has been simultaneously translated into Chinese by a Taiwan historian and a group of historians in China and the former has already been published in Taiwan. Dr Yen's knowledge of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia is solidly based on two decades of research. He has now, in this new book on Ch'ing policy, extended his research to diplomatic matters pertaining to overseas Chinese in South Africa and the Americas. He has thus provided for the first time in a Western language a comparative

perspective on official aspects of overseas Chinese affairs in Southeast Asia and other regions of Chinese settlement. It is an illuminating exercise done with the scholarly care we have come to expect from Dr Yen. It tells us about not only what the governments of China and the West were trying to do but also throws new light on the kinds of problems that the Chinese faced when deciding to go east across the Pacific or south across the South China Sea.

Writing from Xiamen, Fujian
July 1983

Wang Gungwu

Preface

The reseach for this book began in 1971. At that time, two other scholars were interested in related topics: they were Robert Irick, a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University, and Sing-wu Wang, the Chief Librarian of the Orientalia of the Australian National Library, Canberra. Irick was interested in Ch'ing policy towards coolie trade, while Wang worked on Chinese emigration in the nineteenth century, with a special interest to the emigration to Australia. Subsequently, Wang and Irick have had their books published. My study is broader in scope and wider in areas than Irick's and Wang's. I wanted to find out what essentially constituted Ch'ing overseas Chinese policy, how the policy was implemented and why it failed. Although this book deals with all overseas Chinese, its main focus is on the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and the United States.

I collected published materials from various Australian libraries and libraries in Singapore and Malaysia. I especially benefited from excellent collections of the Orientalia of the Australian National Library, the Oriental Library of the Australian National University, Canberra, and the Oriental Library of the Sydney University, Sydney. The materials collected from the above libraries laid a good foundation for the project. In 1974 I had a one-year study leave in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan which gave me access to the Ch'ing archives kept in Taiwan. The most important one was the Tsungli Yamen and Wai Wu Pu Archives kept in the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei. At the Palace Museum, Taipei, I discovered the gazettes of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Commerce of late Ch'ing period entitled *Hsueh-pu kuan-pao* and *Shang-wu kuan-pao*. Both gazettes are very useful for the project.

The first draft of this book was completed in 1978. But I was not happy with it because I felt that I had not exhausted source materials related to the topic and had also not been able to visit the Chinese communities in the United States and Canada about which

I had written. A six-month study leave in 1979 enabled me to visit Britain and North America. In London I worked in the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Documents of the British Library, Russel Square; the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies; the Principal Library of London University; and the Public Record Office in Kew Gardens. In North America, I visited the Harvard-Yenching Library and the Houghton Library of Harvard University; the East Asian Library of the Columbia University; the Library of the Historical Society, New York; the National Archives of the United States, Washington, D.C.; the Congress Libraries, Washington, D.C.; the Library of the University of Toronto, Toronto; the Libraries of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver; and the Library of the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada; the East Asian Library and the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley; the Library of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California; and the Library of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

In these Libraries I had the opportunity to examine some original records of British and American archives connected with the topic. In London, in the British Library, I perused some old Chinese newspapers relating to the activities in the Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya. In the Public Record Office, I examined in detail the Foreign Office Records and Colonial Office Records connected with the topic, in particular, the correspondence of the Chinese Minister in London to the British Foreign Secretary in the period between 1877 and 1912. In the United States, I was excited to have the opportunity to examine the original records of the Bureau of Immigration from 1877 to 1891, and the correspondence between the Chinese Ministers in Washington and the Secretary of State in the period between 1879 and 1906. The records of the Bureau of Immigration, the so-called Segregated Chinese Records, consist of reports and correspondence of American immigration officials in dealing with Chinese immigrants; they are contained in six large boxes, unclassified, and have so far not been microfilmed.

Moreover, I had the opportunity to examine some old Chinese newspapers published in the United States between 1856 and 1912. Among them, the *Chung Sai Yat Bao*, deposited in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, and the *Sun Chung Kwock Bo (New China Daily News)*, deposited in the Library of the University of Hawaii, are most useful. Apart from this I had the opportunity to inspect the original records of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria, British

Columbia, deposited in the Library of the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria was the leading organisation among Chinese communities in Canada during the period under study, its records deserve special attention from scholars.

I also inspected the sites of various Chinese communities in the United States and Canada, and observed their way of life and talked to some of the local Chinese about the writing of overseas Chinese history. The visual impact on me was tremendous. Not only did it give me more confidence in writing about the communities, but it also gave me insight into the problems of the communities about one hundred years ago.

The new materials collected during my 1979 trip have been extremely helpful in the revision of my first draft.

In the course of writing I received help from various people. I would like to thank the librarians of the following institutions: The Barr Smith Library of the University of Adelaide, Adelaide; the Orientalia of the Australian National Library and the Oriental Library of the Australian National University, Canberra; the Oriental Library of the Sydney University, Sydney; the Oriental Library of the University of Melbourne, Melbourne; the library of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur; the library of the National University of Singapore; the library of Nanyang University; the National Library of Singapore, Singapore; the Fung P'eng Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong, the library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica and the Palace Museum Library, Taipei, Taiwan; and also the libraries in Britain, United States and Canada, mentioned earlier.

I would like to thank Professor Wang Gungwu of the Australian National University for his advice and the Foreword for the book. I am indebted to my colleagues, Dr. Robert Dare and Dr. Stephen Large, and my friend Dr. Michael Godley of Monash University, for their efforts in improving the manuscript. I am grateful to Mrs. Beverly Arnold of the History Department and Mrs. Jenifer Jefferies of the Centre for Asian Studies for typing the manuscript.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Kwee Ying, for her understanding and encouragement.

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Introduction

In the study of Ch'ing history, China's policy towards its overseas subjects has received little attention from scholars in either the Chinese speaking or the English speaking worlds. The neglect of this field had been mainly due to the belief that overseas Chinese history is peripheral to the study of modern Chinese history, and that overseas Chinese had little or no impact on the development of China. This is a false belief. Michael Godley's *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang* (Cambridge, 1981) and my early work *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution* (Oxford, Kuala Lumpur, 1976) have demonstrated clearly that overseas Chinese had an important role to play in the late Ch'ing modernisation and the 1911 revolution.

The subject is also important for an understanding of the relationship between China and foreign Powers, for overseas Chinese became an important issue of China's diplomacy, and it occupied a significant portion of the time of Chinese diplomats; it affected China's attitude towards foreigners and the whole range of Sino-Western relations. In short, the protection of overseas Chinese which formed the main part of late Ch'ing policy towards its overseas subjects, was a major issue of China's foreign policy.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, China had been the target of Western expansion and a market for industrial goods. Chinese people became consumers of opium and Western products, and were exploited by foreign imperialists. The fate of overseas Chinese was not much better; they were used as an important source of cheap labour and were discriminated against.

From one perspective, overseas Chinese were men and losers of the two worlds. They lived in one but carried the burden of the two. On the other hand, they were discriminated against by foreigners because they carried the culture and values of the old China; they were invariably regarded as culturally undesirable and racially inferior, and they bore the brunt of attacks on China. On the other hand, they lived and experienced something new and different from

the old Confucian culture, and because they had received some foreign influence, they were regarded by their home government as potentially dangerous.

Of course, China's policy towards overseas Chinese was not influenced just by cultural bias; it was also influenced by history and its bad experience with some overseas Chinese during the Opium War period. Before the Opium War, the number of overseas Chinese was rather insignificant. They were ignored by the Ch'ing government as "deserters" or "political conspirators". The opening of the Treaty ports in the 1840s quickened the process of Chinese emigration, and exposed Chinese in the coastal provinces to the new economic opportunities overseas. The discoveries of gold fields in California and later in Australia, and the new economic developments in the European colonies in Southeast Asia, stirred the aspirations and imaginations of many poverty-stricken peasants. Many of them saw the opportunities overseas for earning a livelihood, and for a short-cut to personal economic advancement. They were prepared to risk imperial penalties to emigrate overseas.

The opening of the Treaty ports also exposed millions of poor peasants to foreign exploitaion. The shortage of labour in the new world as the result of the abolition of the slave trade in the 1830s made China an alternative source of cheap labour. Treaty ports together with Macao and Hong Kong became a hotbed for the activities of labour contractors and their lackeys. Thousands upon thousands of poor peasants who were popularly known in the West as "coolies" were induced or sold to the new world.

The increase in the number of overseas Chinese, either through contract labour or free emigration, created some problems for the Ch'ing government. Many were ill-treated or killed in foreign lands, and in the 1870s their treatment became an international scandal. The Ch'ing government might not have much feeling for the coolies; nevertheless, the scandals injured its pride and undermined its international status. This new reality compelled the Ch'ing government to take some protective measures to protect overseas Chinese.

Much of this book is concerned with the ways in which the Ch'ing government dealt with its overseas subjects and these are the best indicators of the attitude and policy of the Ch'ing government. This study begins with a broad survey of China's overseas Chinese policy prior to 1850. Chapter 1 examines the formation of the prohibition and non-protection policy towards overseas Chinese dur-

ing the Sung, Yuan, Ming and early Ch'ing period, and suggests that Ch'ing non-protection policy grew out of the past, particularly the policy of the Ming.

Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate the process of change of the Ch'ing government's attitude in the second half of the nineteeth century. The exodus of hundreds and thousands of Chinese coolies, the ordeal of the coolies during voyages abroad and their miseries in foreign lands forced the Ch'ing government to look more closely at problems related to the protection of its subjects overseas. No matter how the government viewed the issue, the humiliation suffered by the coolies shattered the image of China as a whole. In dealing with the problems of the coolies, the government was compelled to re-examine its attitude towards emigration and overseas Chinese. This led it to question some of the basic assumptions on which its traditional policies were based, and to change its hostile attitude towards overseas Chinese.

At the time when the Ch'ing government changed its hostile attitude towards emigration and overseas Chinese, China came out of its diplomatic shell and joined the family of nations in the 1870s. The sending of diplomatic representatives facilitated the application of the new attitude, and also had enormous impact on the ultimate change of the policy in 1893. Following the stationing of Chinese diplomats in foreign capitals, Chinese consulates were established in many countries where overseas Chinese sojourned. For the first time, the Ch'ing government had official contacts with its overseas subjects. Chinese consulates enabled the government to collect reliable information about overseas Chinese, including their wealth, hopes and aspirations. At the same time, the consuls could act to protect overseas Chinese. The details of this diplomatic expansion in overseas Chinese communities are fully discussed in Chapter 4.

The years between 1873 and 1893 were a transitional period from the change of the old to the new policy. On the one hand, the new commitment of protecting overseas Chinese led Chinese diplomats to fight injustices suffered by overseas Chinese in foreign lands; but, on the other, the government in Peking lacked sustained enthusiasm and efforts to support these fights. The protection of the Chinese in the United States is the best example illustrating the problems of protecting overseas Chinese during this period. Chapter5 considers this dilemma.

Although the conditions for a change of policy were ripe in the

1880s, it was not until 1893 when Hsueh Fu-ch'eng memorialised the Court that the old emigration law was officially abolished. Hsueh, the Chinese Minister in London, and Huang Tsun-hsien, the Chinese Consul-General for the Straits Settlements, belonged to the group of reformer-diplomats who advocated institutional reform and modernisation along Western lines. They saw the wealth and expertise of overseas Chinese as useful assets in China's economic modernisation. Their joint effort officially changed the policies on emigration and overseas Chinese. An examination of the roles of Hsueh and Huang in changing the policy is found in Chapter 6. This chapter also examines the unfolding of the new policy in China after 1893 and argues that on balance the new policy did not work well. The provincial officials in China paid only lip service to the new policy and their prejudices against the returned overseas Chinese had never substantially changed. Worst of all, the officials together with local bullies still regarded the returned subjects as a source of graft, and attempted to squeeze money out of their victims. This prevented a large number of overseas Chinese merchants from returning or investing in China. This chapter suggests that the well-entrenched, corrupt practices and deeply-rooted prejudices of the Chinese officials were the main causes for the failure of the implementation of the new policy in China.

The new policy also became a crucial test for the protection of overseas Chinese abroad. Chapter 7 shows that the Tsungli Yamen and later the Wai Wu Pu had demonstrated a fresh attitude and taken positive steps to co-ordinate an active protection policy of the overseas Chinese. Many Chinese diplomats gave considerable attention to this task, particularly to the Chinese in the United States where the protection was especially needed. Although the result was not good, the efforts of several diplomats such as Wu T'ing-fang and Liang Ch'eng, were commendable. Of course, the failure of this new protection policy abroad cannot be simply attributed to the weakneses of the Ch'ing government, policies of various imperialist Powers were also to be blamed.

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Legacy of the Past

THE POLICIES OF THE SUNG AND YUAN DYNASTIES

The Policies of Northern and Southern Sung Dynasties

There was little thought given to overseas Chinese before the Sung Dynasty. Although China's international trade had been substantially developed since the seventh century,[1] and while Chinese from Fukien and Kwangtung provinces had increasingly settled in Formosa and the neighbouring P'eng-hu islands (Pescadores),[2] no policy was formed to deal with them. This was probably due to the fact that there was an insignificant number of overseas subjects, though it could have been that the matter was considered too trivial to bother the Court. But the founding of the Sung Dynasty in 960 witnessed an expansion of overseas contacts, particularly with countries in Southeast Asia. The restoration of peace in South China and the new dynasty's southward military conquest provided good conditions for further development in trade.[3] Indeed some of the traders stayed abroad for several years in order to establish commercial footholds in coastal Southeast Asia. Thus these sojourners are generally considered the first generation of the overseas Chinese in the region, and their settlements later formed the centres of overseas Chinese communities.

China's interest in Southeast Asia continued to grow when, after the northern part of China was lost to Chin Tartars, the government was forced to shift its seat to Lin An (modern Hangchow) in the southeast of China. The loss of vast territory meant a great

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[1]A good study of China's early trade in the South China Sea is by Wang Gungwu, "The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea", in *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 31, pt. 2 (June, 1958), pp. 1–135 (independent issue).

[2]See Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations, With Special Reference to Labor Conditions* (Taipei, 1967, reprint edition), p. 4.

[3]Eberhard, W., *A History of China* (London, 1960), pp. 208–209.

reduction in revenue, and this compelled the government to look to overseas trade as compensation. Commerce became the lifeline of the empire and the capital the entrepôt. By the end of the dynasty it was claimed that in the main street of the capital city "there is not a single person who is not in trade. . . ."[4]

Of course government policy was not alone responsible for the development of international trade during the Southern Sung period; there were other factors helping to bring about this change. The development of maritime technology was particularly important. Chinese and Arab observers agreed that Chinese ships were the largest in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Chinese ships, built mostly in Ch'uan-chou and Canton had as many as 1,000 crew members.[5] Size alone testified to the advances in Chinese shipbuilding. Large vessels also gave a greater sense of personal and financial security as did the introduction of the compass — a Chinese invention — in 1119.[6]

The popularity of T'ien-hui,[7] a seafaring goddess, was another factor in helping to develop China's overseas trade. Although technological advances played an obvious part, there was no guarantee of absolute safety in the voyage. A goddess who was considered to be the protector of all seafaring people and was believed to have possessed supernatural power in rescuing victims helped to remove the fear of overseas trips, and encouraged more people to engage in lucrative overseas trade. The conferring of titles on the goddess by the Sung court testified to the popular belief that she was omnipotent.[8]

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[4]Wu Tzu-mu, *Meng-liang lu*, p. 239, quoted in Colin Jeffcott, "Government and the Distribution System in Sung Cities", in *Papers on Far Eastern History*, no. 2 (Sept., 1970), p. 119.

[5]See Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 4, pp. 25–26, Chou Chu-fei, *Ling-wai tai-ta*, vol. 6; Chen Kao-hua & Wu Tai, *Sung Yuan shih-ch'i te hai-wai mo-i* (China's Overseas Trade during the Sung and Yuan Periods) (T'ientsin, 1981), pp. 26–27.

[6]It was first recorded in Chu Huo, *P'ing-chou ko-t'an*, in the first year of the Hsuan-ho reign of the Hui Tsung emperor of the Northern Sung Dynasty. See Chu Huo, *P'ing-chou ko-t'an*, (Shang Wu, Shanghai, 1941), p. 18.

[7]T'ien Hui was also known as T'ien H'ou, T'ien H'ou Sheng Mu and Ma Tsu. She was the most popular goddess worshipped by the Chinese in Fukien, Kwangtung, Chekiang and Taiwan. For the worship of T'ien Hui and the spread of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, see Han Huai-chun, "T'ien H'ou Sheng Mu yu hua-chiao te nan-chin", in *Nan-yang hsueh-pao* (Journal of South Seas Society), vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 51–73.

[8]In 1156, the goddess was first bestowed with the title of "Ling-hui fu-jen"; in