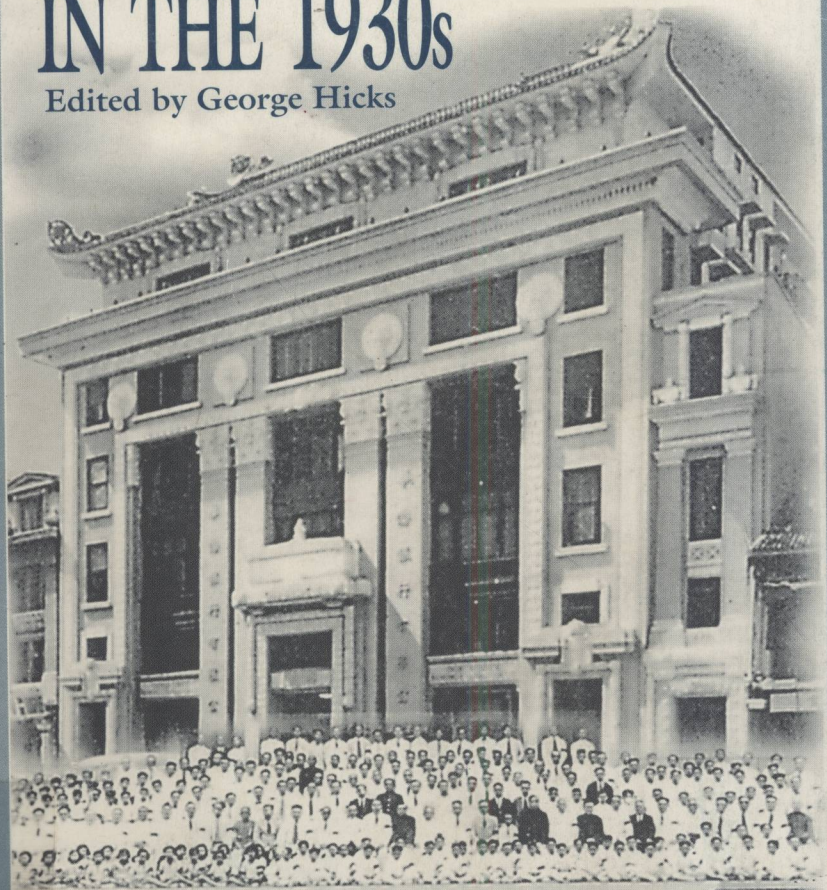# CHINESE ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE 1930s

Edited by George Hicks

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CHINESE ORGANISATIONS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
IN THE 1930s

FOREWORD

This volume is the third in a series of publications on prewar Japanese research on the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. It follows *A Bibliography of Japanese Works on the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia 1914-1945* (1992) and *Overseas Chinese Remittances from Southeast Asia 1910-1940* (1993).

This volume is a logical and chronological sequence to *Remittances* which focused on the period from World War I through the mid 1930s when Japanese interest in Southeast Asia was essentially of an economic and commercial nature, while the present volume demonstrates the subsequent shift to a strategic focus. As the prospect of an extended war loomed, Japan's most urgent need was for a 'realistic plan' for the 'appropriate control' (as the Conclusion puts it) of all social components in the areas to be occupied. Among these the Overseas Chinese presented special problems for many reasons. These include their great economic power in the Southeast Asian economies, the multiple and sometimes conflicting loyalties within their communities, their widely differing status and roles in the various countries of Southeast Asia and their general, though not necessarily unanimous, predisposition to hostility towards Japan arising from the invasion of China — the south in particular. This latter feature distinguished the Chinese from the indigenous populations, who were initially at least, not ill-disposed to Japan's declared war aim of liberation from Western colonialism in a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere.

In framing policies to handle the Chinese, the Japanese authorities could draw on a good deal of expertise accumulated by specialists over the previous generation. Classical Chinese literature and culture had always been a staple element in Japanese education and in the generation leading up to the World War I the Japanese had also been brought into close confrontation with the drama of modern China's evolution.

The first phase of Japanese expansionism had been driven less by economic motives than by the felt strategic need to secure an outer arc of defence against Western imperialism. In Northeast Asia at the turn of the century this meant Imperial Russian expansionism. This latter was also an acute concern of Britain's and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance enabled Japan to create its defensive arc by annexing Taiwan, Korea and southern Sakhalin, obtaining colonial type treaty rights in China and acquiring the mandated territory of Micronesia following the World War I.

In the succeeding period Japan's policy orientation shifted from military expansionism to economic penetration. On the one hand, Japan's immediate territorial goals had been achieved and any further military adventures offered more risk than gain; on the other, Japan's economic base had been expanding rapidly, particularly under the stimulus of the World War I and the resulting shifting patterns of power and commerce. So far as Southeast Asia was concerned, Taiwan now became the ideal stepping-stone, serving as the base of commercial research and enterprise directed by the Government-General's External Affair's section, the Bank of Taiwan, the Taiwan Colonial Company and the Southern Region's Association. These were later reinforced by the base of the southern network of the South Manchurian Railway Economic Research Bureau, Japan's premier economic and strategic research organisation.

Already in 1914 the Bank of Taiwan had published its impressive pioneer survey of the flow of Overseas Chinese remittances (included in the *Remittances* volume). Nothing like this was to appear in any Western language for decades and for a description of how Chinese financial networks worked at the grass roots level it has never been surpassed. All this incredibly detailed information was secretly gathered under the noses of the European colonial authorities and put to good use in the decades that followed.

The Depression of the 1930s was a major setback to Japan as well as to all other economies but despite Japan's lack of colonies in Southeast Asia she enjoyed advantages which enabled her to ride out the storm more successfully than the colonial powers themselves. These included lower shipping and labour costs, devaluation of the yen and the characteristic blend of governmental, semi-governmental and private institutions which are still a source of strength.

The Western colonial regimes eventually defended their interests with sanctions and import quotas, while at the grassroots distribution level competitive tension with the Chinese mounted. This tension had its roots in earlier commercial rivalry but Japan's invasions of China added a political dimension, including repeated boycotts of Japanese goods. Agents of China's national government, as well as to some extent the Chinese Communist Party who were then in a united front, fomented anti-Japanese sentiments. They were most successful in Malaya and Singapore. In other parts of Southeast Asia, long settled communities of Chinese continued with their traditional non-political or opportunistic attitudes and were not easily rallied to an anti-Japanese stance. The ubiquitous Chinese secret societies, which

posed such problems to the colonial authorities also needed the attention of the Japanese.

In prewar Southeast Asia the Japanese faced a very difficult task of how to analyse and handle these complex social configurations with a view to eliminating irreconcilable elements. Those Chinese who were implacably anti-Japanese would have to be eliminated (in Malaya and Singapore they were) while less hostile Chinese were to be utilised in the Co-prosperity structure – naturally to be dominated by Japan but offering others their 'proper place'. As the world crisis deepened in the late 1930s, military and naval intelligence came to take a more direct interest and to intervene actively in relations with Southeast Asia. Many Japanese experts whose earlier concerns had been commercial, diplomatic or journalistic were recruited and given new agendas to collect strategic information.

The present volume represents a compilation by the External Affairs Section of the Taiwan Government-General of such intelligence gathering over a number of years. One source of some inconsistencies is that much of the material reflects the situation at different points of time. There was some updating but obviously the problems created by the war prevented the completion of the study. Prefatory notes crediting Shirota Heisho and Matsuo Yasushi with the compilation also state that the material was not intended for publication in this form, being "printed solely for the purpose of transcription as reference data for the section", although permission might be granted for some use in official publications. Ultimately, according to the notes, it was to become a component in a *Comprehensive Overview of the Overseas Chinese in Southern Regions* (*Nampo Kakyo Soran*) ('provisional title').

The year 1943 represents the approximate limit of the period when the authorities might still have hoped for a compromise peace which would leave some measure of Japanese influence in the contested regions. As this possibility faded, with the disintegration of the Japanese network of control, the 'Overview' could not be completed. The only other part produced was a survey of overseas Chinese remittances and investments, updated to the earliest phases of the war (also contained in the *Remittances* volume.). These two studies therefore present a distinctive picture of a stage in Overseas Chinese studies not otherwise covered so intimately.

A decade ago James Yang Chien Ch'eng made this Japanese study available to the Chinese reading world. It is through his help in supplying the rare Japanese original as well as the Chinese translation that we are

able to bring this study to the attention of the English reading world. Christine Liao translated the Chinese version into English while Les Oates carefully compared the Chinese and Japanese versions and helped, as usual, in many other ways.

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FEBRUARY, 1994

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, the world has witnessed a veritable Chinese Diaspora — a new wave of Chinese emigration that has carried people of Chinese background to nearly all parts of the globe. At the same time, and especially in Southeast Asia, there has been a trend among ethnic Chinese to strike roots where they are and to become, more than ever, part of the countries where they live. There has also been a broad and growing research interest in the characteristics of the global ethnic Chinese. Scholars, business people and politicians in many countries wish to know why they are seemingly so successful in business matters. Is it something to do with values in their Chinese cultural heritage? Or is it a function of their business and social organisation, also derived, it seems, in good part from Chinese cultural sources?

This latest, and most far-flung wave of emigration by ethnic Chinese must be seen within the context of several developments beginning around 1970. Three of them stand out: the opening of China to foreign presence and investment; the relaxation of Cold War tensions; and the opportunities and attractions for ethnic Chinese to migrate to places like the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In Southeast Asia, where most ethnic Chinese abroad continue to live, these developments have stimulated new forms of contact between countries of the region, including their local Chinese populations, on one hand and China on the other. The loosening of Cold War tensions in Asia has encouraged Southeast Asian governments with large Chinese populations to modify their views of those populations, seeing them less readily than before as political security risks. Unlike some other parts of the world, Southeast Asia has not experienced a large influx of new Chinese population as a result of the new 'Diaspora'. Instead, some parts of the region have become senders of Chinese emigrants elsewhere.

On the whole, however, Southeast Asia has become a place with a generally stable Chinese population — a population increasingly integrated into the countries of the region. Indeed, those who study the Southeast Asian Chinese have increasingly treated this population as 'Southeast Asians of Chinese heritage', rather than, as earlier, 'Chinese sojourning in Southeast Asia'. The Chinese themselves have, in increasing numbers, identified themselves as Southeast Asians, whose interests and desires are to integrate, preserving their Chinese heritage if possible.

For this and other reasons, research on the Southeast Asian Chinese has changed its focus since about 1970. In the 1950s and 1960s the context

was one of anxiety on the part of the new nations of Southeast Asia that unassimilated local Chinese populations were, because culturally still Chinese, likely to be politically Chinese as well and, thereby, a potential 'Fifth Column', or subversive group working for a Communist China. Partly for that reason, most of the academic and other research on the society and culture of Southeast Asian Chinese during the period of the 1950s and 1960s focussed on assimilation. The 'traditional' Chinese social organisations, based upon kinship, place of origin, and occupation, were seen primarily as devices for sustaining 'chineseness' and thereby resisting assimilation.

Since 1970, both local attitudes and research agendas have been modified. There is now a more sophisticated view – one that holds that cultural orientation and political loyalty cannot simply be equated. It is now increasingly accepted that there is a middle way – integration – through which local Chinese may be politically identified with the country where they live while retaining at least some of their Chinese values and practices. Southeast Asian countries differ in their willingness to accept full freedom of expression of Chinese ethnicity; but the trend seems to be towards acceptance of integration, rather than requiring full assimilation and obliteration of all traces of 'chineseness'. It is also the case that in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in the world, there is a growing tendency to use the expression *huaren*, 'ethnic Chinese', for local Chinese rather than the older term, *huaqiao*, 'Overseas Chinese' – one that implied primary cultural and political ties to China.

As ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia are coming to be seen as Southeast Asians – by themselves and by others – the focus of socio-cultural research about them has shifted from one that balanced consideration of local influences against those from China to one that seems to focus almost exclusively on local conditions. Given the fact that since the 1970s most Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese have been born and raised in Southeast Asia, rather than China, and thereby have been subject to strong Southeast Asian influences, that is not an unreasonable approach.

But as part of this approach, one often hears the argument that in modern Southeast Asia there is no place for 'traditional' Chinese organisations and that they are dying out or will soon do so. This argument seems to be based upon two ideas: one, that such organisations, being 'traditional' and China-bound in their origin, have no place in a modernised Southeast Asia with a locally-born Chinese population. The other is that the younger generation of ethnic Chinese lack interest in the 'traditional' principles of kinship, filial piety, 'home' district in China, and the like on

which these organisations were originally based, and therefore have no interest in the organisations.

Despite these suppositions, it now appears that such organisations have not only survived but in some ethnic Chinese societies in Southeast Asia are increasing in number. Clearly, these bodies do more than reinforce traditional cultural norms. They have always done more, particularly in the areas of mutual aid and defense of local Chinese interests. In the post-1970 context of renewed and expanded opportunities for involvement with China, these organisations have also become one of the conduits through which business and cultural exchanges take place. Within Southeast Asia itself, they are part of the Chinese business system of each country and thereby of ongoing importance.

In the 1930s, when the Japanese survey that resulted in this book was carried out, there was no doubt of the importance of these organisations or of the importance of China – the presence of China – in the Southeast Asian Chinese societies. In fact, it was in the 1930s that the presence of China in Southeast Asian Chinese societies became much more important than ever before. In China the Kuomintang government, established in 1928, set about organising its relations with the 'Overseas Chinese' by forming an Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission under the Cabinet of the government. As the Japanese moved into Manchuria, China's Northeast, and subsequently further into the country from 1931 onward, agents were sent out by the Commission and the Kuomintang to encourage existing Southeast Asian Chinese 'traditional' organisations to orient themselves less towards their own local concerns and more towards China and its problems, and to form new organisations that would do just that. The tempo of these developments increased once the Sino-Japanese War began in 1937.

The Japanese Survey we have here, therefore, reflects that growing presence of China's government and ruling Party in the Southeast Asian Chinese societies and especially in their organisations. Not only were new organisations created – ones explicitly devoted to resisting Japan in China, in existing organisations the influence of Kuomintang members and their concerns about the salvation of China became increasingly salient.

The growing influence of China in Southeast Asian Chinese circles during the 1930s was paralleled in those circles by growing apprehension about the future of the Southeast Asian Chinese. In the short term, their interests were threatened by the expansion of Japanese imperialism to Southeast Asia. Thus, their willingness to lend support to China was not entirely lacking in self-interest. But there was also the long-term perspective,

one that perceived that the development of nationalism in several Southeast Asian countries would eventually pose entirely domestic challenges to the future of the Chinese in the region.

It seems to me that we have given insufficient attention to the 1930s as a turning point in the history of the ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia. We often tend to see the situation of the Chinese as it was in the 1950s and 1960s as purely a product of the rise of Communist China, the existence of 'Two Chinas', the Cold War, and the claims and interests of nationalism in newly independent Southeast Asian countries. Instead, I believe that it can be argued that in at least some of those countries the stage was set by the 1930s because it was in that decade that the basic local ingredients of the 1950s and afterward came fully into place: local nationalism, the presence of China and China-directed nationalism, and the emergence of 'Left' and 'Right' organisations in Chinese societies.

Not surprisingly, this Japanese Survey pays most attention to those Chinese organisations that were seen to be (or suspected of being) opponents of Japan and its interests. This is, in the end, an intelligence report, and not an academic survey. But while that emphasis may have produced some exaggerations and distortions about the membership and values of anti-Japanese Chinese organisations, the country-by-country survey of these is extremely useful and not easily come by in a single place elsewhere. We can read this survey as a report of reasonable accuracy on Chinese organisations devoted to resisting Japan. We can also read it as an example of Japanese intelligence – its strengths and weaknesses.

One interesting conceptual approach by Japanese intelligence researchers on Southeast Asia, especially those based in Taiwan, was to link South China with Southeast Asia and to point out the influence of the one on the other. For example, a long series of publications entitled *South China and Southeast Asia Surveys* (*Minami Shina oyobi Nanyo Chosa*) was produced. One of the values of the present report is its use of that method – beginning with the kinds of organisations present in South China and then showing how the same kinds, in adapted forms, showed up in Southeast Asian Chinese societies. This is an early example of recognition, since common among many social researchers, that China's influence on the Southeast Asian Chinese was and is not merely political, economic, and familial. It also has involved social institutional models which the Chinese took with them and then modified in Southeast Asia. Since 1970 we have begun to appreciate just how resilient, adaptable, and persistent those institutional models and their results have been and continue to be.

In summary, this Japanese Survey offers us, the researchers of the 1990s, two major benefits. First, it helps us understand the situation of Southeast Asia's Chinese in the critical decade of the 1930s, both in terms of their organisational response to that situation and through the perceptions of Japanese intelligence about them. Second, it gives us an organisational baseline from which we can move ahead to compare the studies of the 1950s and 1960s and after. For the period since 1950 we know a good deal about Chinese organisations in Singapore and the Philippines, at least. This is the result of work by many people and organisations in the Singapore case and, in the Philippine instance, primarily the pioneering work of Chinben See.

We lack a comparative study of Chinese organisations in the region as a whole, although for the 1950s and 1960s we have coverage of some countries in the work of Uchida Naosaku. The publication of the *Huaqiao Jingji Nianjian (Overseas Chinese Economic Yearbook)* in Taiwan annually since the mid-1950s and the issuance of summary volumes like the *Huaqiao Zhi — Zong Zhi* (1956 and 1978), also in Taiwan, enable us to pull together a reasonable discussion of the organisations of Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II. What we have lacked above all is a prewar organisational baseline. We have some discussions of Chinese organisations in individual countries of Southeast Asia for the 1930s. But I know of no study other than this one that attempts to survey the whole region.

There is no doubt that there are shortcomings to this Survey. Indonesia and Thailand, for reasons not explained, receive much less attention than the size and importance of their Chinese communities would warrant. The information available varies from country to country and has the look of 'as available' about it, rather than that of a well-designed, systematic research project report. Still, it gives us a baseline from which to make comparisons with organisational developments later and at least the outline of the picture in the 1930s. In methodological terms, also, the attempt here to group organisations into those of kin, home district, occupation, and the separate (probably because unable to classify) secret societies — is of interest as well. For all these benefits we have to thank Yang Chien Ch'eng for republishing this study in a Chinese version and George Hicks for making it available now in English.

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PREFACE

The original name of this book was *Survey of Overseas Chinese Organisations in South East Asia (Nanyang)*. Published by the External Affairs Section of the Government-General in 1943 during the Japanese Occupation of Taiwan, it was numbered *Survey Report Number 102* (the tenth such report on economics) and classified as a document for internal reference only.

The book was originally several parts of a series, entitled *Comprehensive Overview of the Overseas Chinese in Southern Regions*. However, the series could not be completed so the book was published as a single title. The author of the original manuscript was Shirota Heisho; it was edited by Matsuo Yasushi. Now it has been translated into Chinese by Chu Hsu Tung and and corrected by Huang Kuan Ch'ien.

As the report of a survey put out by a government department, the method of selection of material for inclusion in the report differs greatly from that used for a scholarly work or that of an expert.

The subject matter is principally concerned with the collating of data regarding laws and regulations; and the classification of groups, organisations, official bodies and personnel, according to their aims and by address.

Mistakes often appear in the discursive and analytical aspects of the work; for example, the summary at the end of Chapter Two is weak, because it is excessively subjective and its classification system is illogical. Readers should approach these official Japanese documents, written for confidential circulation internally, with a critical eye. In this way they can pick out the good points and reject the weaknesses.

The book was published two years after the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia (*Nanyang*). At that time, the Japanese wrote the report from their standpoint as a conquering nation.

Their purpose was to determine how to "utilise and control" the Overseas Chinese Organisations (*see Part Five*). However, when one looks at the structure of their report and its bibliography, one can appreciate their thoroughly professional approach and scholarly rigour. This may well be one of the reasons why the Japanese were able to rise again so rapidly after the war was over.

YANG CHIEN CH'ENG
JANUARY 1984

Contents

PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS FOR OVERSEAS CHINESE ORGANISATIONS

CHAPTER 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTHERN CHINESE

Over seven million Overseas Chinese are living in Southeast Asia distributed throughout the region. It can be said that the nearly all of them have come from South China since it is rare to find anyone among them from North or Central China. In fact the overwhelming majority were born in one of the two provinces of Kwangtung or Fukien.

A closer analysis shows that there are Fukienese people who have come to Southeast Asia via the two port cities, Fuchow and Amoy; there are Chaochow people who have come via Swatow; Cantonese and Hakkas who have come from Kwangtung; Kwangsi people who have come via Kwangtung and Hainan and others who have come from Haik'ow.

Described according to country of abode and their place of origin in China, the Chinese who have emigrated have settled in the following countries in Southeast Asia: nearly all the Overseas Chinese in Thailand are of Chaochow origin; the majority of Overseas Chinese in Indochina are Cantonese; those in the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines belong to the labouring strata from Fukien; half of the Malayan Chinese are from Canton and half from Fukien.

As shown in the survey carried out by the Nationalist Government's Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee, the Overseas Chinese population in Thailand is 2,500,000. Of these, 2,200,000 were born in Kwangtung, Ch'aochow people being in the majority and accounting for 1,500,000 of them, Cantonese and Hainanese each accounting for about 250,000, Hakka people, about 200,000, and those born in Fukien, accounting for about 250,000.

The Overseas Chinese population of Malaya is about 1,700,000. Those from Kwangtung number approximately 1,000,000, of these, Cantonese are the most numerous, at about 410,000, while 307,000 are Hakka, 205,000 are from Ch'aochow and 102,000 are Hainanese. As for Fukienese, there are approximately 581,000 and about 102,000 are from Kwangsi.

The Chinese population of the Dutch East Indies is about 1,230,000. Of these 554,000 were born in Kwangtung Province and within that group 246,000 are Hakka people, 184,000 are Cantonese and 123,000 are Chaochow people. Rather more people were born in Fukien, about 667,000, than were born in Kwangtung.