Sarawak Chinese Political Thinking: 1911-1963

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE IN THE INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA SARAWAK (Political Science / History)

Kota Samarahan
2002
Declaration

I hereby declared that
this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree
in the same and other form to any other university.

Voon Jan Cham

24.6.2002

Date
Dedication

For my beloved wife, Ellena Chai Mung Ling

and

my wonderful sons, Ezra and Eden Voon
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Abstract

To understand Sarawak Chinese political thinking, rather than looking at the current happenings, one needs to look at the Chinese historical roots and changes under the different regimes from the pioneering years in the middle of nineteenth century to the year just before Sarawak merged with the Greater Malaysia. This study requires an understanding of colonial regime, Chinese history and the multiculturalism of Sarawak. It is explored from the perspective of the Sarawak Chinese experience alongside other indigenous groups of Sarawak. There was diverse political thinking as evidenced in the numerous dissenting and concurring voices from the Chinese community that found their convergence, as expressed in the anti-colonial sentiments and political compromises.

The central question is where did the Sarawak Chinese loyalty lie? The study also seeks to find out the basic social fabric of the Chinese community and how it developed into its highly organised and effective structure as the cornerstone of the Chinese community. The steady growth of Chinese associations, clubs and other social groups were ample proof of the dynamics of the Chinese society. It is important to examine the spirit that underlined the social life and in turn bring us to a greater understanding of Sarawak Chinese political thinking. Another equally important ingredient of Chinese community is its economic sustainability that had a strong political bearing on the Sarawak Chinese. In this regard, there was networking among the Sarawak Chinese that served to bring about a diversified yet cohesive and vibrant community. The study will reveal the relationship between traditional and modern thinking as well as between social and economic life of Sarawak Chinese.

There was a progressive shift of Chinese nationalism to Sarawak Chinese nationalism and finally to Sarawak nationalism, underpinned by the prevailing spirit of the Chinese community. ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’-The vitality of Sarawak Chinese was perpetuated by the spirits of Yuan, Tong and SA’ATI which all have their relevance and importance to the well-being of the Sarawak multiracial society.
Abstrak


Persoalan pokok adalah di mana terletaknya taat setia masyarakat Cina? Kajian ini juga melihat keadaan sosial yang menjadi batu asas kepada masyarakat Cina dan seterusnya meneliti semanagat yang mendukung kemunculan pelbagai pertubuhan dan badan Cina di kalangan masyarakat Cina.

Faktor ekonomi yang dinamik juga merupakan kekuatan masyarakat Cina di Sarawak dan menjadi landasan yang kukuh dalam mendukung kehebatan politik masyarakat Cina. Kajian ini meninjau hubung kait antara pemikiran tradisional and moden, serta perhubungan antara aspek sosial, ekonomi dan politik di Sarawak.

Semangat yang berkobar-kobar merupakan daya penggerak kepada perubahan masyarakat Cina di Sarawak. Masyarakat Cina telah mengalami pelbagai nasionalisme, iaitu nasionalisme Cina, nasionalisme Cina Sarawak, dan nasionalisme Sarawak. Kajian ini juga membuktikan kewujudan semangat Yuan, Tong dan SA 'ATI yang sangat relevan kepada masyarakat majmuk di Sarawak.
### Glossary and Abbreviations

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<td>Adat</td>
<td>A Malay/Dayak word for custom or tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiau Xin</td>
<td>Literally ‘heart’ of overseas Chinese; the preservation of Chinese culture depends on the continuous link of the overseas Chinese with their counterparts in China.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARJASA</td>
<td>Barisan Ra’ayat Jati Sarawak</td>
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<td>BPS</td>
<td>Barisan Pemuda Sarawak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coloniality</td>
<td>Referring to the two forms of colonialism namely the Brooke regime (1841-1941) and the British colonial rule (1946-1963) and their impingement on the peoples of Sarawak.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Di Yuan</td>
<td>Di literally ‘place’; Di Yuan refers to the relationship of two or more persons or groups of people who came from the same place of origin in China.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>Foreign</td>
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<td>Fan Zhi</td>
<td>Anti-colonialism</td>
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<td>Han Jian</td>
<td>Chinese traitor/collaborator (against Chinese)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hsien</td>
<td>Administrative district</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hua Chiau</td>
<td>Overseas Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hua Yi</td>
<td>Chinese overseas or resident Chinese outside Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kanchu</td>
<td>Literally ‘head of a river’ or A title acknowledged by the Brookes for prospective Chinese leader to open up new areas for economic purpose and human settlement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kapitan China</td>
<td>Chinese leader appointed by the colonisers for each dialect group or a group of people at a specified area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ge Ming</td>
<td>Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongsi</td>
<td>Chinese communal partnership sharing the same economic, social and political interests and was self-governing communities regulated by their own laws and beliefs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ku Chi</td>
<td>Literally ‘air of the bone’ or unyielding strong spirit.</td>
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<td>MCA</td>
<td>Malayan Chinese Association</td>
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<td>MNU</td>
<td>Malay National Union</td>
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<td>PANAS</td>
<td>Party Negara Sarawak</td>
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<td>PESAKA</td>
<td>Party Pesaka Anak Sarawak</td>
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<tr>
<td>RRO</td>
<td>Restricted Residence Ordinance</td>
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<td>SCA</td>
<td>Sarawak Chinese Association</td>
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<td>SDA</td>
<td>Sarawak Dayak Association</td>
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<td>SNAP</td>
<td>Sarawak National Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUPP</td>
<td>Sarawak United People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pei Gui</td>
<td>Literally ‘return to North’ or return to China from Nanyang (South seas).</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA’ATI</td>
<td>Literally ‘one heart’ or a Malay/Dayak word adopted by a political party (SUPP) as a slogan to unite all the races of Sarawak.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sinkheh</td>
<td>Newly arrived overseas Chinese labourers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tong Chou</td>
<td>Literally ‘Together we raise fund’</td>
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<td>Tong Ban</td>
<td>Literally ‘together we manage’</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td><strong>Xue Yuan</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ye Yuan</strong></td>
<td>Ye literally 'occupation'; Ye Yuan refers to the relationship of two or more persons, or groups of people who have the same occupation or profession.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yuan</strong></td>
<td>Fate of two or more persons who are destined to meet for certain purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zheng Yuan</strong></td>
<td>Zheng literally 'politics'; Zheng Yuan refers to the relationship of groups of people who have the same political ideals/interests.</td>
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Acknowledgements

This thesis has drawn on the ideas, expertise and encouragement of many people in Sarawak. I must sincerely thank them all.

My largest debt is to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Michael Leigh, the Director of the Institute of East Asian Studies, from the University of Malaysia Sarawak. Dr. Leigh has consistently shared his scholarship, experiences, guidance and patience to me throughout my study. Dr. Leigh is truly my inspirational teacher.

I should also like to thank Professor Dr. Rashid Abdullah and Professor Dr. Zawawi Ibrahim for their encouragement and professional help. I must not forget the staff and friends, who are in the Institute, Faculty of Social Science and the Post-Graduate Division of 'Universiti Malaysia Sarawak' or UNIMAS, for their generous support and assistance.

I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Daniel Chew of Sarawak Development Institute for his encouragement and positive input. My appreciation also goes to all that I have interviewed, especially Mr. Wu An, Mr. Chan Siaw Hee, Mr. Bong Kee Chok and others. Mr. Wu An has been most generous, in providing relevant materials to me. My sincere thanks also goes to the helpful staff of Sarawak Museum Archive and SUPP Headquarter in Kuching. Special thanks goes to Uncle Bernard Selosa.

In my Kuching High School, I extend my thanks to those who directly and indirectly helped and encouraged me. My special thanks goes to Madam Jong Siaw Hui who works in the school library and Mr. Liew Su Fah who shared much with me.

To my wife Ellena and sons Ezra and Eden, thanks will never be enough for your Christian prayers and good cheer. May Lord Jesus continues to guide us.

Voon Jan Cham
Kota Samarahan
June 2002
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Chapter One

Introduction

As early as 1846, Henry Keppel made this observation regarding the coming of overseas Chinese to Sarawak, “…The mixed breed of the Chinese with the Malays or Dyaks are a good-looking and industrious race, partaking much more of the Chinese character than that of the natives of this country. This mainly arises from education and early formed habits, which are altogether Chinese; and in religion and customs they likewise follow, in a great measure, the paternal stock. The race is worthy of attention, as the future possessors of Borneo. The number of this people cannot be stated, but it must amount to many thousand persons: 3000 were said to be on their way to the Borneon territory.”¹ This is perhaps, the earliest observation about the character of Sarawak immigrant Chinese. Keppel described the coming of Chinese in Sarawak as the future possessors of Borneo. As immigrants, Chinese in Sarawak faced many challenges with a common goal of creating a vibrant and dynamic community alongside other peoples of Sarawak. In pursuit of this goal, Sarawak Chinese began to engage in local politics. Sarawak Chinese struggled with their social and political assertions, in addition to their identity and livelihood, toward the changing environments around them.

This study focuses on the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese, from the period 1911 to 1963. The year 1911 marked the success of Sun Yatsen’s Revolution in China, which ushered in, new political changes and development for Chinese worldwide. Whereas the year 1963, Sarawak joined Malaysia and was political inclined to the new government of Malaysia. It is important to examine the motive of the immigrant Sarawak Chinese and how far they had ‘possessed’ this land of Borneo The Chinese community had stood out as a vibrant, resilient, productive and assertive racial group in Sarawak. In terms of political thinking, Sarawak Chinese had constantly experienced political shift, conceptual modification, ideological extrapolation and other changes. As Chinese immigrants in Sarawak, their loyalty was always a critical problem, loyalty both to motherland China and the immigrant country. It is my contention that Sarawak Chinese were seriously misunderstood and were politically marginalised. This caused serious social and political problems and in turn impeded the development of Sarawak. Thus, it is extremely important to analyse the different perspectives of Sarawak Chinese political thinking in order to cast aside the suspicions held against Sarawak Chinese.

My argument is that Sarawak Chinese, as immigrants, traditionally had always showed their patriotism toward their Chinese counterparts elsewhere and eventually gave their allegiance to Sarawak when they were accepted as one of the peoples of Sarawak. The shift of allegiance was primarily due to various political reasons such as the immigration rules, ideological difference and power struggle, which I shall discuss in the text.

¹ Henry Keppel, Expedition to Borneo, 1846, pp 66-67
The Question of Loyalty

The challenge that the immigrant Chinese faced was to adjust and adapt to their new political environment in Sarawak. Sarawak Chinese were caught between, on the one hand, their Hua Chiau (overseas Chinese) and Sinocentric thinking and, on the other hand, the Brooke regime and multiculturalism of Sarawak. The question of loyalty did not arise for the pioneering Chinese in Sarawak. The Brookes, for example, instituted Chinese governing systems like the Kapitan China and the Kanchu, which promoted intra-Chinese political thinking based on Chinese in China and overseas Chinese elsewhere. The priority for the early Sarawak pioneers centred on providing mutual help and cooperation among themselves and especially among their respective dialect groups. This study examines the early Sarawak Chinese thinking. T’ien, affirmed his observation concerning Sarawak, “...At the same time, from the Chinese who settled here (Sarawak) and what they have preserved in terms of the structure of Chinese society, we can observe the developing behaviour and the inter-relationship of the overseas Chinese society, and discover what were long lost in their old villages (China)”2 The pioneers and the early settlers of Sarawak Chinese had manifested Sinocentricity and Hua Chiau3 mentality. Chinese traditional philosophy is evident in the literature written by Sarawak Chinese. Chinese literature to a large extent determines the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese. It was a grave mistake to demand Sarawak Chinese to discard their identity and to question their allegiance to their immigrant country.

When the private colonialists, namely the Brookes, gained power in Sarawak, their attitudes towards the Sinocentric Chinese varied from time to time. Thus, it is not surprising that Sarawak Chinese loyalty was at times questioned by the Brookes. For example, Liu Shanbang challenged the political legitimacy of James Brooke in 1857.4 However, the Brooke regime continued to facilitate Chinese immigration to develop Sarawak and also developed the early multiculturalism in Sarawak. The Brookes allowed Chinese associations and Chinese education to be developed, alongside the Mission schools and other vernacular schools. But their rights to develop Chinese education were seriously challenged by the colonial authority, later.

Under the Colonial rule (1946-1963), there were two ideological camps, namely leftist and rightist thinkers, and that caused a split in the Sarawak Chinese community. Sarawak Chinese faced a most politically turbulent time under the colonial authority, which sought to eliminate socialist thinkers and followers. In the name of security, many suppressive laws were introduced which directly affected Sarawak Chinese. The colonial authority also tried to extend English medium education, and this posed a threat to the survival of Chinese education.

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3 Hua Chiau refers to Chinese staying overseas or overseas Chinese
The apolitical aside, Sarawak Chinese manifested the ‘Right’ and ‘Left’ nationalisms as a result of their political aspirations towards western or European influence and the rapid ideological prominence of China respectively. Again the loyalty of Sarawak Chinese toward Sarawak as a colony of the Crown was under scrutiny and Chinese faced the problem of losing their identity as Chinese or even their nationality as Sarawakians. Many Chinese were forced to go back to China, against their will. Despite all this political flux and fluidity, Sarawak Chinese came out strong and positive in their political outlook (these positive expressions are discussed in the text of this study).

The Sarawak Chinese community faced another critical problem of being political divided. It is most appropriate to quote a renowned Chinese scholar, T’ien Ju-K’ang who has asserted his observation, “If the double loyalty of the Chinese in the Nanyang today is a political problem, it is because there are underlying social and economic problems of considerable magnitude”. Sarawak Chinese, after experiencing the harsh realities of Japanese occupation, both in China and in Sarawak had begun to assert their political rights in their eventual homeland Sarawak. In the face of new political events like the new colonial regime in Sarawak in 1946 and the Cold-War politics worldwide, Sarawak Chinese began to shift their political thinking. Sarawak Chinese and their encounters with the colonial powers had caused the emergence of Sarawak Chinese nationalism, which spanned from the Japanese occupation right up to late fifties before a multiracial Sarawak nationalism was born.

The strong Sarawak Chinese nationalism manifested in the fifties forced the British colonial authority to revert to the classic tactic of divide and rule in Sarawak. The failure of the colonial authority to divide and rule the Chinese by Chinese dialect groups had made Sarawak Chinese an emerging powerful force for the struggle of self-government in the climate of anti-colonialism. The colonial government continued its policy of divide and rule in the multiracial society of Sarawak. Among the Sarawak Chinese, the question of loyalty to Sarawak was highlighted once again by the colonial authority.

Party politics gradually dominated the political life of the different races of Sarawak since 1959. Sarawak Chinese represented one-third of the total population in Sarawak and their highly political and ideological exposure and articulation caused them to be the main political players. Thus, the pro- and anti-colonial dichotomy set in among the Chinese. The juxtaposition of races in search of power and political representation had created a unique experience, with many lessons to be learnt. The unique role of Sarawak Chinese, as compared with all the

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6 One must acknowledge that Malays had been very active politically in the period 1946-1949, but were placed on the defensive by British repression after the assassination of the second British Governor. This compares with the Malayan Peninsula, where leftist Chinese were hunted down as a result of armed struggle there.
7 See R.S. Milne, “Political Parties in Sarawak and Sabah” in *Journal Southeast Asian History*, Vol.6, No. 2, September 1965, p 104
indigenous groups fighting against colonialism, offered an interesting post-colonial study. An accurate and unbiased understanding of political thinking is vital for the future of Sarawak Chinese.

The hastening of the creation of Malaysia, between 1961-1963, had the Sarawak Chinese further divided into the pro- and anti-Malaysia Chinese. In the face of world political flux, many Chinese in Sarawak exhibited a deep sense of nationalism towards their motherland China. Once again, Sarawak Chinese were misunderstood as unpatriotic toward their new ‘home’. Although Sarawak Chinese loyalty was always questioned, they had managed the changes well. They continued to assert and respond to the political and social challenges. And more importantly, Sarawak Chinese showed vitality in their struggles for political participation.

The vitality of Sarawak Chinese

The vitality of Sarawak Chinese was evident as we examine the multiracialism of Sarawak. Nationalist poet Wu An, through his popular genre, has expressed his personal observation regarding Sarawak Chinese, which have, to a large part, been integrated into the multiracial society of Sarawak. The following poem illustrates this momentous change in the Sarawak Chinese thinking.

“To those who love to sing, sing aloud!
Those who want to praise, Praise!
In the broad arms of our motherland (Sarawak),
Open up our pure hearts!

I could see the mountains, plains and the seas,
Greedily absorbing the clouds,
I would like to plant seeds, and wait till tomorrow.
It will be like Dayak paddy, grow with the fruits of love.”

Sarawak Chinese faced a persisting problem of being perceived as disloyal to Sarawak. Sarawak Chinese had been most assertive and creative as a whole community and as dialect groups in different parts of Sarawak. For example, under the Brookes, Sarawak Chinese faced hardship and difficulties as immigrant Chinese. Sarawak Chinese were able to pool their resources and set up different dialect associations. They built Chinese schools and engaged in small businesses, in order to survive. This gave rise to a strong sense of brotherhood and belonging among themselves, which I call the spirit of “Yuan”. Yuan, in different forms, is the binding force for Sarawak Chinese. The spirit of Yuan encouraged friendship and cooperation for a particular dialect group as well as among the dialect groups of Sarawak Chinese. One can argue that this spirit of Yuan had divided the dialect groups and caused disunity among the Sarawak Chinese community. This is

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8 Khoo Lip Kee. Dungshang de Shipian [Poems on the Shield], Advanco, Kuala Lumpur, 1988 (Reprint), pp 79-80. This poem is entitled At the Peak of the Mountain, composed in August, 1959. These are the last two stanzas and the earlier four stanzas are skipped. Many of Wu An’s poems as from 1959 onwards, reflected the multiracial society of Sarawak.
untrue, as I argue that the unity of the Sarawak Chinese community must start from smaller units like the dialect associations, which bring together Chinese of the same clan, before proceeding to realise a larger inter-dialect cooperation and unity.

Then after the world, in 1945, Sarawak Chinese schools faced a serious problem of restarting their lessons due to under funding. In an unprecedented way, Sarawak Chinese from different associations and dialect groups came together and successfully worked together to restart Chinese education in Sarawak. This is what I call the spirit of ‘Tong’ which had prevailed and benefited the Chinese community of Sarawak for a long time. Sarawak Chinese were united after the War (1945) as a result of Tong spirit. For example, Chinese schools in Kuching used Mandarin as the medium of instruction. This is another clear proof of the vitality of Sarawak Chinese in overcoming their common problem as a result of political persecutions under different regimes, including that of Japanese occupation.

Sarawak Chinese had slowly begun to appreciate and accept the other races of Sarawak. It is to be noted that the indigenous peoples of Sarawak has, likewise accepted Sarawak Chinese (This important aspect is, however, beyond the scope of this study). Sarawak Chinese had long realised the importance of political participation to fight for their rights and interests. After 1959, Sarawak Chinese, together with other races of Sarawak started a political party named Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP) with Chinese as its core members. In an effort to highlight the multiracial composition of SUPP, the leaders had instituted the party motto called SA’ATI, which literally means ‘One Heart’. The SA’ATI spirit again showed the vitality of Sarawak Chinese leaders to realise a united multiracial society. Indeed, the spirit gives life and one can find these unique ingredients in the political struggles of Sarawak Chinese.

The Debate

The loyalty of Sarawak was critically debated amongst the politicians and the Sarawak Chinese community in general. The question of loyalty is central to this thesis and must be well articulated in order to avoid future political conflicts and misunderstanding.

Firstly, the Brookes questioned, to a certain extent, the loyalty of Sarawak Chinese. This was clearly evident after the Chinese nationalist Liu Shanbang staged an insurrection against the first White Rajah of Sarawak, James Brooke, in 1857. Sarawak Chinese under the Brookes were not allowed to involve themselves in the politics of Sarawak. Secondly, the colonial government had consistently demanded loyalty from the Sarawak Chinese community. For instance, many Sarawak Chinese were forced to leave Sarawak due to their associations with communist ideology. Thirdly, when the Malaysia concept was introduced, and pursued by the colonial government in Sarawak, once again Sarawak Chinese

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loyalty was questioned that resulted in many Sarawak Chinese leaving Sarawak. The question of Chinese loyalty to Sarawak was constantly raised. The pursuit of Sarawak Chinese loyalty toward Sarawak by the different regimes in Sarawak, created social and political turmoil that went to the heart of the debate about the character of Sarawak Chinese political thinking from 1911 to 1963.

When the Brookes, the colonial government and the ‘champions’ of the formation of Malaysia continued to doubt the loyalty of Sarawak Chinese, Sarawak Chinese of different backgrounds, inevitably were dichotomised in their political thinking and actions. This created another debate about loyalty among the Sarawak Chinese community. In these three phases of history, there were firstly the pro-Brooke and the anti-Brooke sentiments among the Sarawak Chinese community. Secondly, there were the pro-colonial and anti-colonial Sarawak Chinese who sought to express their loyalty to Sarawak differently. And finally, we have the pro-Malaysia and anti-Malaysia factions among the Sarawak Chinese community, who debated the question of loyalty fiercely.

The debate concerning Sarawak Chinese loyalty has caused much political turbulence and many lives were sacrificed as a result. However, the political conflicts amongst Sarawak Chinese under different regimes allowed Sarawak Chinese to show and manifest their vitality. Sarawak Chinese were divided by world political ideologies, such as communism and democracy, but at the same time Sarawak Chinese were gradually being integrated into the multiracial politics of Sarawak.

Today, in Malaysia, the debate about the loyalty of Sarawak Chinese still remains. My thesis seeks to erase the notion of Sarawak Chinese, or even in the wider sense Malaysian Chinese, being disloyal or not possessing a sense of patriotism to Sarawak or Malaysia. I argue that Sarawak Chinese began to show their loyalty to Sarawak ever since the Brookes. I further argue that Sarawak Chinese manifested their allegiance to Sarawak under the British colonial rule. The debate about loyalty should and must be set aside and settled for the good of Sarawak and Malaysia. This study covers the period from 1911 to 1963, which is a sufficient time to establish the loyalty of Sarawak Chinese to Sarawak.

The “Question of Loyalty” and the “Vitality of Sarawak Chinese” are directly related to the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese at different phases of the history of Sarawak. This is why I give this thesis the title “Sarawak Chinese political thinking: 1911-1963”. By examining the change and development of Sarawak Chinese political thinking, the debate regarding Sarawak Chinese loyalty to Sarawak and Malaysia can be well understood.

I have juxtaposed the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese with the many manifestations of Sarawak Chinese vitality such as the spirits of Yuan, Tong and SA’ATI. I have justified the importance of Sarawak Chinese vitality by analysing the three forms of nationalism dominating the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese (1911-1963) namely Chinese nationalism, Sarawak Chinese nationalism and Sarawak nationalism.
I will now give the outline of my thesis and an overview of my approach. In approaching the subject matter, on the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese, I first provide the traditional background of the immigrant Chinese in Chapter Two. I present the past governing systems of the Sarawak Chinese according to their dialect groups such as the Kongsis, the Kapitan China and the Kanchu systems. The section on the spirit of Yuan is very basic to my systematic study of Sarawak Chinese. The spirit of Yuan has been the central binding force in the Sarawak Chinese community ever since Chinese set their foot in Sarawak.

I then examine the private colonialists, namely the Brookes, and the multicultural aspects of Sarawak, which were part and parcel of the life of Sarawak Chinese in Chapter Three. As it was, the Brookes allowed Chinese education, and vernacular schools to be set up. But the Brookes were more enthusiastic in establishing the Mission schools such as the Catholic, the Anglican and the Methodist schools. Conflicts arose as Chinese education faced pressures from within and without the Chinese community. This chapter will analyse the Sarawak Chinese as immigrants who cannot be totally dissociated from the realities of mixing and socialising with the local indigenous groups and the Brookes.

After addressing the contexts of the local peoples and the immigrant Chinese, I go on to examine the political assertions of Sarawak Chinese in Chapter Four. Chinese nationalism was the underlying force that motivated the Sarawak Chinese. This was in a period of new emerging anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic sentiments, as Sarawak Chinese showed their patriotism toward their motherland, namely China.

In Chapter Five, I endeavour to analyse the nationalism of the rightist Sarawak Chinese. I examine the political thinking of pro-capitalist Chinese leaders such as Stephen Yong, Ong Kee Hui and Tu Nai Ping in the context of post-War politics and the beginning of colonial government in Sarawak. This chapter is vital, as we observe and analyse a section of Sarawak Chinese who were influenced by the British democratic system.

By contrast, Chapter Six examines the leftist nationalism, which was gaining popularity and importance among the Chinese community, especially the Chinese educated. I examine the influence of the great Chinese literati Lu Xun whose works were so familiar and articulated among the Chinese-educated, both the wealthy and the poorer Chinese in Sarawak. I also look into the works of T’ien Ju-K’ang and Sarawak nationalist poet Wu An, in order to pin down the importance of leftist political thinking among a large section of Sarawak Chinese in the fifties.

In Chapter Seven, I synthesise the leftist and the rightist thinking, and examine the emergence of Sarawak Chinese nationalism. Sarawak Chinese nationalism is extremely important as Sarawak Chinese learned to accept the new reality in Sarawak. Sarawak Chinese were to make up their mind as to their nationality and even their political ideology. They had to learn and accustom to political changes, locally and worldwide. This crucial period (the fifties) saw
another climax of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in Sarawak among the Chinese community in Sarawak. I examine the Tong spirit that underlined the Sarawak Chinese political thinking, especially in the field of education. This thesis examines another vital milestone of Chinese education in Sarawak, which had unified Sarawak Chinese in an unprecedented way.

Chapter Eight of this thesis analyses the Sarawak Chinese responses to the Malaysia concept. This chapter concentrates on the pro-Malaysia Sarawak Chinese and their struggles to realise a new nation. In particular, I examine the role of Councillors such as James Wong Kim Ming. Sarawak Chinese contributions towards the new nation-state are not to be underestimated.

In the next Chapter, I devote my study to the struggles of the anti-Malaysia Chinese in Sarawak. I discuss the literature and the philosophies that guided the anti-Malaysia Sarawak Chinese. Important leaders of this period such as Bong Kee Chok and Weng Ming Chyuan are critically examined. The communist ideology is an important part of the history of Sarawak Chinese in particular. This chapter will illuminate readers with the political philosophy of the anti-Malaysia Sarawak Chinese.

In Chapter Ten, I again seek the common ingredient of the pro-Malaysia and the anti-Malaysia Chinese. It is my contention that Sarawak nationalism was born and was manifested in the spirit of SA’ATI. This important turn of events was largely brought about by the formation of political parties in Sarawak. I also examine the political base of the Chinese community in Sarawak.

My concluding Chapter summarizes the analysis of this thesis. I discuss the spirit of Yuan, Tong and SA’ATI and their relevance to the Sarawak community as a whole. I emphasise the importance of three forms of nationalism experienced by Sarawak Chinese namely Chinese nationalism, Sarawak Chinese nationalism and Sarawak nationalism. I also discuss briefly the implications of my analysis in the Postscript attached.

The Context

Before we go on to discuss the “Analysis and Literature Review”, we need to understand the context of the study. One must be aware that Sarawak Chinese political thinking cannot be studied without examining the characteristics of various races of Sarawak. Sarawak has undergone different political phases, namely the Brunei sultanate, the Brooke regime, the Japanese occupation and the Colonial rule, prior to its merger with Malaysia in 1963. The population of Sarawak was characterised by its sparseness in distribution, covering a total area of 47,071 square miles,10 with the Chinese population gravitating towards urban towns, though still with the majority of Chinese living in rural areas.11 The

population was also characterised by its multiple ethnic groups, namely the indigenous groups (Bidayuh, Iban, Malay, Melanau, Kayan and Kenyah, etc.), European and Chinese cultural groups plus other non-indigenous Asiatic cultural groups (Indian, Ceylonese, Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, Filipino and others).

When James Brooke assumed the Government of Sarawak in 1841, there were 10,500 inhabitants stretching from Tanjung Datu to Samarahan. In 1871, the population was 141,546, extending the area of Sarawak to as far as Kedurong, Bintulu under the second Rajah. Thirty years later, in 1909, the population was estimated at 416,000. In 1939, the total population was 490,585. After the war, it increased to 546,385 (1947), 613,879 (1955), 744,529 (1960) and 770,000 (1962). Thus, the first thing to note is the shifting migratory patterns of Sarawak Chinese and the multiracial character of Sarawak's population in different localities.

The widely distributed Chinese population, although gravitating towards the urban areas, posed an obvious obstacle to a more in-depth study of all Sarawak Chinese. However, Kuching or the First division of Sarawak was the focus of early political activities. Chinese politics diffused into other urban cities like Sibu and Miri later. Therefore, it is my contention that a study of the political leaders in Kuching is representative of the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese.

The traditional sources of power such as Kapitan China or Area Headmen can be studied, as the dynamics of the system was the same in urban or rural settings. This study did not carry out any fieldwork in rural areas. It must be admitted that the economic power and the numbers of rural Chinese are not to be underestimated, as pointed out by T'ien and Chew who had both carried out researches in rural Sarawak. T'ien, for instance, pointed out that, "The First division of Sarawak contains both rural and urban areas. These two types of social environment are economically interdependent...".

The distribution, immigration and the different Chinese dialect groups in Sarawak in different times are some of the complicating factors that need to be

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14 J.L. Noakes, Op. Cit. pp 3-4. According to Noakes, there were inaccuracies in the census until the scientific method of census was introduced in 1947. One should note the increase of population with the annexation of various parts of Sarawak at different years under the Brookes. For the annexation of Sarawak under the Brooke regime, see also a map by Graham Irwin, Nineteenth Century Borneo, A Study of Diplomatic Rivalry, Donald Moore Books, Singapore, 1955, behind p 251.
17 T'ien, Op. Cit. p 2
looked into in this study. As early as 1877, the estimated Chinese population of Sarawak was 7,000 and in 1909, it numbered 45,000. Towards the end of the Brooke rule, the number increased to 123,626 with sixty-four percent having been born in Sarawak. During the war, between 1939 and 1945, there was a net immigration of 5,000 Chinese only and the total population of Chinese stood at 145,158.

Immigration played an important role in the rapid growth of Chinese in Sarawak. In the case of the First division (Kuching), there was more than sixteen fold increase from 3,823 in 1876 to 62,121 in 1947 and in Third division (Sibu), more than a hundredfold increase from 534 in 1871 to 58,899 in 1947. There were twenty-three census districts in 1960. Limbang and Lawas districts had a combined population of less than 30,000, of which 3,000 were Chinese whereas by comparison Kuching Municipal itself had 51,000, of which 37,000 were Chinese and Sibu urban had about 30,000, of which 23,000 were Chinese. Thus, Chinese immigrants gravitated towards Kuching and Sibu, which later became the political centres of Sarawak Chinese.

The Chinese, together with the European, Indians and Javanese were considered non-indigenous in Sarawak. There were seven clearly distinguishable dialect groups as in 1960, namely Hakka (70,000), Foochow (70,000), Hokkien (28,000), Teochew (22,000), Cantonese (17,000), Henghua (8,000) and Hainanese (5,000). The Hakka and Teochew formed the largest dialect groups in the First and Second divisions whereas the Hokkien mainly stayed in the First and Third divisions. Most of the Cantonese were found in the Third division while the large majority of Foochow resided in the Third division.

Chinese population thus, was an important element to be examined in Sarawak’s early politics. In 1939, Chinese made up of 25.2% of Sarawak’s population, after the Sea Dayak or Iban (34.2%) and ahead of the Malay (18.9%). By 1960 Chinese were 30.8% of the total population, close to Sea Dayak (31.9%) and ahead of the Malay (17.9%). Sarawak’s large Chinese population made the Chinese less assimilative to the indigenous communities and the large size enabled the Chinese identity to be very much retained. This makes study of the Chinese in

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20 Ibid. pp 56-7


22 Ibid. pp 29 and 57. Figures are rounded.

23 Ibid. p 58. See J.L. Noakes, Op. Cit. p 34. In 1947, there were at least nine sub-groups of Chinese, namely Cantonese, Foochow, Hakka (includes Kheh), Henghua (includes Hockchia), Hokkien (includes Chawan), Hylam (Hainanese), Kwangs, Luichew, Teochew and other or unspecified Chinese. The Census showed that Kiangsi and Luichew were numerically insignificant and could be classified under the ‘other or unspecified Chinese’. It is to be noted that Teochew had a much smaller total than the Hokkien in the first division.

24 Ibid. p 59
Sarawak more meaningful, as their Chineseness is largely retained. This is indeed the plus side of studying the political thinking of Sarawak Chinese

Analysis

After touching on the population of Sarawak Chinese and their context, we are ready to look into how the contents of this study are analysed. A large part of the study focuses on historical research based on empirical data. There has been little serious scholarly research in Chinese language into this part of Sarawak history, especially from the perspective of the Sarawak Chinese and in particular the Chinese educated. The study analyses the Chinese sources, which are generally sinocentric, whereas the European sources are generally Eurocentric. The difference between sinocentric and Eurocentric is at best simply due to the language and communication barrier, and at worst due to bias and prejudice of the two. The difference constantly guided the analysis of the study and the research process resembles that of an open court trial between the sinocentric, presenting their Chinese sources and the Eurocentric Chinese arguing from the European sources.

The other element of the study is the inevitable historical or moral judgment that needs to be carefully analysed. For example, many a time, Chinese are labeled as 'chauvinists' and 'communists'. The study will seek to find the historical evidence that may justify the labelling of Chinese. What were the political motives behind certain 'accusations'? This study also examines the political actions of Sarawak Chinese under the Brooke regime, Japanese occupation and Colonial authority.

This study endeavours to show Sarawak Chinese expressing their nationalistic feelings. As Chinese, where did their political allegiance go? How did the nationalistic feelings come about? The political disfranchisement of Sarawak Chinese and the anti-imperialistic movement in China, for example gave rise to Chinese nationalism among the Chinese in Sarawak. The promise (1941) and the struggle for Sarawak self-independence were subsequently manifested in the form of Sarawak Chinese nationalism. And finally the Japanese Occupation and the continuous struggle for Sarawak Independence vis-à-vis the formation of Malaysia, which gave rise to Sarawak nationalism. In this study, political events and figures were analysed to ascertain the existence and the development of Chinese political thinking in Sarawak.

The analyses of early Sarawak Chinese politics are done in two frameworks. First, it must be understood that Sarawak Chinese were immigrants from China and that their political philosophy was largely based on the works of Confucius and Sun Yatsen. The birth of New China in 1949 popularised the political thinking of Mao Tzedong, which was extended to Sarawak Chinese. In addition, the tremendous influence of great literati such as Lu Xun continued to shape the political thinking of a large section of Sarawak Chinese. Therefore, failing to grasp the above perspectives will simply cause the study to be shallow and hollow.
The second framework of this study is to understand the western capitalist mindset of Sarawak Chinese. The collapse of Manchu Dynasty in 1911, the popularised ideology of Sun Yat-sen and the influence of 'democratic' Kuomintang and its extension in Sarawak are among some of the political sources of western capitalistic thinking. More importantly, the Brooke-sponsored and the colonial-sponsored regimes promoted western legal and socio-economic systems in Sarawak and thus produced a generation of "westernised" Chinese. Free market and Mission schools are some of the examples that illustrate this point. Thus, the study of Sarawak Chinese political thinking must be anchored in this perspective as well.

Apart from these two basic approaches to historical research in Sarawak, other scholarly works are utilised to examine Sarawak politics. For example, Leigh observed that the politics of Sarawak display a more variegated and flexible pattern than that of West Malaysia where the influence of all pervasive ethnic identities is only too apparent.25 This study will look into the Chinese factor that may have contributed to Sarawak's more variegated and flexible pattern. Leigh pointed out that political divisions within racial communities provided a ready basis for compromise, forcing the factions to seek allies outside their community in the quest for political power. This study will examine the intra-Chinese conflicts within a party like SLPPP and see how the two factions seek to compromise in their search for political power.26

The immigrant Chinese from China, in particular, were experiencing the shift from feudalism to a new society free from colonialism and imperialism. The framework of Cold War is an important element in this study. Regional politics, involving many countries in Southeast Asia, is also examined.

26 Ibid, p 39