

Conclusion

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Conclusion

During the first few years following the end of World War II, Malaya's Chinese community continued to hold on to the strong China-oriented identity consciousness that it had developed during the late 1930s. On questions concerning the protection of their rights in Malaya and what the future of Malaya ought to be, the actions of the Malayan Chinese centered largely around the activities of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), and they showed little interest in the comparatively broad range of rights guaranteed them under the Malayan Union scheme proposed in October 1945, due by and large to apathy caused by a feeling among the majority of Chinese that Malaya was not their homeland but merely a temporary place of residence. The prevailing feeling at the time was that even if they would obtain Malayan citizenship, they should hold on to their Chinese nationality, and since the legal scheme offered by the British allowed them to do so, it is little wonder that no one in the Chinese community thought of discarding his Chinese nationality and giving up his right to participate in China's internal affairs. Under such conditions, the Malayan Chinese movement to demand legitimate rights in their country of residence was by no means contradictory to the movement to strengthen China. It is for this reason that we see even the MCP referring to China as the homeland and becoming actively involved in supporting the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) efforts in China.

Involvement in China's internal affairs usually meant supporting either the CCP or the Kuomintang (KMT). Immediately after the war, both CCP and KMT support groups in Malaya joined together in commemorating such events

as China's victory in its anti-Japanese war and the Double Tenth, the beginning of the Republican revolt against the Qing dynasty on October 10, 1911. As tensions and rivalry between the two parties increased in China, these celebrations in Malaya were divided into separate venues along party lines.

The gatherings and activities supporting the CCP were quashed in January of 1950, ironically in the same month in which diplomatic relations were established between Britain and the People's Republic of China. The last large-scale public gatherings in Malaya to support the CCP were none other than the celebrations commemorating that event.

From the frequency with which CCP support rallies and gatherings were taking place up until their suppression, the diversity of the groups participating in them, and the number of Malayan Chinese who got involved, we can get a very good idea of the level of influence which China exerted within the Chinese community during the late 1940s.

Both the Malayan-born leftist groups, beginning with the MCP, and the China-born leftist organizations, beginning with the Malayan branch of the China Democratic League (CDL), had been declared illegal by the British colonial authorities during the late 1940s; and from that time on those Malayan-born leftist factions which were able to survive lost interest in Chinese affairs and began concentrating on Malayan national liberation struggles, primarily because in Malaya the main issue had become the obtaining of rights as Malayan citizens. (Nevertheless, the political stance and struggle strategy taken by these groups almost always followed the CCP party line; in this regard, the MCP made no effort to develop a position and strategy of its own right up until it was virtually disbanded in 1989.) The Malayan Chinese farmers, who formed one of the main bases of support for the MCP, were no different. They too became well aware of the importance of gaining guarantees to landownership rights and earning a livelihood in Malaya, and in the process lost interest in what was happening in China's politics. There were three political forces during that time which grappled with the issues of obtaining and protecting the rights of the local Chinese as Malaysians. These three were the MCP, the Chinese consulates in Malaya, and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Due to its suppression and subsequent underground guerrilla activities, the MCP lost the ability to play any legal and active role in protecting the civil rights of the local Chinese, while the Chinese consulates, on which the Malayan Chinese community had high hopes, were shown to be powerless to help. In the end, it was the MCA which played the most effective role as a legitimate Malaya-oriented organization able to bring forth a Malayan identity consciousness within the local Chinese community including the Chinese farmers.

Many of the nonpolitical organizations which sympathized with the CCP went through a period of transformation during the early half of the 1950s during which they either disappeared altogether or lost interest in the CCP and China and transformed themselves into Malaya-oriented organizations. The organizations which disappeared were primarily those which had been directly associated with the CCP or CDL, or had become deeply involved in the activities of these two China-based political parties. Those who transformed themselves into Malaya-oriented organizations were mainly those which had been tied to China for more emotional than ideological reasons. The main motivation for their transformation, as we have seen in the case of the Singapore Fujian Association (Hokkien Huay Kuan), lay in the all important necessity to obtaining legitimate rights as full-fledged citizens of Malaya, or at least in the all important necessity perceived by the leadership ranks of these organizations.

While many leaders of the CCP-affiliated political groups in Malaya were deported to China, many others returned to China of their own accord in order to battle the KMT or participate in the People's Republic state-building process. Of the leaders who remained in Malaya, there were those who were arrested and imprisoned or fled underground to join the MCP's guerrilla forces; but the majority gradually adopted a strong sense of belonging to Malayan society. Judging from the changing editorial position presented in local Chinese-language newspapers and the conditions under which Malayan Chinese became involved in local politics, it seems that over several years the whole Chinese community in Malaya followed a similar path.

It is difficult for us to determine whether it was the strong-arm, repressive tactics of the British authorities or the transformation in consciousness taking place in the Malayan Chinese community that resulted in what actually came to pass. Both were indeed important factors, but probably more important were (1) it becoming crucially important for the Malayan Chinese to obtain legitimate rights to a livelihood in Malaya, and (2) the establishment of the PRC no longer requiring support to the CCP from overseas Chinese, or conversely, economic policies of land reform, implemented by the new PRC regime to confiscate the wealth of overseas Chinese or their families on the mainland, sparking an anti-PRC reaction abroad. One more important internal factor was undoubtedly frustration over the local Chinese consulates' powerlessness to help the Malayan Chinese community in any way.

After CCP organizational activities were completely blocked, KMT-affiliated groups were tacitly allowed to continue. However, restrictions on these groups were gradually strengthened, and the KMT's biggest yearly event, the Double Tenth celebrations, ceased to be held in 1958, the year after Malayan

independence was attained. Here we find a very important indicator of the local Chinese community's level of Malayanization at the time.

In Chapter 2 we looked at the Malayanization of the local Chinese-language newspapers. On October 20, 1949, the largest of these publications, the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, changed the way it dated issues from the system used by the Republic of China to the Western calendar format. The second leading Chinese-language newspaper, the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, followed suit on January 7, 1950. Moreover, just after the war, over half of the newspaper publication holidays were connected to such Chinese holidays as the commemoration of the birth and death of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Republic of China; however, by the mid-1950s the relation of such holidays to Chinese events was becoming blurred, as newspapers merely announced that a "regularly scheduled publication holiday" would be taken. Then in the 1960s the holiday schedule was changed altogether.

In addition, the fifteen-member staff of overseas correspondents in China employed by the *Nanyang Siang Pau* in 1950 had dwindled to none by March 1954.

In October 1957, shortly after the August 31 independence of the Federation of Malaya, the *Nanyang Siang Pau* featured an essay on the theme of "'our country' is no longer China but Malaya."

The above facts represent ample proof of the way in which Chinese-language newspapers gradually Malayanized their editorial position through the 1950s, making Merdeka on August 31, 1957 their biggest and most noticeable indication of Malayanization.

There were two Chinese consulates general and five consulates in Malaya and British Borneo. The Chinese government regarded all of the overseas Chinese as Chinese nationals from the standpoint of *jus sanguinis*. Here lies the main reason why Chinese consulates took up the issue of protecting the civil rights for all overseas Chinese, and overseas Chinese communities, in their turn, looked to "their" consulates to help protect their civil rights. However, due to a number of reasons including (1) the weak stand of China in international relations, (2) China's exhaustion stemming from the CCP-KMT civil war, and (3) the division of the Malayan Chinese community along CCP and KMT party lines (not to mention the CCP factions demanding that consulates defend their rights while warning them not to interfere in Malayan issues), the Chinese consulates were in most cases not able to meet the expectations of the local Chinese community. On the other hand, during the first half of the 1950s, the MCA, which was founded in 1949, stepped in to play the role that the Chinese consulates were unable to play. The process that produced this state of affairs decisively diluted any sense of belonging that

the Malayan Chinese community had toward China and enhanced the growth of a Malaya-oriented identity consciousness.

Due to the positions taken by the governments of both the Republic of China (ROC) and the PRC stating that Chinese people residing outside of their borders were still under their jurisdiction and protection, the ROC National Assembly in 1948 and the PRC National People's Congress in 1954 both tried to select overseas Chinese representatives to these congresses through local elections in the countries of residence. However, in Malaya such decisions prompted reactions from the British authorities, forcing the ROC to hold irregular, limited elections, and the PRC to select representatives based on discussions among those who had returned to China from Malaya. In the view of the leftist supporters in Malaya, the National Assembly elections were merely shabby performances by the KMT and were none of their business; but the way that elections were held for the People's Congresses worked to distance the Malayan left even farther from what was happening on the mainland.

In the field of education, textbooks used in Chinese schools, which had formerly been written and published in China, began in the early 1950s to be compiled in Malaya; and the content began to refer increasingly to the real local situation. By the mid-1950s textbooks had been completely Malayanized. Many of the CCP-inclined teachers, who had so greatly influenced the Chinese youth of Malaya through a curriculum based on patriotism toward China, returned to China around 1950.

The year 1948 marked the last time the Olympic Games would provide an occasion for overseas Chinese to demonstrate their China-oriented identity consciousness as overseas Chinese athletes participated as members of the team from China. Singapore began sending its own team to the games in 1952, and the Federation of Malaya followed suit in 1956. Malayan and Singaporean Chinese athletes were selected as members of their respective national teams.

In terms of a time frame for the conversion of consciousness discussed in this book, all of the major developments as below that indicate the firm establishment of a Malaya-oriented identity consciousness within the Malayan Chinese community centered around the mid-1950s, on the eve of Merdeka which came in 1957: the disappearance of the Double Tenth celebrations in the Federation of Malaya (1957) and Singapore (1958), the complete disappearance of CCP-affiliated organizations or their transformation into Malaya-oriented groups (mid-1950s); convening the Grand Rally of Literators Responding to the Independence Movement (1956); holding the Representatives' Congress of All Malayan Registered Guilds and Associations (1956);

the change in reference of the Chinese terms for “fatherland,” “homeland,” and “our country” from China to Malaya that took place in the local Chinese-language newspapers (1957); the blurring and eventual end of Chinese factors in determining Chinese-language newspaper publication holidays (latter half of the 1950s); the disappearance of foreign correspondents hired by Chinese-language newspapers to work in China (first half of the 1950s); the substitution of the MCA for Chinese consulates in the task of protecting the rights of local Chinese (first half of the 1950s); the Malayization of Chinese school textbooks (mid-1950s); and the Malayization of local Chinese Olympic athletes (1956). The process of forming an independent, sovereign nation-state in any region is deeply connected to the fomentation and promotion of a national consciousness among its people. In the case of Malaya, such a phenomenon occurred among its Chinese residents who realized in just ten years a tremendous reduction in the passionate sense of belonging they had felt toward China immediately after the end of the war.

This conversion was not totally voluntary, for the repressive measures, such as mass deportation, that the British implemented cannot be brushed aside as insignificant. There is no denying that the process had its painful aspect. Furthermore, to assume that Malaya-oriented identity consciousness of Malayan Chinese had already been well established at the end of the war, without trying to analyze the conversion of their identity consciousness after the war, is equivalent to ignoring the pain and anguish experienced in the process. This is an important reason why examining this China connection has been necessary.

Following Merdeka, it is possible to divide the political organizations active in the Malayan Chinese communities into roughly three types: middle-of-the-road and right-wing groups centered around the MCA; legally active moderate leftist groups centered around the Labor Party (LP; est. 1952) and received support from workers, farmers, small-scale merchants, and intellectuals; and the outlawed left-wing centered around the MCP. The MCP would soon be forced further deep into the jungles and thus cease to influence the Chinese masses. Taking its place was the LP, which strove to protect the rights of workers and “New Village” farmers and promote Chinese education, while at the same time emphasizing collaboration with the Malay non-elite community. In 1957 the LP was successful in forming the Socialist Front in conjunction with the Party Rakyat (PR), its moderate Malay leftist counterpart. However, in 1966 the parties split over the language question. From that time on the LP became radicalized under the influence of the Cultural Revolution in China, and decided to conduct a struggle outside the realm of parliamentary politics. Its suppression by the Malaysian government brought on the

loss of support within the local Chinese community, and it was officially deregistered as a political organization in 1972. There is no doubt that the LP was a Malaya (Malaysia)-oriented political party, but the Cultural Revolution being the decisive factor in its radicalization during the late 1960s indicates that the party had a inclination toward ideologies and ideas Chinese, or at least had CCP sympathies. However, the LP had absolutely no connection with or involvement in Chinese internal affairs, making the nature of its orientation totally different from what was embraced by leftist organizations which existed in the 1940s and 1950s. Prior to the time of the Cultural Revolution, the China-orientation of the late 1940s and the 1950s had already become archaic remnants never again to be revived. After the LP's blacklisting, it was the Democratic Action Party (DAP; est. 1964) that stepped in to represent the lower-class Malaysians of Chinese descent. While the DAP has emphasized both the protection of legitimate civil rights of the Chinese and the preservation of Chinese culture, it has given no special meaning to nor held any sympathy for China.

As for the MCA, despite being rocked by internal strife and schisms from time to time, it has remained the mainstream political organization of the Chinese community through its emphasis on compromise and cooperation with the United Malays National Organization, Malaysia's overwhelmingly largest party in the ruling coalition party. In the 1974 parliamentary elections that were held just after the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC, the MCA won a resounding victory over the DAP, no doubt a result of the joy felt in the Chinese community in general over the treaty. Although it showed their deeply rooted nostalgic sentiment toward China, such sentiment at that time was no more than a familiarity with China felt by Malaysian Chinese as unwavering Malaysians, and cannot be interpreted as "China-oriented" by any stretch of the imagination. Since that time the MCA and DAP have both experienced ups and downs in the elections, based on the popularity of their exclusively Malaysia-oriented platforms. No Chinese issue has ever become a focal point of any election. The Malaysian identity consciousness of Malaysian Chinese has long since become soundly and deeply established.