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A CONTEST OF LOYALTIES: OVERSEAS CHINESE IN THAILAND

The Responses of Thailand's Economically-Dominant Minority
to Complicated Internal and External Pressures

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The status of the large Overseas Chinese minority in Thailand poses some of the most complex and important problems, both internal and international, for the future of that small, strategic Southeast Asian nation,

Although many of the two to three million Chinese who constitute about one-eighth of Thailand's total population have undergone assimilation and have sunk deep roots in their country of adoption, large numbers of them have remained a foreign group with close psychological and material ties to their Chinese homeland. The unassimilated Chinese in Thailand make up a highly-organized alien enclave, and they have been involved in a way disturbing to the Thai with political movements centered in China. The Chinese as a group also dominate the economy of Thailand, and they have successfully maintained this dominance despite the efforts of nationalistic Thai governments to undermine or reduce it.

The position of the Chinese in Thailand is one which has created resentment and fear on the part of the Thai, and it has resulted in a continuing series of discriminatory and control measures directed against them. These measures, in turn, have increased resentment and fear on the part of the Chinese.

The problems arising from this situation were suddenly highlighted when the Communists came to power in China in 1949, and they have remained of major concern. The existence of a powerful Chinese government to the north and a strong Chinese Community within Thailand has increased Thai fears about the role of Overseas Chinese and how it might affect Thailand,

The most pressing short-run questions posed by this situation have been the political ones. In this situation how would the Chinese react to discriminatory and control measures directed against them? How do they feel about the new Communist

government in Peking, and what is their relation to it? Will they become instruments of Chinese Communist influence and subversion in Thailand?

The major long-range question also has become more important. Will the Chinese in Thailand be a permanent alien group **with** a strangle hold on the **country's** economic life, or will they become increasingly assimilated and integrated into Thai society? At present there can be no final answers to these questions, but during the month that I have just spent in Thailand I came to the conclusion that several significant trends can now be observed.

PRESSURES ON THE CHINESE IN THAILAND

The Chinese community in Thailand is a minority which feels that it is subjected to many kinds of unreasonable pressures and restrictions by the ruling majority.

Legal restrictions on the Chinese are not a new phenomenon. They began even before the Revolution of 1932, which created the present constitutional monarchy in Thailand, and in the two decades since then they have steadily increased. These restrictions are a product of Thai nationalism, and, as one person in Bangkok told me, "being anti-Chinese is now virtually a prerequisite for playing a part in Thai politics, regardless of **one's** personal feelings toward the **Chinese.**" Ironically, some of the most enthusiastic sponsors of anti-Chinese measures have been persons of Chinese extraction, while the majority of officials who implement these measures maintain friendly personal or business relations with individual Chinese. Anti-Chinese policies in Thailand are not, therefore, an expression of any deep-seated racial prejudice or animosity; they are nationalistic measures aimed at reducing the economic power and cultural solidity of a strong, energetic, and capable minority. The Thai officially maintain that their restrictions are not specifically anti-Chinese, since they apply to all aliens; but this argument is not taken seriously by many people, since most of the **aliens** in Thailand are Chinese, and the Thai restrictions are clearly aimed at the Chinese.

One might have expected, in view of the present international situation, that the Thai would ease their restrictions against the Chinese, in order to reduce the causes for resentment and to win Chinese support internally. This has not taken place. Instead, not only have existing measures of a restrictive nature been maintained but the general social, economic, and political policies followed by the Government of Thailand have actually increased the pressures on the Chinese community. The Thai are now attempting to keep the Chinese in their place within Thailand and at the same time to force them to reduce their contacts with China, to avoid active involvement in Chinese politics, and to assimilate.

The restrictions, controls, and pressures on the Chinese in Thailand are so numerous that it is impossible even to list them all in a brief space. They fall into several general **categories**. Many, including policies of nationalizing trade and restricting professions open to aliens, are clearly economic in motivation. Others, such as the Thai immigration and education policies, aim at forced assimilation, while recent citizenship laws appear to have the somewhat contradictory purpose of making it harder for Chinese to become Thai. Some, including the arrests, deportations, and residence restrictions affecting Chinese, are political measures. A few, such as **regulations** on travel and remittances to China, represent efforts to reduce contacts between Chinese in Thailand and in Communist China. And measures such as the increase of alien registration fees seem to be motivated simply by a desire to take financial advantage of the members of a minority group and penalize them for being aliens,

ECONOMIC RESTRICTIONS, CONTROLS, AND LEVIES

The economic restrictions affecting the Chinese take numerous forms. Some are not very important. For example, Chinese businesses and shops have Thai translations on their signboards, because the fee charged on a sign written exclusively in a foreign language is high. And according to law, all business organizations must keep their accounts in the Thai language. More important are the restrictions on land ownership. No alien Chinese may now acquire land (this restriction was not made retroactive when it was passed a decade ago, however, so it did not end all Chinese land ownership), and this law is sometimes applied even to second-generation Chinese who are Thai citizens. Laws have been passed (but not strictly enforced) requiring all companies of certain types in Thailand to have persons of Thai nationality as a minimum percentage of their employees. In addition, some occupations and professions have been barred to **aliens**. In 1942 a decree listed 27 such restricted occupations, but the list has subsequently been reduced. At present, aliens are barred from commercial driving of samlors (bicycle-drawn rickshas) and motorcycles or automobiles, rice farming, salt manufacture, haircutting, Thai typesetting, making lacquer or niello (oxidized silver) ware, and manufacturing images of the Buddha.

These legal restrictions have hurt some Chinese, but for several reasons they have in practice been more irritating than damaging to the Chinese community as a whole. In the first place, they apply only to aliens, and many Chinese in Thailand hold Thai citizenship. Also, the Chinese are skillful at evading such laws, for example by registering land or business enterprises in the name of Thai nationals. Most important, however, is the fact that the restrictions apply mainly to economic activities of relatively minor significance; they do not affect the dominant Chinese position in rice and teak milling, or in the other major fields of trade, finance, manufacture, or labor. The Government of Thailand would like to have Thai obtain control of many more

economic enterprises, but in fact they are not capable of doing so at present, and legislation to this end is inevitably rather ineffective,

The legal restrictions are not the most important measures affecting the Chinese economically, however. Anti-Chinese policies carried out administratively by members of the government are more harmful than laws. Many government bodies and officials discriminate against Chinese in every way feasible, both in their employment policies and in contracts or purchases which they make.

Most harmful to the Chinese, however, have been the efforts of the Government of Thailand to move toward nationalization of trade in the country's major products. These efforts have seriously affected the Chinese position in **rice** and teak, particularly the export of these products, which are major sources of Chinese wealth.

Although the Thai have attempted to run a few rice and teak mills themselves, their policies of nationalization prove to be--on close examination--not really an effective effort to take the actual conduct of key economic activities out of Chinese hands, but rather an attempt to bring Chinese big business under bureaucratic control and to levy large concealed or indirect taxes upon it,

Government policies toward the rice trade, which is the foundation of the Thai economy, provide a good example of **this**. The Government of Thailand has attempted to nationalize the rice trade, but its efforts have really affected only procedures for export. The handling of rice within Thailand--from the time it leaves the **farmers'** bins until it is milled and ready for **sale--** is still done almost entirely by Chinese, and retailing within the country continues to be Chinese-controlled. Only the export of rice is "**nationalized**"; and even here nationalization proves to be a device for the government to obtain large revenues and profits from the trade, without to any great extent taking over the actual handling of the rice, which remains largely in the hands of Chinese millers and exporters. In short, the Thai **Government's** trading transactions in rice are for the most part paper transactions. Some rice **it** contracts to sell to foreign governments; on these contracts **it** makes more than 100-per-cent profit, as a result of its foreign exchange regulations and the difference between the high prices **it** charges to foreign buyers and the low prices **it** forces Chinese businessmen to accept for their **rice**. As inducement to obtain rice for government-to-government transactions, **it** gives out additional licenses to Chinese businessmen for private exports; to make up their losses in government sales, these businessmen have had to raise export prices on private sales abroad to such a high level that exports have been limited and markets have **declined**.

One effect of present government rice policies has been

the siphoning off into the treasury, or into officials' pockets, of a large percentage of profits from the rice export trade, thereby seriously hurting Chinese big business in a direct way. Another effect has been to keep rice export prices so high that a sizable amount of Thailand's rice surplus has remained unsold. This has hurt the country's entire economy but has struck particularly hard at the Chinese who comprise most of Thailand's commercial community. It is not only big business which has been hurt, therefore, because the recession in the rice business has filtered downward and touched almost every shopkeeper.

Needless to say, the Chinese in Thailand dislike all of these measures and policies which harm their economic position; but even more they resent certain Thai actions which seem to be motivated less by economic nationalism than by a desire merely to squeeze the Chinese community.

One thing which hurts many Chinese is the alien registration fee, payable annually by each alien over 12 years of age. Until 1952 the fee was only B 20.90 (U.S.\$ 1.00 equals Baht 21.00 to Baht 22.00), but then it was suddenly raised to B 400,000. This fee, amounting to almost U.S.\$ 20, may not seem very large, but it constitutes a heavy burden on a poor Chinese with alien status. For example, a workman with a family including a wife and three children has to pay almost U.S.\$ 100 a year--which may be one-fourth or more of his total income--just to live in Thailand. In fact, many are unable to pay it--the Thai police state that last year they collected \$ 114 million from the fee, which would mean that only 285,000 aliens paid; and their target for this year, B 184 million, still represents fees from less than three-quarters of all registered aliens. Those who cannot pay are subjected to continual harassment by the police and live under the threat of imprisonment or deportation. The financial burden, furthermore, is felt not only by the poor but also indirectly by much of the rest of the Chinese community. The head of the community-supported Chinese Chamber of Commerce says that the problem of helping out, or finding guarantors for, Chinese in trouble because of inability to pay the fee is his major problem, and that the Chamber of Commerce must deal with several hundred such cases each month. In the minds of the Chinese there seems to be little justification for such an unreasonably heavy fee; it is regarded merely as a discriminatory levy to increase revenue and to bring additional money in for the Thai police.

Dealings with officials and police are the cause of constant financial drain as well as psychological harassment to all Chinese in most of their activities. Thai officialdom extends its controls and interference everywhere, large-scale corruption is now so extensive and open that it has become virtually an accepted part of the normal pattern of things, and the Chinese are considered fair game by Thai officials for any squeeze that can be applied to them. As a consequence, the Chinese must give bribes, gifts, and payoffs to carry on almost all of their normal business and other activities. Some observers in Thailand say

that the Chinese have corrupted Thai officialdom; this may be the case, but it is the Chinese who are now the principal victims of the corruption. Although Chinese continue to dominate the Thai economy, the Government of Thailand and its officials are drawing off an ever larger share of the profits of Chinese enterprise.

EFFORTS TO FORCE ASSIMILATION

A great many Overseas Chinese in Thailand, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, have attempted to preserve their Chinese culture and characteristics. The Thai have resented this Chinese tendency to remain distinctive and alien.

Apart from the strong influence of the family itself, the main institutional basis on which the Chinese have tried to maintain themselves as a separate community has been their system of privately-owned Chinese schools. (The largest and best schools are supported by Chinese community associations, but some are privately financed as business ventures.) This school system has been the main target of Thai policies aimed at forcing the assimilation of Chinese, policies which have developed particularly since the early 1920's when the number of Chinese schools grew rapidly and their curricula became tinged with nationalistic Chinese thought.

The Government of Thailand has restricted Chinese private schooling more than any other government in Southeast Asia, and the Chinese battle to preserve a separate educational system for its children has been a losing one,

The first restrictions imposed by the Thai were designed to alter the nature of the Chinese schools, by requiring that their teachers pass examinations in the Thai language, that their instruction be in Thai except for foreign-language study, that their staffs include Thai principals, and that their syllabi conform to government regulations. Later the Thai began to close Chinese schools on various grounds, including charges that they were evading restrictions,

The severity of these measures has varied at different periods during the past three decades, however. The Thai cracked down hard once in the early '30's and again in the late '30's. Then during the war they took drastic steps to eliminate the Chinese school entirely. By 1941 the Government had closed all Chinese secondary schools and by 1944 all Chinese primary schools. After the war, there was a spectacular revival of these schools for a while, and at one time during the immediate postwar period the number of Chinese schools in Thailand was well over the 400 mark. Then the restrictions and closings began again; the last middle school was closed in 1949, and the number of primary schools allowed has been progressively limited.

Strictly speaking the Chinese-supported schools now

remaining in Thailand are not really Chinese schools at all. Although privately supported by Chinese organizations and attended by Chinese children, they teach the same courses as Thai schools, and instruction is in Thai--except that they are allowed to include the Chinese language for a limited number of hours per week. (Most schools teach kuo yu, or Mandarin, but a few teach local dialects.) In short, they are merely private schools which are allowed to include Chinese as a foreign language. At present they may devote up to a maximum of ten hours a week to the Chinese language, but they are encouraged to teach less, and if they limit the time to six hours they can obtain a government subsidy. A large percentage of the teachers in these schools are Thai, and the Thai principals--which all schools are required to have in addition to their Chinese principals--are being used increasingly by the authorities to control the schools more tightly.

At present there is not a single Chinese middle school or, needless to say, **any** Chinese institution of higher learning in all of Thailand, and there are now less than 200 Chinese primary schools (which have 4 grades for children between the ages of 7 and 14). According to the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok, the current legal limit on the number of Chinese schools is 8 each for the 2 municipalities which make up the city of Bangkok and 2 each in Thailand's 71 changwads or provinces. The Thai have allowed the number to exceed **these** ceilings in some areas, but periodic closings bring the number constantly closer to the legal limit.

All of this means that Chinese children now attending school in Thailand do not get a formal Chinese education. They do not, in fact, obtain even a good working knowledge of either Mandarin or the Chinese written language; Chinese editors in Bangkok say, for example, that the graduates of a primary school which teaches only ten hours of Chinese a week cannot really read a Chinese newspaper. A few wealthy Chinese try to remedy this situation by employing private tutors--or by sending their children to Chinese schools in Penang, Singapore, or Hong Kong--and a **few** students return to China for education; but almost all of the younger generation now receive a basically Thai education and receive only a scanty knowledge of Chinese (other than the spoken form of their **family's** native dialect which they may pick up at home). At present one can still travel from the south to the north of Thailand, as I have just done, and everywhere find Mandarin-speaking Chinese--especially persons between the ages of 20-25 and 30-40 (the periods when middle schools operated in Thailand were the years 1933-1941 and 1945-1949)--but if the present situation continues, soon this **will** no longer be true. This causes great concern to those leaders of the Chinese community in Bangkok who fear and resist assimilation and believe, rightly, that Chinese education is the surest way of maintaining their integrity and solidarity as a social group.

Control of education is not the only measure adopted by the Thai to try to force assimilation of the Chinese. Another major move has been control of immigration,

Large-scale immigration of Chinese into Thailand began in the 19th century. By mid-century it constituted a large flow; about 15,000 came into the country annually from 1840 to 1850. During this early period the immigrants were mostly men, and many of them married Thai women, thereby producing a large number of Sino-Thai children,

In the early years of the 20th century the rate of immigration kept increasing, and more women came with the men. In the period from 1918 to 1929, for example, the net Chinese immigration into Thailand is estimated to have been 400,000. This large and increasing flow was interrupted during World War II; then, immediately after the war, there was a big upsurge of immigration again. One estimate places the number of Chinese immigrants at 34,000 for the period during January-August 1946. When I was in Thailand in 1947, officials estimated that 100,000 Chinese had come to Thailand in the year and a half after September 1945. In any case, the immigration was large enough to alarm Thai officials and to lead them to start controlling it. In May 1947, the Government of Thailand restricted Chinese immigration to 10,000 annually; and a year later, in 1948, they reduced the quota to 200 annually, in effect ending the flow of Chinese immigration as it had taken place during the previous century,

The quota of 200 a year is still in force. Chinese in Thailand, furthermore, say that a quota number is now so difficult to get that a person must pay close to B 40,000 to be let in. The Thai police report that only a few wealthy Chinese come in under the quota, and they state that last year the actual number of quota immigrants totaled only 150, or three-quarters of the low legal limit. There may be a few illegal immigrants, but for all practical purposes the large flow of Chinese immigrants which has been going on during the past hundred years has now been halted, at least for the present.

The objective of the Government of Thailand in following its present immigration policy is obviously to stabilize the Chinese population as it now stands and then slowly to assimilate it into the Thai population,

Recent changes in Thailand's citizenship laws are inconsistent with the government's general policy aiming at assimilating the Chinese, however. Until last year anyone born in Thailand--regardless of racial background--held Thai citizenship, unless he specifically rejected it by registering as an alien. Thus, all Chinese born in Thailand held Thai citizenship. (These same Chinese also held, and still hold, Chinese citizenship, because Chinese policy has been to regard all persons of Chinese extraction as citizens, irrespective of place of birth.) It was also not excessively difficult for a Chinese immigrant to become naturalized as a Thai.

Last year, however, a new citizenship law was passed

requiring that henceforth birth in Thailand would not be enough to acquire Thai citizenship.; now one parent must be a Thai citizen--which means that a person born in Thailand of Chinese parents, neither of whom holds Thai citizenship, is not automatically a Thai. The motive behind this new law obviously is to make the legal restrictions against aliens applicable to as many pure Chinese as possible, but it seems rather inconsistent with the Thai's basic aim of turning the Chinese into Thai.

Certainly the general tendency of Thai policy now is to try to force assimilation of the Chinese, principally through immigration and education laws, and this policy makes the Chinese community feel under real pressure and feel defensive about its survival as an identifiable cultural and social group.

WEAKENING TIES WITH CHINA

Traditionally, the Overseas Chinese as a group have not only tried to retain their cultural and social identity abroad, but they have also maintained close ties with their families and native places in South China. Those in Thailand are no exception.

Many Overseas Chinese have looked upon their homes abroad merely as temporary places of residence. Some have supported wives at home, even if they also married in Thailand. Others have sent their children home for at least part of their education. Quite a few themselves used to make periodic visits to their native hsien (county). Investment of their profits in land or in enterprises in their home villages was also common, and almost all of them sent regular remittances to help support relatives in China.

Since the Communists came to power in China, contacts of this sort between Chinese in Thailand and their homes in South China have not by any means stopped, but they have definitely declined. This has been the result primarily of political and economic developments within China, as well as of difficulties of travel and communication; but the result has been welcomed and encouraged by the Government of Thailand, one of the few governments in Asia which has firmly committed itself to an anti-communist position. The weakening of ties with their homeland has added to the feeling of isolation **and--in** a sense--vulnerability, on the part of the Chinese in Thailand,

Thailand has not forbidden either travel or remittances to Communist China, but it has placed restrictions on them. At present a Chinese in Thailand who wishes to visit his home in China must undergo careful police investigation, and even if he is a Thai citizen he must return within a year or lose his Thai citizenship. Remittances to China are allowed, and there are still over 80 remittance shops operating in Thailand, but a ceiling has been placed on the amount of remittances. According to law, no individual Chinese in Thailand may now remit more than

B 2,000 a month to China (the law can be evaded, however, by sending money in the name of a family member or friend), **Thailand's participation** in the U.N. embargo on trade with Communist China has also reduced commercial contacts between the Overseas Chinese and their homeland,

These restrictions are not the **main** cause for the decline in contacts with China, however. A major cause has been the fact that Chinese Communist policies have hurt the families of Overseas Chinese, and most Chinese in Thailand are now reluctant to return to China or to send money to their homes. Despite some concessions and appeals to Overseas Chinese, the Communists have applied their revolutionary policies to areas inhabited by their families. For example, land redistribution has taken away much property belonging to families of Chinese in Thailand, and the so-called Five Anti Campaign against businessmen also hurt large numbers of them. The case of one wealthy Chinese in Bangkok illustrates what happened to many. This man in 1952 still supported a wife near **Swatow**, even though he also had other wives in Thailand. During the Five Anti Campaign the Communists imprisoned his wife and demanded HK\$ 40,000 (almost U.S.\$ 7,000) for her release. The husband sent the money, and she was let go. Later she was again imprisoned, and the Communists asked for HK\$ 100,000 more; this time the husband in Bangkok refused to send it, and he thereby severed his ties with his first wife and, for all practical purposes, with his whole family and native village,

At present relatively few of the Chinese in Thailand are making trips home. It is estimated that from the time of the Communist take-over until this summer, a period of four and a half years, only about 10,000 Chinese from Thailand returned to China; this is a very small figure compared to past normal traffic. Remittances have also declined precipitously. Whereas formerly money was sent to China for investment as well as for family maintenance, remittances now consist almost wholly of small sums to help support relatives. The Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok estimates that the level of remittances is now about B 20 million (roughly U.S.\$ 1 million) a year, which he says is about one-fifth the amount sent home annually before the Communist take-over of China,

This decline of travel and remittances is not only significant in itself (travel facilitated political contact between China and Chinese abroad, while remittances were a major item in **China's** international balance of payments), but it is symptomatic of a recent general weakening of ties--which might be temporary but could be permanent--between Chinese in Thailand and their homeland.

POLITICAL TRENDS AND THE ANTI-COMMUNIST CRACKDOWN

The Overseas Chinese in Thailand in the past have not played a significant role directly in Thai politics. As a rule,

in fact, they have scrupulously avoided involvement in local politics. During the decades since the 1911 Revolution in China, however, Chinese nationalism and politics have extended their influence to the immigrants in Thailand, and political struggles in China have been reflected within the Overseas Chinese community there. Such organized political activity as **has** taken place among the Chinese has been concerned primarily, therefore, with issues and developments in China rather than with those in Thailand. There is no doubt, however, that some Overseas Chinese have felt--at least in a vague way--that their connection with politics in China has strengthened their position abroad, and in recent years they have looked to their home government for support in resisting the tendencies of the Government of Thailand to place restrictions on the Chinese.

Political activity among the Chinese in Thailand has taken numerous forms. Both the Chinese Nationalist and Chinese Communist parties have organized branches in Thailand, and they have competed for influence in Chinese schools, newspapers, labor unions, regional associations, community enterprises, and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Neither party has ever had a very large membership, but at various periods the Chinese community as a whole has generally been oriented either pro-Nationalist or pro-Communist, since the entire community follows along with the general political attitudes of a few leaders as expressed in personal statements by these leaders and by the Chinese press in Thailand.

Right after the end of World War II there was a strong upsurge of nationalism and political feeling among the Chinese in Thailand, and at first this feeling was predominantly pro-Nationalist. Demonstrations, which led to some violence between Chinese and Thai took place in Bangkok, and the Chinese proudly emphasized their link with a homeland recognized as one of the Big Four. In 1946, for the first time in modern history, formal diplomatic relations were established between Thailand and China, and as soon as a Chinese Embassy and several consulates were set up in Thailand they were deluged with requests from the Chinese community for support against restrictive Thai policies and acts. Racked by the diplomatic representation of China, the Chinese community for a short while had a better opportunity to apply pressure on the Government of Thailand than ever before.

At the same time, the importance of the Chinese Communists in Thailand increased. During the war the Communists had carried out anti-Japanese underground activities--but they did not come out into the open until December 1946, after Thailand's repeal of its law banning communism and after its re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The Communists thereafter increased their influence, particularly among youth, labor, and the press, while a decline of enthusiasm for the Nationalists gradually took place as the internal situation in China deteriorated.

Then, in 1949 and 1950, a dramatic swing in the political orientation of the Chinese community in Thailand occurred, after the Communists set up a government in Peking. A large proportion of the Chinese, including many of the conservative business leaders of regional and other organizations, became pro-Communist--or rather pro-Peking. For a while every Chinese newspaper in Bangkok followed the Communist line, large quantities of Chinese Communist literature came into Thailand, and many schools showed pro-Communist tendencies. This pro-Peking shift of opinion had very little ideological foundation; the Chinese in Thailand turned toward the Communist regime in China because it obviously was strong,

Now, five years later, the situation has again changed. There is at present no open expression of pro-Communist or pro-Peking feeling, and although there is a good deal of verbal support once again for the Nationalists, the majority of Chinese in Thailand seems to have adopted a neutral position and is sitting on the fence. There are two major explanations for this latest shift of opinion. One is the disillusionment, which I have already mentioned, of the commercially-minded Overseas Chinese by the internal policies of the Chinese Communists and the adverse effect these policies have had on their economic interests and relatives in China. The other is the severe crackdown of the Government of Thailand on all Communist activities, which took place at the end of 1952.

Until fairly recently the Thai have not been excessively worried by either the Communist activity or other politics among the Chinese in Thailand. The Communists have always been an irritant to the Thai authorities; but although there was a Communist Party of Thailand as well as a branch of the Chinese Communist Party, the number of Thai Communists has **always** been small, and the communist movement in Thailand has been mainly Chinese. The Thai tended to feel, furthermore, that political activity among the Chinese--both Communist and Nationalist--was really more related to China than to Thailand. The situation changed, however, when a strong government--believed by the Thai to have expansionist aims in Southeast Asia--was established in Peking, and when the Chinese in Thailand swung pro-Communist. For the first time the Thai really began to fear that the Chinese in Thailand might become a fifth column used by a foreign power to struggle for control of Thailand itself. This fact undoubtedly helped to persuade the Thai to align themselves strongly with the forces of anti-Communism.

In 1950, the Government of Thailand first cemented its international ties with the Western anti-Communist bloc by signing military and economic agreements with the U.S., and then it began to tighten up against communists internally. Finally, in late 1952, it cracked down hard on the communists and on pro-Communist Chinese leaders in Thailand. Between November 1952 and January 1953, the police arrested several hundred Chinese, including some top community leaders, and deported many of them; closed all pro-Communist publications and book stores; banned the import

of pro-Communist literature; and clamped down on leftists in Chinese schools. Most Communist leaders who were not arrested fled the country to China, and since 1952 all Communist activity has been illegal and therefore underground. As a consequence, pro-Communist or **pro-Peking** sentiment is now dangerous and unrewarding for the Chinese in Thailand; this, on top of the disillusionment which had already taken place, has made most members of the Chinese community abandon their support of the Communist regime in China.

CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND POLITICS

To understand the politics of the Chinese in Thailand, it is necessary to know something about the social organization and leadership of their community, because the attitudes of a relatively small number of organizational leaders establish the prevailing political climate of opinion--the majority of Chinese follow their leaders,

Thailand's Chinese community is highly organized, but it is by no means homogeneous or unified. Although there are a few organizations which have the support of the entire community, most social groups are based upon regional and dialect lines; because even though a large majority of Chinese in Thailand come from one region along the South China coast, they are subdivided into numerous distinct dialect groups and are extremely clannish. Each dialect group has its own regional association, which normally operates one or more large primary schools, a cemetery, and various welfare activities. Membership in each organization consists of several thousand community leaders from the dialect group (leadership is based mainly on business success and wealth), and the association heads are chosen from among those in the groups which have acquired the greatest prestige*

The relative size of dialect groups among the half-million or more Chinese in Bangkok can be used as a rough indication of the dialect breakdown of the entire Chinese population in Thailand. In Bangkok, 60 per cent of the Chinese speak Teochiu and come from an area comprising ten hsien near Swatow in Kwangtung Province; 15 per cent speak Hakka and trace their ancestry primarily to the Meihsien district northwest of Swatow; ten per cent speak Hailam and come from Hainan Island; eight per cent speak Cantonese and originated in central Kwangtung; and four per cent speak Hokkien and come from the Amoy region of Fukien, (NO other dialect group exceeds one per cent of the total.)

There are seven major regional associations in Thailand based on the dialect groups: the Ch'aozhou (Teochiu or Swatow) Association, the Hakka Association, the Hainan (Hailam) Association, and the Kwangchow (Cantonese) Association are by far the most important ones, and they overshadow the Taiwan Association, the Fukien (Hokkien or Amoy) Association, and the Chiangche

(kiangsu-Chekiang) Association, The allegiance or verbal support of the leaders of these associations is one of the most important political factors influencing the entire Chinese community,

Before 1952 the Ch'aochow Association was definitely and unequivocally pro-Communist; it has now swung to a neutral position but remains to some extent under a cloud of suspicion that leftist tendencies, or ties, may still exist underground. The effect of its former pro-Communist stand was somewhat counteracted, however, by the fact that most of the hsien associations into which the Teochiu group is further subdivided consistently maintained a pro-Nationalist or neutralist position. The Hakka Association until recently had no strong political link, but last year an internal struggle for power took place in the association, and a pro-Nationalist leader emerged victorious. The Hainan Association has always been pro-Rationalist, and its leader is the nominal chief of the Kuomintang (Nationalist) organization in Thailand as well as a member of the Nationalists' Overseas Chinese Commission on Formosa. This, however, has been counterbalanced by the existence of a smaller competing Kiungyai (Hainan) Association, which before 1952 was openly and strongly pro-Communist. The Kwangchow Association has been fairly neutral politically, but its present tendency is pro-Nationalist.

The Chinese community is divided into many other associations, organizations and groups besides the regional associations. There are a number of t'ung hsiang hui organized on a hsien basis; there are over 50 t'ung yeh kung hui or guilds based upon occupations; and there are a few family clan associations. In addition, there are several informal but very important groupings of leaders centered in schools such as P'eiying and Huang Hun and business enterprises such as the Asia Trust Company. But although all of these are important in relation to power relations among the Chinese, they are not very significant in terms of broader politics.

Despite this fragmentation of the Chinese Community, there are a few organizations which cut across regional-dialect lines and represent the entire community; these are extremely important politically. The outstanding one is the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. This association, which now has about 4,000 members and occupies an impressive compound comparable to the compounds of foreign embassies in Bangkok, really has a semiofficial status. In fact, before there was a Chinese Embassy in Thailand, it issued travel documents for Chinese, and it still acts as an intermediary between the Chinese community and the Government of Thailand; negotiations between the Chamber of Commerce and the Thai Ministry of Interior (and Police) are far more important to the Chinese in Thailand than those between the Chinese Embassy and the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The chairmanship of the Chamber of Commerce is indisputably the apex of prestige and influence among the Chinese leaders in Thailand. The present chairman, a man who heads the board of at least 18 business firms and is on the board of over 50 more, is now in his fifth term of

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office, and the shifts in his political orientation parallel those of the Chinese community as a whole. Immediately after the Second World War he was pro-Nationalist, although he resisted Kuomintang efforts to reorganize and control the Chamber of Commerce; after 1949 he went pro-Communist; then in 1951 he publicly and clearly shifted his support back to the Nationalists.

In addition to the Chamber of Commerce, the main Chinese organizations having communitywide support are the Pao Teh Shan T'ang welfare society, the T'ien Hua hospital, and the Huang Hun school. Prominent leaders in all of these institutions were openly **pro-Communist** during the period immediately after 1949, but some of them fled to China after the **1952 anti-Communist** crackdown, and there is now at least no open pro-Communist in them,

The visible or audible political changes in the political stand of these organizations have been determined by a handful of recognized community leaders, for the leadership of the Chinese in Thailand is concentrated to a high degree in the hands of a relatively few wealthy businessmen who are closely interrelated through personal ties, blood relations, business connections, and organizational links. The majority of Chinese has merely followed the shifts of opinion of the community leaders.

The most important field in which this generalization does not apply is that of labor organization. Among Chinese workers, who comprise roughly 70 per cent of **Thailand's non-agricultural** laboring force, there have been serious attempts at mass organization. Prior to 1952, the Communist-run Central Labor Union made rapid progress, and dominated the field of labor organization. At its peak it had 50,000 to 60,000 members and over 40 affiliated unions. The kickbacks and contributions which it obtained primarily from wharf coolies helped to finance the Chinese Communist Party's entire program in Thailand, and a large proportion of the laboring force was under the Central Labor Union's influence. In January 1953, however, this union was banned and dissolved, and at present an **anti-Communist** Chinese businessman with the strong backing of the Thai police is trying to organize a new union, called the Free Workers Association, to control labor and eliminate Communist influence. Leaders of this new union say that it now has 1,200 paid organizers and a membership of 7,000 to 8,000, and there is no doubt that its influence will grow as long as it obtains official support. At present it receives an annual subsidy of one million Baht a year (which it expects to be doubled next year) from the police, and the police have allowed it to offer exemption from the alien registration fee to some workers as an inducement to join.

The other two major fields of political activity among the Chinese are the schools and the press. When pro-Communist feeling was at its peak, before 1952, the Communists were extremely active in both fields. Many underpaid teachers, some subsidized by the Communists, taught the party line. The

Communists ran a party newspaper, the Ch'uan Min Pao, a magazine, the Min Chu Hsin Wen, and an important bookstore. The Nationalists also were active in the schools and ran a newspaper of their own. Now, however, political activity in the schools is more tightly controlled. The Nationalist paper folded for financial reasons, and the Communist publications and propaganda outlets were banned or closed in 1952. None of the three Chinese daily newspapers currently being published in Thailand--the Hsing Hsien Jih Pao, Chung Yuan Jih Pao, and Kuang Hua Pao--is a party organ; and, in their official editorial policies, all of them are either neutral or pro-Nationalist.

Since 1952, therefore, open Chinese Communist activity in Thailand has ceased, the party's organization and influence have greatly declined, and most of the party's support among Chinese community leaders has disappeared.

THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS AND CHINESE NATIONALISTS

This does not mean that the Chinese Communist Party has stopped operating in Thailand, of course. Its hard core is still active in several fields, and it is trying out new tactics. One of its major experiments has been the organization of secret study groups among Chinese students of middle school age. Each of these groups consists of seven or less members, since any group larger than that would have to register as a school; and the teachers, often with financial inducement from the Party, teach the Communist line orally without using incriminating literature. The Communists are still able, also, to persuade some Chinese students to return to the China mainland for study; no one knows how many are now going from Thailand, but some informed estimates place the figure this year as high as 1,000. The Thai police claim that another major move of the Chinese Communists has been the organization of a systematic program of oral propaganda; the Communists, they say, have divided Bangkok into districts, and in each one they have assigned persons to carry out a "whispering propaganda campaign" through personal visits, dinners, and meetings* An occasional pamphlet is also secretly circulated by the Communists, and there is still some underground activity among laborers, while infiltration of regional associations, schools, and newspapers is suspected. Chinese newspaper editors say that the Communists also try to exert pressure on them by systematically organizing party members to make telephone calls or to write letters to editors, and also to boycott the outspokenly anti-Communist papers,

The size of the Chinese Communist Party in Thailand is small, however (most estimates place the membership figure at about 3,000), and the party is lacking in strong leadership; it is not able to exert a great deal of influence through the underground methods to which it must now resort.

The efforts of the Chinese Communist Government to exert

influence on the Chinese in Thailand are not very successful either, under existing circumstances, Radio Peking periodically attacks the Government of Thailand for its anti-Chinese measures and makes appeals to the Overseas Chinese. Four of the 30 Overseas Chinese delegates to China's National Assembly are prominent men from Thailand. The Chinese in Thailand are represented on Peking's Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission. And Returned Overseas Chinese Associations in China do their best to extend their influence overseas. But since the Chinese Communists lack an embassy in Thailand, they can really do little to help the Chinese there, and their propaganda outlets to reach them are limited. Furthermore, Communist threats are decreasingly effective, because so much of the property and other interests in China formerly belonging to Chinese in Thailand have already been liquidated.

The force of Peking's influence upon the Chinese in Thailand is reduced, also, by the fact that apparently Chinese Communist leaders have not made up their minds whether to try to exert their influence on Thailand primarily through the Chinese there or through Thai. At present they seem to be trying both alternatives simultaneously (Pridi Phanomyong, former Prime Minister of Thailand, is now in Peking, and this summer he made a broadcast over Radio Peking calling for the overthrow of the present Government of Thailand), so they have not committed themselves to a clear-cut policy of supporting the Overseas Chinese against the Thai.

All of this means that Peking's influence on the Chinese in Thailand at the moment is not very great. It does not mean, however, that Formosa has recouped its position of influence proportionately. There has been an increase in Nationalist influence since 1952, and there are now more pro-Nationalist than pro-Communist Chinese in Thailand, but it seems unlikely that the Nationalist Government and Kuomintang will be able to restore their former prestige and influence.

The Kuomintang organization does not use its own name in Thailand, because no political parties are allowed, but it is tolerated under the name of the China Association. (In some cities outside of Bangkok the branches are called Sun Yat-sen Associations.) Its membership is larger than that of the Chinese Communist Party in Thailand--some people place the present figure at 30,000--but its organization is weak and its activities minimal. Even though there is no ban on Nationalist propaganda, the Kuomintang has no party organs in Thailand now, and even the official Central News Agency no longer distributes its output there. Organized propaganda activity seems to be limited to subsidization of a few editorial writers,

The Nationalists' Overseas Chinese Commission contains representation from the Chinese in Thailand, and it sends its publications to Bangkok. It also has invited a number of delegations of Chinese from Thailand to Formosa to celebrate Chiang K'ai-shek's birthday and China's national day, to take part in

Overseas Chinese conferences, and to encourage trade. The Nationalist Government still maintains an embassy in Thailand, but the Chinese Embassy is small--it is headed by a chargé d'affaires rather than an ambassador--and it is not able to do very much to help the Chinese, Formosa's influence on the Chinese in Thailand is essentially weak, because it can be no stronger than the regime on Formosa itself,

A handful of Chinese in Bangkok has supported a small, so-called Third Force periodical, but its influence has never been significant,

POLITICAL FENCE-SITTING

By far the majority of Chinese in Thailand are now political fence-sitters. The explanation for this fact, as well as for the recent political vacillations of the Chinese community, is to be found in the basic political character of the Overseas Chinese. Most Chinese in Thailand are fundamentally nonideological creatures. Their political orientation is determined almost solely by what they feel will be most advantageous, in an immediate and practical sense, to their economic self-interest. Now, even though they are hurt by Thai policies and resent them strongly, there is no Chinese political organization or group which can really help them. Formosa is weak, and although the Chinese Communist Government is strong it too is unable to exert much helpful influence within Thailand or on the Government of Thailand. Furthermore, the Thai suppression of pro-Communist activity makes the risk of looking toward Peking for help too great at present to be practical; about 300 Chinese were deported from Thailand last year, and 475 more are now in jails awaiting deportation, while others are serving long prison terms,

Under existing circumstances, there does not seem to be much likelihood therefore--in view of the essential political character of the Chinese in Thailand--that the Communists will be able to organize them into an effective fifth column--despite their deep resentments against restrictive Thai policies. On the other hand, if circumstances changed and the Chinese Communists were in a better position either to apply effective pressures on them, or to help them (if, for example, the Chinese Communists had an embassy in Bangkok), it would be very possible for almost the entire Chinese community in Thailand to become suddenly pro-Peking--but in doing so they would be reacting to political change rather than causing it. In short, although the Chinese in Thailand respond to political trends and movements, not many of them play the role of political prime movers. At present they feel that their position is under attack, and yet traditional lines of political activity not only fail to offer solutions but also actually expose them to further attack. Their response to this situation is extremely interesting and significant for the future. The Chinese in Thailand now seem to be groping toward solutions to their problems more within the context of Thai society and less on the

basis of hopes for external support. The most dramatic indication of this is the recent trend toward economic alliances between Chinese business leaders and Thai politicians. The development which may be of greatest long-term significance, however, is the increased pace at which assimilation of Chinese in Thailand is going on,

SINO-THAI ECONOMIC ALLIANCES

The traditional structure of **society** in Thailand is a peculiar one. Because **it** is an almost wholly agricultural country, with 85 per cent of the total population engaged in agriculture (and over 90 per cent of their land devoted to rice cultivation), the class structure of the country is remarkably uncomplicated--yet several of the major class groups in the country are made up of Chinese, a foreign minority,

At the bottom of Thai society **are** the mass of farmers, the basic producers who form the bulk of the population; with a few minor exceptions they are entirely Thai. At the top is the small ruling class, which used to be composed of royalty and nobility but now includes large numbers of officials and military and police leaders; this ruling class also consists almost entirely of Thai (although many have Chinese blood). In the middle are the urban workers, artisans, clerical and professional middle class, businessmen, and the petty bureaucrats, soldiers, and policemen. Of these intermediate class groups only the **bureau-**crats, soldiers, and policemen are predominantly Thai. Both Thai and Chinese make up the urban working class. The artisans, middle class, and businessmen are overwhelmingly Chinese,

In this social structure, political power has been in the hands of the Thai, while economic power has been held by Chinese; and the two traditionally have been, for the most part, separate. The old ruling class in Thailand regarded commercial activity as self-demeaning, and they avoided **it**, while the Chinese felt no desire or **compulsion** to share their monopoly of economic enterprises with the Thai,

Since Thailand's revolution of 1932, however, this situation has slowly changed. A new Thai elite has come into power; a large proportion of its members are newly-risen military men and **civil** officials whose prejudice against acquiring wealth through business is much less strong than that of the old nobility. Lacking the firm foundation of tradition which the old rulers possessed, furthermore, they have been more conscious of the fact that they hold political power without a real economic base of their own,

During this same period, the Chinese have felt increasingly vulnerable under the pressure of Thai nationalism and discrimination **and** have become more willing than previously to share their profits in order to buy some sort of political protection.

This situation has produced a rather spectacular development, particularly during the past two years. A whole series of open and undisguised economic alliances has been formed between Thai officials and Chinese businessmen. Major banks which were formerly exclusively Chinese have been reorganized with Sino-Thai boards of directors. Dozens of large new companies have been formed cooperatively by Thai and Chinese. Huge syndicates, including a Gold Syndicate, a Financial Syndicate, and a Remittance Syndicate, have been formed with Sino-Thai backing. A grandiose Sino-Thai industrial firm called the National Development Company has just been announced.

It is ironic that the Thai members on the boards of these enterprises are almost all top leaders of the government, police, and army--in short, the men who are carrying out current anti-Chinese policies. General Phao, who heads Thailand's national police force, and General Sarit, commander of the army (the two men who monopolize real power in Thailand today), are the most conspicuous men in these companies; but even Prime Minister Phibul Songgram's family is involved, and practically every leading Thai official is now on the board of at least one of these companies. The boards of some of the companies read, in fact, like a cabinet roster of the Government of Thailand. The Thai members on these boards contribute almost nothing managerially to the companies--although they do channel contracts, etc., to them--so actually they are receiving a large share of the profits in return for the political protection which they can provide. They are, in short, cashing in on their political power.

The new economic alliances are expensive for the Chinese, but almost all leading Chinese businessmen in Thailand have become involved in them. It is wiser for them to share their profits in order to buy protection than it is to be forced out of business. For a few Chinese businessmen, furthermore, collaboration with Thai officials has made possible a spectacular rise in prestige and influence and a rapid accumulation of wealth as a result of political backing. There are at present two Chinese businessmen in Bangkok who are regarded as perhaps even more powerful than the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce or the heads of regional associations; both of them have climbed from obscurity to their present status in just a few years with the support of Thai officials.

The development of these economic alliances has also raised the possibility of increased collaboration between Thai officials and Chinese business leaders in the political field. This has not gone very far yet, but there are signs that it may increase. One of the two Chinese nouveau riche mentioned above now wields great political power in Northeast Thailand and is an important figure in the government bloc within the national parliament, while another Chinese with police backing is now attempting to establish control over organized labor.

ASSIMILATION OF THE CHINESE

The present trend toward assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand--or rather, the faster pace of this process of assimilation--is a development which could prove to have great long-term significance.

Assimilation is not a new phenomenon in Thailand (in contrast to many Southeast Asian countries where very little assimilation of Chinese has taken place). In fact, before Chinese women began coming along with their men in sizable numbers, a high proportion of the Chinese immigrants married Thai women, and the common saying was that within three generations the Chinese became Thai. After 1911, however, as more Chinese women came, and Chinese nationalism grew, the process of assimilation slowed down.

At present, there is a complicated spectrum of different kinds of Chinese in Thailand. Those who have roots in the country reaching back several generations, whose forebears intermarried with Thai, who accept Thai customs, and who identify themselves primarily with Thailand are found at one end of the spectrum. At the other extreme are immigrants who retain all of their Chinese characteristics, remain aliens, and are basically more identified with China than with their current place of residence. In between, there are innumerable shades and gradations of Sino-Thai who are the product of varying degrees of racial mixture, cultural compromise, or political opportunism. Right in the middle are families and individuals who straddle the dividing line and could be described with equal justification as both Thai and Chinese.

This complicated blending is one reason why it is impossible to obtain universal agreement on the actual number of Chinese in Thailand. The figure of three million is commonly cited, but most of the people who use it are not able to define what they mean by a Chinese. A few persons have tried to analyze the Chinese community, however, and on the basis of their studies it seems probable that Thailand contains between one-half and three-quarters of a million Chinese immigrants with alien status; about 1.5 million ethnically-pure Chinese; roughly 2 million persons indisputably Chinese in a cultural sense; between 2.5 and 3 million persons who "consider themselves to be Chinese"; and several million who have some Chinese blood but consider themselves to be Thai.

Assimilation has been possible in Thailand, whereas it has not been in many other places, because there is obviously a fairly high degree of cultural compatibility between Thai and Chinese cultures. Despite many differences, the Thai and Chinese are racially quite similar; their histories have long been intertwined (the Thai migrated to their present homeland from what is now Yunnan Province in China); their languages have much in common (both are tonal, for example); and since both have a Buddhist background of tolerance, there has been no religious bar to assimilation.

The actual pace of assimilation has varied, however, according to circumstances. The Sino-Thai spectrum appears to be quite sensitive, in fact, and can change very rapidly. When it is advantageous for a Sino-Thai to emphasize his "Thainess," he does so; when it is to his interest to be a Chinese, he tends to act like a Chinese.

The recent trend toward acceleration of **assimilation** of the Chinese in Thailand is due to a number of factors. One is the fact that Thai policies which aim at forcing assimilation are having a definite effect. Chinese children are being given a Thai education, and for many of them the Thai language and Thai customs seem more natural than those of the Chinese. This is particularly true in areas outside of the principal southern regions, where a majority of the Chinese in Thailand are concentrated; in northeast Thailand where Chinese are scattered, for example, many Chinese children answer their parents in Thai even when spoken to in Chinese,

Another important factor, **which** will have an increasing effect as time goes on, is the decline in contacts with China. With fewer economic interests and weaker ties in their home villages, more and more of the Chinese in Thailand have less interest in their native places and are more willing to identify themselves with Thailand. The stoppage of immigration--if it proves to be permanent, as it may--will also be important. Not only will it reduce contacts with China, but also it will stabilize the present ratio of Chinese men and women in Thailand (which is about three to two), and it will give added incentives for inter-marriage and assimilation,

In addition, the Thai restrictions placed on the Chinese in Thailand provide a tremendous impetus--despite resentment against the Thai--for Chinese to become Thai in every possible way. Of course, this in itself might be described more in terms of assuming protective coloration than in terms of genuine assimilation; but it does reinforce the trend toward assimilation, because its effects carry over to the children of the persons involved. For example, a large percentage of the top Chinese leaders in Bangkok now send their children to a school called Assumption College--which has a high prestige rating in Thailand but which does not teach Chinese--rather than to their own Chinese schools,

One interesting result of this assimilation process may be a **subtle**, slow change in certain values accepted by Thai society, because even those Chinese who are most assimilated seem to cling to certain Chinese characteristics. The product of assimilation may, therefore, be a group of Thai who place great importance upon hard work, economic competition, accumulation of wealth, and family solidarity--Chinese values which have not been primary in Thai society in the past. There are already some Thai families of Chinese origin in which one can see that these values have persisted, and there is no doubt that the importance of the family in Thai society as a whole is growing. Until recently the

Thai family has been such a loose social organization that an average person had little sense of historical continuity; for example, most families had no surnames to pass on, and often they could not trace their lineage beyond their grandparents. Now all Thai families are supposed to have surnames, and an increasing number of them are aware of their family history.

If the process of assimilation continues, therefore, not only will the Chinese community in Thailand change but also Thai society itself may undergo significant modifications.

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