

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE MIDDLEMAN
IN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE MIDDLEMAN IN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

By

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Throughout Southeast Asia the economies of the various nations are controlled by a minority of Chinese middlemen who are usually stereotyped as slick businessmen who are out to get what they can at the expense of the indigenous populations.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the process of the evolution of these middlemen in Thailand and Cambodia, and to question the likelihood of their continuing in their present status.

The local societies in both Thailand and Cambodia were traditionally characterized by dual class structures, with the ruling class on one side and the peasant producers on the other. With the arrival of the Europeans in mainland Southeast Asia, this structure was somewhat modified so that the Europeans displaced the ruling class.

A connecting link was needed between the Europeans and the peasant producers, ie, the Europeans required a means to obtain the primary products of the peasant producers and to market their manufactured goods among the local populations.

Through a combination of favorable circumstances, eg,

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availability at the time they were needed, prior experience, and pre-disposition caused by economic and political conditions in China, the Chinese evolved into the environmental niche of middleman and came to provide the means of distribution required by the Europeans.

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By

Malcolm Dean Otis

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To Dad

His advice to me that, "It doesn't take much of a person to quit," has carried me successfully through many endeavors that might not otherwise have been completed, including this one.

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Much of the background material found in Chapter 4 was taken from my notes resulting from the informative lectures on Southeast Asia by Dr. A. B. Hudson during the 1971 Spring Term.

I retain complete responsibility, however, for the contents of the paper.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Stereotype of the Chinese Middleman and its Basis in Fact

When one speaks of the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, the image of a soft-spoken, wiley middleman comes to mind. This stereotype is somewhat of an oversimplification, for Nan-Yang Chinese are found in almost every economic level in the Southeast Asian countries in which they reside, from the few Hakka rice farmers to the relatively few extremely wealthy bankers and businessmen. Most of the Chinese in Southeast Asia fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

Nonetheless, the stereotype does have some basis in fact. The Chinese middlemen provide the link between the agricultural hinterlands and the urban commercial centers throughout Southeast Asia (Kraar, 1971:79).

In Thailand and Cambodia--the two countries with which this paper is concerned--the resident Chinese control the national economies through their middleman positions in the rice trade and wholesale and retail commerce. Approximately 70 per cent of the Chinese in Thailand are engaged in commerce of some sort (Jiang, 1966:39), and it has been

estimated that any item bought or sold there passes through the hands of at least one Chinese middleman (Coughlin, 1960: 2)(Jiang, 1966:39). Probably over 90 per cent of the people engaged in commerce and 95 per cent of the merchants in Cambodia are Chinese (Willmott, 1967:64) with the result that whatever economic link the Cambodian villagers have with the outside world is through the resident Chinese.

Purpose of the Paper, and Thesis

The purpose of this paper is threefold:

1. To determine and to compare the environmental niche occupied by the Chinese community in Thailand and Cambodia,
2. To determine and to compare how the Chinese have evolved to occupy this environmental niche in each of these nations, and
3. To question the likelihood of the Chinese continuing in their present status.

In making this study my hypothesis will be that the combination of favorable economic circumstances, coupled with a group of people who, through availability, experience, and pre-disposition, were able to fill the vacant environmental niche at a particular point in time, enabled the overseas Chinese to occupy the position of middleman in Thailand and Cambodia.

Comparing this evolution of the Chinese will entail a certain amount of comparison between the two countries, for there are, on the surface, some important differences to

consider--differences that might preclude the same type of evolution in each case.

Thailand, for example, has a long history of independence, while Cambodia, on the other hand, was colonized by the French (although it was considered by the French as a "backwater" area to the main colony of Indochina, ie, Vietnam)(Willmott, 1967:47).

The Chinese faced a certain amount of competition from the Vietnamese in Cambodia in the economic sector, while in Thailand they had the field to themselves. This "field" will be defined more fully later on in the paper when we attempt to define the environmental niche occupied by the Chinese, along with an important similarity between the two countries: When they were introduced (or introduced themselves) into these two, as well as most other, Southeast Asian areas, the Chinese found what amounted to a dual class structure, with the peasant producer and the local royalty comprising the two classes (Coughlin, 1960:116).

One Small Research Problem

Just as Cambodia was a backwater area for the French colony of Indochina, it has been a backwater area as a subject for published research works in English--at least about the Chinese living there. Consequently, while I was able to compare the research of several authors on the Chinese in Thailand, I was essentially restricted to works by Willmott for Cambodia, using for comparison occasional side remarks

made by others in general works on Southeast Asia as a whole. Many of the works in Willmott's extensive bibliography (1967:115-126) that should have proved valuable were in French and therefore not available to me because of the language barrier.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: A BRIEF OUTLINE OF CHINESE COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA PRIOR TO 1511

Introduction

Before talking about the evolution of the Chinese middleman it would first be proper to have some idea of from what this middleman evolved: There have been Chinese in Southeast Asia since at least 221 B. C. (in northern Vietnam) and their role has not been exactly the same during these past two thousand-plus years. With this in mind, this chapter is designed to give a brief outline of overseas Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia, emphasizing Thailand and Cambodia, to serve as a starting point for later arguments.

Early Times: 221 BC - 1407 AD

The earliest Chinese writing about "Nan-Yang"* Southeast Asia was made as the result of a Chinese mission sent to observe and report on the region during the third century AD. There was some trade by Chinese at this time, followed

* Nan-Yang is "South-Seas" in Chinese and refers to Southeast Asia which had been reached by sea, as opposed to Southeast Asia which had been contacted via overland routes at an earlier time.

by a period of Buddhist pilgrimages through the area to India from the fifth to the eighth centuries, during which time not much trade went on that is known about (Wang, 1959:2).

The pilgrimages became less frequent after the eighth century and the Muslims of Persia and Arabia established an efficient trade in spices between China and Southeast Asia, during which time the Chinese merchants played a passive role.

This changed during the period of the Sung dynasty in China (960-1279 AD) as the policy was adopted of encouraging Nan-Yang trade. The Mongols continued this policy after their conquest of China and Chinese traders were given official loans to finance their trade, resulting in greater numbers of Chinese going to Southeast Asia (Wang, 1959:3).

The Voyages of Cheng Ho: 1407 - 1433 AD

This process was accelerated when the Yuan dynasty was overthrown in 1368 and the overland trade routes to China became closed. After a brief period of restriction on trade between 1368 and 1402, the Chinese became interested in opening an alternate route to Southeast Asia and in 1407 the succeeding Ming dynasty sent a large fleet under Cheng Ho to clean up the Straits of Malacca, which were infested with trade-inhibiting pirates (Malacca had been founded in 1403).

(The foundation for Cheng Ho's voyages had been laid

during the tenth century when a large group of Chinese traders began to specialize in Southeast Asian trade to the extent that, by the end of the Sung dynasty, the Chinese traders and seamen had gained control of the carrying trade in the South China Sea (Wang, 1959:6)).

The Chinese then recognized the sultan of Malacca as their official representative in Southeast Asia, and Chinese merchantmen began to call regularly on this port.

During this period of time (1407-1433) China paid directly for merchandise transported by these traders, who bought it in Southeast Asia and transported it directly to China--it was not destined for the world market (Wang, 1959:6).

The Establishment of Overseas Communities & the Incipient Middleman

Cheng Ho's voyages probably did not lead directly to any appreciable influx of Chinese into Southeast Asia, however they must have played a significant role in informing the Chinese of the possibilities of Southeast Asian trade--thousands of Chinese had sailed south and returned to tell of the riches to be found in the Nan-Yang.

Indirectly, however, his voyages most likely did lead to the establishment of Chinese communities in Thailand and Cambodia. Probably due to the increasing Chinese trade, the Cambodian and Thai (Khmer and Siamese, respectively) economies came to depend more and more upon trade and it is generally from this time that permanent Chinese communities in these countries is dated. The tales of the riches to be

had in the Nan-Yang coupled with the takeover of their homeland by the unpopular Mongols, spurred Chinese immigration--and we have developing the economic niche of the Chinese middleman that we shall attempt to define in Chapter 5. A Chinese envoy to Angkor (then capitol of "Cambodia") in 1291 stated that there were Chinese sailors who had settled there and married freely with the Khmer women (FitzGerald, 1962:67). This resident community increased until, by the time of French colonization in 1864, the Chinese in Cambodia numbered in the thousands and controlled practically all of that country's trade (Willmott, 1966:33).

The same type of situation existed in Thailand (Siam) where Li states that the Chinese had been concerned with trade for over 700 years (1957:662). They became especially active in this region of Southeast Asia (both Cambodia and Thailand) in the fifteenth century (Wang, 1959:8) where there were numerous outlets for their entrepreneurial talent that had been built up over the centuries. By the end of the sixteenth century, they had also achieved economic eminence in Thailand (Jiang, 1966:43).

CHAPTER 3

ESTABLISHING A BASE LINE

The Alternatives

In attempting to define the economic niche of the Chinese and how they have come to occupy it, the problem exists of establishing a base line from which to start. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Chinese have been in Southeast Asia for over two thousand years. However, though they were well established as traders and merchants, they did not occupy the position of middleman on a large scale during any period we have mentioned so far.

Not all authorities agree upon the date of this base line--the line that marks the beginning of the "economic middleman" image currently attributed to the Southeast Asian Chinese. Lea Williams defines it as the year 1869--the year the Suez Canal was opened (1966:39). Burling gives a less specific time--that of the last half of the eighteenth century--the time of the industrial revolution in Europe. (1965:136). Coughlin is less specific still, calling it, "...the time of Western economic development of the area." (1955:311). Purcell states, "Whereas in 1900 the alien Chinese were living side by side with their Siamese hosts without great consciousness of difference on either side..."

in 1920 the two communities were deeply conscious of their apartness..." (1965:119), and gives the year 1910, during which the Chinese in Bangkok rioted in protest of repressive government restrictions placed on them, as the starting point.

Purcell's choice of this particular date as a base line points up a danger in attempting to describe just one aspect of a problem, that is, it is almost impossible to discuss the economic position of the Chinese in any Southeast Asian country today without looking at the political and, perhaps, the cultural situation as well--as we will find ourselves doing later.

In this particular case, however, the economic position of the Chinese in Thailand was rather the same after 1910 as it had been earlier. Any difference was mainly one of degree of economic freedom; though I am sure that any Chinese living in Thailand at the time would be quick to point out that the "degree" was considerably less after that date.

The Base Line

For purposes of this paper, the base line from which we will trace the lodging of the Chinese into their current economic niche will be Coughlin's, "time of Western economic development of the area," that is, the 19th century, during which the various European powers set up political and economic control in most of mainland Southeast Asia. For Cambodia, this coincides roughly with the French colonial period, and for Thailand with the signing of the "friendship

and commerce" treaties with England and France in 1896. The period of colonization has not been used per se because Thailand was never colonized.

This generalized base line has certain advantages over the more specific ones mentioned earlier. The industrial revolution in Europe came after the initial establishment of European interest in Southeast Asia and gave impetus to the colonization process already tentitively underway. The opening of the Suez Canal can also be attributed to the desire to expand European economic influence in the area, and it, as did the industrial revolution, gave impetus to the process. The industrial revolution was only a part cause and the opening of the Suez Canal only a partial cause-effect of the overall process of expanding European influence in Southeast Asia.

The Thai government's restrictions that triggered the Chinese riots in Bangkok in 1910 can also be traced directly to European influence. This influence had touched Thailand at least fifty years earlier than 1910--the first Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, better known as the "Bowring Treaty", was signed by England and Siam in 1855 (Coughlin, 1960:16). Subsequent to admitting European traders into Thailand, a number of Thai nationals went to European schools to be educated. While in Europe, the Thai (as did nationals from other Southeast Asian areas) learned a concept that had previously been absent from the area: Nationalism. It was this new feeling of nationalism, brought back to Thailand by these sojourners, that prompted the placing of restrictions

on the Chinese community which, in turn, eventually sparked the riots of 1910.

The general base line we have chosen, then, includes all the more specific base lines and has the added advantage of pointing out that the transition was not sudden but occurred over a period of years.

CHAPTER 4

ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEANS

16th - 18th Centuries: Island Southeast Asia

The primary European interest in the Far East was as a source of spices. Prior to the 16th century, these were available to the European market only through Islamic traders who could purchase the spices in the Far East and sell them to European traders at a neat profit.

The Europeans desired to establish their own trade route to the source of the spice market in order to eliminate the Islamic middlemen and to reduce the expense that dealing through this intermediary entailed.

In 1498 (just six years after Europe had "discovered" America) Vasco da Gama sailed around the South Coast of Africa and found the desired route to the Far East. With the fall of Malacca to the Portugese in 1511, the spice trade was in the hands of the various European powers (the Portugese, Dutch and English, primarily) and the Islamic middlemen were circumvented and therefore no longer required.

This was generally the picture until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Political control over the hinterlands was not as yet attempted or deemed necessary as the Europeans could achieve their goals through "gunboat diplomacy"

by trading with the coastal kingdoms, many of which had no agricultural hinterlands.

One of the primary reasons the Europeans had been able to gain control of the spice trade in the first place was the superiority of Western armaments. A recalcitrant sultan could be kept in line fairly easily simply by sailing a gunboat or two into his capitol or major port. The threat of the destruction to follow was usually sufficient to gain the Europeans their way.

19th - 20th Centuries: Mainland Southeast Asia

Three significant developments took place during the 19th century that brought the Europeans to mainland Southeast Asia and the Chinese out from the "background".*

The first of these significant developments was an improvement in shipping resulting from the industrial revolution. Newly developed steamships, which came to replace the previously used sail powered craft, could carry heavier cargoes through the shortened route to Europe made possible by the opening of the Suez Canal (which was also made possible by the industrial revolution).

Second, resulting from the more efficient shipping, bulkier and heavier crops could be transported to Europe at

* As far as the Europeans were concerned! From their pre-historic beginnings by the Great Bend of the Yellow River the Chinese had expanded steadily southward so that, by the time the Westerners came, they had arrived in Southeast Asia and, as we have seen, were well on their way to becoming the dominant commercial group in the region.

a profit. These included plantation crops such as coffee, tea, black peppers (which the Chinese had already been growing) and, at the start of the 20th century, rubber, which was needed, again, as the result of developments during the industrial revolution.

Mainland Southeast Asia was a suitable area in which to cultivate these newly demanded crops. In the ensuing land rush, the British took over Burma during the period 1824-1885 and the French annexed Indochina during the period 1862-1883. Thailand (Siam) signed a treaty with the French and English in 1896 (Purcell, 1950:43) and avoided being colonized, but still participated in the newly developing trade. Thus, though not colonized, Thailand developed an economic relation with the European powers similar in nature to that of the colonized countries.

These annexations were the partial result of the third significant development. Until the beginning of the 19th century, trade had been conducted by private companies under license from the home governments. These companies subsequently went bankrupt and the home governments, in order to insure the continuation of the profitable trade and the retention of needed markets for their manufactured goods, took over their operations--which brought attempted political control and the development of colonies.

Labor had to be imported into these areas to support plantation cultivation and irrigation projects, as the colonial administrations found the local inhabitants

unsuitable for these tasks. The decade of the 1860's marked the beginning of a huge immigration of Chinese into Southeast Asia that was to last until ca. 1950 (Coughlin, 1968: 92). Why the local inhabitants were not found suitable will be considered in Chapter 5.

Where the Chinese came as laborers they eventually established themselves in a higher level in the economy and became classic middlemen in such areas as transportation and the provision of credit during the latter 19th and early 20th centuries.* They still occupy this same general position in Cambodia and Thailand today. Comprising approximately 7% (Willmott, 1967) and 8½-10% (Williams, 1966) of the total population, respectively, they control most of the economy in each of these nations, mainly in the fields of moneylending, banking (since World War II), construction, rice milling, fish processing and marketing, transportation (mainly river due to government restrictions), and export-import and retail-wholesale operations that vary in scope from international trade to local grocery stores (Willmott, 1967:10).

We turn next to the evolution of these middlemen.

* Indians were also used but did not establish themselves as did the Chinese, with some exceptions as moneylenders in Malaya and Burma. Why the Chinese established themselves as middlemen and the Indians generally did not is beyond the scope of this paper.

CHAPTER 5
EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE MIDDLEMAN

The Evolutionary Model

The model used to describe the evolution of the Chinese middleman is essentially the one posited in Evolution and Culture, edited by Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service (1960).

In this model, man is represented as having two means of utilizing the earth's resources in order to survive. The first is biological and is seen as the organic means. The second, and the one with which the book is primarily concerned, is cultural:

"Culture is the superorganic means available to the human species for utilizing the earth's resources in the service of survival; accumulation of experience through symboling permits improvements in this endeavor: hence, cultural evolution in particular is part and continuation of evolution as a totality." (p8).

Since biological evolution is well known and better understood, the authors use certain terms that are similar to biological evolution to explain cultural evolution. However, as they are careful to point out, "To explain two things in similar terms is not the same thing as explaining one in terms of the other. Therefore there is no reductionism." (p10). There is a fundamental difference between the kinds of evolution in that cultural evolution can be

transmitted between different lines by diffusion, while biological evolution is a much slower process which cannot be so controlled (p27).

A culture is seen as more advanced, ie, more highly evolved, if it tends to capture energy more efficiently than another. This can be within a particular environmental niche, such as that of middleman, or over a wider range of environments, such as middleman vs. rice farmer or the tropics vs. the arctic.

Since culture is seen as an energy-capturing system tending to evolve in the direction of thermo-dynamic improvement, and to adapt to different means of energy appropriation (p9), the statement that a particular culture is more highly evolved, or "advanced", than another is value-free.

Cultures are organizations for perpetuating human life and themselves. "Logically as well as empirically, it follows that as problems of survival vary, cultures accordingly change, that culture undergoes phylogenetic, adaptive development." (p24).

What we shall hopefully see is that, with the arrival of the Europeans, and given the conditions then prevailing in China and Southeast Asia, the problems of survival changed and many Chinese were "selected in favor of" becoming Middlemen. This process of selection is explained by a set of "rules" presented in Evolution and Culture.

Who is Chinese ?

My ancestors, I am told, immigrated to the British colony in America in search of a better life and, perhaps, a bit of adventure in meeting the unknown. They were British citizens. I am not. They probably maintained some loyalty to the Crown--at least initially. I have no such loyalty. The country from which my ancestors emigrated and the country of which I am a citizen today, 200-300 years later, each uses a different dialect of the English language as its official language. However they share the same written language, which facilitates mutual understanding. When did the lineage members of my ancestors cease being "English" and become "American"?

The question of defining who is Chinese in Thailand and Cambodia is even more difficult, for the immigrant Chinese in neither of these two countries ever took control of the colony and made it their own. Their language problem is more severe than my somewhat farfetched example above--they speak "dialects" of Chinese that some maintain are not dialects at all, but distinct languages in that they are mutually unintelligible at the spoken level. However they do share the same written language (Kraar, 1971:79).

The official definition of who is "Chinese" varies from country to country. While ethnic background is the criterion in some countries, nationality or citizenship is used in others (Chang, 1968:97).

Though knowledge of the citizenship of its residents is useful information for a nation's government to have, it does not necessarily tell the researcher much about ethnic background or social and economic affiliation. For example, Cambodia's 1954 citizenship law allowed many Chinese born there to become its citizens so that today many ethnic Chinese in Cambodia are citizens of that country (Willmott, 1969:294). To reiterate, using the criterion of citizenship alone to define who is or is not Chinese would lead us astray in this paper about the Chinese middleman, then, because most retailers in Cambodia are its citizens but are still ethnic Chinese (Willmott, 1967:57).

A similar situation exists in Thailand, where all children that are born there are considered Thai citizens unless registered by their parents at the legations or embassies of their mother countries (Li, 1957:663). The 1960 Thai government census listed approximately 410,000 Chinese citizens in Thailand, however one estimate of the number of persons who speak one of the Chinese dialects and generally conform to Chinese behavior patterns is $3\frac{1}{2}$ million (Jiang, 1966:39)(See Appendix C). Li estimates that only about one ethnic Chinese in three could, by marrying a Chinese woman, establish a purely ethnic Chinese home, so the distinction is becoming more indistinct. FitzGerald states that many Thai families who both speak the Thai language and use Thai surnames are actually all or partly ethnic Chinese (1962:73). But they are, conversely, also part Thai! This "double

identity," as Coughlin (1960) calls it, greatly complicates any attempt to determine exactly who is Chinese. It would appear that neither ancestry nor citizenship is a sufficient denominator.

Most authorities generally agree that the most useful criterion for determining who is to be considered Chinese is that of self-identification: "In the last analysis, being Chinese is, in Southeast Asia, essentially a matter of self-identification." (Murray, 1964:68), "...it seems more realistic to count as Chinese any person...who identifies himself with Chinese, whatever his nationality may be." (Coughlin, 1960:5), "...overseas Chinese identification depends far more on personal social attitudes than on official legislation." (Williams, 1966:5).

Willmott says essentially the same thing in maintaining that participation in the various Chinese voluntary associations is the main criterion of being Chinese (1969:294). This a valid point, because the various Chinese associations make a definitive contribution to the social unity and cultural strength of the Chinese (Coughlin, 1960:60). Without exception, one who considers himself to be Chinese belongs to one or more of these associations.

We shall define as "Chinese," then, one who considers himself to be Chinese and who belongs to one or more of the various Chinese voluntary associations. He most probably has also descended from Chinese immigrants in the male line, if he is not himself an immigrant (Murray, 1964:8).

The Process of Immigration

As we saw earlier, the Chinese had been in contact with the countries of the Nan-Yang for approximately two thousand years by the time the Europeans arrived on the scene. However, this prolonged contact was not associated with any Chinese settlement in Thailand or Cambodia worth mentioning until the nature of the economies in these kingdoms shifted outward and came to depend on trade (Willmott, 1966:33) following the voyages of Cheng Ho. Thus, when the French took control of Indochina during the mid-eighteenth century, they found the Chinese widely settled in the area (Willmott, 1969: 283). In Thailand, it had been the vested interests of the Chinese community already there that had frustrated initial European attempts at trade in that country.

It was not until the arrival of the Europeans that we discussed in the last chapter, however, that the Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia reached the tidal proportion that has since become almost legendary. It is this period that we are concerned about in studying "the process of immigration".

When we talk later about the Chinese occupation of the environmental niche, it will be useful to know something of the nature of the people who came to fill it and, indeed, why they came at all.

First, it was only relatively recently that population pressure became serious in China. The population in China

had had its ups and downs alongside the rise and fall of the various dynasties (or, to stick to our model, the appearance of more highly evolved dynasties which replaced their predecessors).

Second, the mid-19th century marked the beginning of China's first large-scale contact with the West. Hong Kong was established as a free port in the early 1840's, and Canton and Amoy were established as treaty ports by one of the series of unequal treaties that embarrassed China during the latter half of the 1800's (Chang, 1968:91).

That the Manchu dynasty was on the decline is evident by the fact that it was unable to counter effectively the imposition of these treaties. It had come to power in China starting in 1606 AD (Herrmann, 1966:51) and was growing corrupt and feeble with age, as had the dynasties before it. The population had grown during good times and the Manchus were unable to handle the increased load during their decline.

These two factors in combination are generally what caused the Chinese to emigrate, and the first influx of immigrants to Southeast Asia arrived after the end of the "First China War" (or Opium War) in 1842 (Li, 1957:663).

The immigrants came almost entirely from the Pearl River delta, the Han Valley and the rural area around Amoy in the South China provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien (Chang, 1968:102)--the two southeasternmost and thus the two closest provinces to the Nan-Yang (Appendix A).

These immigrants were, in the main, poverty stricken and illiterate. They came from a geographically segmented region of China--the last to be enveloped by the Han Chinese and the farthest from the Manchu political power. They lived on the frontier, so to speak, and had the pioneer "virtues" of, "Thrift, endurance, independence, industry, flexibility, and adaptability." (FitzGerald, 1962:70-71).

Chen describes the desire of the Chinese in the region to elevate their sons from the heartbreaking routine of subsistence farming:

"Trade attracts a great deal of interest and energy even in those families that depend mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. They usually hope that at least one or other of the boys will some day take up trade as his life occupation, and some of the parents start to train their children for a business career quite early in life. It is not uncommon to be awakened in the morning by the street cries of youngsters who, as part of their education, are sent out to sell anything the breakfast menu may require....In the eyes of most of the people, trade is the easiest and obvious road to success. To become a business man is the ambition of the average boy, even when the father is a capable farmer." (Chen, 1940:69).

Chen also states that, though the emigrant population knew a variety of occupations, these did not yield them a sufficient income to maintain their current standard of living (Chen, 1940:58). It was therefore economic reasons more than political that caused the immigration to the Nan-Yang (Li, 1957:663).

These were the pushing factors that helped cause the Chinese to emigrate. Before we explore the pulling forces that speeded the process of immigration it should be useful to point out, since this is a paper on evolution, that this

southward movement fits the psychology of the Chinese rather well (Chang, 1968:100). We saw earlier how the Chinese had been moving steadily southward for years: The immigrants to Southeast Asia came from the southernmost part of China--the last to be taken into the Chinese Empire. That they were the most recent frontiersmen is perhaps one reason why they had what FitzGerald earlier described as the pioneer spirit.

The large-scale immigration began in the decade of the 1860's and lasted for almost a century. And, "pioneer spirit" or not, the bulk of the immigration during this time was initially directed to the areas where Chinese communities were already established (Chang, 1968:92). Although the Chinese had been coming to Southeast Asia for hundreds of years, the arrival of the Europeans and colonial rule gave impetus to the trend by creating a demand for labor on the plantations, in the tin mines of Malaya, and in construction of public works. "By 1890 Chinese colonization had covered almost every part of Southeast Asia--an index of the penetration of Western enterprises and interests." (Chang, 1968:95). Although the Chinese came initially as plantation workers and manual laborers, they would not remain in these menial occupations for long--at least not as a group--as we shall see shortly.

Until the 1920's and early 1930's, the immigrants had been mostly men who were too poor to bring their families. During these years the trend changed and an influx of Chinese women began (Coughlin, 1960:23). Though never at the same

volume as men, this female immigration allowed the establishment of the all-Chinese home for (practically speaking) the first time in Southeast Asia. Up until that time, the Chinese men had taken local wives by the thousands.

The general pattern of Chinese immigration to Thailand and Cambodia continued on generally the same plane until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930's, at which time it came to a virtual halt until after the end of World War II. Immigration that took place after the war will be outlined in Chapter 6.

It is interesting to note, however, that 98 per cent of the Chinese in Thailand today still belong to five speech groups which trace their origins to the two provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien (Jiang, 1966:42), even though there has been virtually no immigration of Chinese to any Southeast Asian nation for approximately twenty years.

Now that we have the Chinese arriving in Southeast Asia in quantity, and are aware of the positions it was intended they fill, it is time to turn to the positions they actually did fill.

The Environmental Niche

At the time of the arrival of Western influence, the Chinese in Southeast Asia had been primarily concerned with trade between the Nan-Yang and China. Their settlement was fairly widespread and their economic influence was not insignificant, but neither were they all-pervasive. With the

widening of European interest in mainland Southeast Asia, this began to change until, eventually, the Chinese came to be indispensable middlemen in the economic structure of the area. This environmental niche that the overseas Chinese came to fill needs further definition than the stereotypical "Chinese middleman" that we used in the introduction. This section is an attempt to define the niche.

Both Thailand and Cambodia had societies that were traditionally characterized by a dual class structure divided between a large peasantry and a smaller ruling class (Jiang, 1966:46). Each of these societies, as a whole, occupied an environmental niche, and these two main classes within the societies each occupied an environmental niche that was a part of the whole. Burling states:

"The lives of the farmers were limited to their villages, their padi fields, and their families, and their relationships with one another were regulated by mutual and communal obligations. Giving symbolic order and importance to their world, however, was the capital city....Its aristocracy was wealthy and acquisitive, treasuring refined and graceful manners but operating in an atmosphere of intrigue and rivalry which contrasted sharply with village life. But aristocrat and commoner alike accepted the fundamental order of the universe, and each unquestioningly granted the place of the other within it." (1965:78).

Money was not the medium of exchange, as villagers traded and paid taxes "in kind". What public works there were were constructed and maintained by the local population using a system of corvée labor directed by the local village headman. The peasant population could expect little from the central government other than some protection from bandits or insurrection (ibid, p103).

It was between these two groups within the traditional society that the Chinese middleman had his embryonic beginning. These early entrepreneurs controlled most of the trade in the area, but this trade was rather small-scale. There was almost no development of trade by the indigenous population other than local agricultural produce and locally made specialties.

Western influence changed this environmental niche so that, if we can picture a stream, the European powers were now the bank on one side (along with the local royalty as a minor "partner") and the peasant producers the other bank. If one wished to transport goods from one side of the stream to the other, one would have to find some means of bridging it. Coughlin writes:

"Under the impact of penetration by industrialized nations and the resulting modernization, there develops in these societies new and increasing opportunities for commercial expansion, principally in the realm of retail trade. There is a need for commercial go-betweens to funnel imported consumption goods through wholesale and retail outlets to the mass of the population." (Coughlin, 1955:311).

Dr. Ward is more specific and further shows that the bridge must be a two-way structure so that the "primary" crop of the peasant producers can get out as well as consumption goods in:

"Rubber, sago, fish, coffee, cotton, cocoa differ fundamentally in production, but share one negative property in that none itself provides subsistence for its producer: all have to be marketed. Most, also, have to be processed in some way (then communicated through often complex systems of overseas export to world markets). Both processing and communication may be difficult, even impossible, for the peasant producer

himself to perform....(Because) peasant producers themselves do not usually have the requisite time or skill to do more than start their produce on the first rung of the market ladder, societies in which their type of commercial production predominates necessarily require middlemen to take over the primary products and handle them on their way to the wider market.

"There is an obverse situation: commercial primary producers require not only to sell but to buy. A society of this kind therefore necessarily also demands middlemen in the distributive trades, from the big importers in the ports down to the smallest shopkeepers...to the most minute villages and settlements up-country." (Ward, 1960:149-150).

This, then, is the environmental niche which the Chinese came to occupy: That of middleman between the two banks of the stream--between the indigenous peasant producers and, "the new economic machine that the Industrial Revolution was creating in the West." (Burling, 1965:136). This new middleman was all that Fredrik Barth's (1966) entrepreneur should be. He was an innovator who was seeking a profit by interchanging goods and services between previously unconnected spheres. The Chinese entered slowly at first, and in small numbers, carrying on what little trade was necessary to maintain the local economies. But, with the French colonization of Indochina and the opening of Thailand to Western trade in the 19th century, they grew in strength until they had gained virtual control of the retail and rice trade (Coughlin, 1955:314; 1960:16)(Willmott, 1967:44,53). Willmott described one segment of the extent of Chinese control of the rice trade in Cambodia toward the end of the 19th century: Through an hierarchy of trade and transport designed to keep the rice trade in Chinese hands, Cambodia's export rice was purchased by Chinese directly from the

peasant producer, taken on Chinese transport to the Chinese operated rice mills in Cholon, husked, and sold to French export firms (1967:53).

These middlemen and the Europeans complimented one another in that the Europeans could not have reached the peasant producers--who were also consumers--without the Chinese (Williams, 1966:44) who understood the local marketing structure. Thus, these middlemen could provide the Europeans with the raw materials needed for export as well as market locally the European manufactured goods (Fitzgerald, 1962:68).

We shall now address the question: Why was it the Chinese, and not the local populations, who came to occupy the environmental niche of economic middleman?

Chinese vs. Non-Chinese Occupation of the Environmental Niche

That the Chinese were able to occupy the environmental niche of economic middleman through a combination of favorable circumstances--the arrival of the Europeans, availability, prior experience, and pre-disposition--has already been seen. This section deals with the other side of the question, ie, the non-evolution of the indigenous economic middleman.

It has been posited (eg, Robequain, 1944:35) that the reason the indigenous population did not evolve as did the Chinese was the "natural tropical lethargy" of the native

Southeast Asian people, however this explanation fails to account for certain facts that have since been reported. For example, the Thai and Cambodians have, since World War II, started slowly to drift into occupations once monopolized by the Chinese such as dockworkers in Cambodia and food hawkers and pedi-cab drivers in Thailand, and they work as hard in these occupations as the Chinese did. In addition, both Thai and Burmese women have traditionally marketed local produce which, even though they did not evolve to the larger-scale middleman role, casts doubt on the theory of a mysterious superior Chinese aptitude for this type of enterprise (Burling, 1965:136). It would therefore appear necessary to look elsewhere for an explanation of why the local population did not evolve to fill the middleman role.

Coughlin is accurate in his appraisal that, "An immigrant group may take advantage of these new commercial opportunities far more readily than the indigenous people whose social goals continue to be realized within the framework of the traditional class structure." (1955:311, emphasis added). This phenomenon illustrates Sahlins' and Service's Principle of Stabilization, namely that, "A Culture at rest tends to remain at rest." (1960:54).

It is true that the local population had to manufacture certain craft-related items as did the Chinese in their own emigrant communities. However, the indigenes were already established in the area, while the Chinese came as outsiders, and there was lacking in the indigenes' ethos a desire to

engage in trade or commerce (Coughlin, 1960,16), while, as we have seen, such an ethos did exist in the Chinese immigrants. In addition, Southeast Asia was not feeling the same population pressure for land that China was, and the struggle for existence was less difficult than the losing struggle that had caused the Chinese to emigrate from the land of their ancestors. The local populations were snug in their environmental groves in that they had adapted themselves to reap an adequate subsistence from their surroundings without undue hardship--so why should they change?

If the Principle of Stabilization seems to explain why the local population would not change, Sahlins' and Service's Law of Evolutionary Potential attempts to show that perhaps they could not change: "The more specialized and adapted a culture in a given evolutionary stage, the smaller is its potential for passing to the next stage." (1960:97).

The local women could market locally their husbands' produce successfully, but it was difficult for them or their husbands to learn enough about the larger evolving market to be successful in it. It is inevitable that a population will adapt itself to its environmental niche (Sahlins & Service, 1960:14), and in the process of adapting will become specialized within that niche so that it becomes an environmental groove that becomes ever more difficult to exit and, conversely, another environmental niche becomes more difficult to enter.

Going back to an earlier quotation of Coughlin in this

section, that an immigrant population is better able to take advantage of new opportunities than an indigenous one, further explanation may be found in two more "rules" of cultural change posited by Sahlins & Service. The first is the Phylogenetic Discontinuity of Progress, which is that, "An advanced form does not normally beget the next stage of advance; the next stage begins in a different line," and the second is the rule of Local Discontinuity of Progress which states, "If successive stages of progress are not likely to go from one (culture) to its next descendant, then they are not likely to occur in the same locality." (1960:98-99).

We have already seen that the local population was well entrenched in its environmental groove and probably had no reason to change. The Thai and Cambodian societies were old and established civilizations and the most highly adapted to their particular environmental niche, that is, they extracted energy from their particular niche more effectively than any competing organism, or civilization. There was no particular selective pressure bearing on them that would tend to cause them to change. Therefore, when the arrival of the Europeans made available a new environmental niche, it was not the local population but, rather, the Chinese who were most likely to occupy it. Insofar as the indigenous societies were influenced by the Europeans or Chinese, they could undergo certain specific changes, such as selling rice to or borrowing credit from the newcomer middleman, while preserving their fundamental social and economic structure (Sahlins

and Service, 1960:54).

People who emigrate do so for a reason, and in the case of the Chinese the reason was chiefly to improve their economic status, not to transplant from China to the Nan-Yang their accustomed standard of living (Chen, 1940:60). They had come as coolie laborers, plantation workers, and tin miners in the hope of improving their economic lot. Thousands died in the attempt and thousands never attained their goal and remained destitute. The fittest survived to grasp the opportunity provided by the Western economic expansion into the area and became the middlemen, building upon the foundation laid by the original immigrants who had followed Cheng Ho.

At first glance, it would seem that the rule of Local Discontinuity of Progress does not fit here, because the new class evolved in the same geographic locality: Thailand and Cambodia. But in a larger sense, it does apply, because the middleman evolved in a different, though adjacent and complementary, environmental niche. And the Chinese middleman came from China--not from local stock--where his ethos had included the desire to enter the marketplace.

Once the Chinese had occupied the economic niche of middleman, it became even more difficult for the indigenous population to do so. This can be explained by citing still another of the principles of cultural evolution posited by Sahlins and Service, the Law of Cultural Dominance: "That cultural system which more effectively exploits the energy

resources of a particular environment will tend to spread in that environment at the expense of less effective systems;..." (1960:75).

We have seen that the Chinese exploited their environmental niche more effectively than anyone else: They were the only ones in it. But once they were in it, they tended to insure that they remained so (A culture at rest tends to remain at rest?).

We stated earlier (Burling, 1965) that it was difficult for the local villagers to learn enough about the markets and the availability of goods. This is because, among the Chinese entrepreneurs, written agreements were rare (and still are). Information was passed by word of mouth and the system based on mutual trust. Without certain mutuality of values, the Chinese were naturally hesitant to do business with non-Chinese on an equal basis.(Coughlin, 1960:123).

Even if a local peasant should start a successful business, he would most likely be put out of business in short order by jealous kinsmen who would force him to hire unneeded help or to make bad loans. The Chinese had the advantage of having their needy kinsmen thousands of miles away (Burling, 1965:136). Even if kinsmen were close at hand, however, there were, and are, important organizational advantages of the Chinese family system. The Thai and Cambodians did not idealize the extended family as did the Chinese. The Chinese extended family, in which individual members were collectively responsible for the welfare of the unit, was ideally suited as a foundation for business

enterprises run on the basis of mutual cooperation and trust.

In summary, the Chinese tended to choose the least competitive occupations and once there, tended to remain in them.

There is a final historical stage to be discussed which takes the overseas Chinese from the general period of World War II to the present, and it is to this stage that we now turn.

CHAPTER 6

POST WORLD WAR II DEVELOPMENTS

The Era of Independence

The first half of the 20th century, and more specifically World War II, proved to be a decisive dividing line for the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Chinese immigration ground to a halt during the war and those that remained secretly wished for the return of the Europeans and the stability and prosperity they had provided for the Chinese middlemen. Their wish was not to be realized, as the post-war period ushered in an era of independence and nationalism that was to have a profound effect on their struggle to remain in their previously won economic niche. An exception to the "non-return" of the European colonialists was Thailand, which had not been colonized in the first place and where the Chinese had had to deal with a local government all along. But as we shall see, the post-war developments there paralleled those in Cambodia.

That the Western powers were invincible was little doubted throughout Southeast Asia until the beginning of the 20th century. First the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905 (Dupuy, 1970:920) caused some Southeast Asian leaders to start thinking, then the smashing Japanese victories

during the first six months of World War II ended forever the myth of Western invincibility.

The rise of Thai nationalism mentioned earlier in Chapter 3 now saw itself repeated in the newly or soon-to-be independent nations of Southeast Asia. This feeling, which had been imported from the West via the new leaders of these countries, most of whom had been educated there, was to manifest itself in the various governmental policies that were to affect the Chinese.

The problems facing these new nations were numerous. Both Thailand and, to a lesser extent, Cambodia are multi-ethnic, and integration into cohesive national units is difficult. A society-wide language is needed which does not exist throughout the population in either country. So there is a problem of bringing together the heterogeneous groups within these states as well as between them.

Even within the Chinese minority we are not dealing with a homogeneous group: There are approximately 12-14 million Chinese living in Southeast Asia who came from the most heterogeneous part of China and speak seven or eight different languages. Each of the five major speech groups (Appendix A) found throughout Southeast Asia is found in Thailand and Cambodia.

The local governments developed a desire to protect their citizens from the encroachments of minority groups (Williams, 1966:31)--especially the Chinese--and adopted an anti-Chinese policy in every country in Southeast Asia

except Malaya in order to realize this goal* (Uchida, 1956: 593). The restrictions that have most directly influenced the Chinese, and those that we will address here, are those on occupation and education.

Government Restrictions and Chinese Reaction

When the economic niche of middleman was complementary to that of the local populations, harmony was not difficult to establish between them. The rise of nationalism was the prime factor that upset that harmony (Freyn, 1960:657).

The leaders in Thailand viewed the Chinese domination of trade and commerce with growing distrust, and when the ultra-nationalists came to power after the 1932 revolution the first formal anti-Chinese legislation was passed. This required Chinese businesses to register with the government and to keep their accounts in the Thai language to facilitate government inspection (Coughlin, 1952:308fn, 379-380).

Luang Phibun Songkhram became the Premier of Thailand in 1938 and ushered in the darkest days the Chinese ever suffered through in that country. They were prohibited from manufacturing and selling salt, tobacco and other key commodities and were excluded from many occupations which had traditionally been theirs (Jiang, 1966:57). As an ally of Japan during World War II, Thailand felt "compelled" to take

* This was as of 1956. The subsequent exclusion of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia must be seen as anti-Chinese.

strict measures against the enemies of the Japanese. The only ones they could get their hands on were, conveniently, the Chinese.

It is interesting, as an aside, that the Thai have been very careful in all of their pro-Thai (anti-foreign) legislation to arrange the wording so that the restrictions have applied equally to all aliens. However, these restrictions have been invariably concerned with activities dominated by the Chinese so that, obviously, the Chinese have been the prime target (Coughlin, 1952:379). It is for this reason that the restrictive legislation can be viewed as essentially anti-Chinese.

A Royal Decree passed in June of 1942 (Appendix E) further restricted the Chinese from 27 trades that ran the gamut from taxi driving to hair dressing by reserving these occupations exclusively for Thai nationals. (Coughlin, 1952:308).

This downward trend in Chinese fortunes was stabilized after World War II when the Siamese-Chinese Treaty of Amity was signed in January 1946 (Li, 1957:663), and the 1942 Decree was superseded in 1949 by another which reduced the number of prohibited occupations which were reserved for the Thai to seven (Coughlin, 1960:132)(Appendix F).

Cambodia enacted restrictive legislation similar to that of Thailand, after gaining independence from France. Article 26 of the 1956 Immigration Act prohibits aliens from

engaging in 18 specified occupations which are essentially the same as those reserved for the Thai (Willmott, 1967:46) (Appendix D), and a 1957 law requires that 70 per cent of all employees in business enterprises must be Cambodian citizens (ibid:62).

After the French left, the Chinese in Cambodia expanded their environmental niche. Where before they had sold processed rice to French firms for export, they now expanded to fill the vacancy left by the French and became predominant in import-export trade. However, foreign trade was nationalized in 1964 and the Chinese reverted back to the role of middleman (Willmott, 1967:53). When pressed, the Chinese were changing only enough to insure that they could retain their economic structure. However, when opportunity presented itself, they were still prepared to expand into a profit-making enterprise, again retaining their basic economic structure. They still maintained control of the rice market and, in meeting the situation of being cut off from the Cholon rice mills after Cambodia and Vietnam became separate states, the number of rice mills in Cambodia was increased from 47 to 1,324 between 1951 and 1964 (ibid:55).

A citizenship law passed in 1954 allowed many Chinese to become Cambodian citizens if they were born there. The laws assigning nationality quotas to business employment, occupational restrictions, and property ownership laws have caused many Chinese to opt for Cambodian citizenship (Coughlin, 1969:294). As a result, most retailers are

Cambodian nationality though still ethnic Chinese (Willmott, 1967:57).

Due to the Chinese adeptness at evasion, the various efforts to control their economic power have only been partially effective (Coughlin, 1960:2). Williams states, for instance, that, "The relative wealth and enduring insecurity of the overseas (Chinese) have long fed bureaucratic corruption." (1966:29).

In Cambodia and Thailand both, the Chinese make a practice of hiring local front men to cover their dealing in prohibited trades (Vanzi, 1971:F4). Influential politicians are appointed to boards of directors (what we might in this country call "conflict of interest") in order that they might, for considerable "salary", supply protection, official privileges and government contracts (Jiang, 1966:64).

Other tactics include registering a business in the name of a wife or child who is a citizen, buying alien licenses, or bribing officials.

The occupational prohibitions have made little difference except among the essentially labor occupations which the Chinese no longer desire to fill, such as longshoremen, barbers and chauffeurs (Willmott, 1967:47). Along this same line, the restrictive legislation is not often well enforced unless local individuals are able and willing to engage in the reserved occupations (Coughlin, 1960:136). The Thai government learned a lesson in this regard when it allowed

its Thai Rice Company to monopolize the rice export trade in 1952. The Thai had neither the experience nor the initiative to handle the enterprise, and the short lived government monopoly has since reverted back to private traders--predominantly the Chinese (Smith, 1968:415).

The other primary axis of government attack has been upon the very identity of the Chinese through restrictions placed on the conduct of Chinese education.

The Chinese have been aware of the advantages of education since the days of the imperial examinations in China, and in Southeast Asia they have frequently supported their own schools. The nature of these schools has often been to give their children a distinctively Chinese education rather than to integrate them into the host country. Since Chinese education tends to preserve the separate Chinese identity (Murray, 1964:69), the direction of these schools has become a sensitive issue between the local governments and the Southeast Asian Chinese (Burling, 1965:139).

Chinese education in Southeast Asia developed rapidly after Western influence had opened the flood gates to Chinese immigration in the latter half of the 19th century, but only a relatively small percentage of the total Chinese population received this education until 1930.

As we saw earlier, the proportion of women immigrants increased substantially in the 1920's and 1930's. There was, "...a subsequent explosion of school age population from purely Chinese homes; increasing interest in schooling for

girls; better sources of teachers and texts..." (Murray, 1964:71) followed by a large rise in Chinese schooling in every Chinese community except Thailand, where government restrictions were already underway.

In reaction to this dramatic expansion of Chinese education, Southeast Asian governments have attempted to nationalize at least a portion of this education to try to shake the Chinese loose from their attachment to China and their "Chineseness". As a partial result, the Chinese languages (Mandarin is used in most Chinese schools) are not recognized as official anywhere except Singapore (Williams, 1966: 35).

No other Southeast Asian nation has made a more vigorous attack on Chinese education and identity than Thailand. In 1937 there were 197 primary and 20 secondary schools there, which was reduced to zero during the dark days of World War II. They were allowed to reopen after the war with the signing of the treaty of amity with China and at one time reached to over 450 in number. Subsequent government restrictions reduced the number to less than 300 by 1950, 244 in 1951 and approximately 167 in 1962 (Coughlin, 1952:380)(Murray, 1964:73).

In an attempt to assimilate younger generations of Chinese into the Thai society the government has limited the hours available for teaching the Chinese language, standardized the textbooks, and required Chinese teachers to pass a stiff Thai language examination which many are unable to do.

Chinese secondary schools are not allowed at all, and violations of government regulations result in the quick closure of offending primary schools (Jiang, 1966:61). On top of all these restrictions, the Chinese children are limited to four years of Chinese primary school--hardly enough time to learn the ideographic Chinese language fluently with the authorized six to ten hours per week of language instruction (Murray, 1964:74).

Though there have been restrictions placed on the Chinese schools in Cambodia, they have not been nearly so severe as those in Thailand (Murray, 1964:80), probably because, until the recent coup, of Cambodia's neutralist policy and friendly relations with the People's Republic of China.

Restrictions on Chinese private schools in Cambodia include a limitation on the size of classes (which presents no problem since enrollment is below the set quota), and a requirement that Khmer language and culture courses be taught by Cambodian teachers hired specifically for that purpose. Schools and teachers must be licensed, but there is no Khmer language requirement for teachers, and textbooks need be approved only for material relating to Cambodia (ibid:83).

The difference in government attitude is reflected in the percentage of Chinese enrolled in Chinese schools. In 1962 there were 71,000 Chinese enrolled in Chinese schools in Thailand for a total of 2.9 per cent of the total Chinese population. The figure for Cambodia was between 30-40,000 for 7-10 percent (Murray, 1964:72-73). These figures seem

to indicate that the Thai policy amounts to a direct attack on Chinese identity while Cambodia's policy is directed more toward integration. So far I have seen no post-coup information on Cambodian policy to tell whether Chinese schools still enjoy this relatively favorable position or not.

The Thai have been successful in that the lines between the Thai and Chinese schools have become harder to define as the Chinese schools have become increasingly Thai-ified (Coughlin, 1960:144). But they are still Chinese private schools and as such help to perpetuate the Chinese culture. So far, the Thai government has developed no realistic alternative in the form of a national education system, although they have recently attempted to do so (Fraser, 1966).

The Current Chinese Middleman

In spite of occupational restrictions, the Chinese have held on firmly to their role of economic middleman and in spite of educational restrictions they have retained their identity as Chinese, whether as Thai or Cambodian citizens or aliens.

There are Chinese in almost every occupation in Thailand and Cambodia, so it would be false to say that all Chinese are economic middlemen, though most of them are in one form or other. It would be closer to the truth to say that all middlemen are Chinese. A vast majority of the trade throughout Southeast Asia goes through Chinese hands, and as Williams observes, "The thought of commerce in most of the

region suddenly without the Chinese is preposterous." (1966: 20). They dominate finance, industry, and trade at every level.

What seems to set the Chinese apart from the indigenous populations is their ability and pre-disposition to save for distant goals (Williams, 1966:26)(Kraar, 1971:78). Their ancestors in China had saved to send their children or grandchildren to school and to purchase passage to the Nan-Yang. Once in the Nan-Yang, the ideal had been to accumulate wealth to return to China and retire to the leisure life. Though the desire and likelihood of returning to China is now remote, the inclination to save and to invest carefully is still part of the Chinese ethos.

Retail trade is the backbone of the Chinese economy (Chang, 1968:105), and Chinese traders move produce between the peasant producer and the marketplace with an efficiency that government agencies cannot match (Kraar, 1971:79).*

In Cambodia the Chinese comprise approximately 7½-8 per cent of the total population (Appendix C). Yet, they control almost all internal trade and a large share of manufacture, including rice milling and transportation (Willmott, 1967: 10), to the extent that at least 50 per cent of the Cambodian economy is in their hands (Vanzi, 1971:F4). Probably over

* Though the Chinese speak several different languages, as we saw earlier, the written language is the same for all of them. This facilitates interaction between the various Chinese of different speech group and occupational affiliations (Kraar, 1971:79).

90 per cent of the people engaged in commerce and 95 per cent of the merchants are Chinese, thus, effectively constituting a Cambodian middle class (Willmott, 1967:64).

They provide the economic link between the Cambodian villages and the outside world, with the small scale rice dealer usually combining his rice business with money lending and retailing of manufactured goods (Willmott, 1967:56). This multiple-interest business is probably a hedge against bad years as much as a desire to acquire yet more money, since the Chinese can still remember being economically decimated during the trade depression of the 1930's (Willmott, 1967:56). The Chinese are the only source of credit at relatively reasonable interest rates for the Khmer villagers, and Willmott estimates that loans from this source represent a yearly total of \$8,600,000 in credit (1967:58). In line with this they also moved into banking since World War II, which is reflected in Chinese investments in Cambodia amounting to five times the pre-war amount (Uchida, 1956: 590).

Fish farms on the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) are another aspect of Chinese commerce. The fishing rights on the Great Lake (Appendix B) are auctioned off by the Cambodian government to (usually always) Chinese bidders (who have the capital to invest), who in turn sub-let the lease to a local Chinese broker (who may also run a combination grocery-retail store), who hires a Vietnamese to do the actual fishing. The catch then moves back up the ladder of Chinese transportation,

marketing and processing to its final market (Willmott, 1967: 45).

The Chinese industrial investment is concentrated in primary processing such as rice mills, saw mills and charcoal furnaces, and in food production such as soft drinks, ice, and soy sauce (ibid:57). In agriculture, the primary pursuits are concentrated in pepper planting and market gardening--also commercial enterprises in that these crops are raised for the cash market rather than for subsistence--though there are a very few Hakka rice farmers (ibid:49).

In Thailand, as well as Cambodia, the Chinese control the economy through their position as middlemen in the rice trade (in which the Teochiu rice millers are predominant) and their control of the wholesale and retail business (Coughlin, 1952:387)(Uchida, 1956:591). They are primarily small businessmen and traders and, as mentioned earlier, almost every article bought or sold in Thailand passes through the hands of at least one Chinese middleman (Jiang, 1966:39)(Coughlin, 1960:2).

In every town, as well as the capitol, Chinese shops form the main business area. These shops and the larger Chinese wholesalers are supplied with needed material goods mainly by the Western business firms in Bangkok (Coughlin, 1960:1; 1955:316). (The Thai, not having been colonized, do not seem to feel the need to be as anti-Western as Cambodia, resulting in some Western businesses still operating there.)

Jiang estimates that about 70 per cent of the Chinese

in Thailand are engaged in commerce, 16 per cent in industry, 6 per cent in mining and 8 per cent in fishery and agriculture (1966:39). So, as in Cambodia, the Chinese in Thailand form a commercial middle class, "...performing essential economic services for both Thai society and for the Western business community, yet remaining fundamentally separate from each." (Coughlin, 1955:314).

Thomas Fraser (1966) describes the distribution of fish caught by the coastal fishermen in southern Thailand as being done by Chinese merchants. The wives of the fishermen take the day's catch to Chinese merchants in Pattani (Appendix B) who might sell it locally or ship it to Bangkok--depending on the current market situation. There is an intricate network of trade based on personal knowledge and mutual trust. The Chinese merchant may have advanced credit to the fisherman for an outboard motor for his fishing boat in return for an agreement to sell all his fish to that particular merchant at slightly below the market cost and/or to purchase his gasoline for slightly above the market cost. Thus, the Chinese middleman not only buys the primary product from the peasant producer, he sells him needed goods as well--plus provides needed credit.

Uchida (1956) lists three factors which, he says, account for the economic dominance of the overseas Chinese:

1. The overseas Chinese economy is "propped" by locally divided social organizations and close family ties, ie, they rely primarily on each other for help,

2. Chambers of Commerce,

3. Craft guilds based on provincial or speech groups.

We have mentioned these associations only in passing, so far, and their function and organization could well be the subject for a separate paper. However, it is necessary to have at least some knowledge of how these associations operate in order to understand fully the position of the Chinese middleman, and this is the intention for this section of the paper. It is not designed to give the reader a comprehensive description of the inner structure or workings of these various associations.

The oldest speech group in Thailand was founded in 1877 and the proliferation of mutual aid associations probably did not occur in Southeast Asia until around the turn of the century (Jiang, 1966:48). Since that time they have come to furnish much of the organizational cohesion that accounts for the economic well-being of the Chinese and the persistence of their cultural patterns and values, until today over 98 per cent of the Chinese in Thailand belong to the five major speech groups which originated in the two southeasternmost provinces of China (Appendix A)(Coughlin, 1960:32)(Jiang, 1966:42). There is no reason to believe the situation to be other than this in Cambodia as well, since Willmott makes membership in a voluntary association his primary criterion for being Chinese.

The four major types of associations--roughly parallel to those mentioned by Uchida--are the surname associations,

dialect associations, occupational associations and benevolent and charitable associations (Coughlin, 1960:36).

The surname associations are primarily immigrant associations and, since Chinese immigration has virtually halted since 1950, are no longer key organizations within the Chinese community. The benevolent and charitable associations are concerned mainly with welfare and, though they aid with the maintenance of cohesion within the Chinese community, are not centrally involved with the economic structure so will not be considered here.

The five major dialect groups are the Teochiu, Hakka, Cantonese, Hainanese and Hokkien. Skinner (1957) and Willmott (1967) both give fairly complete listings of the main occupations engaged in by the members of these groups. Of these, the Teochiu are the most wealthy in both Thailand and Cambodia--especially since the depression--as they have control of the rice trade in both countries (Coughlin, 1960:40) (Willmott, 1967:18). Willmott states that in 1963, "...the nine reportedly richest men in Cambodia were all of Chinese extraction, seven Teochiu and two Hokkien." (1967:99).

Probably the most important associations affecting Chinese economic interests are the various Chambers of Commerce organized by the Chinese. In fact, the largest and most influential business association in Thailand is the Bangkok Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Coughlin, 1960:50). These Associations cut across traditional speech group membership (Chern, 1970:47) and serve as one of the primary sources of information on business transactions and market

conditions for the Chinese. The Thai and Cambodian would-be businessmen have no access to these sources--which is one reason why the economic interests of the Chinese tend to remain intact (Burling, 1965:141). Kraar describes, "A communal credit system based on mutual trust (which) allows many Chinese entrepreneurs to operate for six months or longer before paying their suppliers." (1971:80).

I have been able to find only one oblique reference by Willmott concerning the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Phnom-Penh. From the context of this remark, I came to the conclusion that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce there serves approximately the same function in the Chinese economic structure as the one in Bangkok. He states that the dialect associations are not as important as they once were since, "...economic organization is more diffuse today and lies outside the control of the Chinese (dialect) associations..." (Willmott, 1969:296). "The economic elite (of Cambodia) consists of the wealthy Sino-Cambodians....(one of whom) heads the Chamber of Commerce." (Willmott, 1967:99).

Even though much of the business activity in the Chinese community centers around the various associations, individual households are the primary groups which have been left with the responsibility to, "...work hard and to build their own businesses." (Burling, 1965:141). The Chinese, as we mentioned earlier, idealize large extended families, unlike the Thai or Cambodians (ibid:99), which allows them to build a business around the family group. Either the head of the

family or the business itself will belong to one or more of the Chinese associations and thus qualify for valuable market information, financial assistance, and a voice in the affairs of the Chinese community.

CHAPTER 7

THE FUTURE OF THE CHINESE MIDDLEMAN

Selective Pressures Bearing on the Chinese

Williams states that, "The major matters in which the Chinese are pressed are citizenship, economic opportunity, education, and language." (1966:30). Any attempt to forecast the result of these pressures on the Chinese middleman is extremely hazardous at best, since the stability of Southeast Asian governments seems to be tenuous and economic policy is subject to sudden and surprising changes. With this in mind, I feel the best that can be done is to look at some of the selective pressures bearing on the Chinese and hazard a tentative guess based on Chinese reaction to similar pressures in the past. Only time will tell whether the forecast is accurate or not.

The nature of Chinese businesses as family enterprises has been one of the most powerful factors favoring their economic dominance. Under this system, one could employ family members exclusively and eventually pass the business on to a son to be operated again as a family enterprise (Coughlin, 1960:121).

Economic nationalism, as we saw earlier, has put a severe strain on the Chinese ability to adapt, though so far

they have done so successfully. As a further protective measure they are beginning to reorganize these enterprises along more modern lines by diversifying their individual holdings (as the local level rice merchant or fish broker who also runs a grocery-retail-credit business), and establishing public corporations that can be more easily identified with the national interests of the host nation. Traditional kinship bonds are being transformed into new forms of regional business cooperation, so that, should the economic or political climate in one country become untenable, the capital and business emphasis can be shifted to a branch office in a more favorable location (Kraar, 1971:80).

Above the family, the various Chinese voluntary associations continue to play an important part in keeping Chinese businesses in Chinese hands, since they serve as one of the main sources of market information (Burling, 1965:141). Under the pressure of government occupational restrictions over the past few years, the lines separating the occupations held by Chinese and indigenous populations has become less rigid (Coughlin, 1960:118), but as we saw in the last chapter, the occupations the Chinese are giving up gradually are the less desirable ones such as taxi driving and longshoreman, while the closed doors of the Chinese associations continue to keep the more lucrative businesses in Chinese hands. In addition, if a Chinese businessman experiences financial difficulty, his association can be the source of valuable aid, and if he eventually goes bankrupt, the creditors are all

members of the association who will divide his remaining assets among themselves in partial payment of the debt, while always leaving him enough to start anew. The Thai and Cambodian governments have no such organization to assist their would-be entrepreneurs.

Assimilation or Integration: The Outlook

With respect to the prospect for assimilation or integration, most experts do not agree upon the current outlook. Freyn (1960:660) and Murray (1964:95) believe that the chances of assimilating the Chinese into the local societies are good. The rising Thai generation, for example, is coming to pay attention to economic as well as government service occupations while the rising Chinese generation is becoming increasingly Thai-minded. The widespread use of local and Western language schools by the Chinese tends to foster assimilation, however, the Chinese schools attract the children from the hard core Chinese homes--so the Chinese sub-society continues to be renewed.

Coughlin is not as optimistic as either Freyn or Murray and believes that, due to the influence of the voluntary associations in perpetuating social distinctions, the move toward assimilation has been slowed down so as to have been indefinitely postponed (1960:66).

Williams believes that, "In independent Southeast Asia, the opportunities for social, political, and economic accomodation of the overseas Chinese with the indigenous and

ruling majority seem to be expanding." (1966:16). I believe that this accomodation, which I shall call integration, is a more realistic prospect for the immediate future than assimilation, which would mean the disappearance of "Chineseness" and the ethnic identity of the Chinese as a group.

The niche of the Chinese middleman is intertwined with the political and social history of Southeast Asia. It has not and does not operate in a vacuum--external pressures such as the political fortunes of China, the world trade depression, the coming of Western influence and its subsequent decline, and local nationalism have all exerted pressures on the overseas Chinese.

They have changed in various ways in order to meet these changing pressures and, once established in their economic niche of middleman, the Chinese have been successful in maintaining their economic and social institutions essentially unchanged over time.

Old pressures continue and new ones will appear to challenge the "status quo", though we have seen that the status quo has itself been evolving all along. The Chinese trade associations, as a result of national pressures on the Chinese school system and thus on the Chinese language, may eventually come to conduct their business in the local languages. With the language barrier removed, the way would be open for the local populations (ie, ethnic Thai and ethnic Cambodians) to enter slowly into the associations and, as market information became available, into the trades now monopolized by the

Chinese. This is just speculation, however, and that day, if it comes at all, seems at the moment to be far in the future.

Perhaps over time the Chinese will slowly move from integration to assimilation. Li estimates that only one ethnic Chinese in three can establish a purely Chinese home in Thailand (1957:663) and the Chinese may come to view marriage to an indigenous spouse as respectable and rewarding now that the local people are in political control (Williams, 1966:91). On the surface, this appears to be the case in Cambodia. Willmott states that, "intermarriage has been prevalent for some time between the wealthier Chinese merchants in Phnom-Penh and the Cambodian aristocracy." (1967:98). However, this new Sino-Cambodian economic elite, as Willmott calls it, is still "Chinese" according to our original definition (page 21), since its "members" belong to Chinese associations, donate regularly to Chinese causes, speak at least one Chinese language, and send their children to Chinese schools (ibid:99). In other words, they still consider themselves to be Chinese.

National policies will have a direct bearing on the assimilation or integration of the overseas Chinese and their actions, thereby affecting the national economies either favorably or adversely. For example, the governments, in spite of attempts to curtail Chinese schools, have been slow to provide adequate national schools which might attract Chinese children (Coughlin, 1960:161), and Kraar (1971) states that many Chinese are leaving war-torn Cambodia for Singapore,

which could have serious impact on that nation's economy and thus on the stability of the Cambodian government itself.

Immigration of Chinese into Southeast Asia has been virtually nil since 1950 and Williams points out that, "Under the present conditions of isolation, there will be virtually no overseas settlers with close relatives on the mainland within another generation." (1966:81). This could be a factor favoring assimilation, but Coughlin puts a damper on our enthusiasm by pointing out that, "The situation of the Chinese in Bangkok supports the generalization that a functioning minority culture and society can indefinitely resist assimilation." (1955:316). Which brings us back to the opening statement of this chapter: Forecasting the future can be hazardous at worst and tentative at best.

Meanwhile, the role of the Chinese middleman appears to be secure, albeit changing from time to time in reaction to new government regulations. Their pioneer spirit has been severely strained at several points, but it has not yet been lost.

They seem to have reached the point in their evolution where they fall under Sahlins' and Service's law of Cultural Stability. As Kraar points out, "The Chinese commercial class (in Southeast Asia) is very resilient. They're really not changing their approach. They're still buying not only commodities but generals." (1971:162).

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have traced the evolution of the Chinese middleman from the earliest known overland Chinese contact with Southeast Asia in 221 BC, through the first seaborne traders and the tentative beginnings of the Chinese entrepreneur following the voyages of Cheng Ho. We saw how the arrival of the Europeans created an economic niche which the Chinese were uniquely qualified to fill through a desire for economic betterment, and a willingness to migrate caused by unstable conditions at home. One might speculate that, had the Europeans never arrived, the Chinese might never have come to fill this economic niche--for the niche itself might never have come to exist at all: "A proper business climate is of vital importance to economic development...(and) security under a stable government or the lack of it has been the most important single influence on entrepreneurship." (Yen, 1970:3).

A negative factor aiding the Chinese in occupying the middleman position was the disposition of the local populations to seek their livelihood through agriculture--which was not so difficult locally as it had been in China--and to seek social advancement by entering the government service.

We mentioned in the introduction some differences between Thailand and Cambodia that might, on the surface, preclude the evolution from occurring the same way or toward the same end in each case. During the course of researching this paper, however, it became obvious that the fact of colonization was not a determining factor, while the fact of Western interest and influence was. Thus, the Chinese were able to evolve as economic middlemen in each case because an essentially identical economic niche existed. The lack of colonization in Thailand only served to speed the onset of government restrictions there.

We have hazarded a forecast that the Chinese middleman has reached that point in his evolution where he is primarily concerned with maintaining his economic status quo and appears to be successful in doing so. Whether or not he will continue to be successful only time can tell, though it appears now that he will for at least the foreseeable future.

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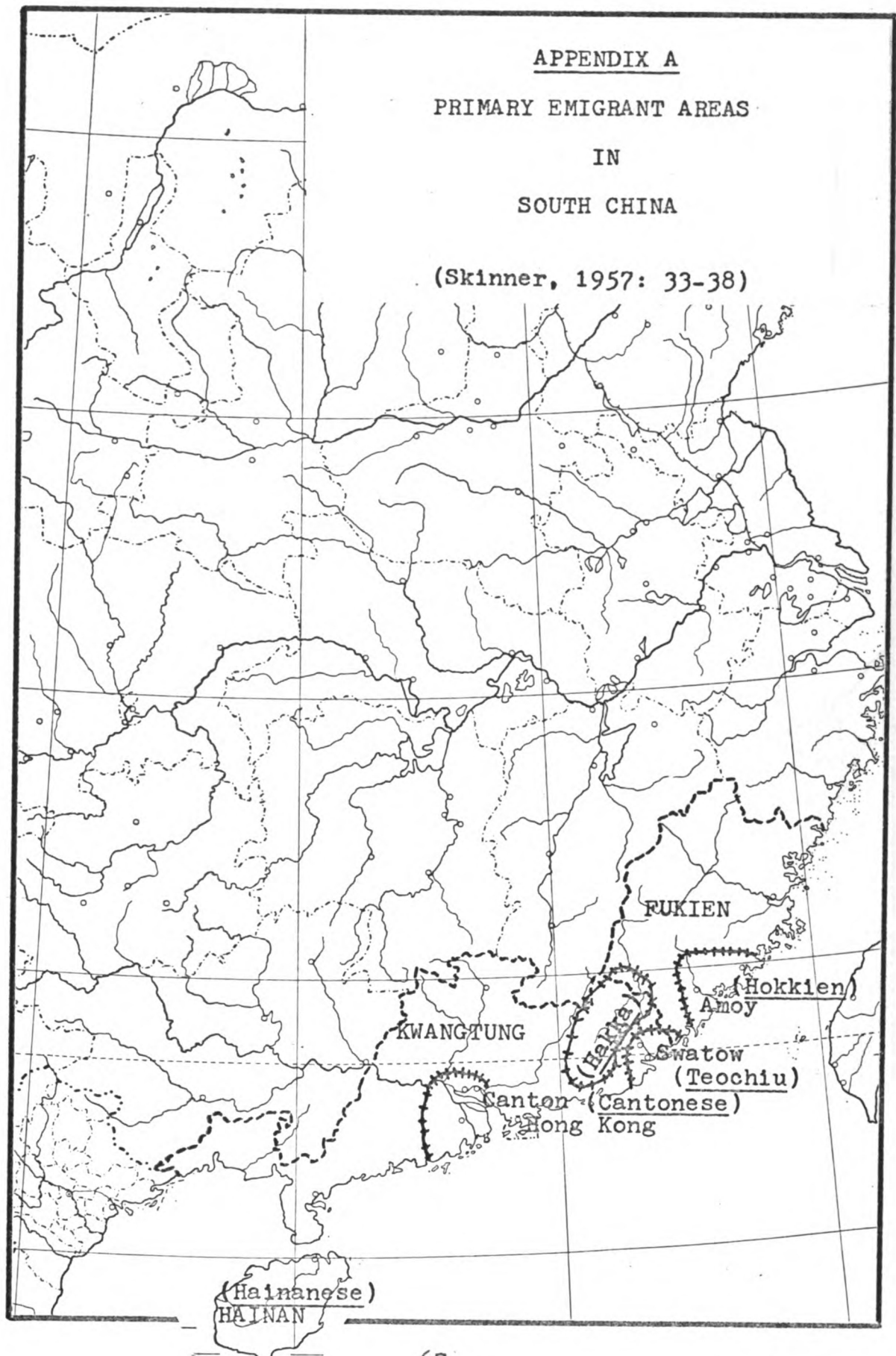
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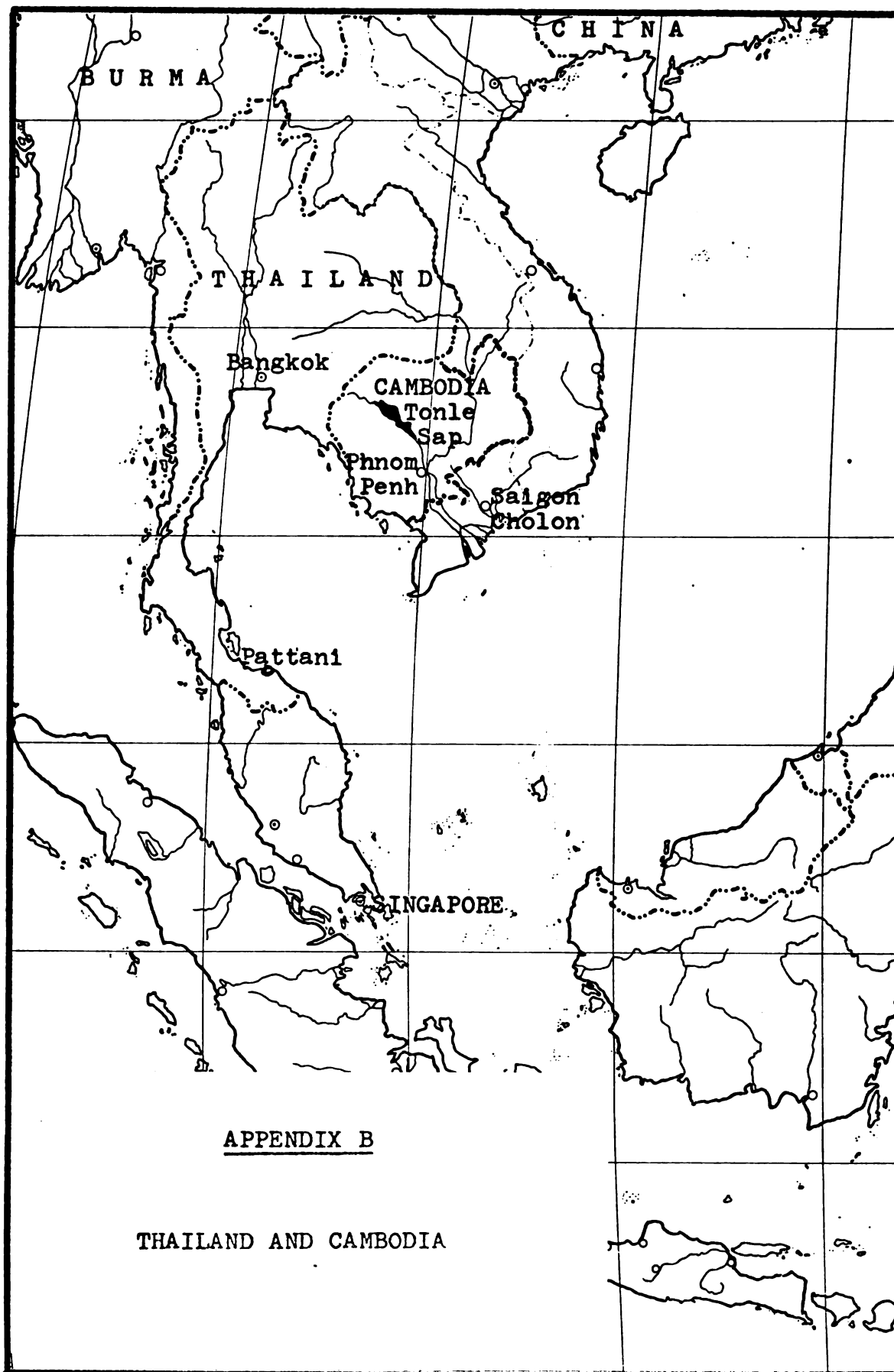
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PRIMARY EMIGRANT AREAS
IN
SOUTH CHINA

(Skinner, 1957: 33-38)





APPENDIX B

THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

APPENDIX C

ESTIMATES OF CHINESE POPULATION IN THAILAND & CAMBODIA

<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>THAILAND</u>	<u>CAMBODIA</u>	<u>AS OF</u>
Chang, 1963	3,799,000	260,000	1963
Coughlin, 1955	2,000,000	--	1955
FitzGerald, 1969	3,600,000	310,000	1965
Murray, 1964	2,500,000	425,000	1962
Vanzi, 1971	--	450,000	1971 (?)
Williams, 1966	2,600,000	435,000	1963
Willmott, 1967	--	425,000	1963

APPENDIX D

EIGHTEEN OCCUPATIONS RESERVED FOR CAMBODIAN NATIONALS BY THE 1956 IMMIGRATION ACT

"No alien may exercise the following occupations in
Cambodia:

- customs agent
- boat consignee or shipping agent
- intelligence agent or private police
- immigration or emigration agent
- director of an employment agency
- licensed general dealer
- arms and munitions merchant
- maker or dealer of private radio sets or parts for these sets
- printer
- hairdresser for men, either employer or employee
- second hand dealer or money lender
- river or coastal ships' pilot
- jeweller or goldsmith, either employer or employee
- chauffeurs of autos, taxis, and transport vehicles
- longshoremen
- woodcutter
- grain merchant
- salt dealer"

(Willmott, 1967:46)

APPENDIX E

OCCUPATIONS RESERVED FOR THAI NATIONALS BY THE 1942 ROYAL DECREE

Included:

- making, casting and selling images of The Buddha
- making and selling bricks, firewood, charcoal and torches
- manufacture of women's hats
- cutting and tailoring of women's dresses
- weaving wicker, with the exception of mats
- manufacture of lacquer wares
- setting of Siamese printing types
- making fireworks
- making dolls
- making toys
- manufacture of umbrellas
- hair weaving and cutting
- legal practice

(Coughlin, 1960:209-210)

APPENDIX F

OCCUPATIONS RESERVED FOR THAI NATIONALS BY THE 1949 ROYAL DECREE

Included:

- making images of The Buddha
- casting images of The Buddha
- lacquer work
- driving for hire tricycles, motor cycles and public
motor vehicles
- rice farming
- hair cutting
- Siamese type setting

(Coughlin, 1960:210)

APPENDIX G

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL RESTRICTIONS IN THAILAND

1. August 1951:
 - taxi driving
 - manufacture of charcoal, umbrellas and accouterments of Monastic Service
2. 1952 (by refusing to renew licenses):
 - operating private wharves
 - commercial fishing
3. September 1952:
 - women's haircutting and hairdressing
 - dressmaking
4. December 1952:
 - marketing of fresh fish

(Skinner, 1957:355-356)

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