

Preliminary Survey of Penang-Myanmar Relations from mid-19th to mid-20th Centuries*

Introduction

Our paper is limited to what we have been able to find out about the **Pashu** (Baba-Nonya) community in Yangon and their descendants. We have information that there were Pashu communities in Dawei (Tavoy) and Myeik (Mergui) and some other towns in the Taninthayi (Tenasserim) coastal region during the British colonial period (from about 1852 to 1948) and some descendants still remain up to the present, but we did not have time to visit those areas, or to go to Mandalay and other Upper Myanmar towns to search for Pashu survivors. This paper, therefore, covers only the Pashu in Yangon; it does not cover the Myanmar community in Penang either. Apart from the Baba-Nonyas, it covers briefly other relationships between Penang and Myanmar. It is our hope that this preliminary survey will lead to long term research on both communities.

Chinese in Myanmar

The Union of Myanmar has a long land border with the People's Republic of China, stretching 1,370 miles mainly over mountainous terrain in the north which lead eventually towards Tibet Autonomous Region and in the north-east with Yunnan Province. There have been commercial and cultural relations between Myanmar and China

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throughout Myanmar history. The Pyu people, one of the earliest inhabitants of Myanmar who left vestiges of an urban civilization in middle Myanmar (from about 2nd century BC to about 10th century AD), had trade and cultural links with the Chinese. The Chinese called the Pyu "P'iao" and mention is made of them in the *Chronicles of the Tang Dynasty of China* (AD 618-905) ¹. A poem by Po Chu-i (772-846) also records a Pyu cultural mission which performed dances and sang songs before the Chinese Emperor in AD 802.² Former Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission Mr. Chen Yi-Sein has identified Lin-Yang of the Chinese chronicle *The T'ai-p'ing-yu-lan* as the Pyu Vishnu City in Central Myanmar, on the main trade route between China and India. Vishnu City or Beikthano Myo in Myanmar flourished from about the 1st to 5th century AD.³

The Myanmar people regard the Chinese as kinsmen -- the popular word for Chinese in Myanmar language is *Pauk phaw*, which comes from the word *Swei-myo Pauk-phaw* meaning relations, those descended from the same forebears. The official *Myanmar-English Dictionary* compiled and published by the Myanmar Language Commission of the Ministry of Education defines *Pauk phaw* as "(1) sibling; (2) intimate and affectionate term conferred to the Chinese by the Myanmar people".⁴

1. E. H. Parker. *Burma with special reference to her relations to China*. Rangoon: Rangoon Gazette Press, 1893. p. 12-13.

2. G. E. Harvey. *History of Burma*. . . London: Longmans, Green, 1925. p. 13-15.
Also D.C. Twitchett and A.H. Christie. "A Medieval Burmese Orchestra," *Asia Major* new series, v. 7, pts. 1 & 2 (Dec. 1959) p. 176-195.

3. Chen Yi-sein. "Lin-Yang (Visnu City) 1st - 5th Centuries AD", tr. by Dr. Than Tun, *Studies in Myanma history* . . . vol. 1. Yangon: Innwa, 1999. p. 65-90.

4. Myanmar Language Commission. *Myanmar-English dictionary*. 2nd ed. Yangon : The Commission, 1993. p. 216.

The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas (1998) begins its chapter on "Burma (Myanmar)" as follows:

"Burmese call the Chinese who live among them *paukphaw*, or 'next of kin'. This implies some recognition of blood affinity, and closeness of a kind is certainly inevitable given the geographical proximity of Burma and China, between which runs a common land border of 2, 171 kilometres."¹

The Pashu being Chinese are regarded by the Myanmar as *Paukphaw* and they easily integrate with Myanmar, unlike the Indians whom the Myanmar regard as *Kala* or "foreigner".

There are several works on the Chinese in Myanmar, especially by the eminent Sino-Myanmar scholar Mr. Chen Yi-Sein who worked for many years with us as a senior researcher and later as a Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission. Unfortunately, to date no one has really studied the Pashu community and their descendants in Myanmar.

The word "*Pashu*" itself is interesting. At one time the whole of peninsular Malaya was referred to as the "*Pashu Kyun-swai*", by the Myanmar people; "*Kyun swai*" is the Myanmar word for peninsula. Kinwun Mingyi U Kaung in his *Paris Diary* wrote about a stop over in Penang on his way to France in 1873. He called the people of Penang *Pashu*, though he also uses *Malay* for the Malays especially those from Malacca.² Today, however, the word Pashu is usually used only for hybridized Chinese-Malay, i.e. the Baba-Nonya of the former Straits Settlements. According to the *Myanmar-English dictionary*, *Pashu*

1. *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*; General editor Lynn Pan. Singapore: Archipelago Press for Chinese Heritage Centre, 1998. p. 140.

2. Kinwun Mingyi U Kaung. *Paris Diary. Pyinhtit-pyi thwa ne-sin mhat-tan*. Vol. 1, Yangon: Wizaya Sar-oke Hta-na, 1929. p. 22.

originally meant Malay or Malayan and is stated as being derived from the Sanskrit word *Paraghsu*. There are several derivatives of *Pashu* used in combination with other Myanmar words, e.g. *Pashu chok*, meaning "lapped seam;" *Pashu mok*, meaning "confection of roasted glutinous rice flour mixed with sugar and coconut shreds;" *Pashu thagu*, "Sago pudding flavoured with diced sweet potatoe and shredded coconut;" and *Pashu eingyi*, "women's blouse Malayan [Chinese] style."¹ All these dress styles and confectionaries are those used by the Baba-Nonya Community in Myanmar.

The Myanmar used to call Malaya, *Malayu*. At present for Malaysia and Malay we just transliterate into Myanmar with the same pronunciation and no longer use the words *Malayu*, or *Pashu* for Malay. A peculiarity we found during our preliminary survey was that among the Sino-Myanmar community there are some elderly Nonya women, but very few Baba men; the men might have died or re-migrated to other countries.

The Chinese immigrated into Myanmar either by land from Yunnan side, or by sea through the Straits Settlements (now Malaysia and Singapore)² Penang was a favourite stop over en route to Yangon, or to some of the other coastal and deltaic towns of Lower Myanmar.

The Chinese from Guangdong (Cantonese), Fujian (Hokkien) and some Hakka, came by the maritime route via Malaysia. The Myanmar call them either *Leto* (literally short-sleeved), or *Letshe* (long-sleeved),

1. Myanmar-English dictionary . . . 1993. p. 254.

2. Dr. Mya Than. "Ethnic Chinese in Myanmar and their identity", in *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*; ed. by Leo Suryadinata. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997. p. 117.

differentiating them by their occupations. The *Letshe* are mainly Hokkien, traders and merchants engaged in blue-collar and white-collar jobs, while the *Leto*, mainly Cantonese came as carpenters, coolies and some farmers.¹ The Pashu are much fewer in number when compared to the Cantonese and Fujianese; they would be regarded mainly as *Letshe* as most of them are well-to-do, or married into wealthy families.

Compared to Malaysia and Singapore, Myanmar has a relatively small Chinese population. The 1931 census gives the population as 193 thousand, which was only about 1.3 per cent of the total population. In 1961 there were an estimated 350 thousand ethnic Chinese in Myanmar, about 1.6 per cent of the total population. In the censuses of 1973 and 1983 their numbers had gone down to 0.8 and 0.6 respectively of the total population.²

The Pashu population in Myanmar, therefore, seems minuscule, even before the Second World War. At present they seem to have integrated completely with other ethnic Chinese. A Pashu lady, Madame Ooi Lai Xin (born 9th Sept. 1938), whom we interviewed in Yangon³, married to Khoo Kay Chong, told us that she came from Penang to Yangon in 1950, at the age of twelve, and now lives in Yangon China-town, undistinguishable from other ethnic Chinese, and no longer wearing her Nonya attire. She seems to be one of the last Pashu immigrants to Yangon.

Among the Chinese immigrants we find both the "Sojourner" and the "Settler." Again to quote *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (1998):

"Migrants are people who change their place of residence. A migrant is usually understood to be someone who has figuratively speaking, taken a one-way passage to a place and is there 'for good'. A sojourner, on the other hand, is understood to be a temporary resident who is at his

1. *Ibid.* p. 117. Also Chen Yi-Sein. "The Chinese in Rangoon during the 18th and 19th centuries". In *Papers on Asian History, Religion, Languages, Literature, Music, Folklore, and Anthropology*. Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1976. Reprinted in Historical Research Department. *Silver Jubilee Publication*, 1982. p. 171-176.

2. See Dr. Mya Than. "The Ethnic Chinese and their identity" . . . 1997. p. 117-121 for further details.

3. At her house on 21st Street, China-town, Yangon (20th June 2003).

new place of abode 'for the time being'. In fact, sojourners often end up by becoming settlers, as in the case of guest workers who stay on."¹

Most of the families of Pashu descent whom we interviewed, like the forebears of the authors of this paper, are settlers. Many of the rich Pashu families have moved out of Yangon China-town and live in some of the best residential areas amongst the Myanmar.

But there were also a number of sojourners. Some left Myanmar at the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), some during the civil war which erupted soon after Myanmar regained Independence (1948-1950) and some during the socialist period when businesses were all drastically nationalized by the military government (1962-1965). Sojourning with its implied meaning of an eventual return to the native place of origin has not been the case with most of the Chinese who left Myanmar. With the worsening of the economic and political conditions from the time the Second World War reached Myanmar many left for "greener pastures", joining their friends and relatives in the West, or other overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia. This re-migration of the Chinese from Myanmar to Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, People's Republic of China, USA and other countries, partly accounts for the dwindling Pashu population. Another factor is the extent to which the Pashu have integrated with the local population as mentioned earlier.

A third factor behind the dwindling profile of the Pashu is the recent influx into Myanmar since the early 1990s of Yunnanese,

1. *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* . . . 1998. p. 46. For Sojourning see, Wang Gungwu. "Sojourning : the Chinese experience in Southeast Asia", in *Sojourners and settlers, Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*; ed. by Anthony Reid. . . Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996. p. 1-14.

Kokangese and the Shan-Tayoke (Chinese hybridized Shan) from the border region with China.

Myanmar-Penang Relations

From the mid-19th century when Yangon and all the coastal areas of Myanmar were ceded to the British Crown (1853), relationships between Yangon and Penang developed. Earlier in 1786 Penang had been taken over by the British crown and the East India Company. Also, after the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26, the coastal provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim were taken over by the British through the East India Company.

There were many dimensions to the Myanmar-Penang relationships. Some Penang Baba-Nonyas migrated to Yangon, Dawei (Tavoy) and Myeik (Mergui), and some Sino-Myanmar migrated to Penang. As we have seen, Penang was a major trans-migration point for Chinese from the coastal regions of Guangdong and Fujian and also for some Hakka. Trade links between Myanmar and Penang were initiated, sustained and expanded by merchants, ship-owners and operators with boats plying along the Gulf of Martaban, down south the Tenasserim Coast to Penang Island. Familial and marital links were also significant, with Nonya brides much sought after by Yangon's most eligible, rich and successful Chinese bachelors. There was travel between the two cities by family members for special occasions like weddings, funerals and for vacations. Religious links connected the Chinese temples of Yangon and Penang, and there were social and kinship links among and between the clan houses, such as the Khoo *Kongsis*.

There was also travel between Yangon and Penang for educational purposes; for attending schools and universities. Informants told us of Yangon Nonya girls going to convent schools in Penang and Baba young men from Penang studying at Yangon University up to the Japanese Occupation of 1943. There were also some political links, especially support for Dr. Sun Yat-sen and later the Anti-Fascist Movement during the Second World War.

To illustrate family relationships we would like to relate about a famous Hakka Chinese of Yangon who became a millionaire and bought a second home in Penang for his third wife. He is none other than the famous Tiger Balm King, Aw Boon Haw (1882-1954). His connections with Penang are interesting as they highlight the social mores of the Chinese in Myanmar during colonial times.

The Chinese in Lower Myanmar at the time, especially the wealthy families in Yangon, wanted Nonya brides from Penang for their sons. They usually did not want their sons to marry the local dusky Myanmar women, and Chinese maidens of what was then considered a marriageable age (i.e. 15 to 23 years) were scarce in Yangon. As Sam King wrote in his biography of Aw Boon Haw.

"Friends and relatives who visited Penang had come home with glowing reports of the comely, gentle maidens there. From an early age, these girls were trained to be perfect wives and mothers. This training was a heritage handed down from mother to daughter. This breed of maidens was to be found among the Baba community in Penang."¹

1. Sam King. *Tiger Balm King*. Singapore : Times Books International, 1992. p.31-32.

In 1905 Aw Boon Haw married Tay Piah Hong (1885-1959) of Penang. Later Aw Boon Haw had thriving business companies in Yangon and Singapore, and on his frequent commuting trips he would stop over in Penang for some rest and recreation. There he met Madame Ooi, a third generation Nonya who arranged for him to view her daughter Ooi Geak Cheah (born 1908) at the Ayer Itam Temple. She was only sixteen at the time (1924), pretty, well-mannered and had learned to cook the Nonya dishes which were famous. They were soon married and Aw Boon Haw established a second home in Penang (on Penang Road).¹ Later a new residence was set up on Cantonment Road. He also contributed generously towards the building of the Pagoda of Ten Thousand Buddhas on the grounds of the Kek Lok Si Temple in Ayer Itam where he first saw his third wife.

One photograph of Aw Boon Haw taken in 1905 shows him with his principal wife Tay Piah Hong who was also originally from Penang, in typical Baba-Nonya attire². During our visit to the houses of Baba-Nonya descendants in Myanmar during the first half of 2003 we found a number of similar photographs, some taken in Penang and some in Yangon of Sino-Myanmar and Pashu families in similar costumes.

Settlers

Among the Chinese settlers, perhaps the most famous is Chan Ma Phee (1850-1920), the largest property owner in Yangon from around 1910. He was the son of Chan Ee Shin of Amoy. After leaving his native

1. For details of this marriage see Sam King, *Tiger Balm King* . . . 1992. Chap. 12, p. 113-131.

2. *Ibid.* 1992. frontispiece.

land, he first went to the Straits Settlements and spent two years there, mainly in Penang, before he migrated to Myanmar and settled down. At first he was quite poor and had to ply a sampan on the Rangoon River. During a storm he drifted away to the delta town of Dedaye where a headman who was also a farmer, U Oung Ba, rescued him and he later married Ma Aye Mya, a daughter of U Oung Ba.

Chan Ma Phee speculated extensively in the rice trade and became the largest dealer among the Chinese between the years 1894 and 1899.¹ He had business and family links with Penang which were continued by his sons, Chan Chor Hline, Chan Chor Khine and Chan Chor Phine.

At one time he owned 99 buildings in Yangon and extensive plots of land in the best residential areas like Windermere Road (now Than Lwin Road) and in Ahlone Quarter where he had his grand residence. There used to be a Chan Ma Phee Road in Ahlone Quarter of Yangon which has now been renamed Hninsi (Rose) Lan (Road). He was very generous and used his vast wealth in many charitable works; he donated to the Chinese temples, e.g. Qing Fu Gong, Fujian Guan Yin Temple in China-town, Yangon, Overseas Chinese Middle School (Hua Zhong) in Yangon on Kyimyindine Road and schools in his native Amoy. A devoted Chinese Buddhist, Chan Ma Phee and his wife Ma Aye Mya built a large shrine on the Shwe Dagon Pagoda platform. He also donated to several Penang temples.

Chan Ma Phee never forgot the kind people who had helped him at one time or another. While he was in Penang, as a poor youth, he

¹ *Twentieth century impressions of Burma . . .* London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Co., 1910. p. 309-312.

developed ulcers on his feet, while he was going around on foot trying to find some work. An old woman gave him some medicine which cured his sores. Throughout his life he remembered this old Penang lady and used to send her money, clothing and other necessities.¹

One of the descendants of Chan Ma Phee, Chan Cheng Hock (Bar-at-Law), now in his eighties, told us about his family and their Penang connections.² The family allowed us to take photographs of old embroidered Nonya blouses and coloured small beaded sandals which their father had made in Yangon in Penang Nonya style. We took photographs of their family altar, and ancestor tablets and recopied old photographs of some elders dressed in Baba-Nonya costumes.³

Patriotic Overseas Chinese Leaders

Our preliminary survey on Penang-Myanmar relations showed that during the first decade of the 20th Century there were several prominent ethnic Chinese in Yangon including Chan Ma Phee, who collaborated with their colleagues in Penang in providing popular support for Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) which eventually led to the overthrow of the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing.

The support took the form of donations, the establishment of local political associations and the publication of newspapers in the Chinese language. The editor of the *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (1998) wrote: "So crucial to his triumph did Sun [Yat-sen] deem the backing of

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1. [*Brief History of Chan Nyakyone-seint-tong Association, Yangon.*] Yangon : Privately printed by the Association, [1999] 8p. In Myanmar language. Life of Chan Ma Phee on p. 5-8.
 2. Three interviews in May and June 2003.
 3. Photographs are available on an accompanying CD-Rom.

the overseas Chinese that he dubbed them, generously, 'the mother of the revolution'¹" We provide below notes on some of these Patriotic Overseas Chinese Leaders in Yangon who worked closely with the Penang leaders, so that further research can be carried out later.

(1) Chan Ma Phee (1850-1920)²

Chan Ma Phee worked closely with his friends in Penang to support Xin Hai Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen, which culminated in the toppling of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. After the victory of the 1911 Xin Hai Revolution, on 26th June 1912, Mr. Chan Ma Phee and Mr. Yang Zhi Zen encouraged Overseas Chinese in Myanmar to donate money for the reconstruction of the Mother Land, i.e. China. They organized and established an organization called "All Myanmar Overseas Chinese Donation Organization". Chan Ma Phee was selected as Head of this organization. The total amount collected up to 5th April 1913 was 287,572.13 tun (kyats). The organization transferred by telegraph to the Beijing Ministry of Finance, a total of 165,000 yuan (silver) and 258,575 Myanmar coins (kyats). Sun Yat-sen honoured him with a horizontal inscribed board and a medal.

(2) Zhuang Yin An (1851-1938)

Zhuang Yin An also worked closely with the Overseas Chinese of Penang in supporting the Sun Yat-sen revolution. He had other names, such as Ji Fu and Xi Fu. A native of Fujian (Hokkien) Province, he left his

1. *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* . . . 1998. p. 101.

2. The information about Patriotic Overseas Chinese Leaders is taken from *Relatives from Quan Zhou in Myanmar*. Beijing: China TV Broadcasting Publishing House, 2002. In Chinese language. Compiled from sources in Yangon.

home for Myanmar at the age of 18. At first he lived in the countryside growing vegetables; later he came to Yangon to open a shop named Yuan Ji Jian Hao. In 1893 he was elected as a member of the third batch of those in charge of internal affairs of Yangon Jian De Zhong She. In 1904 the loyalist Mr. Kang You Wei arrived in Myanmar from India to organize the Overseas Chinese to rescue the Qing Dynasty's administration. He set up the Bao Huang Hooi (Association of Qing Royalists) at Maung Khine Street (now called Bo Ywe Street) in Yangon and nominated Zhuang Yin An to be in charge of Bao Huang Hu. He was responsible for publishing the leading newspaper for loyalists called *New Yangon newspaper*, or *Yang Guang Xin Bao* in Chinese.

In May 1905, the Nationalist Mr. Qin Li Shan came to Yangon to get supporters for the political movement. He stayed at Chen Gan Quan's house where he met Mr. Zhuang Yin An. Mr. Qin Li Shan persuaded Zhuang Yin An to support the Nationalist Movement. Then Zhuang Yin An and Mr. Xu Zhan Zhou entered China Tung Meng Hooi (China Common Alliance Society) in Yangon. In August 1908, Zhuang and Xu together published for the Tung Meng Hu, a leading Chinese newspaper called *Guang Hua Ri Bao*. On 20th November 1908, the China Tung Meng Hu, Myanmar branch, held a meeting and Zhuang Yin An was elected as Chief of the Tung Meng Hu Association.

The Consul of the Qing Dynasty and loyalists joined with the colonial authorities to stop the publication of this newspaper. Colonial authorities wanted to arrest Zhuang Yin An, but he secretly went to Penang and joined with a member of the Penang branch, Mr. Chen Xin. Zhen continued to publish the newspaper *Guang Hua Ri Bao*.

In October 1911, after the victory of the Wu Chang revolution, Mr. Zhuang Yin An was elected as the Chief of Tung Meng Hu of all cities in Nanyang, the South Sea region. He brought to China one hundred thousand yuan donated by Overseas Chinese and returned to Fujian, Amoy. He died in 1938 at the age of 87 at his home town in Amoy.

(3) Zhang Yong Fu (1867-1942)

He was born in Amoy, China. At the age of 15, he accompanied his father to Penang and Yangon to do business. He set up the Xin Yu Long Company in Penang and Ji Fa, Sui Tong (Da Tung) cooking oil mill.

In 1908, together with Mr. Xu Zhan Zhou and Zhuang Yin An, he joined the China Tung Meng Hu. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Sun Yat-sen Xin Hai Revolution.

During the anti-fascist Japanese period, he was also a supporter of the China anti-Japanese War. He was the Chief of the Association of China Civil Aviation Construction. The Association established a Yangon branch in August 1937. Myanmar Overseas Chinese donated money to buy (19) aircrafts to support China's anti-fascist war in 1937. Donors were students, shops-owners and companies, Yangon rice mill-owners and Overseas Chinese from various business firms. He died at the age of 75, on 10th May 1942 in China.

(4) Chan Sun Xu (1893-1951)¹

He was born in the Fujian Province, Quan Zhou Fu, Tung An County. In 1910 he went to Penang, his uncle's place, to earn a living. In 1911 he came to Yangon. First he worked for a shop as a labourer, then he became a salesman. In 1919 he became a broker. Because of his good reputation his business developed very fast. In 1922, he went back to China. In 1924, he again came to Myanmar and supported China's Labour Party movement and anti-fascist activity. When the Japanese occupied Southern Myanmar in 1942, he moved to Lashio (northern Myanmar). At the end of the Second World War, he returned to Yangon. He changed to an export and import business. He was interested in the Overseas Chinese charity. In 1949 he was appointed as Chairman of the Labour Association, and Chairman of Fujian Tung Xiang Hu (same place from Fujian Province), "Second Brother" (2nd position or Deputy) of Hong Meng He Sheng, Head Office, and Consultant of the Rice Mill Association, Board of Directors of *Xin Yang Guang Bao* newspaper, Board of Directors of the Overseas Chinese Middle School and Zhong Zheng Middle School, etc.

Chan Sun Xu was a supporter of the Chinese Communist Party. He was killed on the evening of 6th June 1951 at the corner of the Strand (Kanna) Road and 21st Street in Yangon.

Chinese Temples and Clan Houses

A number of Chinese Temples and Clan Houses (*Kongsis*) in Yangon had connections with Penang, and some have records of

1. Burma Chinese Trade Association 40th Anniversary Journal (1911-1951). In Chinese language.

donations received from Penang. The oldest and the most famous is the Yangon Hokkien Guan Yin Temple.

Yangon Hokkien Guan Yin Temple

(Qing Fu Gong in Mandarin). It is located on Strand Road (Kanna Lan) between 18th Street and Sin-o-dan Street, Yangon. The Foundation Stone of this temple was laid in 1861, and its construction completed in 1863. At first it was constructed with timber, a teak building. In 1897 it was reconstructed in brick and mortar and is now a concrete building. The construction work of this present temple was finished in 1903. Ships which came from Penang donated a lot of money to this temple dedicated to Guan Yin (in Burmese Kwan Yin) the Goddess of Mercy. It is still a popular place of worship for ethnic Chinese in Yangon, and for Sino-Burmese.

There were also some Chinese Temples and Clan Houses in Dawei (Tavoy) and Myeik (Mergui) which had Penang connections.

Tavoy Tian Hou Gong¹

Dawei (Tavoy) was a transit town for Overseas Chinese who came to Myanmar from Penang. They would stop over there for a period of time before moving further north to Yangon and other main cities of Myanmar. At the Tavoy Tian Hou Gong temple for example there is an inscription on a bell donated by Mr. Xiao Ri and Mr. Wu Zheng Hu, from which we know that the construction of this temple in Dawei was

1. Lu Mian An Xi Hui Guan (An Kui Hui Guan in Hokkien dialect) *42nd Anniversary Journal*.

probably completed in 1838, not long after the town was taken over by the British in 1826.

Clan Houses and Youth Associations

We found several types of Overseas Chinese Associations in Yangon, *viz.* (1) *Kongsi* or clan houses; (2) Social (Youth) associations; (3) 'Natives' associations (An Xi Hu Guan); (4) Other religious associations. Many of them had relationships with similar associations in Penang up to the 1950s.

(1) Long Shan Tang, or Long Shan Dong

53 Anawarahta Road in China-town, Yangon, between 21st and 22nd Streets.

This is the main temple and clan house for the Khoo and Chan clans.

(2) Yangon Jian De Tang

Latha Street, Yangon.

In 1868, a special Overseas Chinese Organization called Yang Guang Jian De Zhong Tang was founded by Yang Shao Wang, Guo Guang Lian and ten other persons.

At first it was established as a branch of the Penang Jian De Tang.

(3) Yang Guang An Si Hu Guan

54 Lanmadaw Street, Yangon.

A well-known five-storey building, whose construction was completed on 18th January 1925.

There are several Youth Associations in Yangon such as:

For for the Khoo clan

Lu Mian Xin Jiang Youth Association, 47, 21st Street, Yangon and He Nan-pang He Nan Tang, 134, Maung Khine Street (Bo Ywe Lan), Yangon.

For the Chan clan.

San Shang Tang, 145 Anawrahta Street, Yangon.

For the Zhuang clan.

Si Mei Tang, 103 Lanmadaw Street, Yangon.

For the Yeoh clan

57/59 Latha Street, Yangon. It is the same as the Tan clan house.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce

Around 1856 **Mr. Lee Ah Phoy**, born in Canton in 1839, went to Penang at the age of 17 and joined the Tap Seng firm of furniture dealers where he worked for ten years. In 1866 he first came to Yangon, but went to the Andaman Islands as he obtained contracts for erecting buildings there. He returned to Yangon in 1870 and established the firm of Kong Hip Saing, trading in various Chinese goods.

Many of the businesses in Yangon from mid-19th century to the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation of Myanmar in 1942 had trading and other business links with Penang.

Mr. Lee Ah Phoy was a leading member of the Committee of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.¹

Mr. Yeo Cheng Him, alias Yeo Siew Chye was also a member of the Committee of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in the first decade of the twentieth century. He was the eldest son of Mr. Yeo Teck who emigrated to Yangon from Amoy around 1870 and became the sole proprietor of Seng Hwat and Company. Yeo Teck ran this company for about 25 years and died in 1899.

Yeo Cheng Him (born in Ayeo, Amoy in 1872) entered his father's business in Yangon in 1899. This firm traded with Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Amoy.²

In 1909 Yeo Cheng Him became managing partner of Aik Cheng and Co., which exported rice and imported silk and various Chinese products.

All these trading firms had links with Penang. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce also played a leading role in promoting trade between Yangon and Penang and other Overseas Chinese.

Khoo Clan

Members of the Khoo family were active in business links between Yangon and Penang. For example Mr. Khoo Jeow left Amoy around 1860 and started trading with Penang. He came over to Yangon in 1869 and took a lease of an opium farm which he ran for about 21 years until he started rice-milling. Among his sons Khoo Thwan Beng became a

1. For a short biography and photos. (portraits) of Mr. Lee Ah Phoy *see Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma . . .* 1910. p. 323 with photos on 324.

2. *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma . . .* 1910. p. 319 and 323.

trader in Penang. Mr. Khoo Kim Cheng, the third son, born in Penang in 1873, was educated at St. Paul's School, one of the best Christian missionary brothers schools in Yangon. He and his brother later did a good trade in catch.¹

We interviewed several members of the Khoo families in Yangon. Some like the late Khoo Po Syo (whose mother was a Nonya lady from Penang) were educated in convent school in Penang. We saw letters written in 1929 and 1930 from the Headmistress in Penang urging Khoo Po Syo to return from Yangon to Penang for further education. Khoo Po Syo's great grandfather Khoo Kin built the Leong San Tong (Khoo clan house) in Yangon and Khoo Kin's brother, Khoo Hock Seong, built the Leong San Tong in Penang.² Mr. Khoo Kin and Mr. Saw Pinthong were on the Rangoon Town Council representing the Chinese community.³ For their services to the Council, the British Burma government granted free burial grounds for the Khoo and Saw families in the Tarmway quarter of Yangon.⁴

The Khoo family members in Yangon continued family relations with relatives in Penang and often visited them during vacations. Dr.

1. *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma* . . . 1910. p. 317, 319.

2. Interview with the late Khoo Po Syo's daughter Babsy (Mrs. Alan Khoo), 20th April 2003, and from records left by Khoo Po Syo.

3. B. R. Pearn. *A History of Rangoon*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press for the Corporation of Rangoon, 1939. p. 224. Mr. Saw Pinthong of Messrs. S. Pinthong and Friends had his shop at the corner of 32nd and Merchant Streets. This "Saw" clan merchant dug for public use a well on 32nd Street known as S. Pinthong's well.

4. Interview with Dr. Khoo Cheng Kim, 25th April 2003. Another informant told us that the burial ground for the "Saw" clan was next to the site where the new Myanmar National Library building is located in Tarmway. These old Chinese burial grounds were in existence up to the mid-1990s.

Khoo Cheng Kim (retired Professor, Institutes of Medicine I and II in Yangon) told us that she had been to Penang four times to visit relatives.¹

Conclusion

In this preliminary survey we seem to have touched only the tip of an iceberg. In-depth research needs to be undertaken as soon as possible because the Pashu in Myanmar are integrating fast with the surrounding communities, both Myanmar, Sino-Myanmar and other Chinese. Their distinctive Pashu life-style and their Creolized Chinese dialect is fast disappearing. Their beautiful embroidered dresses and colourful beaded shoes are also usually not worn anymore, only stored up in boxes and dusty cupboards. Their houses are being pulled down to make way for modern high-rise buildings as part of the urban renewal in modernizing Yangon.

Only their temples and clan houses, which they share with other Chinese in Myanmar, their popular, nicely coloured, tasteful little cakes and other Pashu dishes remain. The Pashu food is much liked by other Chinese in Myanmar and also by some of the Myanmar people.

But it is not too late to undertake serious research. The Pashu people we interviewed were friendly and eager to talk about their links with Penang. They also brought out their beautiful costumes, old photographs, cake-making utensils and other household items.

Dr. Michael Charney has written of the trade and other connections from China going through Penang along the Tenasserim Coast to Yangon and the Ayeyawady Deltaic region, right up to Rakhine

1. *ibid*

(Arakan) area near the border with India (and now with Bangladesh). He emphasises the removal of a nation-state-centred framework in analysing research data.¹ This is indeed an important point to note in carrying out further research, for we have many years of shared history along the eastern littoral of the Indian Ocean which transcends modern borders.

We hope that this paper will be the beginning of further, more comprehensive research on Pashu culture in Myanmar which could be undertaken jointly by Myanmar and researchers from Penang and other countries. We would welcome such research; there is an urgent need to record this interesting culture before it disappears entirely in Myanmar.²

(Note: Dr. Penny Edwards of the Australian National University, Canberra, a specialist on the Chinese in Mainland Southeast Asia, edited our paper after presentation at the Shared History Conference. We are very grateful to her for carrying out this painstaking task.)

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ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ချန်ညာကျိုစိန်တုံ အသင်း၏ ရာဇဝင်အကျဉ်းချုပ်။

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