

Chinese Politics in Colonial Saigon (1919–1936): The Case of the Guomindang

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Abstract:

The Chinese (Hoa) in colonial Indochina formed a complex community divided linguistically and economically into several social strata ranging from the long established colonial businessmen (*vieux chinois*) to self-employed merchants, factory owners, or skilled craftsmen, below whom teemed the vast majority of manual workers or petty traders. These Chinese are often regarded as essentially non-political. Using unpublished archival sources, this article reveals a more complex story, showing that local Chinese occasionally played significant political roles in the early-to-mid 1920s. It was colonial repression of Vietnamese anti-colonial movements, plus the urgent needs of the Chinese motherland from the later 1920s, that ultimately oriented most Hoa politics towards China. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, colonial police records confirm their support for the Guomintang; but its internal problems, which mirrored those of the GMD in China, often cost the party the political and financial support of local Chinese.

Keywords

Chinese politics in Vietnam; colonial south Vietnam; French Cochinchina; Hoa; Chinese trades unions; Guomintang; Overseas Chinese; Huaqiao

Introduction

Over recent decades various opinions have been expressed about the economic and political roles of Vietnam's Chinese (or Hoa) minority. After the foundation of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949, "red alert" transmuted into the question of whether Chinese living in Vietnam were a potential threat, or even a possible or actual "fifth column" for its mighty northern neighbour. American diplomats suspected this right from 1949,¹ as did Ngô Đình Diệm after 1954,² and even First Secretary Lê Duẩn after 1975, although for different reasons.³ From another perspective, however, they could be seen as apolitical subjects, recalcitrant⁴ but controllable, who were primarily interested in getting rich by any means. This was the preponderant view of French colonial administrators. One variant of this was a perception that they had always been a loyal, law-abiding, and non-political part of the population, only interested in the economy and wealth⁵ or in helping the endangered Chinese motherland, who had been

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1. See the Restricted dispatch from Ambassador Jessup, 22 August 1949, in Department of State (DOS), Indochina 1944–1954 Reels, reel 10/44.

2. A summary of official Vietnamese views appeared in an article of 2 December 1956 in the "Vietnam Times" (an English language publication edited by a US citizen and controlled by the Secretary of State for Information, Trần Chánh Thành). The French ambassador and US diplomats believed it was written by a member of the president's immediate entourage.

3. For a detailed account of these views, see Thomas Engelbert, "Perceptions sur les Hoa au Vietnam après 1975 d'après des sources vietnamiennes et allemandes," in *Vietnam. Sources et Approches*, ed. Philippe Le Failler and Jean-Marie Mancini (Université de Provence, 1996), pp. 139–55.

4. In 1946, the French administration dismissed the revolutionary potential of the Chinese as follows: "the Overseas Chinese has left his country above all in the hope of getting rich. His politics is always guided by his interests, his position is never precise and always subject to revisions". See Haut Commissariat de France pour l'Indochine, No. 57/D. Saigon, 21 janvier 1946, Archives d'Outre-Mer (hereafter AOM), Indo, CD 104.

5. For instance, Ly Singko claimed: "Chinese minorities are chiefly merchants, industrialists, planters, miners, bankers, petty traders, artisans and coolies, diligent, law-abiding, mammonites or money-makers but

victimised by upheavals beyond their control. This current of opinion persisted until the pledge of unconditional support by “Hoa workers” for the Vietnamese communist revolution became the new official thinking after “Đổi Mới”.⁶

The foregoing attitudes are of course stereotypes. As early as 1972, Wang Gungwu criticised the way these stereotypes appeared in academic literature about Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The very little that had been written so far about Chinese political activities, he said, was usually negative, seeing the Chinese as either apolitical or the opposite, a political threat as the potential fifth column of their northern homeland. For Wang, Overseas Chinese were mobile, active, and agents of change and he pointed out their important contributions to the modernisation of Southeast Asia in both the economic and political spheres.⁷ However, like most stereotypes, which tend to reduce multi-dimensional phenomena into simplified cognitive patterns, these perceptions also contain elements of truth. This essay explores how useful such views are in regard to the “high” colonial era, when resident Chinese were living through a period of Vietnamese political awakening. It considers what French archival sources and Vietnamese materials can reveal about Chinese political life in Indochina, especially in Cochinchina where most Hoa lived, from the early 1920s through to the mid-1930s. This era was characterised in Vietnam by student demonstrations and political ferment that culminated in the 1930 communist peasant and workers uprisings and the Great Depression, while in China these years saw the Northern Expedition that destroyed warlord rule and formally reunited China under the Guomindang (GMD) and the subsequent violent split between the GMD and Chinese communism in 1927. The essay explores Chinese political life in Vietnam at this time within both its local and international contexts, focussing principally on the Guomindang.

The Chinese minority in Vietnam never formed a single social stratum. It was a complex community with many internal divisions: between intellectual and social segments; between different regional origins and settlements; between the newly arrived, longstanding sojourners, and métis;⁸ and between partisans or adversaries of various political factions in China or Vietnam. If no “typical” Chinese or Hoa person therefore actually existed, several factors still collectively differentiated the Hoa from the Việt, as well as various groups within the Hoa. The variable interrelations of these factors created a diverse pattern of interaction between Hoa and Hoa, Hoa and Vietnamese, Hoa and French (and after 1945, Americans). This article aims to illuminate elements of that complexity at a time when intensified national and class awakening was further complicated by tensions arising from dissent within the Guomindang and from anti-communist repression in both China and Indochina.

Before considering these political dimensions, however, it is important to introduce the Chinese community generally, and to sketch its economic position.

politically impotent because of the lack of political interest. They are ... definitely not trouble-makers.... ” *Hanoi, Beijing and the Overseas Chinese* (Singapore: Asia, 1978), p. 88.

6. See, for example, Nguyễn Văn Linh at a veteran’s meeting with the Hoa, 17 April 1985, as cited in *Truyền thống cách mạng của đồng bào Hoa ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh dưới sự lãnh đạo của Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam* [The revolutionary traditions of the Hoa in HCM City under the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party], ed. Nghị Đoàn (HCM City: NXB TPHCM 1987), p. 5.

7. Wang Gungwu, “Political Chinese: Their Contribution to Modern Southeast Asia,” in *Southeast Asia and the Modern World*, ed. Bernard Grossman (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972), pp. 115–28.

8. Traditionally, the offspring of Chinese fathers and Vietnamese mothers were called Minh Hương and enjoyed a special status with regard to jurisdiction and taxes. This arrangement allowed for full assimilation by the third generation. The French later imposed it throughout Indochina. Minh Hương status was officially abolished in 1933, with such people thereafter generally treated as local people, with some variation in different colonial areas following complicated implementation rules arising from the Sino–French Nanking convention of 1930, which had indirectly recognised Chinese citizenship. See G. Levasseur, *La situation juridique des Chinois en Indochine depuis les accords de Nankin* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême Orient 1939), p. 43. See also Thomas Engelbert, “Paris, Nanjing, Hanoi, and Saigon: The Role of the Chinese Minority (Hoa) in Indochina during the Franco-Chinese negotiations, 1926–1937,” *Việt Học Niên San/Annalen der Hamburger Vietnamistik*, 4–5 (2009): 106–49.

The Chinese Community in Cochinchina, an Economic and Social Outline

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Chinese society in Indochina, especially in Cochinchina and Cambodia, slowly but steadily underwent changes that reflected economic and political developments in both its homeland and adopted country. First was the rising crescendo of early twentieth-century Chinese immigration, which contributed to an unprecedented wave of newcomers, as the following table shows. These figures of course only establish a general trend: too many sources for mistakes and uncertainties exist, especially for the provinces, not to mention the inaccurate counting of Chinese women and children under 16, and elderly or disabled men who were exempt from the poll tax. Nevertheless, one factor seems clear: the total number of Chinese, and their proportionate share of the total Asian population, rose until the Second World War in Cochinchina. Nevertheless, in simple numerical terms they were far fewer than in countries like Siam, Malaya, or the Dutch East Indies.⁹

Table 1. Population of Cochinchina, 1886 to 1943 (excluding Minh Huong)

Year	Vietnamese	Chinese	Total
1886	1,586,948 (89.6%)	50,176 (2.8 %)	1,770,833
1911	2,910,447 (87.9%)	136,781 (4.13%)	3,310,350
1921	3,004,833 (84.2%)	206,882 (5.7%)	3,569,314
1928	3,533,331 (83.7%)	237,944 (5.6%)	4,219,548
1943	4,612,136 (82.4%)	396,955 (7.1%)	5,559,451

Sources: 1886: "Tableau récapitulatif de la population en 1886," AOM, Indo, AF, G 01(2); 1911: "Population indigène (1911)," AOM, Indo, AF G 01 (1)-(6); 1921: *Annuaire Général de l'Indochine*. (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1921); 1928: *Annuaire statistique de l'Indochine*, vol. 3, 1930–1931 (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1932); 1943: "Tableau récapitulatif de la population non-blanche au Sud-Viet-Nam (1943)," Vietnamese National Archives No. 2 (QG II), Gouvernement de la Cochinchine (Goucoch), 839.

The increase was caused by two main factors. The former strict emigration rules in China were relaxed, and worsening conditions after the 1911 revolution made emigration more attractive. But more important was the successful French development of Cochinchina and Cambodia generally, and of the rice-producing Mekong Delta in particular. This had led to increasing yields in the traditional rice growing areas in eastern Cochinchina, and to the excessive clearing of new lands in the western Transbassac region, primarily by Vietnamese but to a certain extent also by Teochiu immigrants. Increasing rice production contributed to the economic and demographic development of the Saigon–Chợ Lớn twin-cities, where the principal harbour, market, industrial, and rice-milling centres of the colony were located.¹⁰

9. Chinese in Indochina were the fourth largest Chinese community in Southeast Asia, well after the estimated 2–3 million in Siam in 1936, the 1.7 million in British Malaya (plus 90,000 in British Borneo), and the 1.2 million in the Dutch East Indies. They were still more numerous than in Burma (190,000) or the Philippines (officially only 120,000). Katrine Greene, "Repatriating China's Expatriates," *Far Eastern Survey*, 17 (1948): 44–47.

10. In 1865, Saigon had an estimated 19,000 inhabitants (587 Europeans, 13,000 Vietnamese and 6,000 Chinese). By 1923, there were 78,100 inhabitants (5,370 Europeans, 50,085 Vietnamese, and 23,244 Chinese). In 1867 Chợ Lớn had an estimated 42,700 inhabitants (6 Europeans, 32,209 Vietnamese, and 10,500 Chinese) but 92,837 in 1923 (834 Europeans, 41,165 Vietnamese, and 48,887 Chinese, plus a small number of Khmer, Chams, Malays, and Indians). See *Annuaire de la Cochinchine Française 1865, 1867*

While Saigon was Indochina's largest port, Chợ Lớn was the uncontested "rice capital" of French Indochina, both the basis and the face of colonial prosperity.¹¹ In 1913 ten large rice mills operated there, among them eight owned by Chinese and two by the German–French Speidel Company.¹² In 1931, an estimated seventy-five rice mills were operating here alone, with only three now owned by Europeans and the rest by Chinese enterprises; eight of these mills had a daily capacity of more than 1,800 tonnes. Other rice milling centres were Long Xuyên, Cần Thơ, Rạch Giá, and Sóc Trăng, all in the Transbassac. By contrast, in 1913 Hải Phòng had only two rice mills, then owned by European firms but by 1931 by Chinese companies, and they sufficed for all Tongking.¹³

To a lesser extent, Phnom Penh also developed into a Cambodian regional hub, as an entrepôt for the Chợ Lớn rice mills and Saigon port. In 1921, Cambodia harvested 650,000 tons of paddy. Of that, an estimated 214,000 tons of paddy and 6,000 tons of rice were exported to Cochinchina, 190,000 tons of it by river transport that was overwhelmingly in Chinese hands. In addition, in the years between 1918 and 1922, Kampot exported between 2,200 and 3,500 tons of pepper annually via Saigon. Cambodia generally delivered about 10,000 tons of maize and 2,500 tons of cotton annually.¹⁴

During this time, Chinese were the most significant tax payers in southern Indochina. In 1911, Cochinchina's annual budget was about 5.3 million piastres, of which 1.4 million (or more than one-fourth) came from the personal taxes of foreign Asians who made up only four percent of the total population.¹⁵ Cambodia's budget equally depended on the Chinese. If the poll tax on foreign Asians in 1920 had yielded only 355,000 from a total budget of six million piastres, in 1923 it leapt to 1.9 million from a total budget of 7.9 million. This big jump followed the introduction of a Service de l'immigration et de l'identification in Phnom Penh, with a finger-print register, as an offshoot of Saigon's similar office.¹⁶ Until then, Chinese congregations in Cambodia had been administered by native administrators in the same way as Vietnamese immigrants, a system that had led to much abuse and corruption.¹⁷

By the mid 1920s, Chinese society in colonial Cochinchina was divided into three main social strata: rich traders and entrepreneurs; the mass of Chinese small businessmen and traders in cities and countryside; and Chinese labourers. Particular occupations were often connected to regional origin. According to a report to the governor general in 1908, about 90,000 adult Chinese men lived in Cochinchina, divided between 40,000 Cantonese, 20,000 Teochiu (from Chaozhou), 10,000 Fujianese (mainly Hokkien), 9,000 Hakka, and 5,000 Hainanese.¹⁸ Men still formed a high proportion of the total Chinese population (137,000 in all Indochina in 1911), underlining the fact that intermarriage, especially in the countryside between Teochiu

(Saigon: Imprimerie Impériale, 1865 and 1867); and *Annuaire général de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1921–1925).

11. In 1921, rice and rice products made up 62% of Indochinese exports by value, followed by fish (6.8%), rubber (4.4%), and coal (3.4%). In 1928 (just before the Great Depression), rice had risen to 68%, fish dropped to 4.6%; coal remained at 3.4%, and rubber had dropped to 3.5%. In the 1920s, rice fluctuated between a low of 56.6% in 1923 and a high of 68.2% in 1926. See *Annuaire statistique de l'Indochine (1913 à 1922)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient 1927), vol. 1, pp. 13–22; vol. 2 (1931), pp. 23–29; and vol 4 (1933), pp. 115–201.

12. Henri Brenier, "Du développement actuel et possible de l'industrie en Indochine," *Revue Indochinoise*, 20, 5–6 (1917): 434–52.

13. Wang Wen-yuan, *Les Relations entre l'Indochine française et la Chine. Etude de géographie économique* (Paris: Editions Pierre Brossuet 1937), p. 61

14. Resident Superior of Cambodia (RSC), *Rapport sur la situation du Cambodge. Intersession 1921–1922*," ANC, RSC 2351.

15. Press cuttings, *L'Opinion* (Saigon), 29 Mai 1911, "Les chinois en Cochinchine. Communications du Comité républicain et radical socialiste de Cochinchine," AOM, Indo, GG 38824.

16. RSC, "Rapport sur ... Intersession 1921–22," ANC, RSC 2351.

17. RSC, "Rapport d'ensemble sur la situation du Cambodge, Années 1924–1925," Ibid.

18. See Jean-André Lafargue, *L'immigration chinoise en Indochine. Sa réglementation, ses conséquences économiques et politiques* (Paris: Henri Jouve 1909), pp. 278–85.

settlers and Vietnamese or Khmer women, was normal and still the necessity it had always been during the 300 years of Chinese settlement here.

The social pyramid was dominated by the tiny group of wealthy businessmen and compradors, mostly long-resident “old Chinese” (vieux chinois) like the Hokkien family of Hui Bon Hoa¹⁹, the Teochiu Quách Đăm²⁰ and Vĩnh Sanh Chung,²¹ and the Peranakan Hokkien Tja Ma Yeng.²² These and similar men had co-operated with the French for long years, at the beginning of French occupation serving first as subcontractors or suppliers for the French expeditionary corps or the colonial administration, and then as compradors for the Banque de l’Indochine or other French and foreign banks and businesses²³ before expanding into, and often controlling, the most lucrative enterprises like the rice trade (through the “Chinese rice circuit”, an indirect network that operated in the provinces and in Cambodia). Others operated in profitable businesses, trades, or occupations, especially in ones that bridged southern Chinese or Southeast Asian markets, at one extreme, and French or native producers, at the other. In person or through straw-men they controlled the five obligatory, dialect based, colonial administrative organisations for local Chinese (congrégations or “bang”), whose heads and their deputies were held personally responsible by the colonial administration for their members’ regular payment of taxes, obedience to immigration regulations, orderly behaviour, and generally law abiding nature. The five congregations (Fujian, Chaozhou, Guangdong, Hainan, and Hakka) were very effective administrative instruments, first established in traditional times but adopted from 1859 by the French with the goal of assuring control over the Chinese minority at the least expense to the colonial administration.

In addition, the *vieux Chinois* who were not already naturalised French formed the upper stratum of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. This organ had been founded in 1903 in Chợ Lớn, to serve as a more or less honest broker in all sorts of intra-Chinese affairs as well as to mediate between the Chinese community and the French, or between Overseas Chinese and China. These wealthy men had a high regard for law and order and one of their main interests was to maintain calm. Yet while they wanted to protect their access to the new economic opportunities opened up by French rule, upon which their successful business careers rested, they also tried to accommodate and, if possible, to channel the nationalist aspirations of their own

19. Jean-Baptiste Hui Bon Hoa (Hứa Bồn Hòa) died in 1901. He made a fortune in pawn shops, through a licensed Sino–French company Ogliastro, Hui Bon Hoa & Co. In 1919, this company had rented 25 pawn shops in Cochinchina (usually for a period of 6 years), 6 of them in Saigon. All except one branch office (Phú Lâm, Chợ Lớn) were led by Hokkien, many estimators (*appréciateurs*) had the family name of “Hứa”. In 1926, this company ran 13 of the 19 Cochinchinese pawnshops. [See *Appréciateurs pour Monts de Pieté*. In Goucoch IA8/2911(2)] Another company that Hui Bon Hoa set up with his son operated in real estate and construction, developing many large sites in Saigon–Chợ Lớn and in provincial towns. The most famous possession of this family was Saigon’s Hôtel Majestic which opened in 1925. See Vương Hồng Sển, *Sài-gòn năm xưa* (Saigon in former years). (Ho Chi Minh City: Thành Phố HCM 1990), pp. 284–91.

20. In 1927, he was one of two most influential rice traders, owner of the Chợ Lớn rice trading and milling company Thông Hiệp, plus four seagoing steamships. A French citizen and *Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur*, he died in 1927 and his son Quách Khôi took over the business. See “Rapport annuel de la Sûreté, 1er juillet 1926–1er juillet 1927”, AOM, Indo, Gouvernement générale (hereafter GGI) 65475.

21. Vĩnh Sanh Chung of Saigon possessed two ships which usually plied between Saigon and Swatow. See Sûreté, “Rapport annuel 1926–1927,” Ibid.

22. Tja Ma Yeng (alias Ta Ma Diên), of Sino–Javanese origin, was born 1861 in Batavia and came to Cochinchina in 1885. Beginning as a clerk in a Chinese business, he rose to become a famous rice trader and miller. In 1905, he obtained French citizenship. In the mid-1920s, his main activity was in rice export through his company Hock Guan Hong of Chợ Lớn. He also owned two steamships and a lot of real estate in Saigon and Chợ Lớn. His four Western-educated sons, Ta Thanh Thuyen, Ta Thanh Tông, Ta Thanh Hao, and Ta Thanh Tri, participated in various business activities. Ibid.

23. In 1927, the most important compradors were Wong Lam Hing and Yip Pak Heng, directors of the Saigon branch of the Chinese Bank of East Asia Ltd. Heng was also the main comprador of the Banque de l’Indochine. The Saigon directorate of the Bank of East Asia comprised the leading bank compradors, like Tang Ke (main comprador of the Chartered Bank of India and Australia Ltd); Tang Tang Huan (main comprador of the Banque Franco-chinoise); Ngo Khon or Ngo Chi Hung (main comprador of the Banque de Saigon); Du Xuong (main comprador of the Yokohama Specie Bank), and Chuan Le (main comprador of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation). Ibid.

community and the multiple financial demands coming from China. This meant in practice juggling requests from legal governments, dissenting provinces, and revolutionaries, right from the start of the activities associated with Sun Yat-sen and his comrades.²⁴

At the opposite social extreme were Chinese workers, especially those employed by relatively modern Chinese and colonial enterprises like the rice mills, Saigon port, or the alcohol and tobacco factories.²⁵ In 1931, their numbers were estimated by the “special Chinese committee” of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) as 1,000 industrial workers, 5,000 port coolies, and 3,000 rice mill workers plus approximately 56,000 unemployed.²⁶ The latter number seems doubtful, and grossly exaggerated in view of the total number of 237,000 Chinese living in the colony at that time. Between these extremes lay the mass of the Chinese population, neither “capitalist” nor “proletarian” but playing an essential role.

Chinese were the arteries of the Cochinchina market economy. They worked as petty traders, artisans, go-betweens of all kinds; they were mechanics, carpenters, brick-makers, tailors, and shoemakers; they occupied most market stalls; they ran the small to medium scale factories that processed agricultural products and raw materials for exporting companies. These areas were predominantly Cantonese. In the early twentieth century, Cantonese also provided most of the skilled workers in French enterprises like the arsenal, the inland shipping company Messageries Fluviales, Dupont & Bron, and Graf, Jacque et Cie.²⁷ That situation changed markedly during the First World War when cheaper and more abundant Vietnamese labour was increasingly employed.²⁸ Hokkien-speaking Chinese were actively engaged in large and small scale money lending, in real estate, as compradors and business clerks in Chinese and European companies, as goldsmiths, and as second-hand merchants, especially in scrap iron and used bottles. Hainanese harvested pepper in Hà Tiên²⁹ and Kampot, worked as domestic servants or otherwise generally served the needs of Europeans. The Hakka laboured in less qualified trades and occupations as well as being coolies and unskilled labourers. Teochiu were often rural workers and small-holders: they fished the South China Sea and the Gulf of Siam, extracted salt in Bạc Liêu, planted rice and fruit trees in the Transbassac, or worked as longshoremen in Saigon port. They also traded rice and other goods on circulating riverboats, thus forming the link between regional markets and the Chợ Lớn rice mills, playing quite a similar role to that of rural Cantonese grocery stores.

As Table 2 (over page) shows, the 118,000 foreign Asians living in Cochinchina in 1908 were overwhelmingly Chinese. The exception was a tiny number of Indians and Malays assembled into separate congregations according to their religion (Buddhist means Hindu). The 118,000 foreign Asians were in their large majority city folk, 58

24. One such incident occurred in Phnom Penh, in January 5, 1907. A western dressed Chinese from Singapore arrived and was met by the Canton congregation head, Trịnh Hòa. He subsequently met several other important local Chinese, seeking financial contributions for Sun Yat-sen. The congregation chiefs feared French punishment, however, so while agreeing to commit some funds they asked the envoy to leave on the next boat. See Peyrolon's report to RSC, 8 janvier 1907, AOM, Indo, RSC 234.

25. In 1937, the following larger enterprises employed Chinese labour: Chinese rice mills in Chợ Lớn, the alcohol factory Distelleries de l'Indochine in Bình Tây, the Saigon commercial port, the Compagnie Franco-Annamite de Tabac (COFAT) in Chợ Lớn, and printing houses in Saigon and Chợ Lớn. Chinese were mostly employed as either skilled labour or for heavy manual work (as in the port). Even in the rice mills, the workforce was often mixed. In 1937, COFAT employed 150 female Chinese, and 160 female Vietnamese workers.

26. Saigon Sureté, confidential note, 5 Mai 1931, “Activité communiste révolutionnaire en Cochinchine. Repression. Opération effectuée le 15 avril 1931 à Saigon,” AOM, Indo, RSC 225.

27. See, “Notice sur la situation des Chinois en Indochine (1),” *Revue Indochinoise* 11, 11 (1909): 1063–99.

28. See Brenier, “Du développement actuel et possible de l'industrie en Indochine,” *Revue Indochinoise* 20, 5–6 (1917): 434–52.

29. Among the 545 Hainanese men of Hà Tiên Province counted in 1908, there were 499 coolies, 34 planters, 7 traders, 3 butchers, one coolie and trader, and one merchant. See “Congrégation de Hainam. Hatien et Honchong, 1908,” Goucoch, IA 114/073.

percent of them living in the twin city of Saigon-Chợ Lớn with 37,000 in Chợ Lớn (25,000 or 68 percent of them Cantonese) and 32,000 in Saigon (22,000 or 69 percent Cantonese). Only 1,709 of Cochinchina's Chinese (1.45 percent) were considered wealthy, paying poll taxes in the first to third categories, whereas 68,541 paid the lower taxes of the fourth and fifth categories. The remainder were tax exempt (males under eighteen and over fifty-five, the disabled, and women). Interestingly, a larger percentage of high tax payers existed among Cantonese and Hokkien in Chợ Lớn and among the Chinese in general in Cần Thơ and Sóc Trăng in the Transbassac, whereas in most provinces the Chinese share of wealthy men was low.

Table 2. Foreign Asian Population of Cochinchina, 1 May 1908

	Total	Men (18–55) who paid full poll tax in 4 th and 5 th categories	Men (18–55) who paid full poll tax in 1 st to 3rd categories
Baclieu	5103	4365	24
Baria	254	201	2
Bentre	2165	1584	55
Bienhoa	1113	792	11
Cantho	5031	4130	122
Cap St. Jacques	198	186	2
Chaudoc	1138	876	12
Chợ Lớn	1293	751	47
Giadinh	926	775	9
Gocong	541	432	8
Hatien	1904	1252	10
Longxuyen	1187	928	9
Mytho	1540	12,252	31
Poulo-Condore	12	11	n.s.
Rachgia	1717	1371	24
Sadec	2060	1732	27
Soctrang	8326	6968	107
Tanan	489	371	6
Tayninh	402	317	2
Thudaumot	1211	995	8
Travinh	5131	3993	28
Vinhlong	2392	1976	30
Total of the provinces	44,133	35,258	574
Saigon-Canton	22,695	7702	334
SG-Trieu Chau	3225	1253	25
SG-Phuoc Kien	2818	1283	57
SG-Akas	4340	1541	64
SG-Hainam	1111	451	16
SG-Musulmans	500	220	23
SG-Bouddhistes	411	199	50
SG-Malais	270	116	n.s.
Cholon-Canton	25,085	11,572	305
CL-Trieu Châu	4245	2933	89
CL- Phuoc Kien	6442	4817	114
CL-Akas	1813	947	40
CL-Hainam	388	134	9
Malais et Musulmans	49	43	2
Bouddhistes	93	72	7
Total	117,618	68,541	1,709

Source: "Etat récapitulatif des Asiatiques étrangers résidant en Cochinchine au premier du mois de mai 1908," AOM, Indo, GG 38823

Chinese in the twin-city of Saigon–Chợ Lớn were traders of some sort followed by all kinds of craftsmen. The trade and processing of rice, deerskin, and other agricultural products was Chợ Lớn’s particular business, while creating the comforts of life in a modern, western city was a speciality of Saigon’s Chinese population. For Saigon in 1908, colonial records show there were 68 medium, small, or large traders, followed by 46 butchers, 40 tailors and shoemakers, 31 rice millers, 30 laundrymen, 26 barbers, 17 pharmacists, 15 watchmakers, 14 whitesmiths, 13 jewellers, 13 barkeepers, 12 smiths, 11 saddlers, 10 carpenters, 10 bakers, 7 construction companies, 7 coopers, 5 innkeepers, 1 producer of soda and 1 producer of syrup. In Cholon, there were 64 medium traders, 48 small traders, 31 pharmacists, 21 rice millers, 18 traders (négociants), 17 traders in deerskin, 14 butchers, 14 boat builders, 14 whitesmiths, 14 dyers, 13 tea traders, 12 smiths, 12 coastal ship owners, 12 confectioners (without ovens), 11 merchants, 10 joiners, 10 medium-scale rice traders, 9 rice merchants, 8 potters, 7 silk traders, 7 industrial rice millers, 7 rattan makers, 7 sack traders, 6 bartenders, 5 tanners, 5 saw millers, 4 soap boilers, 4 small rice traders, and 4 carpenters.³⁰

First Political Stirrings: Sun Yat-sen and Indochina

Covert political currents were already stirring some of this industrious Chinese population by 1908. Chinese nationalists in particular had a long connection with French Indochina. Anti-Qing activists had used the French colony as a secure rear base, recruitment area, and spring-board for activities in southern China since the end of the nineteenth century. Sun Yat-sen had visited Indochina in 1900, 1902–03, 1905, and 1907, and had met with French officials, including Governors General Doumer, Hardouin, and Beau. With the material assistance of colonial pressure groups in Paris and the French authorities in Indochina, including their direct financial support, he had set up networks for his revolutionary organisations mainly among the Cantonese in Hanoi, Hải Phòng, Saigon–Chợ Lớn, and at the Tongking–China border, all aimed at facilitating revolutionary activities in southern Chinese provinces. Energetic Qing protests to the French Minister in China, claiming that France was violating bilateral treaties by giving refuge to Chinese who used colonial territory to attack the empire, finally caused Paris to direct the colonial administration to close this chapter. (In any case, the attacks had not brought about the desired results.³¹) After Sun’s extradition in 1907, his closest lieutenants like Wang Jingwei and Hu Hanmin still spent another year in Indochina, securing and strengthening these bases.³²

Despite the official break, Indochinese authorities remained sympathetic to Sun Yat-sen and his party for some time after. Whereas ordinary criminals were directly expelled to China, proven “reformists” or “revolutionaries”, 700 altogether, were interned at Yên Bái, Hanoi, Hải Phòng, or on an island in Halong Bay. They were not treated as criminals and after they had signed an engagement to refrain from any unlawful activity, they were transferred as ordinary passengers on French steamships to Hong Kong, Singapore, and even, after an arrangement with the Dutch Indies, to Batavia. On one occasion, the captain of a steamer from Hải Phòng to Hong Kong released his fifteen “passengers” in July 1908 before the British police boarded, causing a minor diplomatic incident. The Chinese disappeared into the crowd and became “irretrievable”.³³ In April 1911, the governor general even reminded the

30. L’immigration asiatique étrangère étudiée au point de vue de la création de consulats chinois en Cochinchine. Saigon, 27 novembre 1919, AOM, Indo, GG 38823

31. Official telegram, (Copy), Paris, 7 Mai 1908, to governor general, QGI, RST 21023.

32. See Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Sun Yat-sen and the French, 1900–1908* (Berkeley: China Research Monographs No. 14, 1979); “Le mouvement révolutionnaire chinois au Tongkin en 1907,” *Revue Indochinoise* 11(1908): 805–09; Châu Hải, “Trung Quốc Cách mạng đồng minh hội và các nhóm cộng đồng người Hoa ở Đông Nam Á,” *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử* (1991): 83–88.

33. See Bonheure’s letter of 17 juillet 1908, on Asians expelled to Hong Kong, QGI, RST 20480

resident superior of Tongking that expulsion of proven anti-dynastic or revolutionary forces to China was “contrary to our traditions”.³⁴

On 10 October 1911, however, the Qing dynasty was overthrown. Almost all educated Vietnamese had followed these events through Chinese or French newspapers so closely that most even knew the names of the principal revolutionaries. Yet among the Chinese in Indochina, Sun had largely failed to mobilise the richest and most powerful men, who only helped to fund the organisation in this initial phase. In Hanoi, he was backed especially by the Cantonese congregation, and by bandits and Black Flag remnants of dubious repute at the Sino–Indochinese border. In Cochinchina, members for his organisations mostly came from “secret societies” which, thanks to the efficiency of the congregation system, in the twentieth century mainly grouped underprivileged and working class elements without attracting wealthy and powerful Chinese. In general, Cantonese dominated Sun’s revolutionary societies in Cochinchina as well, especially men from his own home county.³⁵

Sun Yat-sen was a genuine revolutionary, meaning he combined vision or charisma with political realism, and he knew to find or change allies for pragmatic reasons. He had little sympathy for Western colonialism, and his French connections were born of circumstance and necessity, after previous defeats when he had relied uniquely on the support of pre-modern anti-Qing societies. On the French side, their assistance was generally dictated by their primary and overall interest in creating a useful counterweight to the Qing court, and in having entrée to a possible revolutionary government, if the declining Qing fell. At this period, relations were quite intense and many layered. They took various forms: joint intelligence operations in southern China; French indirect financial support through Overseas Chinese connections; collusion in Sun’s illicit arms transit through Indochina; and covert assistance in, and even direct support for, his military activities in the immediate border area. Sun, for his part, made far-reaching promises regarding the pacification of the Sino–Tongking border, especially Yunnan, and about French concessions in, and co-operation with, a future Southern Chinese Republic. The French were hardly naive or blind when dealing with this aspiring Chinese leader, and would have realised that great promises made before Sun’s victory might easily change afterwards.³⁶ The cautious French and British support for Sun thus primarily arose from his modern appearance, and was imbued with the hope of future gains in a westernised China, although both were well aware of the strong nationalist commitment of Sun and his revolutionary party.³⁷

Nevertheless modern Overseas Chinese associations, including political parties, were officially proscribed in 1908, and then effectively repressed from 1914, causing many active members to return to China. The reasons for the 1914 repression are not difficult to find. Around 1908–09 the French had settled former members of revolutionary bands in several areas along the Laos–Tongking–China border, like in Mai Châu (Hòa Bình). These men did not return to China after the 1911 revolution, but entertained close relations with relatives and friends across the border.³⁸ After World

34. Governor general to RS Tonkin, 8 avril 1911, QGI, RST 76473.

35. *Huê-huyện*, or *Huaxian*, which had its own territorial association (*đồng hương hội tongxianghui*) in Chợ Lớn. A. Maybon wrote in 1905 that Sun’s influence was strong in Guangdong, where he always found subsidies from the merchants and guilds, but that elsewhere in southern China control of the secret societies eluded him a little. Because of this, he tended increasingly to prepare his forces in coastal towns open to European influence, as he could not guarantee control of revolutionary forces elsewhere. See “La politique intérieure de la Chine de 1898 à 1907,” *Revue Indochinoise* 10 (1907): 1,617–629.

36. Colonial hawks in Paris and Indochina, especially the *Compagnie des Chemins de Fer de l’Indochine et du Yunnan*, wanted to expand French influence in southern China through a railroad connecting Tongking with the Yangtse valley; in a way, this corresponded to Sun’s somewhat simplistic ideas of economic development through the extension of railroads. See Jeffrey Garrigou Barlow, “Vietnam and the Chinese Revolution of 1911” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley 1973), pp. 329–80.

37. Maybon believed that “[Sun] ... always recognised the superiority of western civilisation, as much from the economic as the intellectual perspective, and perhaps he is even too great an admirer of our ideas and activity,” but nevertheless was a Chinese patriot and would not cede any Chinese land or tolerate foreign interference in Chinese affairs. Maybon, “La politique intérieure de la Chine,” p. 1,628.

38. Hòa Bình Resident to Résident Supérieur, 6 décembre 1911. AOM, Indo, GG 64185

War I began in August 1914, several Vietnamese and minority mutinies or uprisings occurred, especially in the north. On 29 October 1914, a state of emergency was declared in Tongking's border provinces, and extended to the whole protectorate in early 1915. While no direct proof of Chinese participation in these events existed, all Chinese publications were then prohibited, in order to prevent Vietnamese from getting news from the European war fronts.³⁹ While China did not help these revolutionaries officially, northern bands could freely access Chinese territory to escape pursuit. Equally, members of the Guomindang leadership, especially Chen Qimei and Hu Hanmin, had supported the anti-colonial Vietnamese revolutionary figure, Phan Bội Châu, during his stay in China. The needle-prick policies the French had once used against the Qing were now being returned by the Chinese revolutionaries who had come to power in China—a pattern not unfamiliar in the history of more than one thousand years of interaction between the Middle Kingdom and the Land of the South. Nevertheless, when post-War political activity began among Overseas Chinese in the French colony, it would push aside this ancient pattern in favour of a new form of political activity that helped to inaugurate modern political life in colonial Vietnam, as the next section explains.

Post-War Politics: The 1919 Boycott and the Candelier Affair

In the years after the First World War, two political events involving Chinese in Cochinchina helped set the stage for those Vietnamese anti-colonial political dramas of the mid-1920s that have been discussed by many scholars. They were the Vietnamese boycott of the Chinese in 1919, and then the “Candelier affair” in 1924.

The boycott of Chinese traders and restaurants in Saigon—Chợ Lớn, styled after the anti-Japanese and anti-British boycotts held in China at the time, originated in an incident in a Saigon street café. The café's Chinese owner had raised the price of his coffee by 50 percent, from two to three centimes. The local press, especially the French-language *Tribune Indigène* edited by Nguyễn Phú Khai, then exploited his act to wage an anti-Chinese campaign. Khai, the son of a naturalised Vietnamese colonial official, was a French-trained engineer who had, after his return in 1915, unsuccessfully tried to compete with Chinese rice millers in Mỹ Tho⁴⁰ before joining with Bùi Quang Chiêu, himself a failed plantation owner and married to a Chinese, to establish this newspaper. (Both men were later involved in founding the moderate, reformist Constitutionalist Party, of which Bùi Quang Chiêu was the leading figure.) On 16 December 1919 various Franco–Vietnamese journals called for a boycott of Chinese goods and businesses in response to the price rise. After a Chinese mob demonstrated outside the *Tribune Indigène* office and smashed its furniture, the anti-Chinese boycott spread to other parts of Indochina, to Hanoi especially, before finally being stifled by acting governor general Monguillet.⁴¹

Khai's very close personal ties with members of the French colonial lobby and senior administrative figures, as detailed in Security Service reports from the time,⁴² raise the question of possible covert French influence in this event, if only because it played so well into the colonial “divide and rule” approach to inter-ethnic relations. Certainly, when the boycott first occurred, French newspapers in Saigon were jubilant that the “Annamite” had finally stood up to the Chinese; the “nephew” was revolting against his “uncle”. The *Moniteur de l'Indochine*, for instance, claimed it was absolutely essential for the Vietnamese to liberate themselves from the Chinese trader, “this

39. Political report, 4th trimestre 1914. AOM, Indo., RST NF 01536. It was then decided to create Vietnamese language newspapers in *quốc ngữ* in order to disseminate “correct” information.

40. Ralph B. Smith, “Bùi Quang Chiêu and the Constitutionalist Party in French Cochinchina,” *Modern Asian Studies* 3 (1969): 131–50.

41. See the Sûreté's “Note d'information politique, portant sur la période comprise entre le 1 juillet 1923 et le 31 octobre 1924,” AOM, Indo, GG, 65474.

42. Ibid.

miserable profiteer, who has impudently made himself the master of business life".⁴³ However, when the boycott erupted into violence and escalated into anti-French school strikes, and was thus repressed by the administration, the *Moniteur* changed its tune to attack the Vietnamese students, young radicals who had shown their ingratitude and unworthiness for a French education by turning against their benefactors.⁴⁴

All those concerned, the French, the Vietnamese, and the Chinese, needed to learn from this incident, and they did, as the more significant Candelier affair would later reveal. In 1924, the Saigon Port Office, part of the Cochinchinese administration of Governor Maurice Cognacq, wanted to lease a twenty year revenue farm on port taxes, plus a monopoly over the transport of rice and maize at the port, to the French business conglomerate Homberg-Candelier.⁴⁵ Cognacq gave two reasons for the move: to attract private capital to extend the port; and to break the monopoly of Chinese rice transporters there. When put to the vote in the Cochinchinese Colonial Council most French representatives had supported the monopoly, with only four French (competing members of Saigon's Franco-Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce) and three from four Vietnamese opposed. Two of the Vietnamese, Nguyễn Tân Duoc and Nguyễn Phan Long, then unleashed a public campaign against the monopoly, especially in the Constitutionalist publications, the *Tribune Indigène* and *Echo Annamite*. These crusading newspapers denounced the deal as corrupt and countered any claim of fighting Chinese monopolies by pointing out that they did not exist in the rice and maize transport business at the port. Further, Nguyễn Phan Long argued that Vietnamese should learn to imitate the Chinese rather than fight them.⁴⁶ Obviously some Vietnamese had learned a lesson from 1919.

The campaign against the Candelier-Homberg monopoly allied four distinct interest groups. On the French side were two groups: rival French entrepreneurs in Saigon; and political opponents of the government, especially lawyers and members of the Radical Socialist or Saigon Republican group, who opposed Cognacq's favouritism and high-handed methods in general⁴⁷ but also wanted to use the campaign to win seats in the Colonial Council and on the Saigon town council.⁴⁸ On the Vietnamese side were the first generation nationalists, peaceful and loyal critics of colonial rule who used the campaign to fight for human and social rights, and especially to push France to fulfil her World War I promises to allow Vietnamese greater responsibility in the management of their own affairs. Lastly, the Chinese business community and the Guomindang used the campaign for their own economic and political purposes.⁴⁹

The campaign kicked off when all the leading representatives of the Constitutionlists were invited to a banquet in Chợ Lớn, where the guild and unofficial trust of Cochinchina's rice trade, the informal committee of rice traders (*Comité des Céréales*) within the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, promised funding for the campaign. As the campaign developed, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce remained in the background, but nevertheless devoted the very substantial sum of 80,000

43. 'C.-L. A' (perhaps Henry Chavigny de la Chevrotière), "Le boycottage des Chinois par les Annamites," *Le Moniteur de l'Indochine*, 20 septembre 1919, p. 3.

44. See Pertinax, "Le boycottage et la politique de M. Sarraut," *Ibid*, 11 octobre 1919.

45. For the economic empire of Octave Homberg in Indochina, see Jean-Dominique Giacometti, *La question de l'autonomie de l'Indochine et les milieux coloniaux français 1915-1928* (thesis for doctorat de Troisième cycle, University of Provence, 1996), p. 49.

46. The *Echo Annamite* was the newspaper of Bùi Quang Chiêu's replacement and rival for party leadership, Nguyễn Phan Long.

47. For further information on radical socialists, especially for the struggle against Cognacq, see Daniel Hémy, *Ho Chi Minh. De l'Indochine au Vietnam* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), pp. 174–78. On Cognacq and the Candelier affair, also see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 113–20; and William J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 103–77.

48. Around 1900, the "Saigon lobby" comprised French journalists and dissatisfied colonial administrators who usually bought the votes of French Indians, who were entitled to participate as citizens. Organised by the Cochinchinese Deputy Blanchy, it was funded by various local French companies and plantations. See Paul Doumer, *L'Indochine Française. Souvenirs* (Paris: Vubert et Nony, 1905), pp. 73–76. The names, but not the situation, had changed by the 1920s and 1930s, when Ernest Outrey or the Marquis de Beaumont were Cochinchina's deputies in the French Chambre des Députés in Paris.

49. See *Hồi ký Trần Huy Liệu* (Hanoi: Viện Khoa học xã hội, 1991), pp. 50–51.

piastres to send the radical French lawyer and human rights activist, Paul Monin,⁵⁰ to Paris to fight for the abrogation of the decree in Metropolitan circles. Members also allocated 20,000 piastres to subsidise Vietnamese-owned newspapers to continue the struggle. As part of this campaign, on 11 December 1923, Saigon witnessed its first public political meeting, when 380 French and Vietnamese gathered to set up a committee to co-ordinate the struggle, under the leadership of three French lawyers (Monin, Dubreulin, and Bazié) and Nguyễn Phan Long. This first modern political gathering was followed by many other meetings, and even mass demonstrations, in ensuing months. When Monin returned after a successful journey in Paris, 200 people, including many Vietnamese high school students and business clerks, demonstrated in Saigon, whistling and booing in front of the headquarters of the hated secret police, the Sûreté.⁵¹

This was the first recorded modern Vietnamese political demonstration in Saigon and more uproar followed in the ensuing months: protests, demonstrations, even the call for a general strike. Hindsight shows that the Candelier campaign, funded largely by Chinese money, would be the catalyst that transformed a widespread disappointment about the narrowness of post-war colonial reforms, and disenchantment with the possibility of peaceful change, into overt nationalist action. After this, radical young Vietnamese then moved in a direction that few resident Chinese wished to follow: as far as the Hoa were concerned, open anti-colonial activity was an invitation for personal disaster, as the French administration could expel any troublemaking “foreign Asians” at will. Nevertheless, this understandable hesitancy to be involved in Indochinese affairs did not mean Chinese were politically unconscious or inactive. Once French repression was relaxed after World War I, cautious Chinese political activity began again, under the inspiration of the nationalist party now known as the Guomindang.

Chinese Politics: The Guomindang and Affiliated Organisations

In 1920, the Hanoi branch of Sun Yat-sen’s Tongminghui was revived. It had been officially banned in 1908, and then crippled in 1914 when its leading members were expelled from Indochina, but the more tolerant post-war climate encouraged its re-emergence. Shortly afterwards, in 1922, the reascent society changed its name to the Guomindang,⁵² or nationalists, although, just as in Sun’s day, it maintained the traditional pattern of enjoying closest relations with the Cantonese congregation.⁵³ In the south, however, matters were different. When the first Guomindang cell was founded in 1922 by Cantonese activists in Chợ Lớn, class and other social differences played a larger role than regional or dialect solidarity. In Cochinchina in the early 1920s, as in China, it was the working class, not the established landowners and merchants, who most actively supported the new GMD. By 1924, more than 14,000 members were registered in Cochinchina, with the number reportedly having doubled in two years. The party organisation comprised one general executive committee based in Chợ Lớn, and two executive committees based in Saigon–Chợ Lớn and in the Transbassac (Bạc Liêu–Cần Thơ). They set up sections and cells in almost all Mekong Delta provinces as well as in Phnom Penh. The party organisation had close relations with the left-wing movement in Canton: in 1924, GMD activists extradited from

50. Paul Monin, also a leading member of Saigon’s Radical Socialist Party, was elected in May 1924 to chair the united socialist election front. He cooperated closely with André Malraux in France. For further information, see Michael Dye, “André Malraux and the Temptation of the Orient,” *Journal of European Studies* 29 (1999): 45–53.

51. See “Note ... sur la période entre le 1 juillet 1923 et le 31 octobre 1924,” AOM, Indo, GG, 65474.

52. Tonkin Sûreté, annual report 1922–1923. (1 Juillet 1922–30 Juin 1923), AOM, Indo, GG 23666.

53. One party leader was A Sam, clerk of a Chinese business. The Cantonese congregation chief San Tiep, a member of the GMD Tongking executive committee, owed his election largely to party support and he cooperated closely with it. The Hải Phòng Cantonese congregation’s leadership was made up of party functionaries as well. *Ibid.*

Indochina were greeted as heroes on their arrival there.⁵⁴ It also enjoyed close relations with a group of left-wing French lawyers and human rights activists, including Paul Monin who, in two cases, had acted unsuccessfully to prevent such extraditions.⁵⁵

This high level of reported membership reflected the GMD practice of counting as party members all those who belonged to trades unions which had, formally or de facto, declared allegiance to the party and joined a GMD "general labour union" or *Tổng công hội (Zonggonghui)*. In Cochinchina and Cambodia, general labour unions were founded by Guomindang activists in 1925. Their official aims were financial aid for extradited members, subsidies for steamship passages to and from China for poor members, financial contributions to the Northern Expedition to reunify China by defeating northern warlords,⁵⁶ and to official missions of party activists. Every member had to contribute 4.50 piastres per year, raised through affiliated unions.⁵⁷

The social and regional affiliation of trades unions was important. In Phnom Penh, the general union, which united six exclusively Cantonese unions in 1927, had its headquarters at the office of the mechanics union. In that year, the president of this union also served as chairman of the general labour union. Five out of six members of the executive committee were Cantonese, representing the unions of mechanics, carpenters, wood-workers, butchers, and of dealers in coffee and hardware. The only non-Cantonese, a Teochiu, merely represented a committee for mutual aid.⁵⁸ Before this 1927 reorganisation, a scandal had tarnished the image of the general labour union and of the party. The Cantonese Lau Yek Veng (alias Lưu Ngọc Hạng) had been, until 1927, chairman of the general labour union and also acting chair of the GMD executive committee for Cambodia. In 1927, the carpenters' union charged him with embezzling membership fees (20 centimes per month per member). Instead of accounting for how the funds had been used, he resorted to appeals to patriotism and assurances that the money had been sent to Canton. With no proof of these transfers, however, members unanimously voted against any further financial contribution to the general labour union. According to the French Sûreté, Lau Yek Heng had used the money, in collusion with the three other board members (one Cantonese and three Teochiu), to buy a shop in rue Ohier. The reorganisation that followed saw the chairman of the mechanics union elected to chair the general labour union, with an executive board that included no party activists.⁵⁹

In post-1919 Chợ Lớn, more than sixty labour unions (*công hội/gonghui*) existed, in open defiance of the 1908 order banning any organisations for foreign Asians except those recognised by the administration (congregations and Chinese Chambers of Commerce). However, these organisations were, generally speaking, more like guilds or mutual aid societies than modern trades unions since they united employees and employers, or shop owners, in one patriarchal organisation, often with the character of a secret society or a traditional syndicate. Only a very small percentage of them were under real GMD control.⁶⁰ A 1921 strike of Phnom Penh's carpenters illustrates the

54. The cases involved 3 Cantonese and 2 Teochiu, but only the Cantonese, who were leaders of the party in Chợ Lớn, were expelled. The 2 Teochiu, who were GMD leaders in Cần Thơ, went underground. After a Cantonese newspaper published a photograph of the Cần Thơ GMD leadership, 2 others were identified and caught, a Cantonese who cooperated and was spared extradition, and a Teochiu, who was originally a trader in gold and foreign currency from Bạc Liêu. See Sûreté, rapport annuel 1924–1926, AOM, Indo, GG 65475.

55. The cases were a Teochiu and a Hakka. See Sûreté, rapport annuel 1924–1926, AOM, Indo, GG 65475.

56. For Sun Yat-sen's plans for a "Northern Expedition", which had existed since 1921, see Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Communist Party*, vol. 1, p. 232.

57. Note from the Sûreté head to the Résident of Kompong Cham, dated 24 mars 1928, and also the Cochinchina Sûreté's confidential note, no. 925, to the head of the Sûreté in Cambodia, 9 janvier 1928, AOM, Indo, RSC 234.

58. Note of 6 juillet 1927 from mayor of Phnom Penh to RSC, ANC, RSC 36,124.

59. "Note confidentielle, 26 juillet 1927", AOM, Indo, RSC 234.

60. A similar situation prevailed in China where the Guomindang-led worker's movement had to reckon with the influence of these traditional guilds which were often associated with secret societies. Purely communist unions were founded at that time, especially among railway workers in northern China. In Shanghai, the communist tried to break the dominance of secret societies in workers' unions, unlike the Guomindang which

internal tension between the shared regional origin of bosses and workers and their diverging class interests. This union had been founded in early 1921 and had originally enjoyed the covert approval of Chinese construction employers. Its first strike, demanding higher wages, occurred in September that same year. The employers, under the leadership of Mac Youn, Lang Co, Tan Pa, and Fong Chhoun, had originally planned to use the strike to pressure the administration for higher prices; but when the workers were urged by Cantonese activists, just arrived from China, to demand information about their employers' contracts with the French administration, the bosses, in league with the Cantonese congregation head Bao Heng, quickly co-operated with the French to suppress it.⁶¹

Not long after the Candelier affair had died down in Saigon, Chinese rice traders there decided to try to have the administration legalise modern Chinese associations. In February 1925, their lawyer Cancellieri sought official approval to create a committee of Chinese rice traders, something which already existed informally within the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. For the Guomindang, such requests were a test for the more important goal of achieving official approval to establish an all-China organisation named the "Association Mutuelle des Chinois de Cochinchine".⁶² In reality, this organisation already existed, having been founded by GMD activists with the main aim of uniting all local Chinese by transcending the dialect-based congregational barriers. The French realised the consequences for their "divide and rule" policy embodied in the congregations, and refused permission. The secondary goal of the Association mutuelle had been to mobilise financial aid for the Canton government. To this end, the organisation had already begun to raise taxes, with Chinese shop-owners who were unwilling to pay threatened with boycotts. When police in the British concession in Shanghai shot several Chinese demonstrators who had been protesting against the arrest of Chinese labour organisers who had organised strikes and boycotts against Japanese companies, action quickly followed. The GMD declared a boycott against Britain (against Hong Kong especially) and Japan, with GMD agents placed onboard all Chinese-owned ships plying the Canton route to ensure that the boycotts were being observed. When the ban was relaxed for foreign shipping in May 1926, leading cadres of the Cochinchina party committee met with six of the most famous merchants of Saigon-Chợ Lớn, including Ta Ma Diên and the son-in-law of Quach Dam, to ensure they knew that the Hong Kong boycott would still continue for Chinese ships.⁶³

Unofficial Chinese trades unions, many with GMD links, continued to exist throughout the following decade. In January 1940, the governor of Cochinchina informed the administrator of Saigon-Chợ Lớn that more than eighty Chinese trades unions existed in Cochinchina, although only thirty had sought official authorisation (which had been denied). The governor asked him to send them copies of new statutes that allowed all these associations, including those which had not sought authorisation, to become mutual aid societies. We do not know if this move was successful. Perhaps the Chinese trades unions finally gave up their passive resistance,⁶⁴ but the statutes could not have been enforced against their will: an outright ban on unauthorised Chinese commercial associations and trades unions would have disrupted economic life too much to be imposed. Perhaps, too, the French attempt was more formal than serious: the sheer number of these *gonghui* indicates that the majority were small societies that united workers, or sometimes still even workers and bosses, who were

co-operated with them. See Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Communist Party*, vol. 1, 1921–1927 (Wichita: University of Kansas Press, 1972), p. 230.

61. See Phnom Penh Sûreté's confidential note No.40-SS, 28 septembre 1921; and also the minute of RSC "Grève des ouvriers chinois maçons et charpentiers de Phnom Penh," both AOM, Indo, RSC 234.

62. *Hoa Kiều Nam Kỳ tương trợ hội*, or *Huaqiao Nanqi xiangzhu hui*.

63. For the "Special License System", introduced in early 1926 for vessels and cargoes of non-British origin that were permitted to sail directly to Canton, see Chang Kuo-t'ao, *Rise of the Communist Party*, p. 472.

64. See the letter of the governor to the Saigon-Chợ Lớn administrator, 5 janvier 1940, about unauthorised Chinese unions, QG II, Goucoch, IIA 45/226(2).

mostly men with shared regional origin working in the same craft or profession. Even under wartime conditions, they hardly posed a threat.

Despite various Chinese attempts to achieve legalisation, until the end of colonial rule the French administration ultimately refused official recognition to Chinese political parties, affiliated organisations, or trades unions. The exceptions were the officially controlled congregations, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and a few mutual aid organisations based on regional origin in China, officially called "Associations des originaires" (*đồng hương hội tongxianghui*). These associations had always existed as more or less independent bodies within the congregations, allowing members from the same county or prefecture to come together for social or mutual assistance as well as to maintain all sort of relations with the homeland (e.g. donations or financial transfers). If they wished to acquire properties or build temples, they had to seek formal recognition from the authorities and submit their membership lists and statutes, as attested by a notary, for official approval. All internal political and religious discussion was strictly prohibited.⁶⁵ In 1948, fourteen such associations existed in Saigon–Chợ Lớn (ten Cantonese and four Hakka), ten of which had been officially recognised before 1945.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, by the 1920s and 1930s, pragmatism dictated colonial practice in such matters. Outright rejection of Chinese associations, whether modern trades unions and mass political organisations, or traditional business trusts under the guise of mutual aid societies, was considered impolitic and impractical, so the French tacitly allowed them to function provided they concentrated on purely Chinese matters, did not trouble law and order, and never challenged colonial rule. By then the colonial organs of control were well established in regard to Chinese. If things seemed to be getting out of hand, culprits could usually be quickly found and were easily punished with expulsion.

The GMD during the Period of Colonial Repression (1926–1936)

Between the Candelier affair in 1923 and 1927, political events in Indochina (as in China, which are discussed below) moved unexpectedly fast. The repeated demonstrations and demands, especially the uproar created by Saigon's Vietnamese school students, should have buried all hopes in French colonial circles that Vietnamese nationalist aspirations could be deflected towards anti-Chinese sentiments like those expressed during the boycott of 1919. Instead, Vietnamese, Chinese, and even French adversaries of the colonial administration were now clamouring for administrative and economic reforms, and for the human, political, and civic rights which the colonial regime withheld from the majority.

For young Vietnamese in the loosely structured "Youth Party",⁶⁷ who had organised the Saigon mass demonstrations and the "general strike" of 1926 and who would later form the core of militant anti-colonial organisations⁶⁸ and of various Cochinchinese Caodaist, Communist (Stalinist) or Trotskyist organisations, the success of their first political steps had elicited encouragement and pride. As their French lawyer Monin had explained to them: "Vous êtes nationalistes!" and they had joyously repeated it to each other, hoping they had finally found the long-desired doctrine that would save the country: "Hey, we're nationalists, got it?"⁶⁹ But within months, the colonial administration responded with repression and the spiritual leaders of young

65. For instance, see the Statuts de l'Association mutuelle des Chinois de Kowkong (Canton) résidant en Cochinchine. QG II, IIA 45/226(2)

66. Leveysière's "Rapport sur les associations chinoises de la Région de Saigon/Cholon," AOM, Indo, CP 147.

67. Jeune Annam or *Đảng Thanh niên*.

68. In particular, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân đảng*) and the Revolutionary Party of New Vietnam (*Tân Việt Cách mạng đảng*).

69. Vietn.: "À, ra chúng mình theo chủ nghĩa dân tộc, mày à!", cited in *Hồi ký Trần Huy Liệu*, p. 65.

Saigon, Nguyễn An Ninh and Lâm Hiệp Châu,⁷⁰ were arrested on 26 March 1926. Chinese activists were also caught up in the repression. Four days later, four Guomindang cadres who had collaborated with Monin in the legalisation campaign were expelled.⁷¹ Only one GMD leader avoided extradition, thanks to his Minh Hương status. But this man, the Sûreté report deplored, had been very active and was most dangerous because he had established links between Chinese and Vietnamese nationalist circles as well as with the local French Radical Socialists during the anti-Cognacq Candelier affair. The extradited five were given a solemn farewell on 4 April 1926 outside the Messageries Maritimes office where a representative of the clerks' union, Lý Đông,⁷² a legal secretary, presented them with fifty piastres. More than a thousand Chinese were present, among them representatives of various trades unions (carpenters, mechanics, restaurant employees, house boys, sing song girls, coolies, and business clerks), and a delegation of Chinese students, both boys and girls. According to the Sûreté, this was the first politically motivated Chinese demonstration in Cochinchina.⁷³ At the same time, the police had confiscated "Communist League" leaflets from Canton calling for unions to be founded and for workers to demonstrate on May Day to show international class solidarity. The governor's strong warning to congregation heads ensured all remained calm on 1 May, however.⁷⁴

The Guomindang was undeterred by the expulsions and formed a new executive committee for Cochinchina. It consisted of six Cantonese, among them a pharmacist, the director of a Chinese school, an unemployed accountant, a cook (representing the employees of Chinese tailors), and another accountant (the chairman of the tailors' union). A Cantonese named La Phu An, registered previously under another name as a "secretary" in Paul Monin's office, acted as liaison between the Cochinchina party committee and Canton. He had left with Monin when the lawyer went to work in Canton in March 1925, and returned in September 1926. Shortly after, La Phu An reported to the Cochinchina executive committee on the need to intensify Sino-Vietnamese revolutionary co-operation. He informed the committee that Nguyễn Ái Quốc (later Hồ Chí Minh) had helped found the "League of Oppressed Peoples" in Canton and, with the official consent of the Guomindang, asked Vietnamese to take part in its political courses.⁷⁵ However, Nguyễn Ái Quốc was severely critical of the "anarchism" of Saigon youth and also mistrustful of Monin's true intentions, he added. Quốc wanted to use Canton as the base for a new, hierarchically structured, and methodically organised

70. They were the spiritual leaders of the Vietnamese "Youth Party" described above in the 1925–26 events in Saigon.

71. They were one Cantonese and 4 Teochiu. A Cantonese *métis* was allowed to stay. See Service de la Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1924–1926. AOM, Indo, GG 65475. Trần Huy Liệu recalled that Monin worked from 1925 until 1927 as judicial advisor to the Guomindang in Canton. When the Canton Commune was crushed, he returned to Saigon. *Hồi ký Trần Huy Liệu*, p. 54.

72. Lý Đông/ Li Dong, one of the leading Guomindang cadres at that time, had previously distinguished himself by fund raising among the Chinese in Chợ Lớn and in the provinces for the Hong Kong strike. See Service de la Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1924–1926. AOM, Indo, GG 65,475.

73. On 3 April 1926 the administration also expelled a young Chinese who had recently arrived from Burma. He had claimed to be a GMD leader there and so had been welcomed by the local organisation, which had facilitated tours of the provinces for him in which he gave flamboyantly anti-imperialist speeches. Postal censorship and evidence found in his luggage, plus a later report from the Shanghai consulate, indicated he was probably a communist. Both *ibid*.

74. *Ibid*.

75. According to Hoàng Văn Hoan, every course had about 2- participants and lasted 2 months. Among the teachers were Liu Shaoqi, who lectured on Chinese communist unionism, and Nguyễn Ái Quốc, who was a teacher, secretary, and translator. After the course, participants were solemnly admitted to the "Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League" (*Việt Nam thanh niên cách mạng đồng chí hội*). Some remained in China, others went for communist training in Moscow, and the rest went back to Vietnam to create a communist movement there. The courses ended after the suppression of the Canton Soviet uprising (December 1927), when Quốc left China with the delegation of Soviet advisers. He claimed that 300 participants had been trained in these courses. See Hoàng Văn Hoan, *Giọt nước trong biển cả. Hồi ký cách mạng* [A drop in the ocean. Revolutionary memoirs] (Beijing, 1986), pp. 25–32, 30–33, 329 and Huỳnh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 62–89.

revolutionary party that would operate clandestinely in the colony. It would be spread in Indochina by graduates of these courses, since each was to be responsible for recruiting five new participants. The Guomindang had agreed to use its networks in Indochina and Hong Kong to escort the Vietnamese students safely to and from Canton.⁷⁶

Around the same time, in the spring of 1926, Monin's wife had arrived in Cochinchina, just before a student-led strike in Saigon. After telling Youth Party radicals about her husband's activities in Canton, and about Chinese women and strike movements, she too proposed they unite closely with the Guomindang and the "League of Oppressed Peoples" in Canton.⁷⁷ Locally, however, after the expulsion of ten leading GMD cadres in 1926, the Cochinchina party committee dropped spectacular public actions in favour of concentrating on organising.

In China meanwhile, the uneasy Guomindang-Communist alliance that had operated for several years was heading for a show-down. The Second Comintern Congress in 1920 had required CCP members to work to transform the Guomindang from within, from a petty-bourgeois to a revolutionary workers' and peasants' party that would ultimately turn the national democratic revolution into a socialist revolution in the form of a "democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants". Leon Trotsky, already being sidelined in the Soviet leadership and soon to be expelled from the party, later warned against this strategy, dismissing it as "illusionary" and "capitulationist". Rather, he urged, the CCP should be allowed to develop its own organisation before it was too late, predicting otherwise that the growing communist led-workers' and peasants' movement in China would ultimately push the GMD majority into the arms of the "rightist" military who would lose no time in crushing the communist movement.⁷⁸ On 20 March 1926, his prediction began to come true when Chiang Kai-shek staged a successful coup in Canton aimed at breaking communist influence in the party, army, and labour movement. At this stage, however, the power struggle was primarily directed against Chiang's main party rival Wang Chingwei, leader of the "leftist" wing within the GMD leadership, who was forced to leave China on 11 May 1926. Chiang did not yet break with the USSR as his forthcoming "Northern Expedition" against the warlords depended on Soviet military aid and advisors. In far-away Moscow, Stalin remained silent about Chiang's move, as China was the only noticeable ally the Soviet Union had at that time.

From March 1926 French diplomats and the colonial administration clearly recognised that the honeymoon between the Guomindang and communism, whether Chinese or Soviet, was over. Furthermore, the long awaited anti-warlord "Northern expedition", and the possible reunification of China, caused a change in attitude towards this ascending party. Both in China and the colony, French authorities returned to a more moderate policy, with the governor general ordering political expulsions be suspended until the outcome of the Chinese civil war answered the question of how Chiang would proceed with Chinese communists and Soviet advisors.⁷⁹ Consequently, the second half of 1926 witnessed an overall upturn of Cochinchina's GMD activities on several fronts.

First, they stepped up propaganda by smuggling in Hong Kong and Canton newspapers. Trần Triệu Cơ (Chen Zhaoqi), editor of the *Nam Kỳ Hoa Kiều Nhật Báo* or *Nanqi Huaqiao Ribao* (Cochinchina Overseas Chinese Daily), also put his paper, with its circulation of 1,000 copies,⁸⁰ at the disposal of the GMD in return for funding and

76. See Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1924-1926. AOM, Indo, GG 65475. For one account of this undertaking and the support received from Chinese seamen, see Lê Mạnh Trinh, "Dans le Kouang Toung et au Siam," *Avec l'oncle Ho*. (Hanoi: Editions en langues étrangères, 1972), p. 195. For the general role of the Hong Kong Seamen's Union, see Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Communist Party*, vol. 1, p. 418.

77. Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1924-1926, AOM, Indo, GG 65475.

78. Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919-1927* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), pp. 99-110.

79. He called the policy "balancing China". See Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1926-1927, AOM, Indo, GG 65475.

80. Its license was officially owned by Henry Chavigny de la Chevrotière, editor of the pro-colonial and conservative *L'Impartial*, a French journal owned by Cochinchina's deputy in Paris, Ernest Outrey.

membership on the Overseas Chinese Commission of the Guomindang's Central Executive Committee in Canton. It was the first step in a political career that would ultimately take him into higher GMD circles in China in 1941.⁸¹ The paper now openly attacked French policies, especially the onerous status of Chinese as "Foreign Asians," demanding they be allowed to become foreign nationals like any other citizens of "most favoured nations". To that end, they agitated for a new general Sino-French treaty and for the creation of consulates in areas of heavy Chinese settlement.⁸²

They also focused on increasing the number of party committees. Their number in the Saigon-Chợ Lớn region alone rose to seven, with 2,400 members (perhaps a more realistic figure than the 14,000 reported above). Several other centres also reported strong membership. After Phnom Penh, whose 1,100 members gave rise to their own Cambodian party committee, the main places were the Transbassac towns of Cà Mau, Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng, and Bạc Liêu, and the old Chinese settlement of Mỹ Tho. Workers and high school students were the most active, as exemplified by the "Society of Hearts and Minds"⁸³ at the Lycée Franco-Chinois, an institution founded in 1908—with obligatory financial support from the Chinese business community—as a pedagogic bulwark for the French *mission civilisatrice* among this minority.⁸⁴

The Cochinchina committee also continued the earlier GMD work among trades unions and workers. In 1926, the Sûreté knew of seventy-three Chinese trades unions, with a total of about 11,000 members, located for the most part in Saigon-Chợ Lớn and in Phnom Penh. A general government circular was sent out at that time to advise that Chinese trades unions should be changed into mutual aid associations, but to no avail. The Guomindang now even founded a "General Association of Chinese Trades Unions". It was officially led by Triệu Tập, a Chợ Lớn pharmacist, but in reality by Trần Đức Phú, a GMD cadre who had only recently emigrated from Canton and who tried, without success, to attract Vietnamese into the unions. The goldsmiths union, which had even had a women's section of forty members, was the most active.⁸⁵

Chevrotière had leased the journal to the Chinese Diệp Canh Ba. As only French citizens had the right to newspapers licences, this was a widely used practise in Cochinchina at the time, for Vietnamese newspapers also. Đào Trinh Nhất, at that time a Tonkin-based nationalist journalist, said this Chinese newspaper had been founded during the anti-Chinese boycott in 1919 as a counterweight to the Vietnamese nationalist press. See *Thế-lực khách-trú và vấn-đề di-dân vào Nam-kì* [The power of Chinese immigrants and the problem of immigration to Cochinchina] (Hanoi: Thụy kí, Nguyễn Đình-phẩm, 1924), p. 31

81. The Hokkien Trần Triệu Cơ (Chen Zhaoqi, other spellings: Tchen Tchao Ky; alias Tchen Kuo-tchou, or Tan Kok Chan), who owned a milk business in Chợ Lớn before the Second World War, was a leading member of the GMD committee in Cochinchina. In 1941, he was expelled. In 1946, he reappeared in Saigon as the official delegate of the Chinese Ministry of Education. From 1947 he was based in Singapore where he accumulated the posts of member of the Central Executive Committee of the Guomindang, Vice-Director of the Overseas Chinese Commission, deputy of the Indochinese Overseas Chinese in the Legislative Yuan, representative of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cochinchina at the General Union of Chinese Chambers of Commerce. In 1948, he was declared *persona non grata* in French territories; but, after re-entering on a false passport, he freely expressed anti-French sentiments and made flamboyantly anti-communist speeches at Guomindang gatherings, to the annoyance of both the consulate and ordinary party members. At the same time, he was reportedly contacted by left-wing GMD cadres with communist membership, who asked him, in view of the approaching Guomindang defeat, to join the CCP as well. See "Personnalités chinoises: Tchen Tchao Ky," and B. R. 2,426, on a GMD meeting in Chợ Lớn, 10 juillet 1948, both AOM, Indo, CP 147. Also see the note entitled "Séjour en Indochine du M. Tchen Tchao Ky," Saigon, 10 juillet 1947, AOM, Indo, CP 6; and the note on "Activités chinoises en Cochinchine: élections des Délégués à l'Assemblée Nationale de Nankin," AOM, Indo, CP 144.

82. See Sûreté, rapport annuel, 1926, AOM, Indo, GG 65457. See also Engelbert "Paris, Nanjing, Hanoi, and Saigon": 106-49.

83. *Hiệp tâm xã* or *Hexinshe*.

84. M. des Tastes, Administrateur des Services Civils. Président de la Commission Municipale de Cholon, à M. le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine, Saigon. Cholon, le 27 octobre 1922, in QG II, Goucoch, IA 8/056/8

85. Trần Đức Phú sold wood and traditional medicines in Chợ Lớn. He also tried, without much success, to found a Vietnamese section of the Guomindang, which was thought of as a section of Phan Bội Châu's "Việt Nam Quang phục hội", operating from Shanghai and Canton. Ibid.

Despite this success, the 18 October monthly bulletin of the GMD Overseas Chinese Commission⁸⁶ advised against political formalism: Chinese should not just apply for party membership, it urged, but should also work in different Overseas Chinese associations.⁸⁷ Although the party always remained the legitimate representative of the Chinese masses, the bulletin stated, it was important that all kinds of party-affiliated organisations also be founded, especially for workers, traders, students, and Overseas Chinese in general. Such organisations were necessary to defend different social interests as well as to spread knowledge of Sun Yat-sen's "Three People's Principles". However, the party and such mass organisations were not the same: only members of mass organisations who had strong commitment could become party members.⁸⁸ These were the instructions from Canton, but Cochinchinese reality was different. In September 1926, seven-tenths of the local GMD membership came, according to Sûreté estimates, from trades unions that acted as informal sub-sections of the party. Equally important, they contributed almost exclusively to the party's budget.⁸⁹ Party finances thrived in 1926, and the organising effort paid off almost immediately in terms of financial assistance for the motherland. During the Northern Expedition, two large fund raising campaigns were mounted by GMD envoys from Canton which, between them, collected 87,000 piastres.⁹⁰ One year later, however, internal dissent within the GMD in China, combined with financial irregularities by its leaders in Cochinchina, would so dismay local unions that the party budget suddenly shrank.⁹¹

In the meantime, the power struggles in China between Chiang and the communists, and between Chiang and the Canton clique (after Wang Chingwei returned from France), reached a new and decisive stage. First, Chiang freed himself from the interference of Soviet and Chinese communism.⁹² The failed Canton Soviet uprising in December 1927, badly organised by Comintern advisors and immediately crushed by the southern General Zhang Fakui, had ended the direct Soviet-led chapter of Chinese revolutionary history. However Chiang, the man of the moment, was unable to enjoy his newly won prestige for long. The New Guangxi clique of Nanning, and the Cantonese clique both in the Central Executive Committee and in Guangzhou, were serious contenders for power in southern China. Chiang tried to crush their rebellions by military or diplomatic means if possible, playing one off against the other, but he could never solve the underlying problems.⁹³

86. Vietn.: "Trung Hoa Quốc Dân Đảng trung ương chấp hành ủy viên hội hải ngoại bộ"; Ch.: "Zhonghua Guomindang zhihang weiyuan hui haiwaibu"

87. *Hoa Kiều hiệp hội / Huaqiao Xiehui*

88. Qian Youguang. Lunzhu: Guomindang yu Huaqiao xiehui. In: *Haiwai zhoukan*, Guomindang shiwu nian (1926), 18.10. (Q. Yg. Commentary: The Guomindang and the Associations of Overseas Chinese. In: *Overseas Weekly*. Guomindang, the 15th year, i.e. 1926, 18.10.)

89. See Service de la Sûreté, Rapport annuel, 1926–1927. AOM, Indo, GGI 65475.

90. Ibid.

91. See, for example, the scandal of the Phnom Penh General Labour Union reported above.

92. Communist fighters had liberated Shanghai in an uprising before the arrival of Chiang's troops (3 March 1927), but on 12 April Chiang's men—united with the secret societies—began bloody anti-communist purges there and in other Chiang-controlled areas. Communist military forces resisted unsuccessfully in Nanchang (in August), then tried to march on Canton, a move decided by their Comintern advisors. This badly planned manoeuvre decimated their formal troop numbers, although it did open the way for CCP guerrilla warfare in Hunan and Guangzhou Provinces that was organised independently of Comintern influence.

93. Chiang was attacked a few months later and deposed by the so-called New Guangxi Clique, led by the generals Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi. Faced with growing party divisions, the 3 main factions, the left-wing under Wang Chingwei, the right wing, and the centrists of Nanjing, reunited the GMD in September 1927 under the leadership of a "Special Central Committee". Their short-lived unity government, without Chiang and Wang, who had once again had left for Europe, crumbled in January 1928. During 1928, Chiang was reinstated as chairman of the party Central Executive Committee and commander-in-chief of the army. The Nationalist government thereafter changed its character from party-based to a military dictatorship, even though formal party institutions remained in place and membership swelled from 150,000 to 650,000 between 1926 and 1929, thanks to an influx of opportunists and turn-coat officials in newly conquered areas. Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1–53.

Chiang's power within the Guomindang thus remained eternally insecure. He was a dictator, but not an uncontested one. In March 1929, the Guangxi clique rebelled again and although Chiang defeated his rivals outside of that province they held on in Guangxi. In February 1931, the house arrest of the veteran leader Hu Hanmin triggered a new rebellion in the south. After his release, Hu headed a rival "national government" in Canton which was little more than a front for southern warlords. Facing a growing Japanese advance in 1931, and popular discontent about China's weak reaction to it, party congresses in Nanjing and Canton sought to renew unity but the resulting governments collapsed almost immediately. In January 1931, Chiang, Wang, and Sun Yat-sen's son, Sun Fo, agreed to share power. After the death of Hu in Guangzhou, the rebellious southern province finally submitted to the central government in August 1936 when faced with attack from Guangxi, acting in cooperation with Nanjing. Finally, in December 1936, Chiang was abducted in Xian and agreed to change his failed strategy of fighting both Japanese and communists in favour of GMD-CCP cooperation. This marked the beginning of the so-called "Second United Front" between the GMD and CCP, more of a temporary truce than a real alliance. As a result, from 1937 Soviet war materiel and advisors once more began to support Chiang, not the communist guerrillas.⁹⁴

How was this turbulent power struggle in China reflected in the daily work of the overseas party organisations? Thanks to the direct influence of Lý Phương Viện, who had been officially sent from Canton to raise funds for the Northern Expedition, the party committee in Cần Thơ declared allegiance to Wang's Wuhan group in 1927 and named itself the new executive committee for Cochinchina. Shortly afterwards, the Saigon executive committee, faithful to Chiang, was informed by the still Canton-based Overseas Chinese Commission that Lý Phương Viện was in reality a secret CCP member and should be expelled from the party. Two committees claiming leadership then existed in parallel until 1931, when the Japanese invasion of Manchuria paved the way for the Chiang-Wang reconciliation in China and a formal reconciliation of executive committees in southern Indochina. Since March 1927, however, both rival committees had agreed in principle, as had Chiang's and Wang's cliques in China, to expel any members who would not renounce CCP membership.⁹⁵ The French helped in this "purification" process in March 1927 by finally deporting 200 Chinese political activists whose expulsion, already decided, had previously been suspended. Although greeted as heroes and victims of "imperialist oppression" when they reached Swatow,⁹⁶ their departure surely represented a serious drain of men from the Guomindang left-wing in Indochina.

Even had the deportees remained, however, the party's left-wing faced an uphill battle for influence locally. National and class interests diverged: both in the colony and in Cambodia, left-wing Wuhan and later Canton influence prevailed among Chinese workers, whereas affluent Chinese preferred Chiang Kai-shek—but only when he truly represented the winning side. Employers used their intimate relations with the Chinese central government, via the envoys and inspectors it sent at regular intervals to Indochina for fundraising, propaganda, and control, to eliminate workers or suspected left-wing elements from leading positions, especially those who had distinguished themselves in the defence of social interests. Any criticisms of inadequate party

94. See Günther Kleinknecht, *Die kommunistische Taktik in China, 1921–1927. Die Comintern, die koloniale Frage und die Politik der KPCh* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1980), pp. 218–21; Eastman, *Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 115–177.

95. See Sûreté, Rapport annuel 1926–27, AOM, Indo, GG 65457.

96. See Chinese press cuttings, "Extrait du Lin-Tung Ming-Kuo Jih-Pao, 15 mars 1927," AOM, Indo., GGI 38823

leadership, or dissent in general, were conveniently stifled as “communist sympathies,” both in China and Indochina.⁹⁷

The Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and subsequent party reunification built new support for the Guomindang in the colony. Mutual aid and relief committees, previously founded to support the Northern Expedition, were enthusiastically revived. The last dissidents of the former Cần Thơ committee openly acknowledged Saigon–Chợ Lớn as the sole GMD executive committee of Cochinchina, and the trades unions became especially active in organising anti-Japanese boycotts, mounting patrols that sought out Japanese and Taiwanese products in shops and markets. A Chinese comprador of the Japanese trading company Mitsui Bussan Kaisha (called Yong Pao-Kien) was beaten and his office demolished, but the victim refused to report it to the French police. When the “Cochinchina Chinese Overseas Daily” wrongly reported a major Chinese victory on 22 February 1932, Chợ Lớn and Saigon exploded with joy and firecrackers resounded all night. The newspaper was immediately banned and the governor of Cochinchina slapped an extradition order on its director, which the governor general later rescinded.⁹⁸

Joy and excitement on the one hand; rancour and dissatisfaction on the other: more allegations spread about the mishandling of financial transfers, both in Saigon and in China, so that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce felt obliged to send a delegation to Nanjing to investigate further. These irregularities caused the Chamber and the trades unions independently to decide to revive their own fund raising committees, and, for the time being, to stop all transfers to the GMD and its mass organisations. In August and September 1931, two different relief associations were founded in Chợ Lớn, officially to answer the call of the Nationalist Government to help Yangzi flood victims. The first, working out of the office of the GMD executive committee at 137 Boulevard Thompson, united representatives of the trades unions and Chinese schools. The second, founded at the Fujianese school, comprised leading members of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. A request from the first committee for the two to combine was rejected by the second. Nevertheless, several individuals belonged to both.⁹⁹ Judging by their different locations, it seems possible that the first committee was closely associated with the Cantonese party majority and the trades unions, and the second with the Hokkiens within the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Their separate existence may thus have reflected not only politics or class, but also old regional differences within the Chinese community.

Another issue involved the real aims of the two committees’ charity work. The Chamber of Commerce reported to the governor of Cochinchina that, to the end of 1931, it had sent more than 66,000 piastres to the Foreign Chinese Family Relief Committee in Shanghai, to bank accounts at the Banque de l’Indochine and the East Asiatic Bank. The largest part had come from Chinese and French businesses of Saigon–Chợ Lớn (38,000 piastres), followed by provincial Chinese congregations in Cochinchina (18,000 piastres), and lastly from official colonial sources (the government of Cochinchina gave 5,000 piastres; the municipality of Chợ Lớn, 3,000 piastres; and Cochinchinese provincial administrations, 1,200 piastres).¹⁰⁰ Thus not only Chinese donated to this committee which, it seems, was only concerned with humanitarian relief. But what can be said of the other committee? The administrator of Bạc Liêu reported that Chinese congregation heads there had invited their members to the theatre on 7 October 1931, to see a Chinese theatrical group from Cholon. The event was approved by the authorities, and its takings were allegedly destined for the Yangzi

97. Cambodian Sûreté, Rapport annuel (de la période du 31 Mai 1929–1er Juin 1930), AOM, Indo, RSC 234. For dissent and similar campaigns in China, see Eastman, *Nationalist China during the Nanjing Decade*, p. 11.

98. Cochinchina, “Rapport politique pour le mois de février 1932,” AOM, Indo, GGI 35505.

99. See Cochinchina Sûreté, Note No. 10,369, 18 septembre 1931, on Chinese activities, QG II, Goucoch, IA 45/175(2)

100. See the letter from Yip Pak Hung, president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Chợ Lớn, 28 décembre 1931, to the governor general, QG II, Goucoch, IA 45/175(2).

flood victims. However, after every act, a Chinese orator took the stage to denounce China's humiliation by Japan and to describe how the Japanese were devastating the country and oppressing the people. He appealed to Overseas Chinese patriotism and urged the audience to donate money towards the purchase of arms to use against the invaders.¹⁰¹

By the end of 1932, the boycott and party fund raising campaigns faded away. The Guomindang's poor performance in the anti-Japanese War, the renewal of party infighting both in China and Indochina, and its financial mismanagement in the colony, had lost the GMD much of its prestige. Membership dropped, and the national day celebrations on 19 October 1932 had to be cancelled.¹⁰² In April 1934, the General Executive Committee of the Cochinchina GMD stopped all financial transfers to Nanjing.¹⁰³

In 1936, the last bitter battle erupted between supporters of Canton and Nanjing within the party, on the one hand, and the Cantonese and Hokkien cliques within the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on the other. At stake was the leadership of the party locally and the presidency of the Chamber. The winners were the Hokkien group in the Chamber and the Nanjing supporters within the party, thanks especially to events in China which enhanced the moral standing of the central Chinese government.

Hu Hanmin's death in 1936 facilitated Canton's surrender to Chiang's troops in August of that year. The retreat of Governor Chen Jitang, nicknamed the "Celestial King of the South", to Hong Kong aboard a British gunboat, and the lack of further subsidies, temporarily solved the problem of supremacy in favour of the Nanjing supporters. Wang Jingwei's defection to the Japanese in late 1938 dealt a final moral blow to the supporters of the "Cantonese separatists" in Cochinchina's party organisation. Thereafter they could not but silently accept the leadership of the Nanjing clique. Nevertheless, the wounds never completely healed, and they would break out again during Japanese occupation, when the Nanjing supporters fled to China or were arrested, and especially after 1945, when three different factions would fight once more over party leadership.¹⁰⁴

The Hokkien merchants who had correctly anticipated the outcome were once more on the winning side. In 1937, Consul-General Shen Jinyi (Thẩm Cận-ỹ) was recalled. He had cooperated with Trần Lập Cự (Chen Liciu) and resisted orders from the Nanjing clique of the party. One year later, Trần Lập Cự lost his position in the Chamber as well. Trương Chấn Phàm (Zhang Zhenfan), the chief of Cholon's Fujian congregation, an honourable man and both a GMD party member and a *vieux chinois*, was elected the new President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. His tragic later fate would reflect the dramatic turn events would take in Indochina.¹⁰⁵ After his election, Trương Chấn Phàm tried to heal the divisions, but the underlying problems—political, factional, and regional—remained unsolved until the end of GMD rule in the mainland.

101. See the police report to the administrator of Baclieu, 7 octobre 1931, Goucoch, IA 45/175(2).

102. See Sûreté Générale, "Rapport politique du mois de septembre 1932 de la Cochinchine," Hanoi, 26 novembre 1932, Ibid.

103. See Cochinchine, "Rapport politique pour le mois d'Avril 1934, Ibid.

104. Thomas Engelbert, *Die chinesische Minderheit im Süden Vietnams (Hoa)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang 2002), pp. 217–46, 281–302, 352–56.

105. Trương Chấn Phàm (Zhang Zhenfan) was an important personality in Chợ Lớn's Chinese community, and was associated through marriage with the eminent clan of Hui Bon Hoa. He owned several rice mills, two steamships as well as large tracts of real estate and traded in cloth. Generally regarded by the French as a "Francophile", he was resented by some younger and more ruthless elements within the Hokkien community who later cooperated with the Japanese and the Việt Minh. From 1938 until 1939 he presided over the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and was also elected as representative of Indochina's Chinese population to National China's parliament, the Legislative Yuan. In the war period he headed the Chợ Lớn "Công Sở" (council of the five Chinese congregations), and, at least nominally, several pro-Japanese organisations. He was found dead in his villa on 15 February 1946, after the French returned to Cochinchina, with no cause of death determined. His son had disappeared after being abducted by Vietnamese revolutionaries, probably the Việt Minh, in Long Xuyên in November 1945. See Engelbert, *Die chinesische Minderheit*, pp. 286, 288–89.

These conflicts severely limited the party's ability to win the hearts and minds of Overseas Chinese, to earn respect as the sole, legitimate, and successful defender of their interests, and to mobilise them for the goals of the party and the central government. Infighting, both in China and Indochina, and indecisiveness and failure in regard to Japanese aggression prevented the Guomindang from enhancing the Republic's reputation, whether among the French administration, the Vietnamese, or the majority of Indochina's Chinese.

Conclusions

Yong and Kenna's 1990 history of the Guomindang in Malaya, written essentially from British archival sources and in particular from those of the various Chinese Affairs departments at different levels of the colonial administration, basically presents the 1920s as an era of conflict between two main forces: the colonial administration and Chinese nationalism manifested through the local Guomindang.¹⁰⁶ To the reader, it almost appears as if this struggle occurred on colonised Chinese soil rather than in Southeast Asia, and involved two basically equal forces, since the local Malay population and individual British interests are largely absent from the picture. The French archival materials that I have consulted so far, which need to be completed in future by other sources,¹⁰⁷ do not allow such a clear-cut perspective.

The basic conflict in Cochinchina, and in Vietnam in general, was of course between the colonising French and the colonised Vietnamese, with Chinese "intermediaries" literally caught in the middle. Even so, during this era none of the sides, whether Chinese, French, or Vietnamese, ever formed single blocs. National, class, political, and personal interests always interacted with and cut across each other, causing shifting alliances between different elements according to changing times and circumstances. These complex interactions created a parallelogram of forces in which mutually exclusive influences clashed. While hindsight might reveal a strong line of historical development resulting from this process, historians must always view and assess it prospectively, working forward from its beginnings rather than back from its well-known outcomes.

Bearing this in mind, what does the foregoing discussion reveal about the accuracy of those general stereotypes about local Chinese with which this essay began? First of all, in regard especially to Cochinchina and Cambodia, archival documents show it would be wrong to conclude that the Chinese community was overall apolitical or only concerned with accumulating material wealth. Interest in Vietnamese political affairs or in political activism in general might have been limited, and membership in radical organisations remained small, yet the joy and excitement about Nationalist Chinese victories over the Qing, the Northern warlords, or the Japanese was a genuine expression of national sentiment and most likely little different from that felt in China. Because of this, the Guomindang could always tap the resources of all segments of local Chinese society, albeit with a certain prevalence among the Cantonese that points both to their numerical strength locally and to their traditional support for Sun Yat-sen's cause. Events in southern China and especially in Canton, from whence the majority of Indochina's Chinese originated, were in this regard at least as important as events in Beijing or Nanjing, subsequent seats of the national capital.

But there was a real proviso to this: Republican China or the Guomindang could count on funds and other donations from the business elite, and on material or human sacrifices from trades unions, provided the party could present itself as dynamic, united, fervently nationalist, and willing to fight foreign aggression or intervention. China's, and especially Chiang's, weak reaction to the Japanese advance can be

106. Ching-fatt Yong and R. B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912–1949* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), pp. 106–39.

107. For instance the rich French, Vietnamese, and Chinese newspaper collections scattered in several French libraries will be a very useful source to be consulted in future.

explained by the previous decade's history of party factionalism and civil war. Internal divisions left GMD governments strife ridden, corrupt, and ineffectual in coordinating the necessary defence, reorganisation, and modernisation of territories under their nominal control during these years, and they would continued their political, military, and regional infighting for the next fifteen years until driven out of the mainland by the communists in 1949. This poor representation at home was mirrored by the lack of party unity and ineffective representation abroad, where the GMD was enmeshed in factions or run by corrupt or incompetent leaders. Thus the party's greatest hindrance to effectively mobilising the Chinese in Indochina for local political action lay with the party itself, just as in China. The local Chinese community repeatedly showed itself willing to sacrifice for the motherland, just not to throw its resources away to no purpose.

Second, we see that Vietnamese and Chinese political organisations always developed better in parallel rather than together, even if Comintern strategies advised the contrary. A Soviet Union model could not work in China or in Indochina—neither among Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao¹⁰⁸ nor between Vietnamese and Chinese. Language barriers formed one obstacle, but more important were strong nationalist sentiments that were not only directed against the colonial masters but at times also against each other, as the 1919 boycott and Candelier affairs have shown. Conservative colonial forces might have tried to exploit these sentiments in their divide-and-rule schemes, but they met with only partial success where the Vietnamese were concerned. Between the failed 1919 boycott and 1945, neither middle class nor young radical nationalists would ever raise this issue in Cochinchina again.¹⁰⁹

Ultimately, what the sources show is that the situation of Chinese people in Vietnam dictated their political preferences and activities at this time. Almost all rejected radicalism as unsuited to their circumstances: not only did every foreign Asian run the risk of expulsion for law and order offences, including political infringements, but only a handful of local Chinese were attracted to revolutionary creeds like communism. Very few of them qualified as exploited proletarians, and even those active in trades unions were less attracted to Marxist ideas than were teachers and high school students, who were always easier recruits for communist organisations.¹¹⁰ On the whole, Chinese trades unions remained Guomindang orientated, even if left-leaning "reformist" in their defence of workers' interests. After anti-revolutionary repression began in Indochina in 1926 and bloody anti-communist purges were unleashed in China in early 1927, many local Chinese unionists undoubtedly harboured anti-imperialist sentiments, and would have sympathised with Vietnamese revolutionaries. Few dared to act openly on such feelings, however. Like the majority of their compatriots in Indochina, their principal political interests were always directed far more towards China than towards their country of residence. Consequently, during the escalating political events that unfolded in Indochina in the 1920s and 1930s, most Chinese remained wisely watchful. Always aware of their insecure situation as an economically powerful but politically impotent foreign minority, whose members could only count on the partial and limited support of a poor and powerless motherland, they preferred to defend their local interests indirectly and to cautiously channel their political energies towards Chinese national issues.

108. For the ICP Indochina strategy, see Thomas Engelbert, "Ideology and Reality. "Nationaltaetenpolitik" in North and South Vietnam and the First Indochina War," in *Ethnic Minorities and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. Thomas Engelbert and Andreas Schneider (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 105–42.

109 The 1927 anti-Chinese riots in Hải Phòng were an exception. Esta Ungar has claimed that rising Vietnamese and Chinese nationalism led the Surêté to incite this unfortunate event, but more evidence is needed to substantiate this interesting hypothesis. See Esta S. Ungar, "The Nationalists and an Overseas Chinese Community: Vietnam, 1927," in *The Nationalists and Chinese Society 1923–1937: A Symposium*, ed. John Fitzgerald (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1989), pp. 95–99.

110 For a detailed discussion of Chinese Communism in Indochina see Engelbert, *Die chinesische Minderheit*, pp. 217–63, 432–46.