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The “Chinese Education Problem” of 1948

– Thai Governmental Repression as Perceived by the Thai Chinese Press

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The “Chinese Education Problem” of 1948 – Thai Governmental Repression as Perceived by the Thai Chinese Press

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Series Editors

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Abstract

Phibunsongkhram’s second term as Prime Minister of Thailand (1948-1957) marked the most severe governmental repression against the Chinese minority in Thailand’s history. The effort to bring the country’s primarily Chinese-operated economy under Thai control and to create a unified and dominant Thai culture (*Thai-ification*) was combined with strong limitations on Chinese social and political activities to encourage – or rather enforce – assimilation into the Thai society. May to August 1948 saw new regulations for private schools to restrict Chinese education, in addition to the raiding of schools, newspapers, social associations and *Kuomintang* offices, as well as the arrests and deportation of many people involved in these institutions. This paper uses the original newspapers of the Chinese community in Bangkok as primary sources to present a more lively historical account of the Chinese perception of these events. While previous works on the Thai Chinese have not given much consideration to these newspapers’ historical narratives and have thereby deprived themselves of a valuable source, this paper aims to give such narratives their place in the writing of history and take into account the many additional details they offer.

Key words

Thai Chinese, 1948, Thailand, Education, Media, Bangkok

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Introduction

The integration of Chinese immigrants into Thai society is a prominent part of Southeast Asian history. In the 1950s, the American anthropologist G. William Skinner observed that the Chinese individuals with the most entrepreneurial success and highest social prestige – those considered community leaders – were also those that had integrated the most. Within two or three generations, he argued, declining Chinese education, increasing usage of the Thai language, Thai education and socialization among Thais would result in the Chinese being fully assimilated.¹ The discussion of this claim has kept many scholars from the field of Thai Chinese Studies busy since the 1980s. They objected to Skinner’s theory and presented examples of Chinese characteristics and social elements that continue to be present in Thailand² today, such as ancestor worship, literacy in Chinese language, marriage preferences and certain occupations.³ In their individual ways, both pro- and contra-assimilation views – and those in between – are proof of the long struggle between the two ethnic groups, one of them striving for domination and control, the other seeking cultural independence and special privileges. This struggle was probably never tougher than during the second term of Field Marshall Luang Plaek Phibunsongkhram (Phibun, 1897-1964) as Prime Minister (April 1948 to November 1957). Unlike both before and afterwards, the government enforced the development of Thai culture and repressed the Chinese minority. Almost strategically, it restricted Chinese education, culture and political activity and alienated the Thai Chinese from the governments of China (the communist government on the mainland and the nationalist government on Taiwan). Since Skinner conducted his research in Bangkok during the later years of this period, it does not come as a surprise that he was so convinced of the imminent Chinese assimilation.

In contrast to the majority of works about the Thai Chinese minority since the 1980s, this study does not discuss matters of assimilation, ethnicity or identity, but of (mainly political) history. Works on Thailand’s history, on the other side, are usually focused on the Thai majority, describe history from this perspective and limit themselves to repeating some facts from Skinner when mentioning the repression of the Chinese community.⁴ In trying to find a different path, this study reaches back to one of Skinner’s original research approaches and aims to take it a step further: it makes full use of the Chinese community’s own newspapers of that time as primary sources to reconstruct a more detailed and deeper view of how the repression of Chinese culture and politics took place in Thailand. These newspapers are of great historical value because they are the major primary sources available to us today that give us insights into the Chinese community and how it experienced and documented the events and developments of the 1940s and 1950s. Unfortunately, most other original sources which Skinner still had available to him in those times – such as documents and protocols of the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce or of the speech group associations – have since been lost so that today we must limit our research to not much more than these newspapers.⁵ Yet despite being the most

¹ See Skinner, 1958.

² For the sake of simplification there will be no use made of the name “Siam” even though Thailand was known by this name until 23 June 1939 and again from 1945 to 11 May 1949 (the Constituent Assembly voted to change it back to Thailand on 20 July 1948), and thus during the main period covered in this article. Exceptions are made in the case of citations. For further reading on the physical and political definition and development of Thailand see Thongchai, 1994.

³ See for example: Blanc Szanton, 1982; Tong & Chan (Eds.), 2001.

⁴ See for example: Nuechterlein, 1965; Wyatt, 1982; Terwiel, 2005.

⁵ An inquiry by the author with the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce resulted in the explanation that all their documents from the 1940s and 1950s have been lost during relocations, destroyed by fire or

comprehensive and authentic contemporary sources for research on the Thai Chinese community still available, newspapers have rarely been used extensively. It is thus an important step to introduce them to this field of research.

Historiography is usually based on the accounts of majorities and the governments they form. Minorities, on the other hand, very rarely have a long-lasting voice and if they are considered by historical accounts at all, it is typically through the official point of view. We need to analyze sources such as the newspapers of the Thai Chinese minority critically because they are just as biased as those from the majority’s side. Nevertheless, they can enhance our historical knowledge and our own historiographical qualifications decisively by giving us a different perspective. Such information not only provides new details, but it allows us to compare the different versions and thereby to reach new conclusions, which as a result might then be of a more neutral nature. It is not yet the task of this study to properly re-evaluate: instead the first step of gathering additional information still needs to be taken. Beyond that, this kind of research also contributes to the general field of comparative studies on ethnic minorities in the same way by providing the necessary general knowledge. Moreover, as older research approaches to the Cold War in Asia that focused on events controlled by the great powers have been proven to be somewhat inappropriate and that instead the Southeast Asian states played a bigger role than originally assumed,⁶ the study of local conditions and groups has gained new importance in our re-evaluation of Southeast Asian and Cold War history.

After a general introduction to the political background in part two, part three will present a detailed account of the first major campaign against the Chinese in May to August 1948. This campaign was significant in several ways: it was one of the first major acts of the military government after Phibun had been brought back into power; it demonstrated that the government was not only acting against the communists, as could have been expected from the official policy of strict anti-communism, but against the whole Chinese community, no matter their ideological orientation; it served to reduce Chinese education in Thailand and instead to promote Thai education among the Chinese, a fundamental step in integrating them further into Thai society. While there have already been a few articles discussing Chinese education in Thailand, most notably those of Murray, Watson and Wasana,⁷ these only offer broader surveys. However, there has apparently been no in-depth study of such a specific crisis based on the primary source material in question here.

Onwards to the Past – Old Ways for a New Age

Thailand’s International Situation

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that managed to stay free from colonialism. Its geographical and tactical position as a buffer between the British and French territories, which both these powers agreed to keep intact between them, played as important a role in preserving independence as did the diplomatic skills of the Thai governments. The kingdom’s leaders, be it the kings during the time of absolute monarchy or the constitutional governments since 1932, have always realized the dangers to and

confiscated and later destroyed by the Thai government. During a visit to the Teochiu Association only materials from the 1960s onward could be found despite help from some association members, and inquiries via several phone calls and emails with the Hakka Association resulted in eventual silence (probably due to lack of material or an unwillingness to make it public).

⁶ See Vu & Wasana, 2009.

⁷ See Murray, 1964; Watson, 1976; Wasana, 2008.

opportunities for their country and through skilful diplomacy sought to curtail encroachments on their sovereignty. Commitments such as the Bowring Treaty of 1855, which allowed the British free trade, permanent residence, extraterritoriality and a consulate in Bangkok, were the price to be paid. But all these measures, be it the approval of Japan’s crossing through Thailand during the Second World War or assistance to the United States after the war, were taken to prevent worse disasters and they eventually succeeded in maintaining Thai independence.⁸

When in early 1945 it became clear that the Allied forces were on the road to victory, the Thais were quick to establish good relations with the United States, who would then protect them from British and French retribution for supporting the Japanese during the war and seizing territories in British Burma and French Indochina. Instead of dealing with the other Southeast Asian countries directly, the Thai government opted to join the Western powers and henceforth negotiated the regional politics with them.⁹ In addition to some economic interests, it was the fight against international communism which connected the two countries and gave Phibun the justification to return to the stage of international politics and become Prime Minister of Thailand for the second time. He had been the scapegoat for the war collaboration with Japan and thus the new government of the November 1947 coup at first kept him in the background to avoid criticism or even interference from the Western powers. But a few months later he appeared to be the only suitable option and as he immediately announced his pro-Western and anti-communist policy, the United States and Great Britain proved only too willing to welcome him back.¹⁰ Terwiel describes it as “political acumen” that Phibun followed a strong anti-communist course, for it allowed him to establish a new image as a member of the free world fighting side by side with the United States.¹¹ With American help he could secure his own position in the heavily factionalised army and rebuild it to become the main political force in Thailand.

During his first term as Prime Minister (December 1938 to August 1944), Phibun had had full control over the army and police and had been the most powerful man in the country. However, by the time of his second term in office, Thailand’s political scene was split into the opposing groups of the army, police, navy, air force and civilians, each of them internally divided into several further factions, so that he had to act as a moderator and relied on political tactics such as compromise to carefully protect his own position.¹²

⁸ Common opinion has it that the Thais were forced into collaboration with Japan – a view propagated by the Thai government. For a more critical study that shows how certain elements of the Thai establishment took the chance presented by Japanese occupation to follow their own nationalistic and expansionist goals, see Murashima, 2006.

⁹ Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 93-95.

¹⁰ Surachart, 1988: pp. 34, 38; Terwiel, 2005: pp. 280-281.

¹¹ Terwiel, 2005: p. 282.

¹² Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 58-59. [This strong division of power makes it difficult to determine which government representatives were the primary forces behind the repression of the Chinese minority. It is fairly obvious that Phao Sriyanond (1910-1960), who became Police Director-General in 1951, was responsible for the anti-communist purge of the Chinese community from November 1952 to January 1953 on his quest to support his partners in drug trafficking crime from the *Kuomintang* (see McCoy, 1972). But in 1948 the Chinese newspapers themselves did not yet make any mention of him, even though he was already among the most powerful army officials by that time and a member of 1947’s Coup Group. Regarding the “Chinese Education Problem”, the newspapers only made mention of Phibun and the Ministers for Education and Foreign Affairs as those responsible for this affair and its settlement, while the current Police Director-General was described in executive function only. It is therefore not unlikely that Phibun was indeed the man behind the first moves against the Chinese community – especially when considering the repressive nature of his first term as Prime Minister – while Phao took over in the early 1950s after Phibun’s power had been reduced.]

Notwithstanding the importance of the anti-communism policy for Thailand on the international stage, Phibun did not at first consider it a major issue in national politics. The threat of communism within Thailand appeared to be rather small and easy to control and despite alignment with the United States, the new government also needed to maintain diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, even more so since the two countries had just begun to establish trade. An obvious repression of communists could have offended Moscow and with the United States still reluctant to guarantee full military protection, Thailand could not risk Soviet hostility.¹³

While Thailand put much effort into its relations with the Western powers – only briefly interrupted by the Japanese – it avoided China for a long time. By its sheer size and especially its traditional sense of self as a superior power, as the cultivated center among “barbarians” which local rulers should pay tribute to, China caused discomfort and even fear throughout Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Although the Chinese nationalist government had tried to establish diplomatic relations for decades, Thailand had always declined, partly because it feared China would get a tighter grip on the Thai Chinese community and interfere with Thai internal policy. Another reason lay in the international relations of both countries: Thailand had aligned itself first with the British and then with the Japanese, both of which China had been opposed to. After the Second World War, however, the tables had been turned. China was among the victorious Allies while Thailand had to rehabilitate itself internationally. The alignment with the Japanese, the refusal to accept diplomatic relations during the preceding decades, the severe repression of the Thai Chinese during Phibun’s first rule, and finally, the Yaowarat Incident of 21 September 1945¹⁵ caused disapproval in China and some even considered Thailand an enemy which had to submit itself and be occupied by Chinese troops. Now it was Thailand that had to strive for an improvement of diplomatic relations, for it wanted to become a member of the United Nations and China possessed a veto power. As it had previously done with other allies, Thailand agreed to certain compromises, this time primarily concerning matters of the Thai Chinese community such as the immigration quota and schooling rights.¹⁶ Ever since the early Republican days it had been an important policy for the nationalist government to encourage the development of Chinese communities abroad and promote classical education among them. This policy aimed at preventing their assimilation into their host societies and securing the continuation of their financial support for China.¹⁷ Several of the restrictions which had been put into effect by the first Phibun government thus had to be lifted to appease the Chinese government. Finally, Thailand was accepted into the United Nations on 16 December 1946 and a Treaty of Amity was signed between the Republic of China and Thailand in January 1947.¹⁸

¹³ Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 101-104; Anuson, 1992: p. 62; Cady, 1974: p. 93; Thompson & Adloff, 1950: pp. 67-68, 74-75.

¹⁴ Yahuda, 2011: p. 15. (For the *Kuomintang*’s plans to gain political influence over Thailand also see Reynolds, 2001 and Wasana, 2008.)

¹⁵ At Second World War victory celebrations in Bangkok, the Chinese flag was risen together with the flags of the other victorious powers but without the Thai flag. Since this was a violation of the law, the police intervened. Later a supposedly hostile Chinese demonstration outside a cinema performance for representatives of the Allies on Yaowarat Road (Chinatown) was crushed by police forces in combat armour. Seven people were killed within 20 seconds, street blockades were erected, Chinese snipers were in position on house roofs and the next three days were ruled by chaos. (Skinner, 1957: p. 279.)

¹⁶ Skinner, 1957: pp. 283-286, 286-289; Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 99-100; *Guanghuabao*: 19 June 1948.

¹⁷ Wasana, 2008: pp. 168-169.

¹⁸ Friendship between the two ethnic groups was on display throughout the whole year: Both Chinese and Thai media emphasized their good relations on 10 October 1947, the national day of the Republic of China, while the Chinese Ambassador to Thailand reminded the Thai Chinese community to ignore the coup of 8

Thailand and the Thai Chinese

Under the surface, however, relations between the Thais and the Chinese remained tense and by the late 1940s the threat of a possible Chinese southern expansion, by both nationalists and communists, aroused new fears among the Thais.¹⁹ If the fight against communism was Phibun’s means to gain international support, fighting the Thai Chinese ensured domestic support. By now Chinese immigration, economic power, nationalism and both cultural and political activity had reached their zenith and were considered a threat to the national security.²⁰

As elsewhere throughout Southeast Asia, since the 1920s, and especially after the Second World War, Chinese immigration to Thailand far exceeded that of previous centuries and caused a certain fear among the Thais of being overrun in their own country. More than half of the roughly 2,000,000 Chinese living in Thailand by the late 1940s²¹ resided in the Greater Bangkok area, where they constituted about 15 per cent of the population and almost 80 per cent of the city center east of the Chaophraya River. Unlike before, about a third of the immigrants were women, so that a new kind of Chinese society emerged – a young society, more than half of which was between 25 and 49 years of age. Even though an ever increasing number were actually born in Thailand, they were educated and socialized in Chinese surroundings, some were sent to universities in China. They grew up in times of new political developments and wars and may thus be described as perfectly suited for political agitation and activism connected to Chinese matters. Skinner also explains that there was a general distrust among the Thai Chinese of government representatives which led to an avoidance of direct contact and kept even legal associations from official registration. With the immigration rate reaching the highest number since 1931, the government regulated the quota from 1947 onwards and did not allow any new immigrants at all in the early 1950s.²²

Another concern among the Thais was the economic domination of the Thai Chinese, who earned a lot of disapproval for sending large remittances to China every year instead of investing them into the Thai economy and also for endangering Thailand’s foreign trade by resisting the major trade partner Japan during the Second World War. It was a main goal of Phibun’s *Thai-ification* campaign to put Thailand – and that especially meant its economy – back into Thai hands, a goal that was only too well demonstrated by the change of name from Siam to Thailand. Numerous businesses were forbidden to those who were not Thai nationals and in other fields of trade the state set up corporations to establish several governmental monopolies, or to at least compete with Chinese businesses. Taxes were increased on the commercial – mainly Chinese – class and all noncitizens had to pay an alien registration fee.²³ While such measures had also been taken in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries, there does not seem to be any relation between these policies. The Thais were rather influenced by conceptions of the Jews in Europe (see below) and Phibun admired European authoritarian leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini.

November 1947 and consider it a purely Thai matter in order to avoid threatening the good relations. (Skinner, 1957: pp. 283-286, 286-289; Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 99-100; *Guanghuabao*: 19 June 1948.)

¹⁹ Anuson, 1992: pp. 70-71; Surachart, 1988: pp. 47-50.

²⁰ Skinner, 1957: pp. 247-248, 324-326.

²¹ This number is based on Skinner (Skinner, 1957: pp. 182-183). An article in *Quanminbao* claims that there were more than 3,000,000 Chinese in Thailand, constituting one sixth of the whole population. (*Quanminbao*: 12 June 1948.)

²² For further details see Skinner, 1957: pp. 177-178, 182-185, 190-191, 195-196, 198-201, 203-206, 208.

²³ Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 98-99; Skinner, 1957: pp. 262-264.

His anti-Chinese restrictions began before the Second World War, whereas the guidance of the United States only became important at the end of (and especially after) the war.

In addition to the high immigration numbers and economic dominance, the Thais were also alarmed by the Chinese nationalism which had begun to develop throughout Southeast Asia in the late Qing dynasty (1644-1912). The imperial government had still ignored the overseas Chinese and for many years until 1910 banned both emigration and re-immigration. Then, during the first decade of the 20th century, the exiled reformer Kang Youwei (1858-1927) visited Southeast Asia and promoted classical Chinese education among the overseas communities, as he considered it essential for the survival and strength of both the empire and Chinese culture and identity.²⁴ But it was primarily Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary movement that planted the seed of nationalism in the overseas communities. He established close relations with the Chinese in Thailand, whom he saw as a political instrument during the final years before the revolution of 1911. Henceforth, the Sun-founded *Kuomintang*²⁵ (Chinese Nationalist Party) supported Chinese education among the overseas communities and discouraged any weakening of ties between them and their ancestors' home country, thereby promoting a form of chauvinism which was unacceptable for the local governments.²⁶ Being delayed only a few years, Thai nationalism began to develop almost simultaneously under King Wachirawut (Rama VI, 1881-1925, reigned 1910-1925).²⁷ Unlike his father, King Chulalongkorn the Great (Rama V, 1853-1910, reigned 1868-1910), who had maintained good relations with the Chinese, the new king had a strong anti-Chinese attitude – his 1914 pamphlet “Jews of the East” being of special notoriety – so that eventually frictions between the two ethnicities were inevitable.²⁸

The development of nationalism also resulted in the promotion of classical Chinese education in the overseas communities throughout Southeast Asia, which was recognized as the major means through which to pass on their language, culture and traditions and to establish a certain degree of cultural independence. Kang Youwei had first recognized this necessity of education in 1900 and a few years later Sun Yat-sen initiated such a cultural development among the Thai Chinese through the establishment of schools, a library and a lecture hall, which also served as bases for propaganda.²⁹ However, compared to Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, the fewer than 8,000 students in 271 schools in all of Thailand during the early 1930s appears to be a rather small number. Only one out of 200 Chinese in Thailand attended a Chinese school, yet in Malaya it was one out of 68 and as many as one out of 43 in the Dutch East Indies.³⁰ These statistics demonstrate the different degrees of integration and governmental repression. After the coup of 24 June 1932 which ended the absolute monarchy, the new Thai government decreed that Thai be taught as the primary language and Chinese only be allowed as a foreign language, thereby reducing the number of hours it could be taught per week – a condition unlike anywhere else in Southeast Asia.³¹

²⁴ Wasana, 2008: pp. 164-165.

²⁵ Throughout the whole text, Chinese names are transcribed in *pinyin* and according to Mandarin pronunciation even though many of them would have been pronounced in Teochiu or other dialects. The only exceptions are *Kuomintang*, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek as they are too common to be ignored.

²⁶ Fitzgerald, 1972: pp. 7-8, 11; Wasana, 2008: pp. 165-167.

²⁷ See also Terwiel, 2005: pp. 231-244.

²⁸ For a more in-depth view of *Kuomintang* politics towards Thailand see Reynolds, 2001 and Wasana, 2008.

²⁹ Wasana, 2008: pp. 164-165, 168-169.

³⁰ There were about 370 schools with almost 25,000 students in Malaya and about 600 schools with more than 30,000 students in the Dutch East Indies at the same time. (Skinner, 1957: pp. 227-228.)

³¹ Skinner, 1957: pp. 227-229.

Indeed, no other country in this region has so vigorously tried to repress Chinese education and so extensively assimilated them as Thailand.³²

Nevertheless, through a new wave of immigration, the number of students in Chinese schools rose to 17,000 by the late 1930s, so that when Phibun came to power the government started a severe repression campaign: Chinese schools were inspected, more than 200 of them were closed after being accused of violating the regulations of the “Private Schools Act” and in 1939 Chinese language classes – which had already been reduced in 1932 and 1936 – were limited to 2 hours per week for primary schools (ages seven to fourteen), while all other students were not allowed any classes at all and instead had to be taught exclusively in Thai. Simultaneously, the expression of Chinese culture was limited further by the closing down of all Chinese newspapers except for one, which soon after fell under Japanese control.³³ The government emphasized that all these measures were based on nationality, not race and that all other foreigners – such as Westerners and Indians – were subjected to them just the same. Yet it was clear that they were primarily meant to harm the Chinese and force them into becoming Thai citizens. They led to a decrease in Chinese private capital, in Chinese society’s activities and expression and crippled the Chinese educational system thoroughly. The whole effort was so strong in its effect that the governments of other Southeast Asian countries were disturbed by the protests of their own Chinese communities.³⁴

However, the need to gain China’s approval after the Second World War caused the new civilian Thai government (1944-1947) to relax its grip on the Chinese minority by reinstating most of the pre-1939 privileges which the Chinese had enjoyed over other minorities. The question of education played a major role in the negotiations for the Treaty of Amity between the two countries, as the *Kuomintang* had adopted the *Tongmenghui* (the “Revolutionary Alliance”, Sun Yat-sen’s first major organization) concept of “migration (移 yi)”, “colonization (殖 zhi)”, “protection (保 bao)” and “education (育 yu)” as the framework for its official policy towards overseas communities.³⁵ At the party’s request the schools were allowed to operate and teach Chinese language again and several restrictions were lifted. Despite some other privileges, such as the high immigration quota, it was made clear that the Chinese schools were simply given the right to teach a certain amount of Chinese language classes. As an editorial in *Zhongyuanbao* (中原報) from 1948 explained in its historical overview, they were not given any special privileges and had to adhere to the general regulations in the same way as other foreign schools in Thailand, including the usage of the Thai language for all other classes. The editorial states that the permitted level of Chinese-language classes (including history and geography) in primary schools was modified to 10.5 hours per week for the first grade, 11.5 hours for the second grade and 12.5 hours each for the third and fourth grades. Chinese teachers who did not teach in Thai did not need to take exams in this language themselves.³⁶ Simultaneously, the Chinese immigration quota was temporarily raised to 10,000 annually and within just a few years Chinese education blossomed like never before. By late 1947, there were over 175,000 students in Chinese schools – one out of every twelve Thai Chinese of all ages.³⁷ When, in November 1947, the military staged another coup and ousted the civilian government, even Phibun – who at that time remained in the background as an advisor – at first tried to win

³² Murray, 1964: p. 71.

³³ Skinner, 1957: p. 365; Wasana, 2008: p. 174; Wyatt, 1982: p. 254; *Zhongyuanbao*: 13 May 1948.

³⁴ Wyatt, 1982: pp. 253-254; Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 98-99.

³⁵ Wasana, 2008: p. 166.

³⁶ *Zhongyuanbao*: 13 May 1948.

³⁷ Nuechterlein, 1965: pp. 99-100; Skinner, 1957: p. 365.

the Chinese nationalists’ support and stated that there would be no anti-Chinese repression under the new government (see below). But when he became Prime Minister for the second time in April 1948, he was quick to re-establish the anti-Chinese policy and with the new Minister for Education, General Mangkorn Phromyothi (1896-1966, in office: 1948-1949), he initiated a strict repression of Chinese education.³⁸

Anti-Chinese Policy in Action

New Regulations and Sudden Raids

Under the leadership of the old and new Prime Minister the military government did not waste any time in demonstrating its intentions. On 1 May 1948, a Thai division of the Labor Union was established to rival the Chinese labor force. A few days later, Chinese shop owners were terrorized by the so-called “Black Elephant Party”. While this might not have been directly related to the government, it did help to teach a lesson. But the real trouble was just about to begin: with the declaration of a new – the seventh – version of the “Private Schools Act” on 12 May 1948, the government showed that the relaxed conditions of the years of civilian rule were over and that it meant to impose limits on Chinese culture in Thailand. Because they did not match the requirements of the act, 383 out of 490 Chinese schools in the country were closed down, which caused more than 3,000 teachers to lose their jobs and left about 100,000 students without schooling.³⁹ The number of legitimate Chinese schools was set to 152 (eight in Bangkok’s eastern district Phranakhorn, three each in Bangkok’s western district Thonburi and the provinces Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima and Ubon Ratchathani and two each in every other province). In order to keep their jobs, teachers were required to take an exam set by the Thai Ministry of Education or to present a diploma from the Republic of China’s ministry in Nanjing. Additionally, they had to take several exams in the Thai language, while the number of Chinese language classes was reduced to 5.5 hours per week.⁴⁰

The reaction of the Chinese community was immediate. The next day, *Zhongyuanbao* dedicated a lengthy front page editorial to what had now been labelled the “Chinese Education Problem”⁴¹ – the fact that the front page was usually reserved for international news with local news featured only on the third page emphasized the significance of this event and the reaction it provoked within the community. Following a general statement that the Chinese set up schools simply to teach their wives and children, the article then gave a synopsis of the various versions of the “Private Schools Act” throughout the 20th century (see above for details). After new regulations had been agreed upon in 1947, all Chinese schools had operated accordingly, the article claimed, but now, in May 1948, the new Thai government was changing the regulations once again. They were rather unclear now, the editor complained, and not acceptable to the Chinese community. To emphasize the importance of the Chinese in Thailand and their claim to certain rights, the

³⁸ Surachart, 1988: p. 44; Skinner, 1957: p. 365; Anuson, 1992: pp. 62-63.

³⁹ *Quanminbao*: 12 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 7 June 1948. (“Black Elephant Party” is the translation of the Chinese term “黑象黨 *heixiangdang*”, referring to Thai fascist activists fighting – what they considered – the danger of a Chinese takeover of Thailand.)

⁴⁰ *Zhongyuanbao*: 13 May 1948; *Quanminbao*: 12 June 1948; Skinner, 1957: p. 366.

⁴¹ “僑教問題 *qiaojiao wenti*”, sometimes also “Chinese Schools’ Problem (僑校問題 *qiaoxiao wenti*)”. “僑 *qiao*” is part of the term “overseas Chinese (華僑 *huaqiao*)” and actually does not hold the meaning of “Chinese” but of “overseas”. It does, however, refer to the Chinese and stylistic preferences suggest to translate it accordingly.

commentary dedicated its final paragraph to a description of the tight relations between the Chinese and Thais, arguing that the two peoples were brothers and that many of the high-ranking Thai officials were actually of Chinese origin.⁴² The Chinese had lived in this country for centuries, the editor reasoned, and every Thai should be aware of the fact that Thailand would not have been allowed into the United Nations had China made use of its power to object.⁴³

The Chamber of Commerce as Representative of the Chinese Community

Just a few weeks earlier, a new Kuomintang Ambassador had arrived in Bangkok, but he would not sign his contract and be officially welcomed before 4 June.⁴⁴ Therefore, the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce was left with the task of representing the Chinese community at this critical stage. On 21 May 1948, a delegation led by the chamber’s Chairman, Zhang Lanchen (張蘭臣, 1895-1961), a Teochiu from Chao’an (Chaozhou, Guangdong), paid a visit to Phibun⁴⁵ to inquire about the new education laws. Xiao Songqin (蕭松琴), another high-ranking representative of the chamber, made inquiries with the Ministry of Education. But both men’s efforts failed to achieve the desired results. Phibun simply explained that the Ministry of Education was doing its best to relax control over the schools, and the ministry itself emphasized the objectives of preventing the Chinese from losing their schools, cherishing the friendship between the two ethnic groups and working on a solution to the problem.⁴⁶

But for Zhang this was only the opening of a negotiation campaign. On the evening of 4 June 1948, the Chamber of Commerce held a large banquet to which it welcomed as guests of honor the Prime Minister as well as members of the National Assembly, the ministers, the heads of the trade associations and representatives of the provinces. At 7:30 p.m., leading members of the chamber led by Zhang and Xiao Songqin formed a guard of honor to give a warm welcome to their guests. Red silks were hung from the walls and the flags of both Thailand and China were raised. At 8:00 p.m., when Phibun and his wife arrived, music was played and everybody stood up to pay their respects. *Guanghuabao* (光華報) described a warm and lively event, talk and laughter, and that both the Chinese and the Thais demonstrated good-will. After mutual toasts by Zhang and Phibun, Zhang began his speech, translated into Thai by Xiao, with an explanation of the great relationship between the Chinese and the Thais, in both the past and the present:

“The two countries of China and Siam are not only both located in Asia and border on each other,⁴⁷ but our blood relationship makes us even closer and our culture, geography, economy, etc. also give us such a close relationship that we cannot be separated from each other. The current situation is a good proof of that. Chinese merchants have never

⁴² While this claim may at first sight appear to be a flowery phrase, Phibun was himself the grandson of a Cantonese immigrant and the army’s Commander-in-Chief Field Marshall Phin Choonhavan (1891-1973), main man of the Coup Group and father-in-law of Phao Sriyanond, was the son of a Teochiu immigrant.

⁴³ *Zhongyuanbao*: 13 May 1948.

⁴⁴ *Huaqiao ribao*: 4 June 1948.

⁴⁵ He was called Luan Piwen (鑾披汶) by the Chinese, *luan* being a phonetic translation of his Thai peerage title *luang*.

⁴⁶ *Zhongyuanbao*: 29 May 1948.

⁴⁷ According to *Guanghuabao*’s record of the speech, Zhang Lanchen did indeed say that the two countries were “bordering each other (毗鄰 *pilin*)” which obviously was no longer the case in 1948. This choice of vocabulary might therefore have been Zhang expressing his sympathy with the Thais’ nationalistic and chauvinistic aim of an expanded country incorporating the other Tai groups of Laos, Cambodia and Burma as had been partially achieved during the Second World War.

neglected the successive generations of the Kings of Siam. We have been under the kind protection of the previous governments, and it is the same under the current government [...]”⁴⁸.

Zhang then went on to explain that the Chinese community in Thailand wanted to do its best to help the development of the country's economy. He expressed his hope for good cooperation and that problems of any kind – should they occur – might be solved together. After the Thai national anthem had been played, Phibun confirmed in his own speech that the Thais and Chinese were indeed one family who had lived on the same Chinese grounds. When the Thais moved South, their Chinese brothers followed them to find a peaceful and rich life in Thailand. The two peoples were not only difficult to differentiate, but they should not be apart, Phibun argued.⁴⁹ He then went on to explain that his current reign would be different from the first one:

“When I previously held the reins of government, due to the force of circumstances there were what appeared to be anti-Chinese actions, but these times were the times of war. If it were not for these [measures], Siam⁵⁰ would not have been capable of the great achievement to [remain] the sole survivor [of the Japanese invasion]. Now that I again have control over the government, [that I] again hold the state power, I dare to guarantee that there will be no more anti-Chinese actions, and that I will put a cover over all kinds of wartime measures[...]”⁵¹.

This banquet is exemplary of a series of many other banquets which both the Chinese and the Thais organized over the following couple of months to cultivate their relationship and negotiate over the current problems, and which shall not be mentioned individually any further.⁵² Besides the demonstration of respect, generosity and good-will it may very well have been the Chinese idea was that the discussion of these critical topics in “Chinese territory” (a restaurant in their own community) could cause the Thais to give in more easily and thus could lead to quicker and more desirable solutions. On the other side, for the Thais such banquets were a way to pretend that they treated the Chinese as friends and to sooth their anger. As will be shown later, it was a strategy of the government to express that everything would be taken care of in a benevolent way while in reality doing nothing or even preparing the next strike. Rhetorically, Zhang’s speech seems to exemplify a typical strategy for the Thai Chinese, who insisted on their privileges and were reluctant to simply follow the government as Thai people were supposed to. It was not only Zhang, in his function as the chamber's Chairman, who made use of such expressions, but it was also a tool of diplomatic conversation used by the *Kuomintang* Ambassadors. This implies that the Chinese still considered themselves to be residents with special rights who should not fully

⁴⁸ *Guanghuaobao*: 5 June 1948. (“中暹兩國，除位居亞洲，同為毗鄰之外，血統之親，更為密切，舉凡文化，地理，經濟等等，均有不可分離之密切關係。目前之情況，正是很好的證明。華僑商人，從未忘記歷代暹王陛下，及歷屆政府庇護之恩，對現任政府亦然。”)

⁴⁹ *Guanghuaobao*: 5 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 5 June 1948.

⁵⁰ It is subject to speculation whether Phibun did indeed say “Siam” or rather “Thailand”, the Chinese newspapers, however, used the older term “暹國 *xianquo*” instead of the modern “泰國 *taiguo*”.

⁵¹ *Huaqiao ribao*: 5 June 1948. (“昔日執政，因情勢所迫，會有似排華之舉，蓋是時為戰時。若不如此，則暹國不克碩果僅存矣。本人者番重掌國政，重執政權，敢担保無排華之舉，蓋於戰時之種種措施。”)

⁵² Most banquets were held by the Chinese Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, they were only mentioned briefly in the newspapers without further discussion. See for example: *Guanghuaobao*: 7 June 1948, 18 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 11 June 1948, 14 June 1948, 16 June 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 14 June 1948.

fall under Thai jurisdiction – or at least not without diplomatic support from China. The promise to do their best to help develop the Thai economy may be seen as their compensatory contribution in exchange for the chance of living peacefully in Thailand and of continuing to enjoy the special trade rights which they had been given ever since. After all, the Chinese had for a long time managed the processing, transport, distribution, sale and export of the country’s four major economic products: rice, rubber, tin and teak (with factories and concessions for tin and teak at times being owned by Western companies), just as they were now building up several new banks which would substitute the old Western banks and soon turn into some of the most prosperous companies in Thailand and beyond. They had once made the country one of the major exporters of sugar in the 19th century and they had now made it the world’s number one exporter of rice.⁵³

The New Ambassador Joins In

Indeed, the Kuomintang's newly appointed Ambassador to Thailand, Xie Baoqiao (謝保樵, born 1896), followed the same strategy as the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. He was an American educated intellectual from Nanhai (Foshan, Guangdong) with a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. After his return to China he worked as a professor at various Chinese universities before entering politics and, via several other offices, finally came to Bangkok in April 1948 until March 1950.⁵⁴ After a consultative meeting with eight school principals on 3 June 1948, and having issued a diplomatic letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the day after,⁵⁵ he made a courtesy visit to the Foreign Minister, His Serene Highness General Pridithepong Thewakul (in office: 15 April 1948 to 29 June 1949),⁵⁶ in the morning of 7 June. In the afternoon he paid an additional visit to the Prime Minister and also met the Police Director-General, Chatit Rakaankosol⁵⁷ (in office: 1947-1951). In these meetings he explained China's stance towards Thailand and stressed the desire for friendship. Together with the Foreign Minister, Ambassador Xie planned a tight cooperation and discussed the current situation of Chinese education in Thailand and the government's attitude towards it. He promised that he would examine the situation with the utmost care and pleaded with the Minister to allow the Chinese schools to resume their classes. Both men claimed to be very satisfied with the negotiations and promised to clear up any misunderstandings between the Thais and the Chinese.⁵⁸ In his communication with the ministry, Xie was always supported by Secretary Ouyang Chun (歐陽純) who also met with assistants of the Minister several times.⁵⁹

Just a day later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an official letter in reply to the Chinese Embassy’s previous letter. It refused the Chinese requests and explained that schools on Thai soil must adhere to Thai law. And while the Chinese emphasized the rights given to them in the Treaty of Amity between China and Thailand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs replied that this treaty did indeed give the Chinese the right to establish their own schools

⁵³ Skinner, 1957: pp. 213-216; Studwell, 2006: p. 8.

⁵⁴ <http://www.baike.com/wiki/谢保樵>; <http://www.cwi.org.cn/zfh/node1473/node1481/u1a3280230.html> (14 April 2014).

⁵⁵ *Zhongyuanbao*: 4 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 4 June 1948.

⁵⁶ His family name is also transcribed as Devakula. He was a grandson of King Mongkut and a son of Prince Devawongse Varopakarn, who was himself the second Foreign Minister. The Chinese called him Mengzhao Peizhidaibang (蒙照佩秩戴邦) or Bilitiemeng (比里貼蒙), *mengzhao* being a phonetic translation of his Thai royal title *mom chao*.

⁵⁷ He was called Luan Chataganesong (鑾察他干哥頌) or Chadakesong (察打哥頌) by the Chinese.

⁵⁸ *Guanghuabao*: 7 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 9 June 1948.

⁵⁹ *Huaqiao ribao*: 7 June 1948.

in Thailand but they still had to comply with Thai law, just like all the other private schools, for example those of the missionaries. There was no way for the Chinese schools to stay outside the law.⁶⁰

Xie kept up his efforts, immediately sending a second official letter and throughout the following days he and the Foreign Minister, Prince Pridithepong, busily exchanged friendly statements, talking about how to solve the “Chinese Education Problem”. In the morning of 9 June, he went to see Phibun again. The media portrayed good relations and painted a picture of the Ambassador being welcomed warmly by a friendly Prime Minister to discuss the current problems for one hour. Xie expressed his wish to work together for friendly relations, to establish cooperation, and emphasized that even though there might be some differences between the two governments, he hoped that China and Thailand would always maintain their friendship and not allow any problems to occur. Regarding the education problem, he explained that the Chinese merely wished for some bending of the regulations so that the 100,000 students could be taught about their home country’s culture. Phibun agreed with Xie in every respect and replied that he also hoped for a quick and satisfactory solution to the education problem.⁶¹

At the same time, Zhang Lan Chen continued to use his position as the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce to deal with the government on behalf of his community. As cited by *Quanminbao* (全民報), Phibun replied to an inquiry regarding the discrepancies between his promises and the actions of the Ministry of Education:

“The Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Naishaha (Zhang Lan Chen),⁶² already came to me several times to discuss this matter, but the two sides have not been able to come to an agreement yet. Regarding [the fact] that I mentioned granting a stretching of the regulations the other day, I have already instructed the Minister for Education to consider it. However, the authority to decide this matter lies with the Minister for Education, I can only make a suggestion to him, but cannot exceed [my] authority and decide myself, for that would be another dictatorship. Furthermore, I have heard that currently most Chinese schools are still acting in ‘violation of the laws’.”⁶³

Zhang and Xiao Songqin also had another meeting with the Deputy Minister for Education, Naisuji.⁶⁴ He raised several questions about the purpose of establishing Chinese schools in Thailand: whether they were to incite abhorrence towards Thailand among the Chinese; whether they were teaching any political ideas; whether they were teaching Chinese customs and literature. The two representatives of the Chamber of Commerce explained that the purpose of establishing Chinese schools was simply to educate their wives and children, nothing else. The Deputy Minister then suggested that Chinese schools which could not adhere to the “Private Schools Act”, such as those lacking the necessary amount of Thai language teachers, would be better off with cooperation: the ministry would provide

⁶⁰ *Huaqiao ribao*: 9 June 1948.

⁶¹ *Huaqiao ribao*: 9 June 1948, 11 June 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 11 June 1948.

⁶² 乃沙哈, the Chinese transcription of what must have been Zhang Lan Chen’s Thai name.

⁶³ *Quanminbao*: 9 June 1948. [“中華總商會主席乃沙哈 (張蘭臣) 會經數度來晤我, 談及此問題; 但是雙方並無法達到任何協議。至於我當日之表示應予通融事, 我已通知教長進行考慮了; 但是這件事的決定權是在教長, 我只能向他提供意見, 而不能“越權”自作主意, 否則又將被提為獨裁了。而且聽說目前一般華校也還是‘犯法’的。”]

⁶⁴ He was called Naisuji (乃素吉) by the Chinese. As his original name could not be verified, I will call him accordingly.

the qualified teachers and guide the schools’ policies, while the schools could still be in charge of the budget. Zhang and Xiao replied that they would have to discuss this proposal with the other Chinese associations.⁶⁵

Support from all Sides

But it was not only these two community leaders who tried to solve the “Chinese Education Problem”. In the early afternoon of 8 June, seventeen representatives of the Thai Chinese Teachers Association gathered to walk to the Ministry of Education, where they pleaded on their own behalf as well as that of the students’ futures and submitted a document to discuss the situation. Besides painting a dramatic picture of students losing their schooling and teachers losing their jobs, this document set out several requests concerning how the teachers wished the whole affair to be solved. About half of these requests referred to teachers’ working conditions, the other half asked for a bending of the regulations in order to comply with the agreement between the Chinese Embassy and the previous government. The respective number of hours for Chinese language classes would thereby be granted, especially for students between eight and fourteen years of age, and the establishment of Chinese middle schools would be permitted. An hour later, the teachers met with Deputy Minister Naisuji because the Minister himself, General Mangkorn,⁶⁶ was not available. Naisuji expressed his admiration that they were acting on behalf of the students, but told them that they would first have to understand why the ministry operated the way it did. He explained that it was in the interest of adhering to the laws of the country, and also claimed that the regulations were not severe at all given the fact that the government had already bent them in favor of the Chinese for two years, but within this period the schools had failed to comply with the law. The Deputy Minister continued by stating that the ministry would like to help, and that it would indeed have to act according to the plan which had been worked out with the embassy concerning the quantity of Chinese language classes for children, but the Chinese schools would first have to adhere to the “Private Schools Act”; everything else was to follow. Upon leaving half an hour later, the teachers felt that little had been accomplished.⁶⁷

The Chinese community even received some outside support. A special broadcast by *Xinhua* (新華), the news agency of China’s Communist Party since 1937, gave a synopsis of the hardships the Thai Chinese had been forced to endure during the preceding weeks and the Teachers’ Association of Singapore sent a formal letter to the Thai Ministry of Education to express its concerns.⁶⁸ An article taken from a Thai newspaper⁶⁹ criticized the government for pursuing a policy which was too hard on the ethnic minorities, referring not only to the Chinese, but also the Malays in the South. The article commented that while they should, of course, love Thailand, be good Thai citizens and contribute to the country, it was also their right to learn about the culture of their respective home country and keep it alive. It would be especially necessary for intellectuals to learn Chinese. Therefore, it continued, the government should consider its policy more carefully and, so long as the Chinese were acting as good Thai patriots, they should have the liberty to learn their own language and

⁶⁵ *Huaqiao ribao*: 9 June 1948.

⁶⁶ Surprisingly, the Chinese newspapers just spoke of the “Minister for Education” but did not mention his name. Only one article could be found that might include his Chinese name, however, the paper has been damaged and the characters cannot be read properly. Thus, no Chinese name can be provided in his case.

⁶⁷ *Quanminbao*: 9 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 9 June 1948.

⁶⁸ *Quanminbao*: 12 June 1948.

⁶⁹ It was only credited under a Chinese name: *Dazhongbao* (大衆報), which translates as “The People’s Press”.

culture.⁷⁰ A Thai economy expert⁷¹ discredited the school policy as outdated and demanded change, while an American-run newspaper in Thailand claimed that the government’s policy was not clear or consistent and the only way to solve the Chinese schools problem was to officially declare a policy and stick to it. It pointed out the divergence between the government’s stated intention to establish a common culture, to have only one country inside the Thai borders, and the contrasting reality of many different positions which were the result of multiple different ethnicities living in the same country.⁷²

Indeed, if the Chinese strategy was to emphasize the common history of the two peoples and therefore to ask for a common effort to find a solution, the Thai strategy was to keep the regulations unclear and push forward with their agenda while at the same time maintaining a friendly appearance. This was demonstrated by Phibun’s replies to the *Quanminbao* journalist and those of the Deputy Minister for Education to the Thai Chinese teachers mentioned above. An additional announcement by the ministry on 11 June argued that schools might not fully understand the situation and should thus refrain from causing trouble and instead wait for further acknowledgements. Nevertheless, these protests appear to have been effective as the ministry also urged all Chinese schools to begin the term on the next day. There were hints that repression would be lifted and that the private schools would get support in resuming their classes while abiding by the law. The ministry planned to increase official registration of Chinese students’ and their family heads, including full personal data plus the names and birthdays of the wives and children.⁷³

Raids at Dawn

These signs of progress notwithstanding, the police remained alert and in the morning of 14 June Police Director-General Chatit held a press conference to warn all newspapers that they should moderate their news coverage in order to avoid harming Thailand’s foreign policy.⁷⁴ Despite this, when the Chinese Embassy’s representatives left a banquet at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the evening of the same day, none of them could have guessed what would happen just a few hours later.

Before the dawn on 15 June, more than ten Chinese schools plus several social associations, newspapers and shops were raided by the Thai police for thorough investigation and more than 30 people were arrested for further interrogation – *Guanghuabao* suggested that there were even more than the 50 arrests acknowledged in a public statement by the Police Director-General at the gathering of the National Assembly the same day. As documented by the Thai Chinese newspapers, at 4:00 a.m. eight Special Forces police officers armed with automatic rifles and pistols entered the Elementary School Department of Nanyang Middle School (南洋中學小學部 *nanyang zhongxue xiaoxuebu*). They woke the people living there and demanded to speak the principal about accusations that some of the students were involved in secret activities, simultaneously announcing that no one was allowed to leave the school. They then collected personal data about all the teachers and by 8:00 a.m. three new police officers, including one member of the Special Forces in combat armor, arrived to search through the principal’s apartment. At midday another six police officers arrived on the scene to conduct further searches of staff rooms, afterwards taking seven school staff members to the police department. Simultaneously, at 5:00 a.m. a team arrived at the

⁷⁰ *Quanminbao*: 9 June 1948.

⁷¹ He was called Paishalasai (拍沙拉塞) in Chinese, the original Thai name could not be verified.

⁷² *Zhongyuanbao*: 3 June 1948; *Guanghuabao*: 7 June 1948.

⁷³ *Quanminbao*: 11 June 1948.

⁷⁴ *Guanghuabao*: 14 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 15 June 1948.

middle school department, put it under surveillance until 7:00 a.m. and then began to search through the rooms until after midday when the Special Forces arrested sixteen people, including the principal.

The Hainanese Qiongya District Association (瓊崖同鄉會 *qiongya tongxianghui*) was raided at 5:30 a.m. by ten police officers, who also investigated its Qiguang School (啓光學校 *qiguang xuexiao*) and *Daobao* (導報) newspaper office, both of which were in the same building. They woke up 20 people – teachers, other school staff and students – with three officers in combat armor blocking the doors so that no one could leave. But the investigations achieved nothing and by 8:30 a.m. the police were already leaving. Other raids were conducted at the Thai Chinese Association for Education (教育協會 *jiayou xiehui*) where eight people were arrested, at *Qiaoshengbao* (僑聲報), one of the smaller newspapers whose editor Ke Dawen (柯達文) was arrested, at several shops, at *Kuomintang* offices and at the Labor Union. Surprisingly, it was not only the Chinese section of the Labor Union – where two people were arrested – that was raided, but also the Thai section where the police confiscated two documents.⁷⁵

Obviously, the Chinese press rushed to gather more information and interviewed Thai officials. The Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior stated to *Guanghuabao*, that some people might be ordered to leave the country, which was depending on the decision of his ministry. Those schools and associations which had been investigated may all have been registered as public organizations, but according to the police there remained some suspicions and thus there were to be further investigations. Concerning those arrested, the Deputy Secretary said that if any of their actions were considered to be a threat to public security or if they had any other kind of criminal history then the authorities would act in accordance with the law, which might lead to deportation. Another *Guanghuabao* journalist met with the Head of the Public Security Bureau,⁷⁶ who claimed that he was merely following orders and that those orders came from the head of the National Assembly or the heads of several ministries. It was now his task to investigate and check the evidence. The arrested persons were being interrogated and might be brought to trial if appropriate evidence was found.⁷⁷ A *Quanminbao* journalist went to interview the Head of the Special Forces. The officer explained that the investigations had nothing to do with a “plan to annex Thailand”, the existence of which some newspapers had speculated over,⁷⁸ but rather were aimed at people who were secretly forming associations. Politics did not play any role in this affair, regardless of whether it was nationalists or communists being arrested. When the journalist pointed out that the associations which had been raided were all legally registered, the officer explained that even though that might be true, if there was any evidence that they had broken the law they would still have to be brought to justice. Thus far there had been more than 30 arrests which the police still needed to investigate further, but they hoped to release those arrested soon. However, progress was slow because of

⁷⁵ *Guanghuabao*: 16 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 16 June 1948; *Quanminbao*: 16 June 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 16 June 1948, 17 June 1948.

⁷⁶ The person in question here is not clear. In most other cases, the newspapers spoke of the “Police Director-General (警察總監 *jingcha zongjian*)”, but in this case – and another, see below – they speak of the “Head of the Public Security Bureau (公安局長 *gong'an juzhang*)”. It may thus be assumed that the journalist did indeed not talk to the Police Director-General here as was usually the case, but to the head of another department whose name is not mentioned though. The newspapers also do not mention the “Public Security Bureau” apart from its head, but do in general only refer to the “Police”.

⁷⁷ *Guanghuabao*, 16 June 1948.

⁷⁸ There might have been some discussion in the Thai media about a potential threat from China, however there was no such discussion in the Thai Chinese newspapers.

language difficulties. It appears that the arrested people did not speak Thai, and according to the officer there were too few among the police who could speak Chinese.⁷⁹ In a press conference with the Deputy Minister for Education, Naisuji, it was pointed out that a newspaper from Shanghai had demanded that the Chinese government bring the case before the United Nations. Naisuji replied that before such a thing could be done, the Chinese government would have to discuss the matter with the Ambassador. But the Ambassador was a man of education, he reasoned, who had been a classmate and friend of the Thai Minister for Finance during their studies in the United States and such a stable man would not believe such rumors.⁸⁰

In the morning of 16 June outside the National Assembly, the Police Director-General told the public that about 50 Chinese people had been arrested so far and were being interrogated at the Special Forces headquarters. The police were not granting bail and although food could be sent, visits were not allowed. They would have to remain in custody for at least two or three days. The Head of the Special Forces explained that the arrests had been based on a list of people who were suspected of being members of secret organizations. The police were now trying to gather enough evidence to put the detainees to trial. But according to information acquired by a *Quanminbao* journalist, they were already preparing a list of people who would be marked as “not welcome” and would simply be deported out of the country without trial.⁸¹ In the afternoon of 17 June, families and friends were finally allowed to visit the detainees, and by 18 June the official number of arrests was set at 57. Of these, 40 had already been interrogated, but no further action would be taken until the investigations had been finished.⁸²

The Second Round of Negotiations

For Xie Baoqiao this dramatic turn of events must have been a serious setback in his effort to defend Chinese education in Thailand. He had just completed a whole series of meetings and banquets with Foreign Minister Priditheppong, and was already preparing for more, probably hoping to reach a break-through soon. But after the raids his whole strategy must have collapsed and he and Secretary Ouyang Chun had to embark on a series of further visits to the ministry throughout the rest of the month.⁸³

On 16 June, the Chinese Embassy sent yet another official letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Asking the government for further consideration of the problem of Chinese schools, the letter referred to the law for private schools which had been established twelve years before and to the Treaty of Amity between Thailand and China, in which both governments had agreed on the right of Thai Chinese children to obtain a Chinese education. Instead of restriction there should be protection, the embassy argued, and if Chinese people established schools in Thailand it would help both countries in creating good citizens. If the government now wanted to change this law because of changes in the state of international affairs, the embassy urged, it should strive for a more thorough consideration of how to change this law and should do so a friendlier manner.⁸⁴

The next day, Xie met with several Chinese experts on education and representatives of some schools to discuss the current situation. Their main concern was about a part of the

⁷⁹ *Quanminbao*: 16 June 1948.

⁸⁰ *Quanminbao*: 16 June 1948.

⁸¹ *Quanminbao*: 17 June 1948.

⁸² *Quanminbao*: 21 June 1948; 18 June 1948.

⁸³ *Guanghuabao*: 18 June 1948.

⁸⁴ *Guanghuabao*, 19 June 1948.

new regulations which prevented the establishment of Chinese middle schools. They realized they would have to follow the regulations of the government, yet at the same time they emphasized the need for independence to administer their own education.⁸⁵

In the morning of 18 June, Xie and Ouyang first arranged another later meeting at the Ministry of Education and thereafter went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a major meeting with several high-ranking officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education, including Foreign Minister Prince Priditheppong himself and the Deputy Minister for Education, as well as representatives of the Public Schools’ Association. They talked for three hours. As usual, Xie explained the views of the Thai Chinese and the Chinese government and expressed the general hope for a friendly relationship and that a solution might be reached by cooperation. The Foreign Minister also emphasized the friendly relationship and willingness to find a solution and then asked the representative of the Ministry of Education to explain the regulations for public schools, which would have to serve as the framework within which the solution would have to be found. Again, Xie emphasized his hope that the “Chinese Education Problem” would not harm the relationship between China and Thailand. When they finished, both sides agreed to announce a preliminary result. But for the newspaper there was no more to report than flowery pleasantries emphasizing good and friendly relations.⁸⁶

On the evening of 20 June, a *Guanghuabao* writer met with Ouyang Chun for an interview. As the Secretary reported, negotiations with the Thai ministries were friendly, but because of the upcoming Thai National Day⁸⁷ a solution would not be found within that week. Instead, both sides agreed to meet again on the following Saturday (26 June) for another discussion, partly also because of some mistakes in protocol in the previous meeting. Ambassador Xie would not be able to take part in that meeting as he had to spend time for the national day, so Ouyang would have to take care of it by himself. The Thai side would also not be represented by the Ministers themselves, but only by assisting officials.⁸⁸

While the Ambassador focused his efforts on the education problem, another prominent member of the Thai Chinese community supported those held in prison. Immediately on 15 June, just a few hours after the raids, the *Kuomintang* Consul Sun Bingqian (孫秉乾, born 1904) and his secretary Chen Handing (陳漢鼎) went to the police to inquire about the conditions of those arrested, but when interviewed by a *Huaqiao ribao* (華僑日報) journalist at 4:00 p.m., the Consul could not yet offer any detailed information.⁸⁹

Sun, who was a Northerner from Jilin, had studied politics at Waseda University, Tokyo, then had entered the diplomatic service and served in Bangkok from 1947 to 1952.⁹⁰ On 16 June, he let *Zhongyuanbao* know that he had made a phone call to the police station,⁹¹ and two days later, Sun and Chen tried again in person. This time, the Head of the Public Security Bureau gave a press statement saying that the arrests totalled 75, but that the whole affair would be finished soon. It had already transpired that many of the arrested were related to business people, while others were related to the heads of various

⁸⁵ *Huaqiao ribao*: 17 June 1948.

⁸⁶ *Huaqiao ribao*: 19 June 1948.

⁸⁷ On 24 June, in commemoration of the 1932 coup, held until 1957 when Phibun, the last of the coup promoters, was deposed in another coup by field marshal Sarit Thanarat (Prime Minister from 1959 to 1963).

⁸⁸ *Guanghuabao*: 23 June 1948.

⁸⁹ *Huaqiao ribao*: 16 June 1948.

⁹⁰ <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/孫秉乾> (14 April 2014).

⁹¹ *Zhongyuanbao*: 17 June 1948.

associations. Some of these, the Bureau’s Head continued, were hiding inside the country’s borders, but others had fled to Malaysia from police units sent out to arrest them. Furthermore, he emphasized that any association which did not abide by the law or disturbed public security would be prosecuted. These arrests and investigations, he said, were based on a recent tendency of the Labor Union to threaten public security.⁹² The next day it was announced that henceforth relatives would be allowed to visit the arrested.⁹³

Reaction of the Thai Chinese Press

Predictably, the government’s actions provoked outraged reactions among the Thai Chinese press. The restrictive regulations caused not only disapproval but also confusion, for the details were unclear. In addition to the front page editorial of *Zhongyuanbao* previously mentioned, a lengthy article in *Guanghuabao* had already commented on the problems caused by the new laws on 7 June. It said that the newspapers were supporting the schools and were willing to fight, at the same time hoping that the Thai government would be understanding and make concessions, would apply a friendlier policy and maintain the friendship between Thais and Chinese. They complained that Thai newspapers only did interviews with the Ministry of Education’s officials or reported their statements and then claimed that the Chinese schools had broken the regulations. Instead, the article explained, the problem was the authorities’ lack of tolerance. There had, in fact, been some stretching of the rules in the past, but the ministry would no longer allow it, and thus all Chinese schools had to follow the pattern of the Thai schools. But they should not change the Chinese schools’ mentality, the commentator had continued, also stating that the regulations for the “Private Schools Act” were not suitable for modern times.⁹⁴

Another *Guanghuabao* commentary took a brave step by considering the views of both sides and suggesting several regulations as a compromise: on the Chinese side, the schools, reconsidering their position, should offer a regular diploma, register with the Ministry of Education and offer free Thai language classes, while Chinese language teachers should pass the ministry’s examinations for teachers. On the Thai side, the government should allow the Chinese schools their time to teach Chinese language as had been agreed upon by erstwhile Ambassador Li Tiezheng (李鐵錚) (1906-1990) and the previous government and allow the establishment of a department for Chinese middle schools.⁹⁵

A commentary in *Huaqiao ribao* kept it simpler and complained in particular about the hardships that would be suffered by the teachers who would have to take fifteen months of Thai language classes, including three exams, and would only be allowed to teach again after passing these exams. It went on to describe how difficult the situation for Chinese schools had been after the war and how the Treaty of Amity with Thailand had sought to improve the situation. The Chinese even made it their objective to learn Thai in order to strengthen the friendship, it said. But Thai was considered an easy language, while Chinese was much more difficult and thus required additional schooling.⁹⁶

Probably most noteworthy is a lengthy examination in *Guanghuabao* dedicated to the relationship between Thailand and China both in the light of international politics and the current repression of the Thai Chinese through the Thai government. In January 1947, after China and Thailand had signed the Treaty of Amity, the article explained, diplomatic

⁹² *Guanghuabao*, 19 June 1948; *Huaqiao ribao*: 19 June 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 19 June 1948.

⁹³ *Huaqiao ribao*: 19 June 1948.

⁹⁴ *Guanghuabao*: 7 June 1948.

⁹⁵ *Guanghuabao*: 26 June 1948.

⁹⁶ *Huaqiao ribao*: 21 June 1948.

relations had been established, with Li Tiezheng serving as the Ambassador. While Thailand’s politics had largely remained the same since then despite Phibun’s military clique seizing power again, in China the civil war raged ever more strongly and thus foreign relations had become lukewarm. The editor believed that the Thai government had misunderstood the intentions of the Chinese government as hostile and objected that with 3,000,000 Chinese in Thailand,⁹⁷ living on its land and eating what it produced, seeking shelter and protection, China was actually taking a careful and considerate direction in its political dealings with Thailand. He then explained the tight relationship between the two peoples throughout history: the origin of the Thai people on Chinese soil, the intermarriages between the Tang Dynasty and the Kingdom of Nanzhao (617-902),⁹⁸ how the Chinese followed the Thais to the South and how they had lived there together and cooperated up to the contemporary present. Many Chinese, he argued, were very diligent and helped to develop Thailand and the friendship between the two peoples and their states. In the light of international politics, the article continued, Thailand simply could not sustain a situation in which it had no close relations with China because they were both part of a wider picture and thus each country inevitably had to arrange its international relations accordingly. China, even though it was among the allied countries, had laid its focus on East Asia, but it still needed to arrange its policies in accordance with the United States and Great Britain. It depended on the help of the United States, just as the United States depended on China’s help. And this, the editor reasoned, made it difficult for any third party to have different types of relationship with the United States and China. Thailand could not be friends with the United States and at the same time enemies with China, but had to consider the allied status of the United States, Great Britain and China and design its foreign relations accordingly.⁹⁹

The article then went on to discuss Thailand’s economic situation as a large country with a rather small population which depended on the hard work of the people. Even though it was rich and could prosper from agriculture, for now it needed capital from the World Bank and the United States, and it also needed the financial support of the Chinese population in Thailand. However, although Thailand had asked the United States for help and maintained friendly relations with them, it rejected and arrested the Chinese. The editor considered this situation unwise because in his view China was one of the world’s great countries with a long history and bright prospects for the future, while Thailand was still young and its influence limited to Southeast Asia. Today’s Burma and Vietnam, he continued, were still weak and powerless, but if they suddenly developed then Thailand would have difficulty standing against its neighbors and would need the help of China to maintain its regional power status. Furthermore, a good relationship with China would also help to maintain peace and order inside Thailand, the article explained. For while Thailand took Marxism, which was seen as the main international problem of that time, rather lightly and did not consider it to be much of a threat, there were certain activists who could harm the country. But most Chinese in Thailand had a tendency to stay in line with the country’s policies and Ambassador Xie Baoqiao did his best to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. As a country of rather little prestige, the editor finally claimed, Thailand could not afford to neglect its foreign relations during the process of developing its economy, otherwise it would stumble.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Again, the Chinese newspaper’s number differs from Skinner’s estimate (also see above).

⁹⁸ Nanzhao has in the meantime been recognized as a kingdom of a Tibeto-Burmese people, not the Tais (of which the Thais are a subgroup), as originally suggested.

⁹⁹ *Guanghuabao*: 19 June 1948.

¹⁰⁰ *Guanghuabao*: 19 June 1948.

In light of this commentary, several factors merit further examination. First, as has been mentioned above and also in this newspaper article, as of 1948 the Thai government was not yet too worried about communism (or Marxism) and used it primarily as a means to establish a closer relationship with the United States. While there was a growing concern among the Thais in the late 1940s, the Cold War had not yet affected Thailand, a small Thai communist movement was only just beginning to develop and the Thai Chinese communists – according to their own leader Major Qiu Ji (丘及) – were not interested in Thailand, but were instead oriented towards China. Phibun himself, as pointed out by the United States’ Ambassador Edwin Stanton, was aware of a potential communist threat and specific communist activities, but he paid them little mind at that time. Media control and occasional deportations of those who were indeed engaged in illegal political actions appeared to be sufficient for him to take care of the situation. Instead, Phibun considered a general threat of the whole Chinese community to the Thai economy and the livelihood of the Thai people as much more serious than any communist actions.¹⁰¹

Second, this article appears to be a very typical example of a commonly held Thai Chinese attitude towards the Thais. Just as Zhang Lanchen had emphasized the blood-relationship and wish for cooperation in his banquet speech, so did this article. But it was a rather chauvinistic view: in the Chinese language the term “brothers” is made up of the words “elder brother (兄 *xiong*)” and “younger brother (弟 *di*)”, and it is fairly obvious who is supposed to be who according to the Thai Chinese. The description of how the Thai people actually originated from Chinese soil but were driven further South supports this claim of superiority, even though the aggressive aspect is being concealed in this case. Furthermore, while the Thai newspaper article cited above expressed the wish that the Thai Chinese might be good Thai patriots, the Thai Chinese still spoke of China as “our country (我國 *woguo*)” which of course did not correlate with what the Thais hoped for. Certainly, the Thai Chinese were interested in peaceful cooperation and they might even have realized that it was not only that Thailand needed them, but also that they needed Thailand. However, while Thailand needed not only the Thai Chinese but the whole of China in the current situation of international politics, China most certainly did not need Thailand and was thus again perceived to be in a superior position.

And third, what kind of standing did Ambassador Xie Baoqiao as the main representative of the *Kuomintang* actually have in the Thai Chinese community and how well was he able to perform his office? Of course, the available sources do not provide an easy answer to this question, but they include several hints and there are a few general facts which may be taken into consideration. In 1948, despite still being the major political force among the Thai Chinese, the *Kuomintang* was confronted by growing criticism and the communists, as well as the Democratic League (*Minzhu tongmeng*), were slowly gaining ground. Several of the nationalists’ original supporters, including the Teochiu Association and the Chamber of Commerce, the two major organizations, had developed a rather lukewarm attitude as can be seen in the conflict between Consul Sun Bingqian and the chamber.¹⁰² As the chamber’s chairman and also one of the leading Teochiu it may thus be assumed that even Zhang Lanchen lost his commitment, for a while at least, to the *Kuomintang*, even though he became one of its most ardent supporters again in the 1950s. Zhang was not only Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce for well over a decade, but he also occupied high or leading

¹⁰¹ Nuechterlein, 1965: p. 101; Anuson, 1992: p. 62; Cady, 1974: p. 93; Thompson & Adloff, 1950: pp. 51-52, 59-60.

¹⁰² See Skinner, 1957: pp. 294, 296-297.

positions in several other organizations and was thus the de facto chairman of the whole community.¹⁰³

If Zhang Lanchen was indeed reserved about the *Kuomintang* during Xie Baoqiao’s term as Ambassador (1948-1950), it could have made Xie’s work more difficult and diminished his standing, especially since the nationalists’ agenda included a strong effort to gain control over the Chinese in Southeast Asia. They sent many cadres with open political intent: they were in desperate need of the overseas communities’ financial support, and since 1932 they even had a revolutionary program to educate and train the Thai Chinese according to the party’s guidelines and to exert political influence on Thailand.¹⁰⁴ But the Thai Chinese were no easy prey for propaganda and often went their own way, as Fitzgerald observes:

“Despite the special relationship of some Overseas Chinese with the KMT it is probably the case that most Overseas Chinese who were and are concerned to preserve the link are concerned with China rather than political parties. This made it easier for some to transfer allegiance to the government which came to power in 1949; it also posed problems for that government.”¹⁰⁵

Another factor that might have had a negative influence on Xie’s work and standing was his origin. Born in Nanhai, a district of Foshan, he was Cantonese in a community dominated by Teochiu. About 60 per cent of the Thai Chinese in Bangkok were Teochiu (approximately 56 per cent in the whole of Thailand), while only 7 per cent of them were Cantonese (both in Bangkok and nationwide).¹⁰⁶ For Xie it was much easier still than for Consul Sun who was a Northeasterner from Jilin and thus almost a foreigner with no links at all, but it must nevertheless have been perceivably more difficult for the Cantonese Xie than it would have been for a Teochiu. Furthermore, even in a community which had just recently experienced a huge wave of immigration and thus included many newcomers, the Ambassador must have been a bit of an outsider. The more successful and influential Thai Chinese had obviously spent some time in Thailand already, while Xie had just arrived and would only stay for a few years (in the end he was not even in office for two years). His interests were solely based on his political mission and thus differed from those of the Thai Chinese who had to establish a new existence and make a living in Thailand.

These speculations appear to be noteworthy and reasonable, yet they are impossible to confirm solely based on the newspaper evidence. Contrary to them, several of Bangkok’s newspapers did, in fact, portray Xie Baoqiao in a positive light. The nationalist *Huaqiao ribao* supported the Ambassador anyway, but the politically neutral *Guanghuabao* and *Zhongyuanbao* emphasized his work for the community as well, always referring to him by his title, and they spoke of the Republican government in Nanjing as “our government (我政府 *wo zhengfu*)”. At the same time all three papers also reported Zhang Lanchen’s efforts and did not seem to hold either one of them in higher regard than the other. The communist *Quanminbao*, however, mentioned the Ambassador much less and referred to him by his name only, without the title. It also spoke of the Republican government simply as the “Nanjing government (南京政府 *nanjing zhengfu*)” or “Chiang government (蔣政府 *jiang zhengfu*)”. By contrast, it portrayed Zhang as the defender of the Chinese community

¹⁰³ Skinner, 1957: p. 322. (For Zhang’s support of the *Kuomintang* from 1953 to 1956 see Skinner, 1957: pp. 338-339, 340-341, 344. In October 1952, Bangkok’s local organizations did not support the Republic of China’s national day and Zhang could also not be persuaded to attend the Nationalist Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission in Taipei. See Skinner, 1957: pp. 334-335.)

¹⁰⁴ Fitzgerald, 1972: pp. 8, 10-11; Wasana, 2008: pp. 170-171, 174-175.

¹⁰⁵ Fitzgerald, 1972: p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Skinner, 1957: pp. 208-212.

who met with government representatives several times to end the crisis. While this might have been a move to simply discredit the Ambassador of the rivaling Nationalist Party, it also is proof of the high prestige that Zhang enjoyed within the community and with the Thai government. Even though he was a supporter of the *Kuomintang*, at least he was not a party official and that the Chamber of Commerce had several communists among its members at that time might have helped his image with *Quanminbao*.

In Prison and to China

In the morning of 21 June, the detainees were brought to court for the first time. So far they had been held in custody for one week in several prisons and some of them had been transferred from one prison to the other during this time. At court, they were chained hand and foot and were guarded by more than 20 police officers carrying automatic rifles. Some relatives also appeared at court to plead for release on bail, but the police intervened. The names of all those arrested were listed once again and they were informed that they were suspected of membership of a secret society – a violation of the penal code paragraph 177. According to the law, members of such secret societies would be imprisoned for at least three years and would have to pay a fine of 50 to 5,000 Baht, while the head of such a secret society would be imprisoned for at least five years and would have to pay a fine of 100 to 5,000 Baht. The actual trials could not begin yet because the interrogations at the police station still had not been finished.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, they were to be postponed even further, for the morning of 22 June witnessed yet another series of raids. At 5:00 a.m. the police investigated at fifteen Chinese-operated logistics companies, confiscated documents and arrested 27 more people.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, the embassy and newspapers all sent their polite congratulations on the Thai National Day on 24 June, Xie Baoqiao gave a speech and even Chiang Kai-shek made a congratulatory phone call from China. The Ministry of Education had just issued an update to their new regulations, which demanded that the curriculum of the Chinese schools had to be in line with the standard curriculum designed by the ministry and that the schools had to use the ministry’s text books. There were also two more arrests of Chinese in apparently leading positions in the provinces Si Saket and Ubon Ratchathani, but still the situation seemed to relax slightly.¹⁰⁹ Of course, Ambassador Xie and Consul Sun kept up their efforts, met with Prime Minister Phibun and the Ministers for Education and Foreign Affairs, held further banquets and visited the police station. The police even announced that schools that still did not adhere to the regulations would be treated increasingly strictly, yet for now it looked like most of the community could continue their normal lives or were beginning to come to terms with the new situation, such as a number of teachers who took up the task of passing the Thai language exams.¹¹⁰ Only those in prison¹¹¹ were facing a dark fate. On 1 July, it was announced that they had to endure for twelve more days, but on 14 July, when they had already been held for one month, the police stated that they would keep the prisoners for another twelve days and then take them to court. In fact,

¹⁰⁷ *Quanminbao*: 22 June 1948.

¹⁰⁸ *Quanminbao*: 23 June 1948.

¹⁰⁹ *Quanminbao*: 24 June 1948, 26 June 1948; *Quanminbao*: 26 June 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 24 June 1948.

¹¹⁰ *Zhongyuanbao*: 29 June 1948, 3 July 1948, 7 July 1948, 9 July 1948, 10 July 1948, 13 July 1948, 16 July 1948.

¹¹¹ By now the exact number of detainees is obscure: *Huaqiao ribao* first spoke of 55 (17 June 1948), then of 75 (19 June 1948) as did *Guanghuabao* (19 June 1948); *Quanminbao* first said 57 (18 June 1948), then 56 (22 June 1948); by mid-July, *Zhongyuanbao* spoke of 59 (3 July 1948, 14 July 1948), then of 61 (19 July 1948, 28 July 1948). These numbers are even more unclear when adding the 27 arrests of 22 June 1948. It is to be expected that the numbers would change frequently due to some people being set free, albeit that most of them were deported at various times, even without trial.

they had already been taken to court on 19 July – *Zhongyuanbao* spoke of 61 Chinese by then – with trials lasting until 26 July, yet there was not enough evidence to convict any of them. But on 28 July it was finally decided that they were to be deported after Phibun had signed a declaration that listed the Chinese as “unwanted”. Under this new accusation the government was able to imprison them for a prolonged time, no longer investigating secret activities, but rather alleged minor crimes until proceeding with deportation.¹¹²

Faced with the “Chinese Education Problem”, the government kept up a course of pressure, denial and delay. On 3 July, *Zhongyuanbao* reported that the Ministry of Education and the police wanted to enforce strictness against private schools that still did not adhere to the regulations, especially the so-called underground schools. Yet then the International Schools Association registered its disapproval, which brought the Ministry of Education to affirm that there was no plan to wreck Chinese education in Thailand. On 26 July, *Bangkok Post* published a piece of news about a meeting between Xie and Deputy Minister for Education Naisuji and others, in which they agreed that the Chinese middle schools should resume classes again. However, when a *Zhongyuanbao* journalist went to the ministry to inquire, Naisuji denied any such agreement, thereby once again delaying any solution.¹¹³ Only a few days later, the Ministry of Education even stated its disapproval of foreigners establishing universities.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the government became increasingly aware of the problematic situation, especially upon pressure from the International Schools Association, which sent several letters to demand the Chinese schools be immediately allowed to function again. One letter also protested against the arrested communist school staff being deported to areas under the control of the nationalists. The association informed the Thai government that they had reported the rough treatment of the Chinese to the educational associations of the United Nations and that they would consider further steps should the situation have failed to improve by the time of their next meeting in September.¹¹⁵ At its meeting on 3 August, the Upper House was seriously concerned about the criticism from the International Schools Association and the “Chinese Education Problem” turned out to be a major topic of the day.¹¹⁶

More Raids and the Eventual Solution

But any hope that international pressure could be of help soon dissipated, as just a few days later the situation escalated again when the police conducted a nationwide series of further major strikes against the Chinese, this time including many private businesses. The operation was supervised by the Metropolitan Police Force following a command by the Prime Minister and was executed by local stations throughout the country. Beginning in the early morning hours of 10 August, the raids lasted for three days with some further operations on 14 August, altogether arresting somewhere between 150 and 200 Chinese in 71 provinces including prominent merchants who played important roles in the Thai economy and other influential members of the Chinese communities. Based on police statements, *Huaqiao ribao* listed 31 arrests in Nonthaburi’s Bang Bua Thong district, 30 in Nakhon Ratchasima, 23 in Chiang Rai, fifteen in Chiang Mai, ten each in Ayutthaya and Saraburi and seven in Lampang. *Quanminbao* listed 31 arrests in Nonthaburi’s Bang Bua Thong district, 21 in Chiang Mai, 21 in Chiang Rai, 20 in Lampang and at least five in Lamphun. As if to demonstrate that they were not aiming at the communists specifically

¹¹² *Zhongyuanbao*: 3 July 1948, 14 July 1948, 19 July 1948, 28 July 1948; *Quanminbao*: 7 August 1948, 9 August 1948.

¹¹³ *Zhongyuanbao*: 3 July 1948, 26 July 1948, 28 July 1948.

¹¹⁴ *Zhongyuanbao*: 8 August 1948.

¹¹⁵ *Quanminbao*: 9 August 1948.

¹¹⁶ *Zhongyuanbao*: 4 August 1948.

but at the Chinese in general, the police arrested the heads of all *Kuomintang* departments throughout Thailand and criminalized their actions. However, as *Huaqiao ribao* explained, the government apparently did not have any legal basis upon which to interfere with *Kuomintang* activity and the actions of all these party members could not be labeled as threats to public security or the government. Nevertheless, the police still accused them of violating the law by setting up secret societies and argued that such activities were illegal in Thailand, no matter if done by Thai people or foreigners. Struggling in his press statement to offer a good explanation for the necessity of such arrests, a police representative said that the foreign origin of these people complicated the affair in regards to the good relations between Thailand and China. However, for the sake of national security there was no other choice but to arrest those engaged in secret societies, no matter their nationality or political ideology. While most of the raids were aimed at the *Kuomintang*, the highest number of investigations in one single place was actually in Chonburi, a stronghold of the Chinese Communist Party in Thailand, and it was estimated that 30 of the 50 arrested there were communists.¹¹⁷

As before, it was mainly Consul Sun who negotiated with the police about the conditions of the arrested because Ambassador Xie focused on the education problem, but the two *Kuomintang* representatives met to discuss the best course of action. Sun and Chen Handing, his secretary and translator, then met with Police Director-General Chatit on 16 August at 11:00 a.m. for two hours. Regarding the arrests, Sun said that the matter had caused deep concern among the Chinese and taken them by surprise. He then asked for a further explanation of the current regulations for donations that had been announced on 29 May and how donations became illegal. The Director-General replied that the new regulations were to give the police a single frame to accord to, not solely for Bangkok but for the departments in all provinces, who in the last year had not often interfered with public donations. The Consul agreed that there had been some single cases in which the regulations had been neglected, but insisted that the Chinese usually adhered to the law.¹¹⁸ Afterwards, the consulate took up official negotiations with the Thai government about the nationwide arrests, but apparently the government had already decided to deport all the detainees.¹¹⁹

Just a few days later, as *Quanminbao* reported on 19 August, it was announced that those arrested on 15 June had been deported. Moreover, the newly arrested had been denied release on bail and instead were given the choice to stay for trial or to be set free on foot if they were to leave the country by themselves. Using information from a Thai newspaper (“The People’s Press”), *Quanminbao* cited a representative of the Special Forces who stated that the arrested Chinese were being accused of violating the regulations for remittances and had therefore, upon Phibun’s order, been sentenced to deportation. The officer explained that this kind of violation might not appear to be a severe crime, but in reality these remittances were taken from what each private person would have had to pay as taxes and thus caused the rise of prices throughout the country.¹²⁰ To make such a statement and have it published in a Thai newspaper was a rather obvious move to mark the Chinese as leeches upon Thailand. At a time when the government made itself vulnerable to criticism over the harsh repression of the Chinese minority, such an argument could easily evoke an emotional reaction among many Thais. The Chinese had

¹¹⁷ *Huaqiao ribao*: 14 August 1948; *Quanminbao*: 14 August 1948, 16 August 1948, 18 August 1948; *Zhongyuanbao*: 13 August 1948, 14 August 1948, 16 August 1948, 18 August 1948.

¹¹⁸ *Huaqiao ribao*: 17 August 1948.

¹¹⁹ *Huaqiao ribao*: 19 August 1948.

¹²⁰ *Quanminbao*: 19 August 1948.

already aroused general disapproval for their remittances in the past and it was a practical tool for the government to mobilize public support.¹²¹ By late August, 53 Chinese were officially sentenced to deportation by Phibun’s order. On 25 August, three of them were accompanied by the police to the airport and left the country “voluntarily” (or so it was called). However, the government of Hong Kong would not allow permanent residence, thus the remaining 50, who were to be deported by 29 August, would be sent to Shantou (Swatow) in Guangdong Province.¹²²

With the case concluded and sentences carried out, the Chinese could no longer do anything but strengthen their stance and be better prepared for the next time. The embassy and the consulate therefore kept up a certain pressure on the Thai government.¹²³ Eventually, a compromise was found in the “Chinese Education Problem” so that on 27 August, the Chinese Embassy and the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a preliminary agreement. The Chinese schools were to prepare to open their classes again and were allowed to teach 10 hours of Chinese language per week while the teachers were required to take Thai language exams as regulated by the law. This agreement was to come into effect on 1 September.¹²⁴ On 30 August, a *Zhongyuanbao* journalist went to the Ministry of Education to conduct an interview. The Minister reflected upon the negotiations with Ambassador Xie:

“Because I have been negotiating the Chinese Schools Problem, I have often come into contact with Ambassador Xie and got an impression [of him]. I feel that Ambassador Xie truly is a hard to come by kind of fine diplomat. In each of our meetings we have felt like people on the same side with one another. Ambassador Xie is a person who understands legal theory and is proficient in international law. He expressed deep sympathy for the situation of Siam during the process of our negotiations. Besides studying the basis of legal theory, we have consulted with each other on the principle of mutual benefit with the result of finally finding a reasonable solution.”¹²⁵

A similar impression had already been shared by Deputy Minister for Education Naisuji two months earlier when he referred to the Ambassador as a bright and understanding man who did a lot to bring about a solution for this problem.¹²⁶

During the following days, the new regulations were put into effect and on 3 September, the Minister for Education, Mangkorn, explained their two main agreements: First, teachers of private schools were a part of the educational system in Thailand and thus had to comply with the regulations. Therefore Chinese teachers, too, had to have knowledge of the Thai language and were expected to pass exams within one year. Those who failed to pass had to take classes for another year and then take the exam again. Second, elementary schools could teach up to 10 hours of Chinese classes per week. It was now each province’s duty to

¹²¹ For a discussion of Chinese remittances sent to China see Skinner, 1957: pp. 224-227. Skinner does, however, claim that a much larger proportion of money made by Chinese in Thailand actually did remain in the country.

¹²² *Zhongyuanbao*: 28 August 1948.

¹²³ *Zhongyuanbao*: 3 September 1948.

¹²⁴ *Zhongyuanbao*: 31 August 1948.

¹²⁵ *Zhongyuanbao*: 31 August 1948. (“本人因談判華校問題，常與謝大使接觸，所得印象，感覺謝大使實為一位難得之優良外交官。在本人與大使每次之會晤中，彼此均有如自家人。謝大使為一位瞭解法理之人物，且精通國際法律。氏對暹國之處境極表同情，故談判過程。雙方除根據法理研究外，並在互惠原則下進行會商。結果終能達到合理之解決。”)

¹²⁶ *Guanghuabao*: 26 June 1948.

take care of putting the new regulations for Chinese schools into effect. On 5 September, the Ministry of Education gave the order to the provinces, and on 6 September, schools in Bangkok began to set their Chinese language classes accordingly.¹²⁷

Conclusions

For the Thai government the anti-Chinese campaign of May to August 1948 was a success. In a period when the Chinese community in Thailand was larger, better organized and both culturally and politically more active than ever before, the government had demonstrated its goals and that it was willing to take drastic measures to achieve them. The number of schools had been reduced significantly and they had been brought under a greater measure of state control, while Chinese teachers now had to learn Thai and would thereby serve as an example of integration into Thai society for their students. The raids, arrests and deportations had made the point clear: the government expected the immigrants to become Thai citizens and it did not accept any kind of political activity beyond the officially registered groups, especially nothing related to the civil war in China, and even registered groups could always be accused of criminal activities if deemed necessary.

To analyze the situation during Phibun’s second term properly, particularly with regard to the first year, we need to consider the international context. Just when the Cold War broke out in Europe, the Chinese Civil War simultaneously worked in the communists’ favor and national struggles for anti-colonial independence were the order of the day in Southeast Asia – in many cases led by communist forces. The decision to fight the Chinese community at this time was logical because the Thais considered that communism was not in accordance with the Thai mentality – which had been molded by Buddhism and a strictly hierarchical order – and was seen as something that could only come from the outside, especially from the Chinese. These had demonstrated an increasing support of the Communist Party of China and some Thais already feared a potential fifth column.¹²⁸ Phibun, however, did not yet consider communism to be a serious threat inside Thailand.¹²⁹ The rather small group of activists appeared to be easily manageable and thus his exhibited anti-communism was of a primarily diplomatic nature, as it consolidated Thailand’s position at the side of the United States. Simultaneously, the government still needed to be cautious of the Soviet Union and therefore confined its anti-communism to rhetoric, rather than making it an actual practice.

Indeed, it does seem to have been the right strategy because the Thai Chinese themselves did not yet devote too much thought to communism. Support for the Communist Party of China was mainly motivated by the wish for a strong Chinese government, not by ideological preferences, while the actual communists in Thailand were not only few but were oriented towards China without the intention of interfering in Thai politics. Outside the small communist media, there were only some rather unimpressed observations of communist activities in Malaysia and sometimes in the South of Thailand, but these were not considered to be connected to the community in Bangkok. Also, articles about communism were simply taken from international news agencies, while editorials and other kinds of self-written articles almost exclusively dealt with local events and the war in China.

Therefore the repression of all Chinese, both communists and nationalists, had priority and

¹²⁷ *Zhongyuanbao*: 7 September 1948.

¹²⁸ Thompson & Adloff, 1950: pp. 51-52; Wyatt, 1982: p. 267.

¹²⁹ Thompson & Adloff, 1950: pp. 59-60.

was conducted without any kind of political bias. The goal was not only to strengthen the economic power of the Thais and to keep politics an exclusive matter of the Thai majority – or rather the government – but also to culturally absorb the Chinese minority as far as possible in order to achieve a homogenous nation.

The Chinese, however, had a long tradition of cultural independence and a perception of self as being culturally superior. To be treated like this was a new experience for them which they were not willing to accept without resistance. But the community underwent a period of decisive change: on the one side, internal conflicts caused by the civil war in China had begun to weaken the community’s unity – political division led to conflicts in the social associations and some were distancing themselves from the *Kuomintang* and its representatives. On the other side, new immigrants, the founding of new families, the progress in social and political organization and a huge increase of cultural expression (especially through the press) had enriched Chinese life in Thailand significantly. The efforts of government officials, associational representatives, teachers and the involvement of the media demonstrated that the Chinese knew about their rights and also considered themselves to possess certain privileges which they were determined to protect. But as a peaceful community they were rather helpless against the often forceful repression of the government and in the end simply had to accept the new conditions. They were only able to preserve the quantity of Chinese-language lessons taught in schools that the previous Ambassador had agreed upon with the previous civilian government.

For the new Ambassador, Xie Baoqiao, it was a case of jumping in at the deep end. Just at the time of his arrival, the Chinese community was thrown into probably its most severe crisis so far, and he immediately had to spend months in difficult and tiring negotiations with the Thai government. He did get support from Consul Sun Bingqian and the Chairman of the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Zhang Lanchen, but it is difficult to say if Zhang might also have had motives concerning the distribution of power among the Thai Chinese. While a *Kuomintang* supporter for most of his time, he distanced himself from the party out of disillusionment for a short period in the late 1940s and early 1950s. If he had already begun to distrust the *Kuomintang* officials in May 1948, he might have tried to take up negotiations with the government in order to prevent the *Kuomintang* possessing too much prestige and influence. However, this is only subject to speculation and hardly verifiable today.

But no matter why and how, when it came to negotiations with the Thai government the Chinese bit on granite. While actually considering themselves a minority with a natural right to privileges and to be the elder brothers of the Thais, they mainly expressed their wish for friendly relations and for solving the conflict by consensus. But the Thai officials were diplomatically skilful and experienced in dealing with foreigners. Prime Minister Phibun, Foreign Minister Prince Priditheppong, Minister for Education Mangkorn and Deputy Minister for Education Naisuji all elegantly went along with the efforts of the Chinese representatives: they attended and held countless banquets, repeated the Chinese’s emphasis on the strong link between the two ethnicities, praised them as intelligent men of great insight and agreed to find a good solution through friendly cooperation. But when they were expected to state clear facts and act, they evaded the Chinese and referred to someone else in charge or the necessity to adhere to the law.

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