

THE EARLY KAPITAN CHINA IN THE MALAYSIAN STATE OF SABAH, 1887-1946*

Danny WONG Tze-Ken

摘要

华人甲必丹是一种最早存在于沙巴州华人社会里的领导机制。它是于1887年由北婆罗州(特许)公司所提出,作为沙巴州华人与政府之间的中间人。华人甲必丹的职位也是第一份受政府承认以作为领导华人社群的职务。本文旨在探讨沙巴州华人甲必丹,其职务早期的进展,看它如何从1887年的一位甲必丹增至战前的至少五位,但这些却是未被政府承认的。另外,本文对于此职务于二次大战之前,华人甲必丹和华人其他领导机制的关系进行了一番探讨。本文的最后部分,是针对战后数年的此项要职提供一个简介。

The Kapitan China institution was for some time an important feature of Chinese leadership in Southeast Asia. While scholars have disputed the origins of this institution, it is believed that the position was first introduced by the Portuguese in Malacca shortly before the turn of the seventeenth century. After Tin Kap, the

* This is a revised version of a public talk given at the Sabah Society in Hotel Promenade, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah on 18 July 2000.

Danny WONG Tze Ken is Lecturer at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur. E-mail: dannyw@um.edu.my

first Kapitan of Malacca passed away in 1617, new ones were appointed and this practice lasted into the nineteenth century in Malacca (Wong 1961). The position later became an integral part of local government in other places where sizeable numbers of Chinese were found. The Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) adopted this institution in 1619 when they appointed So Bing Kong to be the *Kapitein* of Batavia (Wong 1961). In Singapore, the position of "China Captain" was instituted in 1820 (*Journal of Indian Archipelago* 1853).

Kuala Lumpur boasted one of the more celebrated Kapitan China, Yap Ah Loy, who dominated the local political scene for several years until his death in 1885. He was in turn succeeded by two others before the appointment was discontinued in 1902 (Middlebrook and Gullick 1983; Chew 1984; Lee and Chow 1997).¹ In Sarawak, Rajah Brooke appointed Ong Tiang Swee as Kapitan China of Sarawak in 1889.²

The widespread nature of this institution in Southeast Asia suggests that it was looked upon as an important position by both the local rulers and the colonial administrations which took over the rein of government from the indigenous elites. The position basically symbolized leadership of the Chinese community appointed to serve as intermediaries between the local rulers and the Chinese. He was "officially vested with certain executive, administrative and, in some cases, judicial powers over his own people, and invariably acting as the channel between the Government and the community" (Wong 1961).

The importance of the office of the Kapitan China institution began to decline at the beginning of the twentieth century as other forms of community leadership began to appear. By the 1920s, the institution had almost completely ceased to exist in most parts of Southeast Asia. This however, was not the case in Sabah, East Malaysia, where not only did the institution survive, but also experienced some amount of expansion.

This is a study of the institution of Kapitan China in Sabah, where it first began in 1887 and has continued to exist until the present day. It has actually evolved from having only one Kapitan China in 1887, to 96 in 1998. Given the fact that more than a hundred years had passed since the appointment of the first Kapitan China, the persistence of what is normally considered an antiquated institution deserves attention. This paper examines the evolution of the Kapitan China system in Sabah from its introduction to the year 1941 and its development in the post-war period.

The Pioneer Kapitan China of Sabah

Historically, Sabah (known as British North Borneo up to 1963) was part of the Brunei and Sulu sultanates until 1878 when the North Borneo Chartered Company established its authority in the territory from 1881 to 1942. Between January 1942 to August 1945, Sabah came under Japanese occupation. After the war, Sabah was administered first by the British Military Administration (September 1945 to July 1946) before being declared a Crown Colony. In September 1963, Sabah joined Malaysia and became the second largest state in the Federation.

In their efforts to overcome the problem of labour shortage, the North Borneo Chartered Company brought in Chinese as labourers, and at the same time attempted to attract business venture into the state (see Oades 1961; Wong 1999). From this early migration process, the Chinese population in Sabah began to grow. There were 3,771 Chinese in the state in 1880 and about 5,000 in 1881. When the first census was taken in 1891, this number reached a total of 7,156 persons (Jones 1953). This growing number prompted the Chartered Company to think of a way to govern the community. As it turned to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States for guidance, the Chartered Company was inspired to adopt the institution of Kapitan China as a means to mediate between the Company and the Chinese and, at the same time, to exercise a minor role as controller of the community. The decision to appoint a Kapitan China marked the first attempt by the administration to designate a person to oversee the welfare of the Chinese in the state. The appointment also reflected the economic significance of the community in the eyes of the Company administrators.

Two appointments were made in 1887, the first being Fung Ming Shan, a shop owner in Sandakan in April 1887, with a mandate covering the entire Chinese population in the state (Wong 1997a). Fung was a Cantonese from the Tung Kwan district in Guangdong and had arrived in Sabah in 1882. He was probably one of the few Chinese traders who entered Sabah under the immigration scheme introduced by Sir Walter Medhurst (*NBSF* No.16, 1882).

The other appointee was Toonah whose jurisdiction was more localized, being confined to the settlement of Semporna on the East Coast. A resident in Sulu for 25 years and who had married three Sulu women, Toonah was the leader of a group of Chinese refugees from southern Philippines who were settled by the Chartered Company at Semporna. They were forced to leave their home in Maimbong, Sulu, after it was destroyed by the Spanish in May 1887. In his communication with his superior in London, Governor William Crocker explained that as "Capitan China",

Toonah was to settle all trivial disputes amongst the Chinese. He was given a flag and a "chop" (official seal) and his position was similar to that of a native chief to whom a small salary was paid. In carrying out his duties, Toonah had to report to the Assistant Resident at Silam near present day Lahad Datu (Chartered Company Papers 1887; Warren 1981). Even though appointed Kapitan China, Toonah's affinity with the Sulu people was perhaps instrumental in his appointment as headman for Semporna in 1891 with the title of Maharajah Santa Toonah (*BNB Official Gazette* 1891). As Toonah's authority was confined only to the vicinity of Semporna, and that the nature of his appointment had changed from that of a Kapitan China to that of headman of Semporna, his role as Kapitan China ceased in 1891. Henceforth, it was through Fung Ming Shan and his successors that the Kapitan China institution was kept alive in Sabah.

Fung was the proprietor of Fung Ming Shan & Co. at Sandakan. As Kapitan China, he was also invited to sit on the North Borneo Council, the first legislative body for Sabah that was created on 22 April 1887 in Sandakan.³ Despite the fact that the Chinese were still new to Sabah, the presence of Fung in the legislative Council as a representative of the Asian communities at this early stage of Western rule in Sabah was a distinct recognition extended to the Chinese community by the Chartered Company. Even though the Kapitan China had no voting rights in the Council, his presence opened a channel through which the interests of the Chinese community were safeguarded. However, as little is known of the actual function of the North Borneo Council, it also remained unknown as to how Fung had discharged his duties for the benefit of the Chinese.

While serving as Kapitan China, Fung continued to run his commercial business in general trading. Additionally, he was also a member of the Segama River Gold Committee, of which Chinese of various dialect groups were represented. The Committee was set up to monitor the gold mining activities of the Chinese in the Segama River basin and to which Fung was granted exclusive concession right to sell supplies to the Cantonese. Through this committee, Fung's role in defending Chinese interests was better known. In 1887, the Chartered Company proposed to impose a \$3 mining duty as a means to control the influx of prospectors to the gold fields. But the collection of the proposed fee was deferred by several months upon Fung's appeal. A recent trip to China had convinced him that the Chinese in Canton and Hong Kong were eager to enter Sabah as gold prospectors, and he argued for a delay in the imposition of the mining fee in order to encourage the inflow of suitable people (*BNBH* 1887).

Fung was obviously a man with financial means. His biggest revenue generator

had been his operation of the revenue farms. In 1890, he obtained the concessions to operate an opium farm and the rights to collect duties for the import and export of spirit. Both items were highly demanded by the Chinese community in the state (*BNBH* 1890). He was the donor of a big bronze-cast bell to the San Sheng Kung, the oldest temple in Sandakan, established in 1887. The bronze bell is one of two artefacts found in the San Sheng Kung temple which bore Fung Ming Shan's name in Chinese character (Franke 1987).

When the Chartered Company administration decided to establish a Chinese Advisory Board in 1890, Fung was appointed as its chairman (*BNBH* 1890). Representation to the Board consisted of elected members from the respective dialect groups comprising three Cantonese, two Hokkiens, two Swatowese (Teochiu), and three Hakkas. With the establishment of the Advisory Board, the pre-eminent role of the Kapitan China as the primary intermediary of the Chinese community suffered a setback as the sole channel of communication between the community and the Company administrators. Nonetheless, given the fact that Fung was also the chairman of the Advisory Board, his status as Kapitan China was not seriously threatened. Furthermore, the Chinese Advisory Board failed to make a strong impression and its effectiveness was determined by the initiative of the Government Advisor acting as the Protector of Chinese Affairs.

Fung's role as Kapitan China was one of considerable success. As leader of the Chinese, he worked for the betterment of the community's welfare. Consultation with the government afforded an effective conduit in championing the cause of Chinese interests. Some of these official meetings took place at the highest level, including talks with the Governor in 1892 in a discussion concerning the welfare of the Chinese community in the state (*BNBH* 1892). However, Fung's business interests in China and Hong Kong and his enforced extended annual absence from Sabah compromised the effectiveness of the office of the Kapitan China. This was especially true during the period between 1891 and 1895 when Fung was reportedly making preparations for his permanent departure from the state. As Fung needed to proceed to China on a business trip, his place was acted on by Wong Sow Chuan of the Sun Kwong Lung & Co. (*BNBH* 1890).

When Fung decided to return to China in 1895, the position of Kapitan China was offered to Koh Kim Hin, a Hokkien trader, and owner of Kim Eng Watt & Co. Koh was one of the earliest Chinese traders in the east coast of North Borneo. It is believed that he had come to Sandakan even prior to the establishment of the Chartered Company rule over that part of the territory in 1878. He was probably one of the two Chinese traders mentioned by William Pryer, the first Resident of

Sandakan, as someone operating a shop on the island of Timbang Batu. Koh also had strong connection with the Chinese merchants in the Sulu archipelago, especially in Zamboanga.

Like Fung before him, Koh was a member of the Segama Gold Committee, and the holder of the exclusive concession right to sell goods to Hokkien gold miners and labourers, as well as a member of the Chinese Advisory Board. Koh was Kapitan China for 16 years, serving until his death in April 1910 (*BNBH* 1910). As the North Borneo Council had probably ceased to function around the turn of the century, the channel to which the Kapitan China could voice his opinion on the various policies of the Chartered Company was also sealed. In order to make his voice heard, the Kapitan China had to depend on the Chinese Advisory Board, though he could still publicize his concern to the Chartered Company through personal communications. However, it is clear that the position of the Kapitan China was no longer as important as it was during the time of Fung Ming Shan.

Koh was succeeded as Kapitan China by Chan To Pun who served from 1910 to 1915. He was the principal Teochiu trader and the owner of Kong Teo Eng & Co. Chan was also a founding member of the Chinese Advisory Board, the Gold Committee, and the St. John Ambulance Association. A man of considerable wealth through his involvement in the timber industry, Chan was reputed to have some 500 coolies in his employment (*BNBH* 1887).

It was during Chan's term that two events occurred that affected the position of the original Kapitan China. First was the appointment of a new Kapitan China for the West Coast in 1911 and the other was the establishment of the State Legislative Council in 1912.

Economic progress and social changes since the appointment of the first Kapitan in 1887 prompted the Chartered Company to create an additional Kapitan China in the state. Hitherto, development of the state had been confined to the East Coast and Kudat. But with the establishment of Beaufort in 1898 and Jesselton in 1899, and the opening of the railways, the West Coast of Sabah began to assume some importance. Agricultural development along the West Coast saw a sharp increase in the Chinese population induced by employment opportunities in the rubber plantations that had sprung up along the new railway line and Tuaran Road, while others found work on the railway. With the growing volume of Chinese, the Chartered Company realized the need for a second Kapitan China. Thus in addition to Chan, who continued to hold the original Kapitan China office at Sandakan, a second position was established based in Jesselton and with jurisdiction over the entire West Coast, the Interior and Kudat. With this new appointment, the

jurisdiction of the Kapitan China at Sandakan was re-defined to take charge only of the Chinese communities in Sandakan and the East Coast.

The title of Kapitan China for Jesselton and West Coast was conferred on Ng Thiam Chuan on 27 January 1911 (*BNB Official Gazette* 1 February 1911). Ng was a Hokkien and the proprietor of Seng Soon & Co. in Jesselton but little else is known about him. He was the only Kapitan China for Jesselton before World War Two. The last time he was mentioned in a Chartered Company record was in the Civil Service List of 1916 in which he was listed as Kapitan China.

In 1915, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Jesselton was asked to nominate a candidate to replace Ng. As no reason was given, one could only guess that Ng had indicated his desire not to serve as Kapitan China. In reply, Chin Sam Loong, the secretary of the Chamber, informed the government that members of the Chamber agreed that "a Kapitan China would not be necessary, and resolved that such position be abolished, as the Government could communicate with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, in case anything should happen concerning the Chinese Community" (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915a).

The decision not to perpetuate the office of the Kapitan China clearly reflected the important role attached to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce by the Chinese community in the West Coast. This decision was accepted by the government, and no appointment was made for the West Coast and Interior until after the end of World War Two. Thus, despite the government's decision to have two positions of Kapitan China in the state, the Chinese were only represented by the Kapitan China from Sandakan and East Coast after 1915 (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915b).

Like their counterparts in the Malay States and the Straits Settlements, the two Kapitan China of Sabah were actively involved in the various functions organized by the government. They were also invited to sit on various committees and councils, including the sanitary board of the principal towns within their jurisdiction. For instance, Kapitan Chan To Pun of Sandakan was a member of the Sanitary Board of Lahad Datu as well as official Prison Visitor for Sandakan (*BNB Official Gazette* 1 February 1911). The two Kapitan China were also jurors and members of the visiting board for hospitals.

Alternative Chinese Leadership

If the Kapitan China was meant to act as an intermediary between the government and the Chinese community as well as the leader of the Chinese

community, such roles were becoming less pertinent by the 1920s. The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of alternative leadership within the Chinese community in the forms of the Chinese Advisory Board, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Chinese membership in the State Legislative Council, and the office of the Chinese Consul General. This multiplicity of bodies had invariably caused some confusion to the Chartered Company administration and within the community itself.

By 1900, the once active Chinese Advisory Board in Sandakan seemed to have declined in importance and ceased to play a meaningful role within the Chinese community. In December 1907, the Chinese Protector W. H. Peney forwarded a recommendation for the formation of a Chinese Chamber of Commerce after holding discussions with leading Chinese merchants and traders (*NBSF* No.1127, 1908). The idea was well received by the Governor, E. P. Gueritz, who in turn recommended that the Chamber be formed for the "improvement of trade in the state ... by affording a medium between British North Borneo and the countries with which trade is carried out" (*NBSF* No.1127, 1908). The first meeting was convened in March 1908 in Sandakan with Kapitan China Chan To Pun elected as its chairman and the Chamber became officially known as the North Borneo Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

It is noted that prior to Penney's proposal, a Chinese Chamber of Commerce was already set up by Chinese businessmen in Sandakan in 1891. It is also important to note that all the Kapitan China of Sandakan were office bearers of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce at one time or another, including the time when they were holding the office of Kapitan China. Thus, there were times when a Kapitan China served the community through his official role as government intermediary and an unofficial one through his position in the influential Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Likewise, when the Chinese Chamber of Commerce was established in Jesselton in 1911, Kapitan China Ng Thiam Chuan was among its first office bearers.

Following the establishment of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Sandakan and Jesselton, branches were set up in smaller towns. By 1920, branches were found in the towns of Tuaran, Papar, Beaufort, Kudat and Tawau. The existence of these branch chambers had allowed voices from the "periphery" to be heard. The Chamber's efficiency in maintaining strong links with all its branches helped to ensure the smooth administration of Chinese affairs, and in the process turned it into the most popular institution for the Chinese to voice their grievances and lodge their complaints. Being widely dispersed, the Chamber and its branches

were the best means to preserve Chinese interests compared with the Kapitan China who was confined to Sandakan or Jesselton.

In 1912, a State Legislative Council was established comprising various official members who were senior civil servants under the leadership of the Governor. There was also a category of non-official members representing various interest groups in the state and nominated by the Governor. The Chinese were represented by a Chinese member who also spoke for the larger Asian community. The first person so nominated was Kwang Tze Ying but whose term was brief and he was soon succeeded by Lim Swee Cheng.

The elevation of a Chinese other than the Kapitan China to the Legislative Council diminished further the status of the latter in the eyes of the Chinese community. Indeed, the Chartered Company never once appointed the Kapitan China to sit on the Legislative Council.

In 1923, the Chartered Company, probably as part of the government's effort in maintaining the State Legislative Council representation as the most accepted channel of communication between the government and the Chinese community, and also in response to the growing number of Chinese in the state, which by then had reached a total of 39,256 (Jones 1953), appointed a second Chinese representative to the Legislative Council. Kwan Hiu Sheung of Man Woo Loong & Co from Sandakan was chosen to occupy the extra slot.⁴ The government's move to strengthen Chinese representation in the Legislative Council was accompanied by a redefinition of the role of the Chinese member. In an amendment made in 1912, the Chinese representatives were to safeguard only Chinese interests, and not the wider interests of other Asian communities in the state (Ordinance No. 1, 1912; *NBSF* No.310, 1923a).

In 1916, China opened its consulate for Borneo in Jesselton. The presence of a Chinese Consul-General was agreed upon between the Chartered Company and the Chinese government in August 1913 (Tregonning 1965). The first Consul-General was Dr. Sia Tian Bao, who was sent by the Chinese government to oversee the welfare of a group of northern Chinese who had emigrated to Sabah in 1913 (Tan 1997; Wong 1998). The Consul-General's functions were concerned mainly with matters pertaining to immigration and the promotion of a Chinese education system in the state. Nonetheless, this did not prevent the Consul-General from assuming the role as a channel to which Chinese could turn for advice or assistance. Indirectly, however, this role further eroded the position of the Kapitan China.

The Last Kapitan China

When Chan To Pin passed away in 1914, the advice of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce was sought concerning his successors for Sandakan and East Coast. In response, the secretary of the Chamber, Lam Man Ching, promised to put forward some names (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915b). Incidentally, Lam had been the acting Kapitan China since 1914 (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915c). Two names were provided in March 1915, Lam Man Ching himself, nominated by the Chamber with 159 votes, and Kwan Woon Kwong of Man Woo Loong & Co., Sandakan, with 15 votes. Lam's appointment was formally confirmed in the *Official Gazette* of 1st May 1915.

Lam was a Hakka from the Bao An county of Guangdong (Wong 1997b). He first came to Sandakan in the 1890s and established Kwong Luen Shing, his flagship company and engaged in general trading. He had first earned his reputation as the leader of the Chinese revolutionary group, the Tung Meng Hui in Sandakan, having been appointed by Dr. Sun Yat Sen himself in 1905 (Hakka Association of Sandakan 1986). Because of his excellent education background, Lam was accepted as a leader of the Hakka community in Sandakan and became the president of the Yan Foh Hui Kwan, the forerunner to the Hakka Association of Sandakan.

Lam served as Kapitan China until his death in 1943, making him the longest serving pre-war Kapitan China in Sabah. He also served for many years as the English Secretary for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and chairman of the board of directors of two schools in Sandakan, the Chi Hwa school and Chung Hwa school (Chi Hwa Primary School 1989). During the Japanese Occupation, Lam was called upon by the Japanese forces to act as a link between the Japanese Military authority and the Chinese community, a task which he firmly refused, citing advanced age and health problems. For his refusal to cooperate, the Japanese army burned down his mansion not long after his death. Destroyed were his prized collection of Chinese calligraphy works.

The Minor Kapitans

By the 1920s most Chartered Company administrators felt that the duties and responsibilities of the Kapitan China were merely advisory, and his role was narrowly confined to that of a medium between the Chinese community and the government (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915e). Despite its diminished role, the Kapitan China commanded respect within the Chinese community. Many continued to seek

their help and to voice their grievances, especially in matters pertaining to Chartered Company policies that impinged on the interests of the community.

Even as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in West Coast had decided against having a Kapitan China to represent Chinese interests, there were requests for the appointment of Kapitan China from other towns. In most cases, such requests were made under the notion that the appointments would benefit the administration of the respective towns. In 1915, the West Coast Resident and the District Officer of Beaufort approved the election of Cheah Chu Yong by the Chinese community in Beaufort to be the Kapitan China of that town (*NBSF* No.1261, 1915f). The Governor, however, failed to endorse this on the grounds that the state was adequately served by two Kapitan China.

Nevertheless, the decision against having more than two Kapitan China in the state did not affect the unofficial appointment of other Kapitan China. These ad hoc appointments were sanctioned by local government officials, especially the District Officers. The case of Lam Man Chung (also known as Lam Boon Chung or Lam Man Cheong), the elder brother of Lam Man Ching, the Kapitan China for Sandakan, is an example. To the Chinese in Lahad Datu and Tawau, Lam Man Chung was the *de facto* Kapitan China from as early as 1911. In fact, Lam was listed as a member of the Lahad Datu Sanitary Board and appropriately addressed as Kapitan China (*NBSF* No.1261, 1929). This was a case of an appointment that was sanctioned by the District Officer but not endorsed by the state authority.

A similar case emerged again in Tawau in 1929 when Chan Fook was elected as Kapitan China in place of Lam Mau Choy, often considered the "late Kapitan China", who was believed to be a deputy of the East Coast Kapitan China Mr Lam Man Ching (*NBSF* No.1261, 1929g). The matter was rejected by the government's insistence on having only two Kapitan China in the state. Likewise, the election of Gan Kui Siew as the Kapitan China for the interior town of Tenom in 1930 was not officially endorsed by the government (*NBSF* No.1261, 1930).

Clearly, although the duties of the Kapitan China were poorly defined, the appointees were recognized as leaders of the Chinese community. The Kapitan China, though holding an ill-defined office, were among the most important personalities in the Chinese community. That Chinese in small townships opted to elect Kapitan China of their own was a demonstration of the eminence and importance placed on this office. Thus, aside from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Kapitan China was the most important leadership institution in the communal life of the Chinese of British North Borneo. The government's insistence on two Kapitan China did not prevent local authorities from arbitrary action in

elevating respected individuals to the status of Kapitan China to serve the needs of local administration.

The creation of *de facto* Kapitan China caused some confusion among later generations who accepted these persons as *de jure* "Kapitan China". Thus uncertainties arose in attempts to determine the "genuine" pre-war Kapitan China. The souvenir magazine of the pro-tem Committee of the Kapitan China Association of Sabah offers a classic example in which efforts to determine the old Kapitan appointees resulted in almost every Chinese community leader being identified as Kapitan China (Buku Peringatan 1997).

Post-war Kapitan China

In its planning for development during the first few years after the war, the British colonial government was acutely aware of the unique position of the Chinese. While recognizing the need to have some form of control over the Chinese, the colonial administration dispensed with the Kapitan China system in major towns such as Jesselton, Sandakan, Kudat and Tawau, and instead justified its introduction in smaller towns where the personal touch would be more effective in dealing with the Chinese. As a result, a Kapitan China was appointed in sixteen different towns, namely, Beaufort, Kimanis, Membakut, Mesapol, Putatan, Tenom, Sungai Paal (Tenom), Bongawan, Keningau, Tambunan, Lahad Datu, Tamparuli, Menggatal, Kota Belud, Ranau, and Tenghilar. In some cases, the appointment was an official confirmation of the unofficial title of Kapitan China that had already been associated with their names, as in the case of Tenom, Bongawan and Beaufort.

The post-war Kapitan China holders were very much similar to their predecessors in several respects. First, most of them came from the wealthiest group of businessmen in their respective localities. Second, they also combined the position of Kapitan China with several other public appointments such as chairmanship of the local branch of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese school boards, and the local Chinese temple. An example was Foo Pat Yin of Beaufort. Foo was a Hainanese from Wen Zhang county and arrived in Sabah in the 1930s. Before the war, he was already acting as a *de facto* Kapitan China. His multiple roles as chairman of the Hainanese Association of Beaufort, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Beaufort branch, the local school board, the North Borneo Anti-Tuberculosis Association and member of the Beaufort Sanitary Board, were instrumental in his appointment as Kapitan China after the War (Sia Soo Lin 谢诗麟

1995). By virtue of his diverse social standing, Foo was the undisputed Chinese leader in Beaufort. His counterparts in other towns were similarly well-placed. In other words, these Kapitan China wielded not only administrative influence, but also had economical clout and commanded respect.

The Kapitan China institution experienced different fate under different administrations after independence in 1963. For many years, the position of Kapitan China became obscure and fell vacant. Nonetheless, this had not prevented the local Chinese community to designate their own leaders as Kapitan China. The office was once again activated during the Berjaya Administration (1976-1985) and continued under the Parti Bersatu Sabah (1985-1994) and eventually Barisan Nasional (since 1994) administrations. On various occasions, it was placed under the Ministry of Local Government, and later under the Chief Minister's Department.

The number of Kapitan China had grown from a single appointee in 1887 to 96 in 1998. Today, appointees continue to play the role of Chinese community leaders in their respective localities but partly due to specialization, their functions have changed considerably compared to the pre-war period. Today, the Kapitan China is appointed not so much on the basis of financial standing though many are still indeed wealthy. The present day appointments are closely tied to political affiliations. The areas of jurisdiction have been narrowed down to allow them to focus on their responsibilities in representing the interests of the community.

Conclusion

First introduced in British North Borneo in 1887, the office of Kapitan China had undergone several stages of development. From being the most important leadership institution for the Chinese in the state before the turn of the twentieth century, it declined in importance among the Chinese as the sole channel for voicing their grievances. This was especially true after the emergence of alternate leadership institutions in the 1920s. This paper argues that despite this change, the office of Kapitan China has remained as an official bridge between the Chinese community and the government. This is evident from the requests forwarded from smaller towns seeking to appoint Kapitan China in their own localities. The Japanese Occupation of the state and the demise of Lam Man Ching marked the end of an era where there was only a single Kapitan China for the entire state.

The post-war period saw the colonial government resorting to the Kapitan China institution as a means to administer the Chinese community in smaller

townships. Since then, the number of Kapitan China appointments has been increased. Likewise, post-independence administrations continue to look upon the Kapitan China as the local leaders of their community. Today, the Kapitan China is generally regarded as *Ketua Masyarakat Cina* or Chinese community leader. Their jurisdiction and authority are also restricted to their respective villages or settlements. Further investigations are required to reveal the changing nature and role of the Kapitan China in the modern period.

Glossary of Chinese Names

Chan To pun 曾道宾
 Fung Ming Shan 冯明珊
 Koh Kim Hin 许金兴
 Kwan Hui Sheung 关晓雄
 Lam Man Ching 林文澄
 Man Woo Loong 万和隆
 Seng Soon 成顺
 Wong Sow Chuan 黄漱泉

Chen Sam Loong 陈三龙
 Gan Kui Siew 颜贵秀
 Kong Teo Eng 广潮兴
 Kwang Tze Ying 关子英
 Lam Man Chung 林文忠
 Ng Thiam Chuan 黄添泉
 Sia Tian Bao 谢天保
 Yan Foh Hui Kwan 人和会馆

Foo Pay Yin 符拔英
 Kim Eng Watt 金永发
 Kum Eng Watt 金永发
 Kwong Luen Shing 广伦盛
 Lam Mau Choy 林茂才
 San Sheng Kung 三圣宫
 Sun Kwang Lung 新广隆

Notes

1. Yap Ah Loy was a Hakka of Fui Chew origin. He was born in China in 1837 and came to Malaya in 1854 and started his career in the mines before making a fortune through his control over tin mines in the Klang valley and also as a revenue farmer. He was made the third Kapitan China of Kuala Lumpur in 1868 succeeding Liu Ngim Kong. For some studies on Yap Ah Loy, see Middlebrook and Gullick (1983), Chew (1984), and Lee and Chow (1997).
2. Ong was born in Kuching in 1864. He made his fortune from running the monopoly of opium and gambling farms. He became a director of the Sarawak and Singapore Steamship Co. in 1887. He was also for many years, the leader of the Hokkien Chinese in Sarawak. He died in 1950. See Cooper (1968).
3. Very little is known of the function of this Council, but it is conceivable that it played the role on an advisory basis to assist the governor in administrating the country. This should not be confused with the State of North Borneo Legislative Council that was established in 1912 and served as the precursor to the present day State Legislative Council of Sabah.
4. Kwan Hui Seung came to Sabah in the early 1900s to become the managing partner of the family-owned Man Woo Loong & Co. The company was one of the oldest surviving Chinese enterprises in the state, having been established in 1882. By the 1920s, the company had become one of the largest in Sabah, with diversified interests. Kwan's involvement in public life began with his appointment to the Sandakan Sanitary Board in 1912. In 1920, he became the chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. See Wong (1997b).

References

- British North Borneo Official Gazette* (BNB Official Gazette), 1 February 1911.
- British North Borneo Herald*, 1887, 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1910.
- Chartered Company Papers, 1887. CO874/243: Inward Despatches from the Governor.
- CHEW, Ernest 1984. Frank Swettenham and Yap Ah Loy: the increase of British political 'influence' in Kuala Lumpur, 1871-1885. *Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 57 (1): 70-87.
- COOPER, A. M. 1968. *Men of Sarawak*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- FRANKE, Wolfgang 1987. *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Malaysia*, Vol. III. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Hakka Association of Sandakan 1986. *Sandakan Hakka Association Centenary Anniversary, 1886-1986*. Sandakan: Hakka Association of Sandakan.
- JONES, L. W. 1953. *North Borneo: A Report on the Census of Population held on 4th July 1951*. London: University of London.
- Journal of Indian Archipelago 1853*. Notices of Singapore, Vol. VII.
- LEE Kam Hing and CHOW Man Seong (comp.) 1997. *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.
- Chi Hwa Primary School, 1989. *Majalah Kenanagan SRJK Chi Hwa, Sandakan Sabah*. Sandakan.
- MIDDLEBROOK, S. M. and GULLICK J. M. 1983. Yap Ah Loy 1837-1885. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 24 (2): 1-127.
- North Borneo Secretariat File (NBSF) 1882*. Report on Immigration and the Formation of Chinese Companies by Sir Walter Medhurst. No.16.
- 1908. Rule of the North Borneo Chinese Chamber of Commerce, No.1127.
- 1915a. Capitan China: Chin Sam Loong, Secretary, Chinese Chamber of Commerce to Resident, West Coast, 22 March, No. 1261.
- 1915b. Capitan China: Assistant Government Secretary to Residents of East & West Coast, 5 February, No.1261.
- 1915c. Capitan China: Lam Man Ching, Secretary of North Borneo Chinese Chamber of Commerce to W. W. Smith, Acting Resident, Sandakan, 11 February, No.1261.
- 1915d. Capitan China: Acting Resident to Assistant Government Secretary, 17 March, No.1261.
- 1915e. Capitan China: Government Secretariat Minute 652/15, 26 February, No.1261.
- 1915f. Capitan China: Resident West Coast to Government Secretary, 26 January, No.1261.
- 1923a. State Legislative Council: Governor to the President, British North Borneo Company, 1 May, No. 310.
- 1923b. State Legislative Council: Government Secretary to Governor, 20 December, No. 310.
- 1929. Capitan China: Resident Tawau to Government Secretary, 19 November, No.1261.
- 1930. Capitan China: Resident Interior to Government Secretary, 26 March, No.1261.
- OADES, Rizalino 1961. *Chinese Emigration Through Hong Kong to Sabah Since 1880*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Hong Kong University.
- SIA Soo Lin 谢诗麟 1995. 保佛的华人社会 (*The Chinese Society in Beaufort*). Kota Kinabalu.
- TAN Chee Beng 1997. The Northern Chinese in Sabah, Malaysia: origins and some sociocultural aspects. *Asian Culture*, 21: 19-37.
- TREGONNING K. G. 1965. *A History of Modern Sabah*. Singapore: University of Malaya Press.
- WARREN, James Francis 1981. *The Sulu Zone*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

- WONG, C. S. (Wong Choon San) 1961. *A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans*. Singapore: Dewan Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Kebangsaan.
- WONG Tze Ken, Danny 1997a. Fung Ming Shan. In *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*, compiled by Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.
- 1997b. Kwan Hiu Sheung. In *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*, compiled by Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.
- 1997c. Lam Man Ching. In *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*, compiled by Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.
- 1998. *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society: A History of the Chinese of Sabah*. London: Asean Academic Press.
- 1999. Chinese Migration to Sabah Before the Second World War. *Archipel*, 58 (3): 153-154.