Female Emancipation in a Colonial Context: the Chinese Community in Singapore 1900-1942

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Abstract

The advent of female Chinese immigrants was an important factor in shaping the Chinese community from an immigrant society into a stabilized community in Singapore at the beginning of the 20th century. Using a combination of Chinese language press and Colonial Office records, my study explores those primary sources to assess the voices of Chinese women, and examine how Chinese women were constituted as a group in the Chinese community during the colonial era. Chinese newspapers were an effective tool for disseminating information concerning nationalism in China as well as stirring up a consciousness of national identity within the Chinese community. Those activities carried out by the Kuomintang pushed forward the development of Chinese female education, and offered them opportunities to participate in the National Salvation Movement in the 1930s. On the other hand, three archetypes of Chinese woman - prostitutes, *mui-tsais* (domestic servants) and educated women - are introduced so as to examine their role in the formation of the Singapore Chinese community. The Colonial Office records are thus used to identify those Chinese female-related issues in order to examine the practices and attitudes of the British authorities with regard to the social ills within the Chinese community. The difference between the values of the western and eastern culture reflected in their policies towards these social problems among Chinese women, and how those social reforms represent the variation in Chinese females' family position and status in society throughout the colonial era will be discussed in my research.

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Introduction

Research Aim

From the first days of Singapore, it has been an immigrant society, with a majority of Chinese immigrants throughout the colonial era. Being one of the largest and busiest ports in the world, Singapore plays an important role in maintaining social orders and political stability in Southeast Asia as well as dominating the economic sphere. In the post-1945 era, most scholarly works have focused on the political, socio-economic, and cultural elements of the Chinese community and how its leadership has led to Singapore becoming a prosperous, modernizing country. Against this background, I began to analyse the relevant research on the Singapore Chinese community and found that there have been few attempts to examine how the social status of Chinese women and their position within the family has changed over time. In exploring the formation of the Chinese community in the late 19th century, the advent of female migrants could be viewed as an important factor in transforming the Chinese community from an immigrant society into a stabilised community by the turn of the 20th century. In this respect, my research will explore the developing role of women within the Chinese *disapora* from the late 19th century to the fall of Singapore to the Japanese (on 15 February 1942). Of the relevant sources, the Chinese language press[1] played a vital role in reporting matters concerning the Chinese

[1] See Xu Guoqi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism, and National Identity: China from 1895 to 1919', in C.X. George Wei and Liu Xiaoyuan (eds), *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 104. In the Chinese context, the press serves as a tool for disseminating information considering the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 20th century in China. The content of the press aimed to report foreign and domestic affairs as well as introducing new ideas, new terminology, and new information to the general public. In this respect, the press became an effective vehicle through which the Chinese community could share their feelings and understanding about China and the rest of the world; Hung Chang-Tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (London: University of California Press, 1994), pp.39-47. In the 1930s, press also symbolized a weapon for spreading patriotic messages and politicizing public opinion in China. This originated from the rise of modern journalism in the 1920s. The press was a powerful instrument for

community, including political, educational and social problems. Thus, it will be used as the main resource for assessing the voices of Chinese women, and examining how they were constituted as a group within the Chinese community during colonial era.

On 30th January 1819, Singapore was founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), and was incorporated into the Straits Settlement along with Penang and Malacca in 1826. A vast number of Chinese males, driven by the poverty in China soon arrived in the colony, seeking work. These migrants were known as *coolies* (苦力 cheap menial labourers), and were dominated by various dialect groups.[2] In the 1850s, the Taiping Rebellion (太平天國 1850-1864)[3] caused great social unrest and economic recession in China. Against this background of hunger, poverty, and insecurity, many Chinese women also migrated to Singapore**.** There were two ways in which they could move to Singapore: either arriving with their family or being sold by traffickers. The former group were mainly Chinese immigrants' wives or relatives who came to Singapore on a voluntary basis without being indebted; and most of these returned to China after a few years, with only a few choosing to settle in Singapore permanently. The latter group consisted of prostitutes and *mui-tsais* (妹仔 female domestic servants) imported by traffickers to the colony illegally.[4] They were often sold to brothels or Chinese families on their arrival in Singapore. In the 1860s,

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spearheading social change and raising public consciousness, and was effective in disseminating information and shaping the minds of a wider audience.

[2] See Henrietta Harrison, *Inventing the Nation: China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 70. In the 19th century, Chinese workers were shipped as bonded labourers from Guangdong to Southeast Asia. Most of them worked in the opium farms, tin and rubber factories.

[3] The Taiping Rebellion was a civil war in southern China that lasted from the 1840s to the 1860s. It was led by Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全 1814-1864) who fought against the Qing regime. The rebellion ended in 1864, and Fujian and Guangdong Provinces were devastated. This situation caused social unrest and an economic recession in China: many felt insecure and migrated overseas.

[4] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), p.16.

the Qing regime abolished its closed-door policy[5] and allowed its subjects to migrate overseas. From the 1870s onwards, the flow of Chinese female immigrants into Singapore helped to alleviate the imbalance between the sexes, and thus created a more stable society within the Chinese community in the early 20th century. There are usually considered to be three archetypes of Chinese woman: prostitutes, *mui-tsais* and educated women, and each will be introduced in my research to examine their role in the formation of the Chinese community.[6] By identifying the role of the educated women in the Chinese community, my research aims to explore the following questions: How did education change Chinese females' social position and status within the family? How did female education push forward the progress of women's emancipation within the Chinese community? And how did women intellectuals make efforts to help illiterate women to participate in social affairs?

Another issue to be explored in my research is the prostitution and *mui-tsai* system brought about by the human trafficking trade in the 19th century. The emergence of prostitution could be viewed as a demand and supply relationship between Singapore and China. The Chinese community needed prostitutes to solve the imbalanced sex ratio problem and China could provide girls for them.[7] Initially, the Colonial Government had adopted a policy of 'letting the Chinese rule the Chinese' and had not interfered in the business of prostitution in Singapore. However, the rivalry

[5] The closed-door policy originated from the fear of Qing government that its subjects would participate in the activities of 'overthrowing the Qing regime, restoring the Ming Dynasty' (反清復明 Fan Qing fu Ming). The Chinese subjects were hence not allowed to migrate overseas and merchants were forbidden to conduct business overseas in the 19th century.

[6] In the mid-19th century, there were also *Tsae mui* (自梳女 sworn sisters), female migrant workers in the southern provinces of China who went to Singapore to make a living. The Samsui women travelled from the Guangdong province in China to reach in Singapore in the 1820s and work in the mines, on construction sites and as amahs.

[7] See Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 17. The male to female ratio within the Singapore Chinese community was imbalanced in the mid 19th century. On the other hand, traditional Chinese values favoured sons over daughters, so many Chinese parents in China sold their daughters to traffickers. These were the two major factors in the smuggling of Chinese girls overseas.

between the various secret societies over prostitution gradually led to social unrest, and undermined economic development in the colony. The authorities concerned began to take effective controls by prohibiting the activities of the secret societies and enacted laws to abolish prostitution.[8]My aim is to understand how those social problems unfolded in the late 19th century and how the Colonial Government and the Chinese community handled these matters. By exploring the following questions, it is hoped to provide a new perspective for Chinese women's studies: How were the differences between the values of the western and eastern culture reflected in their policies towards these social problems within the Chinese community? How did the social reforms carried out by the Chinese community and the Colonial Government change Chinese women's lives?

Chinese newspapers served as an important source for exploring these research issues. From the 1880s onwards, Chinese newspapers played an active role in reporting everyday events within the Chinese community. The editors and writers of those newspapers were mainly China-oriented and primarily concerned with Chinese affairs. In this sense, the social reform movements within the Singapore Chinese community largely followed the pattern of events in China: namely, the Confucian Revival Movement, the New Culture Movement (1915-1919), and the May Fourth Movement (1919) throughout the colonial era. The main thread of my study will thus be to analyze how social reforms improved the life of Chinese women as reflected in the discussions in Chinese newspapers. In order to justify my selection of the Chinese press the following questions will be explored: How did the social reform reported in

[8] The relevant legislations are Ordinance NO.XI of 1870, An Ordinance to Prevent the Spread of Certain Contagious Diseases, Ordinance No. IV of 1880, An Ordinance to make provision by Law for the protection of Chinese Immigrants, Ordinance No.1 of 1887 An Ordinance to make further provisions for the protection of women and girls, and Ordinance No. XVII of 1896, An Ordinance to Consolidate and Amend the Law relating to the Protection of Women and Girls and for the Suppression of Brothels.

the newspapers shape the Chinese community, and bring about changes to Chinese women's lives in the public sphere? How was the growth of the Chinese press linked to the development of the Chinese community? What were the main aims of the Chinese leaders and Chinese intellectuals in promoting educational and social reforms with regard to Chinese women? How did educated women use Chinese newspapers to express their ideas through the women's supplements?

Literature Review

Newspapers

The Chinese press and Colonial Office records will constitute the main primary sources for this research. The former include *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-1907), *Lat Pau* (叻報 1881-1932), *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商報 1923-1983), *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (星洲日報 1929-1983), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* (新國民日報 1919-1939), and *Sin Chung Jih Poh* (星中日報 1935-1942), as these are considered to be important vehicles that disseminated information of cultural and political activities in the Chinese community. *Lat Pau* and *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* are available in digital format on the National University of Singapore Library website, while the microfilm of *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *Sin Chung Jih Poh* are located in the Singapore National Library Board and National University of Singapore Library.

In the past few years, little research has been conducted using the Chinese press in Singapore as a primary source to probe into the development of the Chinese community. The work that has been carried out can be categorized into two types: the

history of the Chinese press, and topics related to Chinese female issues.[9] Between the 1830s and the 1880s, the mercantile English press, such as *The Straits Times* (1845-) and *The Singapore Free Press* (1835-1962), became the predominant newspapers in the settlement. These newspapers focused on matters related to trade and foreign news, with a few items of local interest and local advertising, and were aimed mainly at the European, English-speaking community.[10] At that time, most of the Chinese inhabitants were labourers who had migrated to Singapore for the purpose of making money to maintain their families in China. Once they had paid their debts and earned sufficient money, they usually planned to return to China. As for the Chinese merchants, they went to Singapore for the purpose of making a profit in the settlement. Thus, they did not intend to invest their money in publishing newspapers, and for these reasons it was difficult for a stable Chinese-based readership to be formed in Singapore. It was not until the number of Chinese immigrants increased as a result of the abolition of the closed-door policy in the late 19th century that a suitable environment emerged for a Chinese press to emerge. The rise of Chinese journalism symbolized the changing policy of the Qing regime toward the overseas Chinese community in the 1870s. From this period onwards, the Qing regime noticed the economic strength of the Singapore Chinese community, and thus began to seek its support in Chinese affairs, by organizing cultural societies, promoting Chinese-medium education and establishing a Chinese Consulate to stimulate the

[9] Those works are David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932* (London: Routledge, 2003), Mary Constance Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore: 150 Years of the Straits Times* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holding, 2005), and Yap Koon See, *Man Xin Xinwen Shi* (The Press in Malaysia & Singapore (1806-1996)). Kuala Lumpur: Han Chiang Academy of Journalism & Communication, 1996.

[10] Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 66.

Chinese community's sense of national sentiment.[11] In this way, Chinese newspapers became an effective tool for disseminating information about political affairs in China as well as increasing Chinese identity consciousness within the Chinese community. In addition, these newspapers supported the reformation movement in China as part of an expression of overseas Chinese cultural nationalism and were used as vehicles for the movement to reach the general public.[12]

Against this background, the first daily Chinese newspaper *Lat Pau* (12 March 1881- 31 March 1932) was founded by the Hokkien Chinese See Ewe Lay (薛有禮 1851-1906). The purpose of founding this publication was to create a forum in which writers might assert their opinions to the Chinese public.[13] It also aimed to bolster the Chinese residents' patriotism and make them more China-oriented. Prior to 1911, these newspapers were mainly published by Chinese intellectuals, and devoted to news reports from China. In other words, the reformists or revolutionaries used newspapers to express or exchange their political ideas, presented in the form of

[11] See Xu Guoqi, 'Nationalism, Internationalism, and National Identity: China from 1895 to 1919', in C.X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu (eds), *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases*, p.104. The emergence and growth of the Chinese newspapers in Singapore between the 1880s and 1890s was influenced by the emergence of the new press and rise of the nationalism in China. As Xu argued, the defeat of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 brought changes to newspapers in China. The appearance of the political and independent newspapers started to report domestic and foreign affairs and brought new ideas of technology to its readers. Those new press was also crucial for the rise of nationalism in China. It encouraged readers to share and discuss their understandings and feelings about the world and their country. The sense of grouping became a key factor in carrying out political reforms in the late 1890s which helped to create national consciousness and national loyalty among the reformists and revolutionists. It can thus concluded that the rise of modern journalism had brought the emergence of nationalism in China, and those changes were also applied to the Singapore Chinese community in the beginning of the 20th century.

[12] Yen Ching-huang 'The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya, 1899-1911', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 3.2 (1976), pp. 35-36.

[13] See Henrietta Harrison, *Inventing the Nation: China*, p.117. The idea of utilizing newspapers as a tool for developing a sense of national identity originated in China in the late 19th century. The reformist Liang Qichao argued that newspapers should be used as a media between the government and its subjects for the purpose of transmitting government policies to the public as well as allowing the people to express their opinions to the government.

literary works and critical essays.[14] However, these publications rarely expressed concerns about the social affairs of the Chinese community, and therefore failed to receive wide support from the general public.[15] Ultimately, most of these newspapers ceased publication after a relatively short period.

Following the success of the 1911 Revolution and the establishment of a Nationalist Government in China, Chinese industry in Singapore also entered a new phase. The Kuomintang (中國國民黨 Chinese Nationalist Party)[16] further promoted Chinese nationalism among the overseas Chinese community in Southeast Asia. Chinese newspapers published in the 1910s aimed to propagate the KMT's political activities in Singapore and Malaya, seeking to develop an *imperium in imperio*[17] in Singapore and garner support from the Chinese community to alert the Chinese residents to China's national crisis and thus make them more China-oriented. As a result, the Colonial Government enforced stricter laws in controlling the Chinese community, and declared the KMT to be an illegal party. However, the rising tide of

[14] See Yong Ching Fatt R.B. McKenna, 'The Kuomintang Movement in Malaya and Singapore, 1912-1925', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studie*s 12.1 (March 1981), pp. 123-124. The Revolutionary Alliance (同盟會 Tong Meng Hui) used newspapers as an important instrument for disseminating political ideas and propaganda to gain support from the overseas Chinese community. In this respect, Tong Meng Hui's branch in Singapore founded *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* (圖南日報 1904-1905), and *Chong Shing Yit Pao* (中興日報 1907-1908) for the purpose of spreading revolutionary messages and its ideology among the Chinese community.

[15] Those newspapers were *Chong Shing Yit Pao*, *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*, *Nan Chiau Jit Poh* (南僑日報 1910), and *Singapore Chinese Morning Post* (星洲晨報 1909-1910).

[16] See Wang Ke-wen, *Modern China: An Encyclopaedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), p.131, p.290. The KMT also known as the Chinese Nationalist Party was established by Sun Yat-sen on 10th October 1919. It was the ruling party of China from 1928 to 1949. Many KMT branches were also founded in the overseas Chinese community. In Malaya, the main purpose of those branches was to united the Chinese from different dialect groups and keep it in close touch with China. Its roots could be traced back to the establishment of the Revive China Society (興中會 Xing Zhong Hui) in 1894, the Revive Han Society (興漢會 Xing Han Hui) in 1899, and the Tong Meng Hui in 1906. Initially, the main purpose of those organizations was to overthrow the Qing Government and establish a republican government in China, and, the main aim of the revolutionists' activities was to spread Chinese nationalism to the overseas Chinese community in order to obtain the local residents' supports. The Tong Meng Hui branch, founded in 1906, and reading societies in Singapore thus became the most important organizations for propagating Chinese nationalism in the settlement.

[17] *Imperium in imperio*- a state within a state.

the May Fourth movement[18] and New Culture movement[19] introduced new ideas of reform into Singapore- namely sexual equality, coeducation, vernacular language, and a modern school system.

In these circumstances, many Chinese-medium schools and newspapers were founded during this decade. Of these newspapers, *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* (1919-1939) published on 1st October, 1919 was one of the most influential KMT publications within the overseas Chinese community, providing a rich historical source for the study of the events within the Singapore Chinese community in the 1920s and 30s. The mercantile Chinese newspaper became more prominent in the Chinese community in the 1920s, the most successful of which were Tan Kah Kee's (陳嘉庚 1874-1961)[20] *Nanyang Siang Pau* and Aw Boon Hu's (胡文虎 1882-1954)[21] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. The main purpose of the entrepreneurs who founded these newspapers

[18] See Choi Kwai Keong,'Haixiazhimindi Huaren Dui Wusiyundong de Fanxiang' (Overseas Chineses Response to May Fourth Movement in the Straits Settlements), *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 20. 1&2 (1965), pp. 13-18. The May Fourth movement was a mass movement which started in 1919 following the handing over of the German possessions in China to Japan at the Versailles Peace Conference. Though initially led by Peking University students, the movement spread throughout urban China, appealing not only to anti-imperialist sentiments but also to many young Chinese people's sense of frustration that the promises of the 1911 revolution had been betrayed by an inept and fractured Chinese government. Often referred to as the 'Chinese Renaissance', the movement included everything from calls for an end to foreign (particularly Japanese) intervention in China to plans for a radical overhaul of Chinese society to make it more equitable, modern and unified.

[19] See J.A Mangan (ed.), *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies Modern China* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 120. The aims of the New Culture movement were to introduce the innovative ideas of positivism, equality, and democracy from Western culture to the Chinese society. The Chinese intellectuals' purposes were to make use of those ideas and build a new modern nation. David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.14-15, p. 115. The New Culture Movement in Singapore took place between June 1919 and December 1932. During this period, Chinese intellectuals used newspapers as a forum for tackling the main social problems within the Chinese community, namely women's liberation, individual emancipation from the family, social welfare and equality.

[20] See Yong Ching Fatt, 'British Attitudes towards the Chinese Community Leaders in Singapore, 1819-1914', in Yong Ching Fatt, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), pp. 303. Tan Kah Kee was a China-born Chinese who sought to promote Chinese culture, education, and nationalism throughout his life. He was chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce helping to organise the Hokkien clan association in Singapore, and also the prominent leader of the National Salvation Movement, that organized many fund-raising activities in the 1930s. Under his leadership, the Chinese community including the KMT, the Malayan Communist Party, the Chinese community became more united and harmonious.

[21] Aw Boon Hu was a newspaper magnate, chairman of Haw Par Tiger Balm and President of the Khek Community Guild.

was to promote, advertise, and sell their companies' goods in order to save on adverting costs. The function of mercantile newspapers was not only to provide financial and business information but they were also utilized by the Chinese leaders to support the Nationalist Government's anti-Japanese activities in China.[22] In this decade, prominent Chinese leaders used newspapers as the tool for promoting the boycotting of Japanese goods, highlighting the anti-Japanese aggressions movement, and made great efforts to raise funds for refugees in China.[23] In the meantime, the old classical language was replaced by the standardized vernacular, *Guoyu* (國語 Mandarin), and the use of this new language in the Chinese newspapers represented a new style of modern journalism in the Chinese community in this decade. The newspapers in the 1920s hence provided a new, simpler, and more direct way of conveying messages to the readers, which enabled the latter to understand the content of the newspapers more easily.[24]

Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Chinese leaders launched fund-raising activities and the National Salvation Movement in the colony.

[22] See Stephen Leong, 'The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10.2 (September, 1979), p. 293. The May Fourth Incident of 1919, the Tsinan Incident of 1928 (濟南慘案), and the Mukien Incident of 1931 (九一八事變) stirred up the Singapore Chinese's national sentiments against Japan. The Singapore Chinese Chambers of Commerce, clan associations, trade guilds, Chinese-medium schools, and Chinese newspapers played a vital role in disseminating information about these events to the Chinese community. Chang-Tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*, p.39. Of these media, Chinese intellectuals considered Chinese newspapers the most effective weapon for spreading patriotic messages and politicizing public opinion, as reflected by the growing recognition among the Chinese community of journalism as a respectable profession and the increasing readership.

[23] See Hung Chang-Tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China*, 1937-1945, p.153. The main theme of the wartime newspapers in China focused on the brutality of the Japanese army, the heroism of the Chinese soldiers, and the life of the general public.; Stephen Leong, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*, pp. 293-320. The newspapers were the main instrument for arousing patriotism among the overseas Chinese community. In Singapore, Chinese newspapers played an important role in bringing wartime news about China with the purpose of seeking financial supports from the overseas Chinese society.

[24] See Hung Chang-Tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* p.48. The use of Mandarin in Chinese-medium schools, Chinese newspapers and KMT activities has a great influence on uniting the Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese dialect group within the Chinese community.

The South China Relief Fund Committee (1937-1941) and South Seas China Relief Fund Union (1938-1941) were also set up to support these activities. In this respect, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* played an important role in strengthening a China-oriented loyalty by disseminating a vast amount of information on Chinese affairs and the national crisis to their readership.[25] In the Chinese context, newspapers could be considered a powerful tool in highlighting Japanese aggression, and the most effective way of galvanizing supports from the public to participate in the National Salvation Movement. Between 1937 and 1941, $146 million was raised by the Chinese community in Malaya, the largest amount donated among the Southeast Asian Chinese communities.[26] Although the Chinese newspapers were forced to cease publication and their offices were closed following the Japanese invasion of Malaya at the end of 1941, they played a vital role in the National Salvation Movement by stirring up the Chinese community's national sentiments, and gradually planting the concept of 'nation' within it. In the post-war period, this sentiment helped to solidify Chinese society and contributed to Singapore's transformation into an independent country in the 1960s

Colonial Office Records

In my research, Colonial Office records from the National Archives will be employed to explore the Colonial Government's administrative policy toward the Chinese community at different stages of the colonial era. File CO 274 Straits Settlement Acts (1867-1941) contains the legislation enacted by the Colonial Government throughout the colonial period. My research attempts to analyze how the Colonial Government's policies shaped and influenced the development of the

[25] Yong Ching Fatt, 'Pattern and Traditions of Loyalty in the Chinese Community of Singapore, 1900-1941', in Yong Ching Fatt, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 86.
[26] Stephen Leong, 'The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941', p. 297.

Chinese community. In the late 19th century, the policy of the authorities centred on controlling and banning the activities of the Chinese secret societies and prostitution. 'An Ordinance to provide for the better protection of Chinese Immigrants' (1873) and 'The Women and Girls Protection Ordinance 1888' (1890) were thus enacted by the Colonial Government, seeking to maintain the Chinese community's social stability and to foster economic development within the settlement. My study aims to explore the amendments to the ordinances; for example, the Women and Girls' Protection Ordinances and Chinese Immigrant Ordinances, in order to understand the changing policies of the Colonial Government throughout the colonial era. It may provide a fresh perspective for understanding the attitude of the authorities concerned towards the Chinese community.

The emergence of Chinese nationalism and KMT activities in the 1910s led the authorities to fear that rising Chinese political and economic power might compete with British political and commercial interests. The use of Mandarin in Chinese-medium schools and the use of these schools as platforms for reformists to propagate a KMT political agenda also led the Colonial Government to enforce stricter laws in order to control the Chinese community. Between 1919 and 1920, the boycott Japanese movement led to riots and several fatalities among participants in Singapore. Against this background, the Colonial Government enacted the Education Ordinance in 1920, requiring the registration of all schools, teachers and managers in order to restrict KMT activities. The Printing Presses Ordinance was also issued in 1920 for the purpose of controlling Chinese newspapers. These measures were aimed at maintaining social order in Singapore. Under such circumstances, the May Fourth Movement can be regarded as an important event that enabled Colonial Government to adjust their policy on governing the Chinese community. From the 1920s onwards,

the authorities concerned placed stricter control on the KMT's activities, and banned publications from China that contained reports of anti-imperialist or anti-Japanese activities in the 1930s.[27]

File CO 273: The Colonial Office: Straits Settlements Original Correspondence documents the activities concerning Singapore Chinese community (1867 to 1942). *Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs* (1931-1939)[28] surveys the important events in the Singapore Chinese community in the 1930s. The main function of these documents was to enable the Colonial Government to understand events in China and the KMT's political activities in Malaya. In addition, there exist many documents about prostitution and *mui-tsai* problems, for example 'Prostitution in Singapore: concerns over heavy incidence of venereal disease. Including reports for 1899, 1906 and 1923', 'Mui-tsai system in Malaya: concern expressed at its operation by women's rights and anti-slavery groups in the United Kingdom', 'Women and Girls Protection Ordinances, 1930', and 'The Mui-Tsai question: resolutions from individuals and Societies'.[29] The purpose of these ordinances was to prevent young girls or women from being driven into prostitution through illegal human trafficking between China and Singapore. It could be understood that eradication of these social ills had been the

[27] See CO 273/585/4 Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs: Nov and Dec 1932, and Jan 1933, p. 199. In the 1930s, the Colonial Government became aware of the KMT's political activities in Singapore. They noticed that the KMT were trying to instil the idea of nationalism into the Chinese community through books or journals that had been published in China Thus, the authorities concerned issued a Censor's Report in the Monthly Reviews of Chinese Affairs that listed the books or journals from China that were banned, and stated the reasons for this. For instance, the first edition of *Hai Wai Yuekan* (海外月刊 the Overseas Monthly Magazine) was banned because it contained anti-imperialist articles and KMT propaganda, while *Ji Qi* (激起 Raise) was banned because it contained a report of the miserable life of overseas Chinese living in the British and Dutch colonies.

[28] *Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs* (1931-1939) was edited by Sng Choon-Yee (孫崇瑜 1897- ?), the Chinese Assistant of the Chinese Secretary A. B. Jordon.

[29] See Yong Ching Fatt and R.B. McKenna, 'The Kuomintang Movement in Malaya and Singapore, 1912-1925', p. 127. The legislation of the Registration of Schools Ordinance in 1920 was the first step towards controlling Chinese nationalism and KMT activities in Malaya. In addition, the practice of censorship was also a important measure used by the Colonial Government in administering the Chinese community.

main aims of the Colonial Government throughout the British colonial era. These Colonial Office records provide a way to understand how and why the Colonial Government dealt with these social ills and how the Chinese community responded to these reforms.

Secondary resources

In recent studies, a vast amount of research by American and British scholars centres on the political, military, and general history of Singapore. The main focus of western researchers has been on exploring how the Colonial Government ruled multi-racial Singapore and the main causes of the fall of Singapore in the political and military sphere.[30] Conversely, researchers in China and Singapore have focused on socio-economic issues among the Singapore Chinese community, namely Chinese-medium education, social affairs, social problems, and the National Salvation Movement, with an emphasis on the formulation of the Singapore Chinese community, KMT activities and the rise of Chinese nationalism in Singapore.[31]

In the imperial history context, Singapore was considered as a mercantile society, and Chinese merchants were the middlemen between the Colonial Government and the Chinese labourers in the socio-economical sphere. There were two major ethnic

[30] The relevant works are Edwin Lee, *British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), Kay Gillis E., *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman Publishing Ltd, 2005), and Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Services and its Predecessors, 1867-1942* (Oxford: Olio Press, 1981); Kevin Blackburn & Karl Hack, *Did Singapore Have to Fall?: Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress* (London: Routledge, 2004), Brian Padair Farrell and, Sandy Hunter, *Sixty Years On: The Fall of Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002), and Noel Barber, *A Sinister Twilight: The Fall of Singapore, 1942* (Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

[31] The relevant works are Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Yong Ching Fatt's *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992) and *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1990); Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore in Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986) and *Community and Politics: The Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1953) .

groups co-existing within the Chinese community, namely, the China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese. The former consisted of immigrants from China while the latter were mostly mixed race- with one male Chinese parent and one Malay female parent who had immigrated from Malacca.[32] Lee Poh Ping in *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore* adopts a socio-economic approach to examine how British imperialism dominated the Singapore Chinese community in the 19th century. In Lee's account, the British authorities needed the Chinese for two reasons: to act as middlemen between the European merchants and the local residents, and to provide labourers for the rubber and mining industries. He held the opinion that the Colonial Government's main concern regarding the Chinese was economic interests rather than to incorporate the Chinese community into the colony. This attitude enabled the Chinese community, especially the China-born Chinese, to preserve their Chinese identity.[33] In this respect, the role of the China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese in promoting female education and its influences on the female emancipation movement will also be explored in my research.

From the 1870s onwards, the Colonial Government and Qing regime set up the Chinese Advisory Board and Chinese Consulate respectively to support the Chinese community. The Colonial Government intended to cultivate the support of the Peranakan Chinese by developing English-medium education, setting up Queen's Scholarships, admitting Peranakan Chinese to the British citizenship, and offering them jobs in government organizations. These measures adopted by the Colonial

[32] See Wu Fengbin, *Dongnanya Huaqiao Tongshi* (The General History of Chinese in Southeast Asia). Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1993, p. 208. Peranakan Chinese also known as Straits or Strait-born Chinese spoke Baba Malay and, the majority of them were Muslim. This group of Chinese immigrants from China migrated to the Straits almost 100 years earlier that the China-born Chinese. Some Chinese immigrants married *Nyonyas* (娘惹 Peranakan females) and their children were known as Peranakan Chinese.

[33] Lee Poh Ping, *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1978), p. 4.

Government divided the Chinese community into two groups: British-oriented and China-oriented. As for the China-born Chinese, the Colonial Government adopted the policy of controlling KMT and Communist Party activities in Singapore in the 20th century. Yen Ching-hwang's *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* aimed to explore the social structure and functions of the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaya between 1800 and 1911. He pointed out that the Colonial Government's records of the Chinese community were fragmentary in the 19th century. [34] However, it could be seen that the Colonial Government's policy was aiming at the suppression of the secret societies' activities, the prevention of contagious diseases, the abolition of prostitution, and the enforcement of KMT political activities. Its main purpose was to maintain the social order in order to foster economic development. Against this background, the political activities of the KMT in the 1910s mainly centred on seeking the support of China-born Chinese rather than Peranakan Chinese so the main purpose for the Colonial Government in controlling the Chinese press was to restrain the KMT's political activities in Singapore. Thus, the authorities' attitude towards social activities within the Chinese community was elastic, and the Colonial Government did not intervene in the fund-raising activities of the Chinese community in the 1920s and the 1930s.

In the overseas Chinese history context, the concept of a 'Chinese diaspora' has been widely discussed in historical and sociological studies.[35] In Singapore, this

[34] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. xi.

[35] See Ling-yin Lynn Ang's 'A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s', PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2001), p.96. Diaspora, a Greek word representing the act of dispersal, evokes an image of a people being scattered from a centre, a place of origin a home; Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays (Volume I)* (Singapore: Time Academic Press, 1998), p. xiv. In the Chinese context, the Chinese diasporas refers to the Chinese immigrants who were ,traders or coolie labourers, established their own community and preserved their customs in foreign countries. Although they adopted the lifestyle and language of the

phenomenon originated from the large numbers of coolies who migrated to Singapore in the 19th century, and their sense of isolation in their new environment created the sentiment of a diaspora. Wang Gungwu in *China and the Overseas Chinese* adopts an historical perspective to examine the push and pull factors that caused the Chinese *diaspora* in the formation of the Chinese overseas communities. The former derived from the Taiping Rebellion and opening up of treaty ports in China, while the later resulted from the Industrial Revolution and the increasing demand for labourers in the production of opium, pepper and gambier[36] and in plantations, and the rubber industry.[37] Wang held the opinion that *huiguan* (會館 clan organisation)[38] played an important role in helping migrants from different provinces of China gradually to develop their own triads or clan groups. It could be considered that the Colonial Government's 'let the Chinese rule the Chinese' policy led the Chinese community to form a society of their own.

Conversely, Ling-yin Lynn Ang's 'A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s' provides clear definition of the *diaspora*. She notes that most of the individuals in the diaspora retained a "memory" of their homeland, even if they did not regularly communicate with friends or relatives there. In fact, most of the immigrants never returned to their homeland, but memories of it

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countries in which they settled, they still abided by traditional Chinese customs. In the late 19th century, the Qing regime exploited this sentiment to gain support from overseas Chinese societies.

[36] See Carl A. Troki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p.10. Gambier is astringent extract of the tropical plant that grew in Southeast Asia. Its leaves are boil and turn into a hard paste, and are used in tanning leather are boiled as a dye.

[37] Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991), p. 176.

[38] See Ling-yin Lynn Ang, A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s', p.110. For Chinese immigrants, their familial and ethnic identification with the homeland is realised through clan associations, known as *huiguan*, which play an important role by representing a form of 'imagined community' which provides a link between the Chinese residents and thier homeland. Hence, each of the dialect group had its own *huikuans* in the Chinese community. Carl A. Troki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p.50. *Huiguans* were small organizations that brought together individuals of the same lineage and, occupational group. Those clan organizations were supported by the charitable donations of their wealthier members in the 19th century.

were passed down from generation within the family to generation through pictures, stories, and traditions. It was this national sentiment that caused the term *huaqiao* (華僑 overseas Chinese)[39] to be in widespread use at the turn of the 20th century.[40] The concepts of the Chinese *diaspora* and *huaqiao* were first used by the Qing regime and revolutionists to garner the support of the overseas Chinese. The Chinese diaspora could be considered an important factor in promoting the progress of Chinese nationalism among the Singapore Chinese community. The concept of 'falling leaves return to their roots' (落葉歸根 *luo ye gui gen*) thus made the China-born Chinese more China-oriented. Lee Guan-Kin further explored this issue regarding changes in the Chinese community. Initially, Lee argues that the concept of hometown (鄉 *xiang*)[41] was stronger than the idea of nation among Chinese immigrants in the 19th century. The language and region was the indicator for the Chinese immigrants to identify with other ethnic groups. [42] It was not until the 1870s that the idea emerged of pledging loyalty to China within the Chinese community. My study is based on the concept of a 'Chinese diaspora' in order to examine the Chinese government's policies towards the overseas Chinese community and its influence on the development of female education in Singapore.

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[39] See Ling-yin Lynn Ang, A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s', pp.113-115. The Chinese Nationality Law was enacted in 1909 giving all China-born Chinese lived overseas an official status of Chinese citizens. It signified that a formal link between the overseas Chinese and China was established. It was helpful in strengthening the overseas Chinese's loyalty toward the Qing Government and the latter could utilize this national sentiment to collect donations from their overseas subjects for the use of political activities.

[40] Kenley David, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, pp. 11-13.

[41] See Ling-yin Lynn Ang, A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s', p.100. In the Chinese context, *xiang* constitutes the distinct relationship between a *disapora* and its homeland. This concept of home is important as it is defined in both racial and cultural terms.

[42] Lee Guan Kin, 'Xin Ma Huaren Shenfen Renting Yishi de Zhuanbian' (The Transition of Singapore Chinese's Self-identification Consciousnness), in Lee Guan Kin (ed.), *Xin Ma Huaren: Chuantong yu Xiandai de Duihua* (Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity). Xinjiapo: Nanyang Ligong Daxue Zhonghua Yuyan Wenhua Zhongxin, 2002, pp. 61-62.

Yen Ching-hwang in 'Reformation in the Overseas Chinese History (1403-1941)' stated that the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism marked a turning point, when the Singapore Chinese community began to show concern for the political activities and social affairs in China. It could also be perceived as a way for the Chinese immigrants in Singapore to call upon their sentiments and memory of their hometown, and thus become more China-oriented.[43] Thus it appears that the idea of the Chinese diaspora was the key factor in the success of Chinese nationalism within the Singapore Chinese community. It was the concept of 'returning to their homeland' that prompted the Chinese immigrants to become attached to their mother country and these strong family ties to their homeland constituted the basic element of overseas Chinese nationalism.

The concepts of the Chinese *diaspora* and *xiang* thus became the key factors promoting the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1900s. The idea of Chinese nationalism was given different meaning in the new phase of Republic of China[44]. Chinese intellectuals began to propose the idea of bearing healthy citizens to make China a prosperous, modern nation. In these circumstances, the promotion of female education was considered the best way to cultivate well-educated Chinese women who could act as a good model for their children. This idea was also spread to Southeast Asia in the early 20th century.

[43] Yen Ching-hwang, 'Huaren Lishi Biange (1403-1941)' (Reformation in Overseas Chinese History (1403-1941)), in Yen Ching-hwang (ed.), *Xin Ma Huaren Shehui Shi*. Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chuban Gongsi, p. 26.

[44] See Henrietta, Harrison, *Inventing the Nation: China*, p. 149. The establishment of Republic of China could be perceived as the overthrow of the Manchu Government by the Han Chinese. It could be understood as a conflict between the Qing regime and Han culturalism that eventually transformed China into a modern nation after the Revolution of 1911.The changing ideas of Chinese nationalism was thus emerged in the 1910s.

Prior to the 21st century, most of the scholarship on Chinese female education in Singapore and Malaya provides only a cursory overview,[45] although more recent studies have explored this topic in greater depth. Su Jing's *Christianity and Singapore Overseas Chinese, 1819-2010*), explored female education from the establishment of Singapore to the 1850s. At that time, most of the girls' schools were founded by western missionaries. He analyzed the reasons of the inefficiency of Chinese female education in the mid-19th century, and described the difficulties that the school administrators encountered in running those schools, namely, opposition from the Malay and Chinese communities, and the missionaries' own indifference or discrimination against the establishment of girls' schools. Thus, most of the girls' schools did not receive a subsidy from the local government, and few Malay or Chinese parents allowed their daughters to receive an education. In these circumstances, most of those schools closed relatively quickly.[46] Moreover, most of the school founders were missioners or Christians who had not received any formal educational training, and were unfamiliar with the culture of the Chinese community. It can be seen as the root cause why female education failed to make progress during this period.

Most importantly, at that time there were only a few Chinese immigrants and it was difficult to build up a sound educational system during this period. The feudal family

[45] See Chen Guohua, *Xianquzhe de Jiaoyin: Hai Wai Huaren Jiaoyu San Bai Nnian, 1690-1990 nian* (Footprints of the trailblazers: 300 Years of Chinese Education Oversea). Hong Kong: Royal Kingsway INC., 1992, Tang Qing, *Xinjiapo Huawen Jiaoyu* (Chinese Education in Singapore). Taipei City: Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1964, Tang Qing and Song Zhemei (eds), *Xing Ma Jiaoyu Yanjiuji* (Research Papers on Education in Singapore & Malaysia). Xiang Gang: Dongnanya Yanjiusuo, 1974. The first book outlined the important events related to overseas Chinese education in chronological order; while the last two books introduced the major Chinese-medium girls' schools in Singapore, such as Nanyang Girls' School, Chung Hua Girls' School, Chong Fu Girls' School, and Nan Hua Girls' School. Those studies can viewed as important guide books for understanding the development of Singapore Chinese female education.

[46] Su Jing, *Jidujiao Yu Xinjiapo Huaren, 1819-1846* (Christianity and Singapore Overseas Chinese, 1819-1846). Xinzhu: Qingda Chubanshe, 2010, pp. 173.

system was a main reason why females could not receive a proper education within the Singapore Chinese community. J.A Mangan in *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* stated that it was Confucianism that caused female education to stagnate in Chinese society, as he claimed that it not only provided an ideological justification for women's low social position, but also underpinned women's inferior status within the family system. Chinese women were virtually without property rights and inferior domestically, economically and legally, being regarded as the property of men in Chinese families. Against this background, young girls were sold by their fathers into slavery, concubinage, or prostitution, while husbands pawned or sold their wives into temporary marriage to other men.[47] Confucianism[48] was the key factor that instilled these ideas into the Chinese society. The Confucian motto 'a woman without talent is virtuous' kept Chinese women within the family and considered education to be inappropriate for them. It was not until the reformist movement at the end of the 19th century that this sentiment was to change.

The reformists Kang Youwei (康有為 1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873-1929) in China advocated the importance of sexual equity in relation to women's rights and promoting female education, which signified the beginning of Chinese women's liberation movement.[49] These innovative ideas of promoting

[47] J.A Mangan (ed.), *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, pp.123-124.

[48] See, *ibid*., p. 5. The reformist movement had swept across China and matured in Malaya in the wake of China's defeat by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895.Confucianism: is essentially a system of social ethnics. The yin-yang doctrine was adopted to keep women to a subordinate position. They were relegated to an inferior role because they were designated as being weak by nature. Consequently, female education taught women to display total submission towards men. Physical constraints, particularly foot binding, served as a practical means of confining women to the home. Female bodies, therefore, were restrained to actualise and symbolise their subordinate role.

[49] See Yong Ching Fatt, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1990), pp.7-8. The defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War led China to sign a treaty of Shimonoseki with Japan in 1895, stating that China had to pay 200 million taels and

female education also spread into the overseas Chinese community. Chinese female education reforms were launched by Peranakan Chinese intellectuals in Singapore, as many of these had received an English-medium education, and parents were more open to allowing their daughters to receive an education. In *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, David Kenley examined the background to the promotion of Chinese female education during this period. At that time, Great Britain's early feminist movement of the late 19th century made great efforts to demand women's rights in the educational, career and political arenas. [50]

In 1897, Lim Boon Keng (林文慶 1869-1957) and Song Ong Siang (宋旺相 1871-1941) founded *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-1907) and used it as a forum for promoting the ideas contained in their essays. Chinese intellectuals intended to use this publication to stress the importance of eradiating the social problems and promoting female education to the general community. [51] As Lee Guan Kin demonstrates in 'The Ideas of the Singapore Peranakan Intellectuals on Feminism and Female Education' these educational reforms were mainly initiated by males, and few Chinese women took part in those activities.[52] This was also because most of the female Chinese immigrants were labourers, prostitutes or *mui-tsais* in the late 19th

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cede Taiwan to Japan. Appalled by China's declining power as a nation, the Singapore Chinese leaders Khoo Seok-wan (邱筱園 1874-1941) and Lim Boon Keng mobilized local Chinese to press for reform in the settlement, which led to the Confucian Revival Movement.

[50] Kenley David, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, pp. 165-166.

[51] The relevant essays are 'Female Education for Straits Chinese', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 11.2 (1907), pp. 41-43, 'Singapore Chinese Girls' School', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 6.24 (1902), pp. 168-170, Lim Boon Keng, 'Our Enemies', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 1.2 (June 1897), pp. 52-58, and Lin Meng Cheng, 'Chinese Women', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 2.8 (December 1898), pp. 154-158.

[52] Lee Guan Kin,'Xinjiapo Hai Xia Huaren Zhishifenzi de Nuquan yu Nüxue Aixiang' (Singapore Paranakan intellectuals' Ideas on Feminism and Female Education), in Song Nian Yang and Kang Ding Wang (eds), *Dongnanya Huaren Wenxue yu Wenhua* (Literature and Culture of the Overseas Chinese in the Southeast Asia). Xinjiapo: Xinjiapo Yazhou Yanjiu Xuehui, March 1995, p. 299.

century and did not have an opportunity to obtain a proper education. In fact, it was not until the establishment of the Nationalist Government in China that Chinese female education made progress in the 1910s.

After the establishment of the Republic of China, the concept of 'woman without talent is therefore virtuous' and 'worthy mothers and good wives' developed into the idea of the 'mother of citizens'(國民之母 *guominzhimu*). The term 'mother of citizens' or 'mother of the nation' was introduced by intellectuals in China, and then spread across the overseas Chinese community. Henrietta Harrison in *Inventing the Nation: China* argued that the 1911 Revolution enabled the Chinese to identify themselves as patriotic citizens through new customs and ideas.[53] The participation of women in the creation of the republic was regarded as legitimate and proper, which meant that women were given more rights in the public sphere. Henrietta Harrison's other work *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political, Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* raised a further question: to what extent could women participate in this new community as a Republican citizen? She indicated that girls had fewer opportunities to receive a modern education and thus were slower than men to adopt the new customs. In the 1910s and particularly during the May Fourth movement, Chinese women were regarded as conventional, weak and dependent upon men. This image also symbolized the backwardness and weakness of the nation itself. The increasing physical strength of women was hence bound up with the strengthening of the entire nation.[54] This concept could be termed the 'mother of the nation', which meant that, if a woman had an opportunity to receive a proper education, then she could nurture healthy children, and those future citizens would make China a

[53] Henrietta Harrison, *Inventing the Nation: China*, pp. 3-4.
[54] Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political, Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 76-78.

powerful modern nation.[55] Based upon these discussions, my research aim to explore how the idea of worthy mothers and good wives' transferred to the idea of 'mother of citizens' in Chinese community in Singapore, and how these ideas influenced or promoted the Chinese women's lives.

Against this background, education was considered the most effective tool for making overseas Chinese more China-oriented, and it also indirectly promoted the development of female education. Many Chinese girls' schools were thus founded in the 1910s. The Chinese-medium girls' schools adopted the school system of China and played an important role in elevating Chinese girls' educational levels within the Singapore Chinese community. Paul Bailey in *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century* focused on the discourses of female education in China from the 1890s to the early 1920s, during which period the Chinese intellectuals in the Qing regime and the nationalist government carried out educational reforms for the purpose of nation-building to invigorate China's economy and society. The promotion of female education was hence one of these important reforms. Bailey assumed that female education should focus on supplementing women's traditional virtues with modern knowledge to cultivate skilled, diligent, efficient household managers who might help to create social stability, family harmony, and national prosperity.[56] Bailey's researches suggest that the main focus of the educational reform still centred on the development of a modern nation, and thus their demands related to Chinese women lives still restricted in the concept of 'worthy wives and good mothers'. My study is based on the Bailey's understanding of female education and examines the Singapore Chinese

[55] J.A Mangan (ed.), *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, p. 99.
[56] Paul, Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.120.

intellectuals' discussions about female education in the Chinese newspapers throughout the colonial era.

Karen Teoh in her thesis 'A Girl without Talent is Therefore Virtuous: Educating Chinese Girls in British Malaya and Singapore, 1850s-1960s' adopted a cross cultural comparative approach to examine the motivations and strategies of various groups, such as missionaries, the colonial government and Chinese reformists, regarding the reform of female education.[57] She employed oral history and personal interviews as the main approach in exploring the life of educated women. In Teoh's view, the Chinese girls' schools offered up an entirely new range of career options, bringing overseas Chinese girls and women in Malaya and Singapore into greater contact with each other as well as with transnational forces of nationalism and modernization.[58] Based upon these studies, the main focus of my research will be to explore the role of Chinese women in the transforming stage from 'worthy mothers and good wives' to 'mother of the nation', and how this promoted the development of Chinese female education. It could be assumed that Chinese community was following the patterns of China with regard to Chinese female education. I seek to compare the similarities and differences between the educational reforms in China and those of the Chinese community within Singapore and how these elevated women's social status and position within the family. Thus, the focus of my study is on using Chinese newspapers as primary sources to provide a fresh perspective for examining the influences of education on the female emancipation movement in Singapore.

Against this background, the May Fourth movement and New Culture movement in China produced innovative ideas about social reforms within the Singapore Chinese

[57] Karen M. Teoh, 'A Girl without Talent is therefore Virtuous: Educating Chinese Girls in British Malaya and Singapore, 1850s-1960s', PhD thesis (Harvard University, 2008), p. 139.
[58] *Ibid,* p. 177.

community. Marriage autonomy and economic independence were the major demands of the women's emancipation movement, symbolizing that Chinese women were no longer restricted to the conventional Chinese customs, and possessed the ability to make their own living. Esther Quah Sok Khee in 'Divorce among the Chinese in Singapore 1819-1960' stated that modern conservatism among the Chinese community was the major factor that hampered the progress of marriage reform. Traditionally, Chinese males were permitted to marry a principal wife then acquire a few *tsais* (妾 secondary wives). By the 1920s, divorce was considered legal in China. But, most of the Chinese males in Singapore regarded legitimate divorce as symbolizing their inability to maintain a family and harming their dignity. As for women, they believed that divorce would deprive them of their role as a mother, a daughter-in-law, and a wife. In other words, the conventional marriage system provided Chinese women with a sense of security and fulfilment as a mother and wife, even if they were confined within the family.[59]

Under such circumstances, the authorities concerned set up the Chinese Marriage Committee to collect the Chinese community's opinions on marriage and divorce in 1925. At the same time, Chinese newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* also provided a forum for the different dialect groups to state their opinions about the Chinese marriage system. However, the marriage reform ultimately failed. The conflict between the authorities concerned and the Chinese community were the key factor in the stagnation of the Chinese marriage reform in the 1920s. As for the Chinese community, they considered that the Colonial Government was attempting to take control of the administration of the Chinese

[59] Esther Quah Sok Khee, 'Divorce among the Chinese in Singapore 1819-1960', Academic exercise (National University of Singapore, 1990), pp. 2-3.

community and thus rejected the proposed marriage reform. The discussions in the newspapers reflected the different values of the western and Chinese cultures. Analysing the content of these discussions among the Chinese community also provides another perspective for understanding the influence of traditional Chinese values on the overseas Chinese community. In addition, the concept of modern conservatism will be employed in my study in order to understand the changing ideas of Chinese intellectuals on marriage reform during the pre-war period.

Fan Ruolan in *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)* also states that the development of female education in the 1930s had cultivated women intellectuals and thus enabled them to become economically independent. It gave them the opportunity to participate in social affairs, which gradually changed the Chinese community's viewpoint of the traditional role of women in the family, and elevated their social position and status within the family.[60] Although Chinese female education was making progress in Singapore and Malaya by the turn of the 20th century, only a few Chinese girls had the opportunity to receive an education, as the 'modern conservatism' of the Chinese community (combined with a patriarchal system) hampered the development of education. Thus, most educated women were still restricted by the conventional Chinese customs, and located themselves within the home and family. At that time, many male intellectuals noted the importance of allowing their womenfolk to receive an education but still opposed their demands to participate fully in social affairs. In other words, educated women were only allowed to participate in the social affairs allowed by their fathers or husbands in the 1920s. Based on Fan's research on the

[60] Fan Ruolan, *Yimin, Xingbie yu Huaren Shehui: Malaya Huaren Funü Yanjiu* (Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941*)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 2005, pp.170-172.

Chinese female education, my study will use Chinese newspapers to examine the influence of modern conservatism on female education.

In the 1930s, the National Salvation Movement offered Chinese women the same opportunity as men to participate in social affairs. The Singapore Chinese community played an important role in leading the fund-raising activities and boycotting Japanese goods in Southeast Asia during this period. Leow Hwei Min's thesis 'A Study of the Coverage of Feminine Issues in Singapore-Malayan Chinese Newspapers' Women-Supplements: The Pre-War Years (1937-1942)' used newspaper reports as the main sources to outline the activities of the women's association in the Sino-Japanese War. Leow's work focused on the essays drawn from 11 women's supplements in Chinese newspapers in Singapore and Malaya, such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *Sin Kuo Min Poh*, categorizing the main themes of female issues into: the feminist movement, the National Salvation Movement, marriage, education, and careers, the Singapore Chinese community played a leading rule in the educational and cultural sphere of Malaya. Leow considered that Singapore Chinese women were the most active in participating in the National Salvation movement and were regarded as playing the leading role in the Southeast Asian Chinese communities. However, the influences of women's supplements on female emancipation are not fully explored in Fan's research. In this sense, my study will further explore the representation of female in the women's supplements, and their contributions to the female emancipation movement.

Fan indicated that the female activities in the National Salvation Movement were regarded as part of the political mobilization of the Chinese community. She held the opinion that the activities of the women's associations in Singapore followed the

pattern of the National Salvation Movement in China. However, most of the female participants did not have any political allegiance to the KMT or the Chinese Communist Party. Most of the time, they were simply following the instructions of the Chinese leaders in carrying out their fund-raising activities. Compared to China, the number of women's associations and participants was relatively small. Thus, it could only be considered as the first social mobilization movement that Singapore Chinese women participated in the history of the Chinese community. In these circumstances, the family and educational background of the leading women intellectuals in the National Salvation Movement will be explored in my study in order to understand their main demands relating to those activities.

The influx of Chinese female immigrants throughout the colonial period caused social problems in Singapore in the form of prostitution and the mui-tsai system. Many researchers have discussed the origins and influences of those social ills during Colonial era. Kani Hiroaki, in '*Zhu Hua': The Girls who were Sold Overseas*, used primary sources, such as correspondence and official reports in Hong Kong's Po Leung Kuk, to examine the background of human trafficking in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. He indicated that the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia were formed on the basis of a coolie trade society and the trafficking of women and girls in this region was closely linked with the coolie trade in the 19th century. Thus, Hiroaki held the opinion that that this phenomenon was a result of the rising price of Chinese women in the human trafficking market. Based on Hiroaki's research, the main focus of my study is to explore the policies enacted by the Colonial Government, and the discussions printed in the newspapers between Singapore's Chinese intellectuals on prostitution. James Warren in *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, used Coroners' Records to identify the population, location

and size of the brothels in Singapore and explore the history of prostitution in Singapore. He indicated that the roots of prostitution lay in the patriarchal system of China, and the human trafficking trade had turned prostitutes into profitable market commodities by the 19th century.[61] From this discussion, it can be concluded that female servitude was a common phenomenon in China that led to the human trafficking trade in Southeast Asia. In this respect, prostitution should be viewed as a Chinese problem which can provide a better understanding of the reasons why the Colonial Government was unsuccessful in abolishing this system in the early 20th century.

The *mui-tsai* system was another social ill within the Singapore Chinese community throughout the British colonial period. In the late 19th century, many Chinese girls were sold or transferred to wealthy families to engage in household duties. This was known as the mui-tsai system and originated from the servant girl system in China. The *mui-tsais*' main task was to undertake domestic work in exchange for food and shelter. Their main tasks were running errands, cooking and the cleaning house. When they grew up, their employers would decide if they married or remained in domestic servitude in the household. They could also be child brides who married to their owner's son when they grew up. Some of them became the concubines of their owners. As Wilfrid Woods discussed in *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission,* the *mui-tsai* system was a phenomenon peculiar to the Chinese community, and it was unlikely that British laws could be relied upon

[61] James Warren, Pirates, *Prostitutes and Pullers: Explorations in the Ethno- and Social History of Southeast Asia* (University of Western Australia Press, 2008), p. 12.

to eliminate this social ill. In other words, this system originated from conventional Chinese customs and its necessity for the maintenance of Chinese society.[62]

Similarly, Rachel Leow in *Contexts of Abolition: the mui tsai controversy in British Malaya, 1878-1938* considered that the *mui-tsai* system was a philanthropic solution to the infanticide in conventional Chinese families for giving up their daughters. In return, the natal families could also receive a sum of money and therefore their financial burdens were reduced. In this respect, it could be viewed as a win-win situation for the natal parents and the adopted families, which meant that infanticide would not happen and the financial problem were solved as well.[63] Her another work, 'Do you Own Non-Chinese Mui tsai?' Reexamining Race and Female Servitude in Malaya and Hong Kong, 1919–1939', further indicates that the Colonial Government should have considered *mui-tsais* as a 'Chinese question', which would have enabled them to concoct a better solution for improving *mui-tsais*' lives.[64] Based upon these discussions, the main aim of my research was to analysis how the patriarchal system, directly or indirectly, led to the emergence of the *mui-tsai* system in Singapore.

As the problems of prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system were brought to public attention, the Colonial Government and Chinese community managed to find ways to eradicate these social ills. The authorities concerned thus enacted ordnances and set up organisations to protect women and girls. Chinese intellectuals also published their opinions in the Chinese press, and urged the authorities to implement schemes for rescuing prostitutes and *mui-tsais* from their miserable life. These researches suggest

[62] Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1937)**,** pp. 303-312.
[63] Rachel Leow, *Contexts of Abolition: the Mui Tsai Controversy in British Malaya* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2008), p. 2.
[64] Rachel Leow, 'Do you Own Non-Chinese Mui tsai?' Reexamining Race and Female Servitude in Malaya and Hong Kong, 1919–1939', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46.6 (November 2012), p. 1738.

that the *mui-tsai* system was a phenomenon that was peculiar to the Chinese community. The different attitudes of the Chinese community and the Colonial Government were reflected in their social reform of the *mui-tsai* system, which will thus form a major theme of my study.

Methodological Approach

The main theme of my research is to explore the changes and variation in Singapore Chinese women's social status and position within the family from the perspective of the popular Chinese press of the early 20th century. My approach will therefore examine how the Chinese press fits into the history of the Chinese community and issues relating to Chinese women. About 20 Chinese language newspapers existed in Singapore from the 1880s to the 1940s, differing in content and political position. Thus, the publishers, layouts, and purpose of establishing the newspapers will also be analysed in my research: to identify how Chinese newspapers reported the important events occurring within the Chinese community.

Firstly, my approach aims to examine how Chinese newspapers reported and interpreted the life and activities of Chinese females in the early 20th century. Previous western studies found it hard to use Chinese newspapers in the Colonial era, as most western researchers were unfamiliar with Mandarin so it was difficult for them to use newspapers as their primary source for gathering and analysing opinions within the Chinese community about female issues. As for studies from Asian sources, most of the works came from the 'academic exercise'[65] at the National Singapore University. The main focus of these researches was to introduce and analyse the

[65] This is the essays written by the students of National University of Singapore in their final year of the university.

contents of the newspapers, with no particular regard for Chinese female issues.[66] My aim is to make use of reports and essays from the Chinese press to probe into how the Chinese community leaders and intellectuals addressed Chinese female education, and how the educational reforms changed the position of Chinese females. In addition, reports and concentrates on how discussions regarding prostitution and the mui-tsai system will also be analyzed in order to understand how those social ills influence the Chinese community. In this sense, my research intends to explore the motives of the Chinese leaders in implementing the educational and social reforms for Chinese females by analysing the relevant newspaper reports in light of the following question: did they launch these reforms with the aim of improving women's life, were they merely following the world trends or were they are simply following the patterns of the social reforms implemented in China throughout the Colonial era?

Secondly, the methodological approach concentrates on how the women's supplements in Chinese newspapers serve as a platform for the general public to discuss female issues, and charts the changes in women's supplements between the 1920s and 30s to understand the main focus on female issues within the Chinese community. Yee Ji-Yun (葉季允 1859-1921) asserted that newspapers were the public instruments of a society, and the only medium through which public opinion could be expressed. Newspapers served as the mouthpiece for society and their position should have been neutral in seeking to deliver public opinion[67]. The

[66] The relevant studies are Teng Huey Bin, 'An Analysis of the News Content of the Union Times, 1908-1941', Academic exercise (National University of Singapore, 1998). Yeo Aik Ser, 'An Analysis of the News Content of Lat Pau, 1887-1932', Academic exercise (National University of Singapore, 1998). Kiat Wai Keong, 'An Analysis of the News Content of the Kok Min Jit Poh and Sin Kuk Min Jit Poh, 1919-1940', Academic exercise (National University of Singapore, 1999).

[67] Yap Koon See, *Ma Xin Xinwen Shi* (The Press in Malaysia & Singapore (1806-1996)). Kuala Lumpur: Han Chiang Academy of Journalism & Communication, 1996, pp.21-22.

emergence of supplements[68] thus plays a role in Chinese newspapers. In 1906, *Lat Pau* added a supplementary page, containing essays, poetry, and short stories, which signified the emergence of supplements in the Chinese press. Prior to 1920, Chinese newspapers put emphasis on critical essays and reports from China, and hence showed less concern for supplements. From the 1920s onwards however, supplements were used to introduce the new ideas of the May Fourth Movement and New Culture Movement into Singapore. By the same token, the Chinese press began to use the vernacular language or Mandarin in the supplement, which enabled readers from a greater variety of socio-economic groups and educational background to read and understand the arguments contained there.[69] In 1925, the first women's supplement 'Women's Section' was published by *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, and further women's supplements appeared in the major Chinese newspapers in the 1930s. Those supplements played an important role in providing a forum in which educated women could express their ideas to the public as well as providing a channel for making women aware of their situation and that they should obtain the same rights as men in terms of sexual equality and economic independence.[70] My approach is to examine how the women's supplements represent the progress of women's emancipation movement within in the Chinese community. The female leaders of the women's associations within the National Salvation Movement and how they expressed their ideas in women's supplements will also be explored.

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[68] See David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, pp. 77-78. *Fuzhang* (副刊 supplement) was usually half or a sheet of paper added in the newspapers, which provided a space for general public to discuss or share their ideas. Most of the supplements contained poetry, essays, prose and stories. Some of them would select articles from China which was very common in the Singapore Chinese newspapers. This was due to the fact that major Chinese newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, often employed the chief editors from China.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 165-66.

[70] Those supplements were *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*'s Women's World, Modern Women, Women and Youth, *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s Modern Women, Women in Nanyang, Women's Life and Women's World, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s Women's World, Women's Circle, and *Sin Chung Jit Poh*'s Women's World and The Women.

Lastly, my approach will look to identify Chinese female-related issues in Colonial Office records in order to examine the practices and attitudes of the authorities towards the social ills within the Chinese community. Documents and legislations regarding prostitution, venereal disease, and the *mui-tsai* problem will be used in order to understand the Chinese community's response to these issues. In addition, there will be comparisons between the *mui-tsai* system in Hong Kong and Singapore in order to understand the differing attitudes of the Colonial Government toward this issue. Against this background, I also aim to examine how the different views of female problems are reflected in western and Chinese societies and how they work together to deal with these matters.

Content of Thesis

After this introductory chapter, Chapter I will examine how Chinese female immigration made the Singapore Chinese community a stable society at the turn of the 20th century. On the one hand, reports by the English press in *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press* will be cited in order to understand the reasons why Chinese female immigrants migrated to Singapore. On the other hand, the flow of Chinese female immigrants also led to serious social problems in the late 19th century: namely, prostitution and the *mui-tsai* problem. The Colonial Office records will thus be used to explore the Colonial Government's policies regarding the Chinese community. Chapter II will looks at the establishment and development of Chinese female education from the late 19th century to the May Fourth movement in 1920. Both English and Chinese-medium education will be examined in order to understand the Colonial Government and Chinese community's policies regarding the promotion of Chinese female education. Reports regarding Chinese-medium education from *Lat*

Pau and *Straits Chinese Magazine* will also be used to understand the attitude of the Chinese community toward female education. However, it was not until the success of the 1911 Revolution and establishment of the Nationalist Government that female education made progress in the settlement. The spread of Chinese nationalism in the Singapore Chinese community raised the idea of 'mother of the nation' and led to the establishment of the Chinese-medium girls' schools in the 1910s.

Chapter III will explore the life of educated and uneducated Chinese women in the 1920s. The development, activities and difficulties that the Chinese girls' schools encountered during this decade will be discussed in order to understand the variation in female education. Hence, both educated and uneducated women's social status and position within the family will also be investigated in order to understand the purposes of launching educational reforms during this decade. The May Fourth Movement and New Culture movement introduced the modern ideas of coeducation and freedom of marriage into Singapore, which marked new phase of feminist activity. Numerous reports in *Lat Pau* and *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* discussed whether Chinese women should possess equal rights to men in the family and public spheres, offering a different scope for understanding the Chinese community's opinions about female issues. In the mean time, serious social ills, such as prostitution and the *mui-tsai* problem, still existed within the Chinese community and the notice of the Colonial Government and the Chinese leaders.

Chapter IV probes into the activities of both educated and illiterate Chinese women in the 1930s. The Great Depression and Sino-Japanese War were the most important factors in promoting the women's emancipation movement during this decade. Using essays from the women's supplements of Chinese newspapers, such as *Nanyang*

Siang Pau, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Sin Chung Jit Poh*, the participation of Chinese women in the National Salvation Movement and fund-raising activities will be explored in order to understand their position and achievements in this regard. In addition the measures and legislations implemented by the Colonial Government and Chinese community on abolishment of prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system will also be examined. On one level, these changes and improvements in female education, social affairs, and social schemes signified the advancement of the women's emancipation movement within the Chinese community. On another, the progress of Chinese women's socio-economic involvement in the public sphere gradually enabled them to challenge the traditional Chinese conventions regarding women's roles within the family in the post-war period. Epilogue aims to discuss the life of Chinese women during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) and the post-war period. The Conclusion will overlook the achievements and defects of the female emancipation movement in the early 20th century in order to understand the variation in the Chinese females' social position and status within the family during the Colonial era.

Chapter I Chinese Female Migration to Singapore

The focus of this chapter is on the contribution of Chinese female migration toward shaping the Singapore Chinese community from an immigrant society into a stable community at the turn of the 20th century. The three archetypes of Chinese women: educated women, prostitutes and *mui-tsais* were also formed during this period. The female Chinese immigrants can be divided into two ethnic groups: Peranakan-born Chinese and China-born Chinese. The culture and orientation of these two groups will be analyzed in order to examine their social status and position within the family. In addition, female Chinese immigration also brought serious social problems to the settlement, namely prostitution. The Colonial Office records will hence be used to explore the policies of the authorities concerned regarding those social ills in order to explore whether these reforms brought improvement to Chinese women's life in the late 19th century.

I.I Chinese Female Immigration into Singapore

The foundation of Singapore in 1819, attracted many Chinese males to travel there from China in great numbers. These Chinese migrants were driven by the poverty in their hometown to seek opportunities in this new settlement. Most of them went to Singapore through the so called coolie trade, and were called coolies. The emergence of the coolie traffic[1] originated from the demands for labourers in Singapore. These Chinese worked as plantation workers, rickshaw pullers, and construction labourers,

[1] See Tee Seng Chu, 'The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941', *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 26.1 (1971), p. 5. Chinese labourers who went to Singapore through the coolie trade can be divided into two groups: paid passengers and credit-ticket passengers. The former were known as s*inkhehs* (新客new arrivals) who paid for their own passage, and could choose any form of employment in Singapore they liked. The latter formed the majority of the labour force in Singapore. They could not pay for their passages and were indebted to the junk masters or brokers.

which work brought prosperity to this new city, and they soon formed the backbone of Singapore's labour force. From the 1820s onwards, the Chinese gradually became the largest ethnic group in Singapore. Nevertheless, there were only a few female Chinese immigrants in the settlement. According to the records of Figures I.1, the first record taken of the number of Chinese females in Singapore by the colonial authorities was 361 in 1824. By 1860, the female Chinese population had reached 3,248, and 33,674 in 1901.[2]

The scarcity of Chinese women in Singapore was mainly due to the Qing government's closed-door policy in the 19th century. According to Du Qing Luli (大清律令 Great Qing Civil Code), Chinese subjects were not allowed to migrate overseas and merchants were forbidden to conduct business overseas.[3] Anyone who disobeyed the law would be deported from China and punished severely. This was due to fact that the Chinese government feared that its subjects would participate in the activities of overthrowing the Qing regime, restoring the Ming Dynasty. Against this background, the Qing administration also adopted a strong position in opposing Chinese women's migration overseas in the mid-19th century. There were also other reasons why only a few Chinese women went to Singapore during this period. The majority of male migrants were very poor and could not afford to pay for their passage to Singapore. Most of them were coolies, who had to sell their services in advance to junkmen. After arriving in Singapore, most of the coolies needed to work several years to pay off their debt. In this respect, they could not bring their families

[2] Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), p. 25.
[3] George Thomas Staunton, *The Fundamental Laws of China* (1810), Book III. Protection of the Frontier, Section CCXXV Illict Exportation of Merchandise, pp. 239-240.

Figures I.1: Growth of the Chinese Population of Singapore

Year	Total Chinese	Male Chinese	Female Chinese	Total	Percentage of Chinese
1824	3,317	2,956	361	10,683	31
1834	10,767	9,944	823	26,329	41
1849	27,988	25,749	2,239	52,891	53
1860	50,043	46,795	3,248	81,743	61
1871	54,098	46,631	7,467	97,111	56
1881	86,766	72,571	14,195	139,208	62
1891	121,098	100,466	21,462	184,554	66
1901	164,041	130,367	33,674	228,555	72
1911	219,577	161,348	57,929	303,321	72
1921	317,491	215,918	101,573	425,912	75
1931	421,821	263,191	158,630	567,453	74
1947	730,133	387,883	342,250	942,824	78

Sources: Freedman, Maurice, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), p. 25.

in China to Singapore.[4]

The Chinese patriarchal system was also a key factor that restrained Chinese female immigration in the 19th century. The idea of favouring men over women was deeply rooted in Chinese society, and it was Confucian doctrine that led to Chinese women's lives being confined within the family. The Chinese girls had to obey the rules of the 'three obedience and four virtues' (三從四德 *Sancong Side*). The former was to obey their fathers when they were young, their husbands after they got married, and their sons in their old age, while the latter was to be well behaved in behaviour, speech, demeanour, and household duties. As Gallagher noted, China was a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal society. This meant that man was given the formal power in the society, and it was through the male line that carried on the family's name. Thus, once a Chinese woman married into her husband's family, she was regarded as the member of that family, which meant that she no longer had any connection with her natal family.[5] Hence, she could not leave her husband's house without his permission, and when her husband died, she was not allowed to return to her own family. This concept was related to the idea of 'a woman without education was therefore virtuous', which considered that women only needed to learn how to manage their household duties and that it was unnecessary for them to be educated. These conventional Chinese values hence kept women in a state of ignorance and subordination, and only at the end of the 19th century did the reformists' proposal to promote female education change this situation.

[4] Choi Kwai Keong, *Xinjiapo Huaren: Cong Kai Bu Dao Jian Guo* (The Chinese in Singapore: Past and Present) Singapore: Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, 1994, p. 21.

[5] Mary Gallagher, 'Women and Gender', in Howard Giskin and Betty S. Walsh (eds), *An Introduction to Chinese Culture through the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 90.

In addition, most girls from wealthy families in China had their feet bound at the age of five or six; while girls from the rural areas needed to help their mothers with domestic duties.[6] The custom of foot binding was also a way of restricting Chinese women to the home. The result of this custom was that Chinese girls and women seldom went far from the village where they lived. This was also because traditional Chinese values dictated that men were the breadwinners while women were housekeepers. In other words, Chinese men were the main economic resource in the family and women were subordinate to them. Chinese women were not allowed to seek jobs outside the home and had to look after the whole family while the men worked overseas. Religion was another influence that kept Chinese women in China. The cult of ancestor-worship was important in China, whereby it was a bounden duty for living male offspring to sacrifice and attend to the needs of their deceased ancestors. If a man went overseas, his wife needed to perform the rituals of *qingming* (清明 Tomb Sweeping Day) and *qiujie (*秋祭 the Autumn Ceremony), which meant sweeping and worshipping the ancestors' graves at specific times of the year. [7]

The Background of Chinese Immigration

Between the 1840s and 1860s China suffered from internal revolts and foreign invasions. The First Opium War of 1839-42[8] thus partially shattered their closed-door

[6] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 20.

[7] Lim Joo Hock, 'Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901', pp. 63-64.

[8] See Wang Ke-wen, *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, pp. 252-253. The Opium War was a Sino-British conflict concerning Sino-foreign trade in the 1830s and 1840s. The British government was dissatisfied with the restriction of the Canton system which regulated that foreign traders should conduct business through the Thirteen Factories on the harbour of Canton during the trading season. In the early 18th century, Great Britain begun to sell opium to China as a way of balancing their trade deficit with the Qing Government. Nevertheless, opium addiction created serious social and economic problems in Chinese society, and the illegal opium trade reversed the balance of Sino-foreign commerce. In 1839, Lin Zexu (林則徐1785-1850) was appointed imperial commissioner to deal with opium suppression in Canton. He banned the sale of opium and

policy. The events that affected the Qing government's immigration policy were the Taiping Rebellion, and the First and Second Opium Wars. The former was the major impetus towards Chinese female migration to Singapore in the 1850s. It unsettled society and caused an economic recession in China: many people felt insecure and migrated overseas. The rebellion ended in 1864, but Fujian and Guangdong Provinces were devastated. Against this background of hunger, poverty, and insecurity, some Chinese women followed their husbands or relatives to Singapore. The *Singapore Free Press* of 19th November 1863 also reported,

> ……the disturbances in China seem to be now affecting what has long been felt as a great desideratum in Singapore- an increase in the female part of the Chinese population. Many of the traders are being joined by their wife.[9]

The above report demonstrates the devastation caused by the wars, which was the main reason why Chinese woman were forced to migrate overseas. Another reason for this was the influence of the missionaries due to the First and Second Opium Wars. Between the 1840s and 1850s, the Qing government lost the wars with western countries and was forced into humiliating changes in its foreign policy. The First Opium War led to the Chinese government signing the Treaty of Nanking (29 August 1842) and brought about the opening of treaty ports in China, in Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai. This treaty allowed European missionaries to preach in China and led to the establishment of girls' schools in Fujian and Guangdong. Those missionary schools promoted western education and spread new ideas in the treaty ports. The missionaries also supported anti-foot binding activities in the southern provinces of China. They felt that foot binding was harming Chinese girls'

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enforced the suspension of Sino-foreign trade and the blockade of foreign factories in Canton. The main consequence of this event was the First Opium War of 1839-1842.

[9] *Singapore Free Press*, 19 November 1863, as cited in Lim Joo Hock, 'Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901', p. 67.

life psychologically and physically, and hence began to advocate its abolition. The anti-foot binding organization "Heavenly Foot Society" was hence established in Amoy in 1874.[10] In this respect, those missionaries' activities offered the local Chinese residents opportunities to make contact with westerners, which helped to destroy the idea of forbidding Chinese female immigrants going overseas.[11]

Against this background, the Qing government gradually adjusted its immigration policy. On 24th October 1860, the Convention of Peking 1860 was enacted to allow Chinese labourers and their families to migrate overseas legally, for the first time, and women were also allowed to migrate to foreign countries. However, this act mentioned that single women could not travel alone and must be accompanied by family members. Thus, single women had to wear men's clothes and be smuggled overseas. This was due to the fact that human trafficking was wide spread throughout Southeast Asia in the 19th century. There were two ways for female Chinese immigrants to reach Singapore in the mid-19th century: they either came with their family or were sold by traffickers. The former Chinese immigrants' wives and relatives went to Singapore on a voluntary, free basis without being indebted; while the latter consisted of prostitutes and *mui-tsais*, imported by traffickers to Singapore illegally.[12] A report in the *Singapore Free Press* of 1st June 1854 noted the arrival of Chinese women in Singapore,

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[10] See Zhao Yin Yi, 'Jjidujiao he Jindai Zhongguo Funü Yundong' (Christianity and Women's Movement in Modern China), *Journal of Shanghai Teachers University (*social science*)*, 29.4 (2000), p. 94. John MacGowan was a missionary of the London Mission and started the first the anti-foot binding movement in Amoy. In 1875, he called together sixty Chinese women together in his church to discuss the nature of foot binding and how cruel this practice was. He told them that they should not bind their feet because God created their feet and it was against God's will to do that. Some of the women agreed with MacGowan's viewpoints and stopped binding their daughters' feet.

[11] Lim Joo Hock, 'Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901', p. 74.

[12] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 16.

> The advent of several Chinese ladies with small feet has occasioned some sensation, but we trust that they will have sons and many of their fair country-women to keep them in countenance so that their presence in our Island will cease to be accounted a novelty. [13]

The fact that these women had 'small feet' implies that they came from wealthy families. However, only a few of this type of Chinese female immigrants went to Singapore, and most of them returned with their families to China a few years later with only a few choosing to settle there.[14] Those girls who did not leave Singapore were mainly prostitutes or *mui-tsais*. In fact, most them went to Singapore through illegal trade, and were engaged in prostitution or became *mui-tsais* in the Chinese households. They constituted nearly 80% of female Chinese population in the mid-19th century. These social ills resulted from the unbalanced sex ratio problem in Singapore. The Colonial Government also noticed those social problems and started to take action to restrain the coolie trade and prostitution in the mid-19th century.

The Colonial Government's Policies toward the Chinese Community

The Colonial Government's policy towards the Chinese community can be divided into two periods: 1819-1867 and 1867-1942. Before the 1870s, the Colonial Government adopted a 'let the Chinese rule the Chinese' policy. This was due to the fact that the British administrators regarded Singapore as a commercial centre. Their main interest was to make a profit in the settlement. As Lee argued, the colonial authorities originally founded Singapore in 1819 for two purposes: to use this new

[13] *Singapore Free Press*, 1 June 1854, as cited in Lim Joo Hock, 'Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901, p. 66.

[14] See Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, pp. 22-23. Some Cantonese women in Guangdong province formed an anti-marriage movement in the beginning of the 20th century. Most of them refused to be subordinate to their husbands and chose to escape from the marriages arranged for them by their parents. As discussed in Introduction, they were known as *tsae mui* who gave each other support and often lived together in sisterhood houses. Some chose to go to Singapore to make a living, as it offered an escape opportunity for them than in China.

settlement as a port to protect India as well as the East India Company's trade with China; and to use Singapore as a base to carry out free trade in South East Asia. [15] The policy of the Colonial Government regarding administrating the Chinese community thus can be summed up as follows,

> The main concern of Raffles and his successors up to the middle of the nineteenth century was to increase the importance of Singapore as a trading settlement. In this they were singularly successful and the annual value of trade increased phenomenally. The various communities were therefore principally of interest as the bringers of wealth to Singapore, and so long as they did not disturb the peace they were left very much to themselves.[16]

As for the different ethnic groups in Singapore, such as the Chinese, Malays and Indians, they were left to their own devices. The Colonial Government conducted no census and restricted itself to enacting laws to maintain law and order in the settlement. To that end, they set up the *kaptain* system to rule Chinese society. The authorities concerned appointed Chinese leaders from different dialect groups as *kaptain cina* (甲必丹 captains) of their community. Most of the Chinese leaders were businessmen or members of the secret societies, and it was their duty to maintain law and order within the Chinese society.[17] Against this background, the authorities

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[15] Lee Poh Ping, *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore*, p.9.
[16] Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 76.
[17]See, Lee Poh Ping, *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore*, pp. 48-49. The clan organization (localized lineage) based on blood ties, *huiguans* and secret societies (non-localized) based on geographical and dialect ties, and secret societies constituted the Singapore Chinese community in the 19th century. At that time, a person could be the member of the secret society and the leader of the clan organization in the Chinese community. However, there were differences between the clan organizations and secret societies. Basically, there were differences between the clan organization and secret societies. The secret societies was based on a broader kinship ties which could be perceived as a sense of brotherhood among the different dialect groups in the Chinese community. Thus, the leaders of the secret societies would utilize this emotion in organizing protests or riots against the British authorities. By contrast, the members of the clan organizations mostly came from the same province or village and spoke the same dialect. The leaders of the clan organizations would raise funds for their families and friends in China , and took care of the sick and poor members in Singapore. In this sense, they formed a self-government community and rarely had contacts with the British authorities in the 19th century.

concerned were unable and unwilling to deal with these social problems, because that they were unfamiliar with the Chinese language and did not understand the customs. Most of the Chinese labourers were also unwilling to settle in this unstable colony. As soon as they had paid off their debt, they wished to return to China.

This phenomenon was linked to the idea of Chinese *diaspora*, which particularly took place in the overseas Chinese community. It could be seen from the strong emotional attachment of the *huaqiao* toward their hometown in China. As Yen noted, both the coolies and merchants would send their earnings annually to their families in China. Moreover, the rich Singapore merchants would raise funds for the war, famine, and flood relief as well as donated money to establish schools for people in their hometown. In the late 19th century, this sentiment among the overseas Chinese society further developed into a strong feeling that hoped China would become a powerful nation in order to protect its subjects in the foreign countries.[18] It was also this strong sentiment toward their family and country that led to the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Two major events that changed the British administrators' policy toward the Chinese community: the transfer of the Straits Settlement from British India to the Colonial Office in 1867 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. On 1st April 1867, the Straits Settlement became a Crown Colony of the British Government. From then onwards, Singapore was ruled by a governor with the assistance of executive and legislative councils. The Colonial Government could thus apply its policies to the Chinese community more directly and more effectively. The opening of the Suez

[18] Yen Ching-hwang, 'Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Singapore and Malaya, 1877-1912', in Yen Ching-hwang, *Community and Politics: The Chinese in Colonial Singapore and Malaysia*, p. 200.

Canal increased the importance of Singapore as a commercial centre and port, as it was situated on the shortest sea route between Europe and the Far East. This major development and the increased prosperity encouraged great waves of Chinese migration into Singapore and accelerated the economic development of the settlement[19] The Colonial Government also understood the importance of Chinese labourers and started to deal with the social problems within the Chinese community, such as the secret societies and coolie trade. At that time, most officials were ignorant of Chinese culture and language, and there were no effective means of dealing with Chinese affairs. This drove many Chinese immigrants to seek protection from the secret societies[20], which led to serious social problems and threatened the stability of the settlement.[21]

In 1877, the Chinese Protectorate was established to cope with those problems. William Pickering (1840-1907)[22] was appointed the first Chinese Protector to deal with matters concerning the coolie trade, secret societies and protection of Chinese women. The establishment of the Chinese Protectorate signified the Colonial

[19] Wang Gungwu, 'Local Governments and Nation: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity', in Lee Guan Kin (ed.), *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*, p. 21.

[20] See Eunice Thio, 'The Singapore Chinese Protectorate Events and Conditions Leading to its Establishment, 1823-1877', *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 16.1&2 (1960), pp. 44-45. The first secret society established in Singapore was 洪門 Hong Men. Its origins could be traced back to the 天地會Tian Di Hui in Fujian Province in China. Most of the members were Chinese coolies while some of them were members of the triads who came from Malay Peninsula. A new branch of Tian Di Hui was hence set up in Singapore known as Ghee Hin Society.

[21] See Lee Poh Ping, *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore*,, p. 78. Between 1845 and 1885 a serious of riots was organized by the Chinese secret societies in Singapore. Those riots were Anti-Catholic Riots (1851), 1854 Riot, and Post Office Riot (1876). Those riots were mainly conflicts between the dialect groups or protests against the British authorities. The former were often rivalries over the profit in prostitution and coolie trade; while latter were the leaders of the secret societies attempted to maintain its credibility and control over the Chinese community.

[22] See Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Services and its Predecessors, 1867-1942* (Oxford: Ohio Press, 1981), p. 150. William Pickering had nine years' experience in China, mostly in Formosa (Taiwan) and the Fukien Coast. Between 1862 and 1865, he was put in charge of the service's office at Taiwan Foo in Formosa, and learnt Mandarin. Thus, he was the ideal person to assist the Colonial Government to solve the Chinese problems in Singapore.

Government's new policy of closer control of the Chinese community instead of the laissez-faire policy in the previous years. As Kenley argued, the authorities concerned thought that if the Chinese protectorate could assist the new immigrants by offering them job opportunities and protection, they may not join the secret societies. [23] In that way, the social turbulences created by the secret societies might be reduced. Under such circumstances, the Colonial Government enacted immigrant ordinances to control the coolie trade. Prior to the 1870s, it had no examination or control mechanism system for screening Chinese immigrants when they arrived in Singapore. The Harbour Master only checked whether the ship carried the correct numbers of passengers under the legislation. In this respect, the Colonial Governments passed legislation to control the coolie trade and Chinese immigration in Singapore.

The Chinese Immigrants Ordinance was enacted to protect and regulate Chinese immigration in 1887. According to this ordinance, Chinese immigrants were required to be examined on ship before arriving in Singapore. The official would ask them questions such as their purposes in going to Singapore, and whether their migration there was voluntary or forced. This Ordinance authorized the Governor to appoint a Protector of Chinese Immigrants and to set up depots for immigrants. It also offered protection for Chinese immigrants which legalized the detention of *sinkheh* for up to 10 days and provided written contracts between employers and employees.[24] In order to secure this examination system, the Colonial Government further enacted the Ordinance IV of 1880, which came into force on 1st April 1881.[25] It set up the Examination Depot and all immigrants were checked by an official on board, and then

[23] David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, p. 30.
[24] Edwin Lee, *British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), p. 71.
[25] CO 274, Ordinance No. IV of 1880, An Ordinance to make provision by Law for the protection of Chinese Immigrants, pp. 1-4.

sent by a vessel to the ports. The improvement of the examination system attracted more Chinese immigrants to go to Singapore, and helped to increase the number of Chinese women immigrants in the early 20th century.[26]

I. II Cultural Difference between Peranakan Chinese and China-born Chinese Women

The Singapore Chinese community was developed into two types of ethnic groups: Peranakan Chinese and China-born Chinese. This was due to the fact that two groups differed in terms of their culture, orientation and origins. The Colonial Government used an alternative way to dominate the Chinese community, which was divide and rule. They offered English-medium education for the Peranakan Chinese to make them more British-oriented; and used legislation to control the China-born Chinese who were more in support of the Qing government.

Peranakan Chinese

The Peranakan Chinese have also been called Straits-born Chinese or Straits Chinese. Scholarly works have discussed the differences between these terms. Clammer offered distinctive definitions of Straits-born Chinese, Straits Chinese and Peranakan Chinese.[27] The term 'Straits-born Chinese' referred to Chinese residents' ancestors who were born in the Straits Settlement before the independence of Malaysia and Singapore. They retained most of the Chinese characteristics, including the language, religion, dress, occupations, and kinship, the Straits Chinese regarded the Straits Settlement as their homeland, but maintained their Chinese identity,

[26] Mary Constance Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 87.

[27] Works are J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlement* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1974), Wu Feng Bin, *Dongnanya Huaqiao Tongshi* (The General History of Chinese in Southeast Asia). Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1993, and Ling-yin Lynn Ang, A Question of "Chineseness": the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore 1819-1950s, PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2001).

political allegiance, and continued to send financial remittances to family in China. The Peranakan Chinese were defined as a sub-ethnic group among the ethnic Chinese, and were more influenced by Malay than Chinese culture. Hence, this term simply referred to local-born people who were influenced by the Chinese who wore Malay clothes and spoke Malay, identified as *Baba* (峇峇 Peranakan males) and *Nyonyas* (娘惹 Peranakan females).[28]

The origins of the Peranakan Chinese can be traced back to a group of Chinese immigrants from China who arrived in the Straits almost a hundred years earlier than the China-born Chinese. In the 19th century, more Chinese migrated to the Malay Peninsula. After Singapore became a British colony in 1819, many Peranakan Chinese immigrated from Malacca to Singapore. This brought an increase in both the China-born and the Peranakan Chinese population[29], due to some of the Chinese immigrants marrying into *Nyonyas*' families, and their children becoming Peranakan Chinese.[30] The male immigrants did not mind living in their wives' houses, because the Peranakan Chinese migrated to the Straits Settlement very early. Hence, they had many relatives and were likely to have been better off. Unlike the China-born Chinese, they had more frequent contact with westerners and, English was also widely used by the Peranakan Chinese. The Peranakan Chinese adhered to their ancestors' traditional customs, but were also influenced by Malay culture.

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[28] John R. Clammer, *Straits Chinese Society: Studies in the Sociology of the Baba Communities of Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore : Singapore University Press, 1980), pp. 2-3.

[29] See Wu Feng Bin, *The General History of Chinese in Southeast Asia*, p. 208. The Peranakan Chinese was the mixed Chinese and Malay blood. Their common language was Baba Malay, combined with many Hokkien dialects, which was different from the Malay. The women were of higher status than the men in the family. Hence, they favoured girls over boys. The children of overseas Chinese and Malays would become the Peranakan Chinese, which was the local saying 'three generations made Chinese true Babas '.

[30] Chen Zhi Ming, 'Haixiazhimindi de Huaren: Baba Huaren de Shehui yu Wenhua' (The Chinese in the Straits Settlement: Society and Culture of Baba Chinese), in Lim Chooi Kwa and Loh Cheng Sun (eds), *Malaixiya Huaren Shi*, (The History of Chinese in Malaysia), Selangor: The Federation of Alumni Associations of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia, 1984, p. 176.

Against this background, intermarriage between Chinese and Malays had a great impact on Singapore's Chinese society in the 19th century. Malay women in mixed marriages did not understand Mandarin and Chinese males had to speak Malay at home. Their children also learnt Malay from their wives. However, most of them raised children according to the traditional Chinese customs. Vaughan mentioned that fathers even left the responsibilities of teaching their young children to their Malay wife, who brought them up as Chinese.[31] From the end of the 19th century, prominent families among the Peranakan Chinese thought that marriage between families of equal social rank could help to cement their economic relationship. Thus, most of the Peranakan Chinese families allowed their sons to marry non-Chinese or local-born Chinese women. However, *Nyonyas* were not allowed to marry Malays,[32] due to the fact that Peranakan Chinese tended to preserve a pure Chinese lineage through matriarchal marriage. As for their life in Singapore society, this can be best be summed up by a contemporary newspaper article,

> Family life is the education which forms a Chinese woman, and she only aspires to be learned in the art of governing her family. She superintends her children's education, and is content to devote her existence to her family. If the fates give her a good husband, she is certainly the happiest of women. [33]

The above excerpt reveals the Peranakan Chinese's expectations of *Nyonyas*, which was that they be a perfect wife to take care of their husband and sons. Although the Peranakan Chinese were less affected by the traditional Chinese values, they still clung to some of their principles. Therefore, most girls were not allowed to receive an education in the 19th century, as their parents thought it unnecessary, since their main

[31] J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese* of the Straits Settlement (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 4-5.
[32] Choi Kwai Keong, *The Chinese in Singapore : Past and Present*, p. 87.
[33] Song Ong Siang, 'The Position of Chinese Women' (March 1897), http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/civilsoc/scm/cwomen.html [accessed 20 Feb 2010]

task was to learn how to handle household duties in order to be a good wife. After marrying, they needed to worship their ancestors and show filial piety to their husband's parents. Thus, it could be argued as that Peranakan Chinese still followed the traditional Chinese culture.

Most of the Peranakan Chinese could speak fluent English and had closer contact with westerners. Most of them worked as merchants, store owners, and Europeans' employees. Although the population of Peranakan Chinese was small in Singapore, many of them were rich merchants with a higher social status. The number of Peranakan Chinese in 1881 reached 8,527, which constituted 9.5% (100,466) of the total Chinese population. There were 4,513 males and 5,014 females, which shows that the Peranakan Chinese did not suffer from an unbalanced sex ratio problem.[34] There was also no clan organization within the Peranakan Chinese community. Against this background, the Peranakan Chinese did not have social problems caused by secret societies.[35] In addition, in comparison with the China-born Chinese, the size of the floating population among Peranakan Chinese was much lower, and thus formed a stabilized community. Under such circumstances, the Peranakan Chinese became the leading ethnic group among the Chinese community in the late 19th century.

China-born Chinese

Another group of female Chinese immigrants was the China-born Chinese, who tended to come came from the southern provinces in China and migrated to Singapore in the mid-19th century. These immigrants might be further divided into four dialect

[34] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911*, pp. 122-123.
[35] Choi Kwai Keong, *The Chinese in Singapore : Past and Present*, p. 98.

groups: the Cantonese from Guangdong Province (the largest Chinese ethnic group in the Straits Settlements), the Hokkiens from Amoy in Fujian province and the districts of Chuanchow and Changchow, the Hakkas from the southern provinces of China, and the Hainanese from Hainan Province.[36] From these distributions, it can be seen that the female Chinese immigrants came from the same areas as the males. However, Hainanese women were forbidden to leave the island during the 19th century. Only after the 1920s were they allowed to leave with their husband, when this was permitted by the patriarchal clan.

Most of the Chinese immigrants in Singapore came from villages of various sizes with populations ranging from hundreds to thousands in the rural China. The basic unit of the village was the clan, consisting of individuals who shared the same blood and same surname, which formed a lineage. The elder of the family would be elected chief of the clan and exercised a centralized leadership which empowered him in certain circumstances to act and speak for the lineage as a whole.[37] Because Singaporean society was based on the development of industry and commerce, and clan organization did not translate easily there, so the Chinese immigrants established clan organizations there among those who shared a common place of origin and dialect. They united under the principle of mutual assistance, and set up associations and co-villager associations to help each other.[38] After the Chinese immigrants settled in Singapore, they started to marry and have children while most of their other relatives stayed in China so there were fewer problems between wives and mothers-in-law in Singapore.

[36] Lim Joo Hock, 'Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901', p. 69.
[37] Choi Kwai Keong, *The Chinese in Singapore : Past and Present*, p. 81.
[38] *Ibid*.

The environment was another reason for the different social structures in southern China and Singapore. The rural area of southern China was an agricultural society that required an enormous labour force. In this respect, households constituted both production and consumption units. Thus, it was common for three or more generations of the same extended family to live under the same roof, which was the fundamental bedrock of Chinese rural society. They shared the responsibility for family affairs and worked the land together.[39] Chinese women in the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, for example, were responsible for both the household duties and farming, such as cooking, sewing, and weaving, as well as processing tea, grain, tobacco, and other crops. Hence, Chinese women in southern China often engaged in the heavy manual tasks in the villages and towns. Their workload was as heavy as that of men, who transported the agricultural produce from the fields and processing mills.[40] By contrast, Singapore was a mercantile city and most of the Chinese immigrants returned to China as soon as they had earned enough money. Thus, the Chinese households in Singapore were very small and it was difficult for two or three families to live together. In addition, the history of the Singapore Chinese community was very short, and extended Chinese families were thus very rare in the colony.[41] In this sense, the Chinese household in Singapore was usually composed of a nuclear family, including the parents and unmarried offspring. On reaching adulthood, the offspring would either move out of their parents' house on their marriage or set up a separate household when their parents passed away. Chinese girls followed the traditional Chinese custom, moving into their husband's house on marriage.

The polygamous marriage system was also different in China and Singapore. In

[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, pp. 21-22.
[41] Choi Kwai Keong, *The Chinese in Singapore : Past and Present*, p. 81.

China it was common for rich men or the gentry to have a wife and one or more concubines. This tradition was inherited by the Chinese overseas. The early male immigrants in Singapore had often married before they went overseas. These wives back home were called primary wives. Merchants who made a fortune in Singapore would marry concubines. Many of the merchants lived in Singapore for a while, making brief visits back to China. This phenomenon of having wives in both China and overseas was called "two households in separate places".[42] Freedman thought that the Colonial Government and Qing government held different attitudes towards concubines in the 19th century. The former granted the same legal position to wives and concubines in Singapore, while the latter gave wives a higher position within the family.[43] In China, the primary wife was the hostess of the family, while concubines were subordinated to her with regard to marriage, the family, and financial affairs. In Singapore, concubines received equal legal and economic rights as primary wives. Concubines lived under the same roof as the primary wife in China, but they lived in a separate household in Singapore. Even up to the end of World War II, rich men and the gentry in Singapore still took two or more wives.[44]

Based upon this discussion, it appears that Chinese society in Singapore was not merely a copy of that in rural China. Instead, it more closely resembled that in the towns or cities of China.[45] This was because China was a patriarchal society associated with the transmission of landed property in the rural villages. Most villagers were either farmers or landowners while most of the residents of Singapore were labourers or merchants. The latter's connection with the land was weaker than

[42] Chen Da, *Nanyang Overseas Chinese and Ming Yue Society (*1938), pp. 155-156.
[43] Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*, pp. 57-58.
[44] Choi Kwai Keong, *The Chinese in Singapore : Past and Present*, p. 85.
[45] Joyce Lebra and Joy Paulson (eds), *Chinese Women in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Times Books International, 1980), pp. 10-11.

that of former. Although Chinese families in Singapore adopted China's patriarchal system, the power of the clans was weaker there than in China, as parents came into contact with western ideas. Their thinking was hence less conservative and they allowed their daughters to be educated. In this sense, the patriarchal system was partially shattered by this new social structure in Singapore. In this respect, the status of both China and Peranakan Chinese women in Singapore was higher than that of those in the remote areas of southern China. Male Chinese immigrants, as they became financially more secure, brought their families from China to join them. Educated Chinese women and *Nyonyas* also had more right to decide family affairs due to the fact that their husbands' parents stayed in China.

I.III Social Problems of Chinese Women in Singapore

Prostitution

The emergence of prostitution could be discussed from the social and economic background of the Singapore Chinese community history. From the economic perspective, the illegal human trafficking trade for prostitution was a flourishing business that existed in the Southeast Asian colonies. This was because prostitution was permitted in Singapore by the Colonial Government in order to cater for the sexual needs of the large numbers of bachelor labourers. As Warren stated, the network between China, Hong Kong and Singapore provided a vigorous market for human trafficking in the 19th century. The flow of Chinese coolies, merchants and British sailors and soldiers made prostitution became a boom industry in Singapore. [46] Yen also held the opinion that the existence of prostitution in Singapore was to meet the demand of rapid commercial development in the Settlement. At that time, not only

[46] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, p.77.

women but also men were sold to Southeast Asia and America as coolies for the purpose of pushing forward the economic market in those countries.[47] Against this background, prostitution became an important social issue in Singapore.

From the cultural perspective, the patriarchal system was the main factor that led to this social ill. It was the male ideology that made women inferior in the traditional family. The poverty problem in the overpopulated villages and outlying districts of Southeast China was the main reason that helped to accelerate the development of human trafficking trade, and enabled Singapore's prostitution business to prosper.[48] This was because many parents were unable to feed all the mouths and suffered from economic problems; they would sell their daughter to maintain their own life. Some of those parents' purpose was to give their daughters a better life as a mistress or mui-tsai. Other parents were in debt or addicted to opium and sold their daughters for money. Against this background, this phenomenon enabled prostitution to prosper in Singapore. As Warren analyzed the root cause of prostitution in the rural villages in the southern provinces in China,

> Prostitution in Singapore was directly linked to the economic, social and personal problems in traditional family life due to a 'male' ideology that asserted that there could be no such thing as equality for women… The subordination of women to men within family and society was justified in Confucian ideology by the importance of filial piety and yin-yang theory, which reflects the natural order.[49]

The passage above reveals that prostitution was a product of patriarchal system. The girls were treated as the properties of the family and they could not make decisions

[47] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911*, pp. 248-249.
[48] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, p. 32.
[49] *Ibid*, p. 29.

for themselves. In the mid-19th century, the famines and wars that occurred in China produced many girl orphans, who came from poor families in rural China. Hence, traffickers' major activity was to buy or adopt the girls from orphanages and sell them to Hong Kong, Macao and other treaty ports.[50] They also used illegal means to dupe young women and girls into going overseas. One method was visiting the villages to tell the young women that there were good job opportunities offering reasonable wages, as hairdressers, housemaids, and seamstresses in Singapore. In addition, traffickers also kidnapped young women from the villages and was smuggled them to Hong Kong or Macao. At that time, there were two kinds of traffickers transporting women from China: local and overseas traffickers.[51] The former existed in the rural villages in southern China, Hong Kong and other treaty ports; they were familiar with the situation in China and had experience of dealing with the Qing government. The latter took girls overseas then sold them to various places in Southeast Asia. Once in Singapore, they would be sold to brothels or Chinese families to become prostitutes or concubines. It was estimated that about 80% of the young girls who went to Singapore were sold to brothels.[52]

There were two major reasons that prostitution was difficult to abolish in the Chinese community. Firstly, there were no laws to protect the rights of women and children by the Qing government in restricting the development of prostitution and human trafficking in China. Nor were there legislation to protect the rights of women and children. In addition, the Qing government allowed its subjects to enter and leave Guangdong and Hong Kong without any restriction. It therefore created an

[50] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 233.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 231.
[52] Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 125-26.

opportunity for the traffickers to smuggle women overseas.[53] Secondly, it was hard to identify the background of the traffickers. As Yen noted, the traffickers might be from Hong Kong or treaty ports in China or overseas Chinese who had returned to China.[54] On their journey to Hong Kong or Singapore, traffickers had to travel with their goods. Hence, they maintained contact with the secret societies to ensure the safety of the girls. He pointed out that some of the traffickers were older women who pretended to be the girls' relatives or mother. The female kidnappers would wear different clothes each time they appeared at the Chinese Protectorate. The traffickers also prepared documents for the girls to be checked by the officials in Hong Kong and Singapore. In addition, they taught the girls how to answer the officials' questions in order to get past immigration officers. The girls were illiterate and did not understand Singapore's laws or their rights. Under the threats of the traffickers, they had no choice but to lie to the officials.[55] Although the Hong Kong and Singapore government attempted to restrict the illegal trades in Chinese females, it was still difficult to abolish prostitution without the cooperation of the victims. This was because the brothel-keepers would threaten the girls if they attempted to escape or cooperated with the government official, they would be severe punished and sold in another country. [56]

Prostitutes of different nationalities co-existed in Singapore. Most of them were from China, followed by Japan, the Malayan Peninsula, and Europe, and usually only accepted their own countrymen as customers. There were about 349 brothels and

[53] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, pp. 70-71.
[54] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia*, *1800-1911*, pp. 231-233.
[55] 'Suggestions as to the precautions that should be taken to prevent abuses in connection with Chinese female emigration to the Straits Settlement' as cited in G. T. Hare (ed.), *Text Book of Documentary Chinese: for the special use of members of the civil services of the Straits Settlements and the protected native states*, Part I, Chapter III &VI (1894), pp. 85-86,
[56] CO 886, Memorandum by Dr. M.F Simon, Principle Civil Medical Officer S.S., pp.78-79.

Figures I.2: Number of Prostitutes and Brothels in Singapore

Year	Prostitutes				Brothels
	Europeans	Chinese	Others	Total	
1867	12	1580	874	2468	
1868	9	1644	408	2061	349
1876	21	1274	40	1335	242
1885	29	2793	135	2957	328

Sources: Wu Li, 'Xinjipo Huaren Funü Shehui, Jiating Diwei de Bianqian' (The Variation of Chinese Women's Social Status and Position within the Family), *Overseas Chinese History Studies*, 1 (1994), p. 36.

2,061 prostitutes recorded in 1895; 1,644 of whom were Chinese.[57] These Chinese prostitutes can be further divided into three categories: sold, pawned, and voluntary prostitutes. Sold prostitutes were bought by the brother-keepers for the traffickers. They worked like slaves in the brothels and received no pay from the brothel-keeper. Hence, any money they earned was given to the brothel owners directly. They only received the basic necessities of pocket money, clothing, lodging, and food. Pawned prostitutes were girls sold by their parents or guardians who needed to pay off their debts to obtain freedom. They could receive half of their salary from the brothel owners and could buy back their freedom. This was called the contract-debt system. However, most of them were unable to pay off their debts and leave the brothels, as they spent the money on clothes, jewelry, rent and luxuries, such as tea or cigarettes. Hence, the best way out was to find a man to marry them and buy back their freedom.[58] Voluntary prostitutes were very rare in Singapore among the Chinese in the 19th century, because Chinese society was dominated by the secret societies. These prostitutes had to pay protection money to the secret societies in order to work independently.

In fact, most prostitutes were not free agents, but were brought to Singapore against their will. The brothel-keepers treated them like chattels or slaves, and did not give them a share of their earnings. In the mid-19th century, there was no compulsory examination, inspection or segregation enforced by the authorities concerned. [59] As they aged, they began to feel anxious about their future if they could not find someone to marry them. Hence, some prostitutes bought one or two girls themselves and

[57] Annual Report of the Chinese Protectorate, 1894, SSLCP, 1895, as cited in Lee Mei Xian, *Xinjiapo Jian Shi* (The History of Singapore). Guoli Jinan Guoji Daxue Dongnanya Yuanjiu Zhongxin, p. 28.
[58] Lee Mei Xian, *The History of Singapore*, p. 28.
[59] CO 886, Rev. W. G. Shellabear, 12 May 1898, p. 68.

trained them as prostitutes. The girls were adopted as daughters and had to make a living for their foster mother. As this kind of business started to make money, retired prostitutes began to buy more girls to set up brothels in Singapore.[60] In addition, other social problems followed the emergence of prostitution in the Chinese community, including the rivalry between the secret societies. In fact, the Chinese brothels were largely under the tight control of the secret societies and brothel-keepers. In this highly organized control system, prostitutes were treated like commodities. The agents or the brothel-keepers could buy and sell them at will.[61] The prostitutes were always under the surveillance of the brothel- keepers and former prostitutes, who trained them and took charge of their everyday lives. Some brothel-keepers also belonged to the secret societies, which was another major cause of the rivalry,

> Trafficking agents formed a closely connected and highly organized chain and included procurers, brokers, shipping agents, secret society members, brothel keepers and employers at various points of recruitment, dispatch, resale or allocation, and work. In many case, these agents were members of the same organization, usually a secret society or were at least under its control.[62]

The quotation above demonstrates the connection between the coolie trade, the secret societies and the brothels. In fact, brothels were a business enterprise that relied on cooperation with the secret societies, paying them monthly or annual protection fees. In return, the secret societies took responsibility for guaranteeing the smooth running of the brothel's business. Hence, when customers failed to pay the brothel-keepers, they would seek help from the secret societies. Moreover, the brothels also sold opium to their customers, the revenues from which also became an important financial resource for the secret societies, which then fought to bring further brothels under

[60] *Lat Pau*, 16 May 1908.
[61] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 31.
[62] *Ibid*., pp. 30-31.

their protection. This sometimes turned into rioting between gangs.[63]

Before the 1870s, the Colonial Government considered Singapore a trading port and thus adopted a non-restrictive policy toward prostitution. Their main interest was to attract Chinese labourers to migrate to Singapore to make profits for them. Nevertheless, the high revenues from the brothels often led to rivalries between gangs from the secret societies. The Colonial Government became concerned that these conflicts might have negative effects on Singapore's economic development, and so began to address the problem,

> Prostitution had existed from the start of Singapore's history, primarily because of the sizeable number of bachelor coolies in the colony. But the economic development of Singapore and the Malay Peninsula in the 1880s and 1890s gave prostitution a real boost throughout the city. The colonial authorities viewed prostitution as a necessary evil, since there were so few eligible Chinese women to go around, migrant-labourers who did not have wives would have to visit prostitutes. [64]

From the passage above, it appears that gender imbalance was the major reason why the Colonial Government adopted a non-restrictive policy towards prostitution. Among the Chinese population of 1884, for example, there were 60,000 men but only 6,600 women. Of this female population, roughly 2,000 were prostitutes.[65] In this respect, prostitution was needed to alleviate the turbulence that might have been caused by the bachelor Chinese labourers. Nevertheless, the Colonial Government did not enforce a labour policy to restrict the number of male immigrants for the reason of economic development in Singapore.

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[63] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 235.
[64] James Francis Warren, 'Prostitution and the Politics of Venereal Disease: Singapore, 1870-98', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 21.2 (September 1990), p. 361.
[65] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 33.

It was not until the social reforms carried out in Britain throughout the 1860s that changed this situation. Between 1864 and 1869, a series of Contagious Diseases Acts passed in Britain for the purpose of preventing the spread of venereal disease. Against this background, the Singapore authorities followed the steps of British government and started to set up a legalized system of controlling prostitution and preventing the spread of venereal diseases.[66] It should be noted that the main purpose of those measure was to protect British sailors and citizens in the overseas territories. The Chinese community in Singapore was hence covered under the regulations regarding venereal diseases. In this respect, an Ordinance to Prevent the Spread of Certain Contagious Diseases was enacted in 1870 to control prostitution in Singapore. The legislation regulated that brothel-keepers had to be registered at the Chinese Protectorate and obtain a license from the registering office. The brothels were also required to make a list of the name, age and nationality of their prostitutes both in English and their native language, so that the Colonial Government could control prostitution more efficiently. Prostitutes were issued with a ticket and a copy of the regulations as a way of communicating with the Protector if she encountered difficulties or was mistreated by a brothel-keeper.[67]

By 1881, the Chinese Protector and Registrar was authorized the rights of entering and investigating these licensed brothels by the Colonial Government. In addition, if the brothel-keepers discovered that their prostitutes were infected with venereal disease, they must give notice to the visiting surgeons, and send and pay for the girls to receive medical treatment in hospital. If they disobeyed the law, they would fine up

[66] James Francis Warren, 'Prostitution and the Politics of Venereal Disease: Singapore, 1870-98', pp. 362-363.
[67] Yoong Ng Siew, 'The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877-1900', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2.1 (1961), p. 89.

to $250 or imprisoned (with or without hard labour) for up to a year.[68]

Initially, the introduction of the Ordinance had been effective in combating sexually transmitted diseases. Nevertheless, this ordinance did not receive wide support among the Chinese community, as it threatened the benefits of both the brothels and the secret societies. The 打手 *Samsengs*[69] from the secret societies could no longer collect the protection fees from the brothels. It could be understood that if the earnings of the brothels were reduced, the secret societies would find it hard to extract their cut of the profits. The brothel-keepers were also afraid that they could not make a profit due to this ordinance, because ill prostitutes had to be sent to hospital for treatment. As for the prostitutes, they opposed this ordinance because of the need to be examined physically by European doctors. In addition, there were divergent ideas between the authorities concerned and William Pickering toward Contagious Diseases Ordinance and prostitution throughout the 1880s. The Chinese Protector thought that the Colonial Government should severely punish the agents of illegal human trafficking, and the Contagious Diseases Ordinance need to be re-enacted in order to make it more fit into the Singapore environment. By contrast, Whitehall held the opinion that the Chinese Protector should not be authorized discretionary legal power in dealing with prostitution issues.[70] The disputes between Picking and Whitehall came to an end when the Contagious Disease Acts were repealed in Britain in 1887.[71]

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[68] CO 274, Ordinance NO.XI of 1870, An Ordinance to Prevent the Spread of Certain Contagious Diseases, pp. 1-5.

[69] Mary Constance Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975*, p. 95. *Samseng* were fighting men of the Chinese secret society, and the Colonial Government saw them as rowdies and bullies.

71. James Francis Warren, 'Prostitution and the Politics of Venereal Disease: Singapore, 1870-98', p. 366.

[71] See J. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.1-2. There were several repeal groups founded between 1870 and 1885 for the purpose of repealing Contagious Diseases Acts. This was due to the fact that under these acts any woman could be identified as a as common prostitute by a special plainclothes policeman and sent for an internal examination. The word 'common prostitutes' was vague and the

Against this background, the compulsory medical examination, and inspection of brothels under the Contagious Disease Ordinance ceased in Singapore on 31st December 1887, which meant that there was no longer any proper control of brothels or prostitutes. The medical examination, personal treatment, and health standards were now based on self-regulation, and the Chinese Protectorate was not authorized to inspect brothels. The repeal of the ordinance brought venereal disease among the Chinese community and sailors to a pandemic level, and turned Singapore into one of the unhealthiest spots in the British Empire.[72]

Moreover, the spread of venereal diseases amongst the British navy and the Chinese community became worse after the end of the registration system in 1894. Although Chinese prostitutes were still issued with a ticket by the Chinese Protector, and the Chinese-speaking European inspectors from the Protectorate also inspected brothels regularly to see whether any of the girls there were under eighteen years old, the Protector did not know where prostitutes went once they left his office, after examination or arrival from China, and knew absolutely nothing about their transfer to other parts of Southeast Asia from Singapore.[73] Under such circumstances, the Colonial Government officials hence aimed to find practical measures for dealing with prostitution in the following years. The Colonial Government began to interview both Chinese and European doctors to investigate the root cause of prostitution, and sought

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police had enormous discretionary power under those acts. Accused women had to submit the police and medical examination; otherwise, they would be brought to the local magistrates. This provoked considerable religion and feminist opposition. The National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and Ladies National Association (LNA) were established in 1869. Both groups actively campaigned against the acts throughout the 1870s and 1880s. They made great effort in arousing public attention on the issues surrounding prostitution by making petitions and holding meetings. By 1886 they succeeded in repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts.

[72] James Warren, Pirates, *Prostitutes and Pullers: Explorations in the Ethno- and Social History of Southeast Asia*, p. 297.

[73] Yoong Ng Siew, The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877-1900, p. 76.

a way to stamp out venereal diseases. Dr. C.P Roger, worked in Coombe Lying-In Hospital, asserted that most prostitutes did not take the full course of medication and continued in prostitution to make money. This was the main reason why the prevalence of venereal diseases could not be reduced during this period. Mrs. McBreen, a Eurasian woman of Chinese descent, who kept a hospital for Chinese patients, also indicated that venereal disease had increased in the 1890s, and believed that the regular examination of prostitutes could end this increase. She held the opinion that most prostitutes would not object to being examined but that if the doctors explained the importance of the medical treatment to them properly, they would be willing to receive it. [74]

In effect, the prostitutes were controlled by the brothel-keepers, and most of them did not know that they had the right to go to hospital for treatment. Before the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance, the Medical Officer was given the rights by the authorities concerned to force the brothel-keepers to send their infected prostitutes to hospital, and the latter could not continue in prostitution until they were cured. However, after the repeal, brothel-keepers were no longer obliged to send infected prostitutes to hospitals now, and only a few saw a doctor on their own initative, mainly because, to pay for the doctor's fees and medicine, they would have to work in the brothel even longer. Hence, even when their symptoms of venereal diseases became severe, they would not visit a European doctor but took native medicine instead. Thus, most infected prostitutes were forced by the brothel-keepers to continue working, which exacerbated the spread of venereal diseases in Singapore.

Against this background, the Colonial Government sought suggestions from the

[74] CO 886, 2 May 1898, pp. 60-62.

local doctors regarding the best way to deal with prostitution and venereal diseases. The Methodist missionary Dr. William Shellabear (1862-1947) suggested that hospitals should be established by the Colonial Government for the purpose of keeping women out of the brothels. He asserted that it was the relevant authorities' responsibility to give the prostitutes medical treatments, but that it was wrong to send them back to the brothel when they were cured. This forced them continue in prostitution and ultimately led to more disease and the moral degradation of the Singapore's residents. It would produce more prostitutes, and would inevitably lead to the further spread of venereal diseases.[75] The Acting Governor Sir J.A Sweetham thus suggested that a female doctor of the prostitutes' own nationality should encourage them to receive treatment. But the female doctors in Singapore in the 1890s were unable to speak the dialects used by the Chinese prostitutes, so it was impossible for them to exercise any influence over them. Moreover, there were few qualified female doctors at that time. If each had taken charge of 50 prostitutes, the public brothels would have needed 35 female doctors, which was simply impractical at that time.[76]

In addition, the Colonial Government enacted ordinances for the protection of females in Singapore to weaken the power of the Chinese brothel-keepers from the 1880s onwards. Ordinance No.1 of 1887 authorized the Chinese Protector to offer protection to girls under sixteen who were used or trained for immoral purposes in brothels. He also had the power to summon any person whom he suspected was being brought into the colony for immoral purposes.[77] The Women and Girls' Protection

[75] CO 886, Rev. W. G. Shellabear, 12 May 1898, p. 75.
[76] CO 886, Straits Settlements No. 4 Acting Governor Sir J.A Sweeetham to Mr. Chamberlain, 1 September 1898, p. 54.
[77] CO 274, Ordinance No.1 of 1887, An Ordinance to make further provisions for the protection of women and girls, pp. 1-2.

Ordinance 1896 gave the Chinese Protectorate more rights to ban prostitution. The Chinese Protectorate kept an in-house list of tolerated brothels, including the names of the brothel-keepers and prostitutes. The newly-arrived prostitutes needed to be interviewed by the officials, and those brothel-keepers on the unofficial list needed to take their girls to be inspected regularly by private doctors. Otherwise, the brothels would be forced to shut down by the Chinese Protectorate.[78] This legislation was helpful to hold back the spread of venereal diseases among Europeans in the brothels, but all male Chinese who frequented brothels still fell the victims to it, as the Colonial Government failed to produce a more effective scheme for solving the problem of the link between the Chinese coolies, prostitution and economic development in the colony. In the meantime, the Chinese community was dominated by the different clan organizations and it was difficult to unify them as a group to deal with prostitution. This situation thus prevented the authorities concerned from coming up with a better solution to break the indispensable link between prostitution, immigration and economic development in Singapore.[79]

The major organization set up to eliminate prostitution was Po Leung Kuk (保良局 Society for the Protection of Women and Children). In 1884, the Chinese leaders in Singapore society thought that the ill-treatment of prostitutes and *mui tsais* had become a serious problem there. Hence, they asked the Colonial Government to protect these girls. The governor set up Po Leung Kuk under the Chinese Protectorate and provided refuges for females. [80] As Yen noted, Po Leung Kuk was a semi-official organization which was

[78] CO 274, Ordinance No. XVII of 1896, An Ordinance to Consolidate and Amend the Law relating to the Protection of Women and Girls and for the Suppression of Brothels, pp.1-6.
[79] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, p.152.
[80] Lee Mei Xian, *The History of Singapore*, p. 28.

formed by a committee of prominent Chinese under the chairmanship of the Chinese Protectorate. The Chinese Protectorate provided the chair of the committee and they held monthly meetings. The income of Po Leung Kuk came from sponsorships by the Colonial Government and Chinese social organizations.[81] Thus, it could be understood that this organization aimed to help females who suffered abuse and mistreatment. After the establishment of this organization, any Chinese women who entered Singapore would be questioned by the officials of the Chinese Protectorate to ensure that she had not been sold or kidnapped. If the officials found anyone suspicious, they would send the girls to Po Leung Kuk. There, they offered women the opportunity to be educated or trained in basic skills so that they might marry into a respectable family. Due to the problem of the unbalanced sex ratio, many poor labourers came to Po Leung Kuk to find a suitable bride. Po Leung Kuk would check these men's background and find a female for them. The girl could decide whether she wanted to marry this man or not. If they both agreed to the marriage, the man had to undergo a health examination and pay forty dollars as the woman's dowry to Po Leung Kuk.[82]

In the beginning, Po Leung Kuk was very successful in offering protection for females. However, the Colonial Government seems to have failed to continue this policy. Yen argued that this charitable organization had done more to help those poor girls in Singapore than other organizations by the end of the 19th century. However, the authorities concerned amended the Ordinance of 1889 in 1894. Under this new law, the rights of the Chinese Protectorate were weakened. Unless they received

[81] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 239.
[82] Lee Mei Xian, *The History of Singapore*, p. 29.

complaints, they could not inspect the brothels. In addition, the regular examination of brothels was also cancelled.[83] Under these circumstances, cases of the abuse of prostitutes rose in the following years. In 1896, the Protection of Women and Girls Ordinance was passed, which restored some of the Chinese Protectorate's rights.[84] On the contrary, Lee held a different view on Po Leung Kuk. He thought this organization played an important role in protecting and helping Chinese females in Singapore, but often suffered from insufficient funding and was unable to carry out its policies.[85] Those defects thus kept Po Leung Kuk from being a more efficient organization to help these females in need.

In summary, the Contagious Disease Ordinance, Protection of Women and Girls Ordinances and Po Leung Kuk could not alleviate the problem caused by the Chinese brothels in the 1890s. It was not until the end of the First World War that the Colonial Government took more effective measures for abolishing prostitution. The Chinese community also used newspapers as a platform to discuss this social problem and managed to set up schools for prostitutes to improve their life.

Conclusion

The arrival of female Chinese immigrants was an important factor in shaping the Chinese community from an immigrant society into a stabilised community at the turn of the 20th century. It was therefore necessary to probe into the background of Chinese female migration to Singapore in the 19th century. The Chinese community in Singapore was formed of upper and middle class Peranakan Chinese, and middle and lower class China-born Chinese during this era. With the start of immigration of

[83] Yen Ching-hwang, *The Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 239.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] Lee Mei Xian, *The History of Singapore*, p. 29.

Chinese women, the Peranakan Chinese seldom married Malay women. The Singapore Chinese society hence preserved its ethnic features and traditional culture. Nevertheless, the floating population of Chinese immigrants and high illiteracy rates among the Chinese community mean that the Chinese newspapers could not provide a platform for them to exchange or discuss their ideas about dealing with the community problems in Singapore.

It was the nature of the immigrant community that made prostitution prevalent in Singapore. The *mui-tsai* system was also found in the late 19th century. As discussed in Introduction, poor families in southern China often sold their daughters to a rich family in the overpopulated areas. When there were too many mouths to feed at home, parents would often sell the daughters, and sometimes to their creditor to pay off a debt. Basically, mui-tsais often worked without payment and they received no proper medication when ill. Some of them were tortured by their owner and could be beaten to death. Reports of these unfortunate events were often published in the newspapers, and the local organizations in Singapore asked the authorities concerned to abolish the *mui-tsai* system. However, the Colonial Government hardly took any measures before the end of the 19th century. The issues surrounding *mui-tsais* hence will be discussed in the Chapter III. In addition, the Colonial Government's policy towards the Chinese community was considered 'let the Chinese rule the Chinese', as there were limited controls and a reluctance to place stricter control on their affairs prior to the 1870s. In the 1890s, the authorities concerned started to eliminate the Chinese secret societies and took control of prostitution. With the improvement in law and order in Singapore, Chinese women were more willing to settle down in Singapore with their families from the turn of the 20th century.

Chapter II Getting Educated: from Family to Public Sphere

II.I Establishment of Chinese Female Education

This chapter focuses on the establishment and development of Chinese female education from the late 19th century to the May Fourth movement in 1920. Both English-medium and Chinese-medium education will be examined in order to understand both the Colonial Government and the Chinese community's policies in promoting Chinese female education. By identifying the role of educated women, this chapter offers a perspective for exploring how education improved their lives and pushed forward the female emancipation movement at the beginning of the 20th century. As the promotion of female Chinese education began to make progress in Singapore, proposals for establishing free schools and reading clubs for prostitutes and *mui-tsais* were also made during in the 1920s.

In addition, the development of female education may be viewed as the Chinese community's, and especially the China-born Chinese's quest for modernization and national identity with China. Thus, the chapter will also explore the connections between the Chinese women's emancipation movement in Singapore and the reformist movement in the late Qing regime, the Peranakan Chinese's reform movement, and Kuomintang's political activities carried out in the colony in order to understand the changes in Chinese women's life at the beginning of the 20th century. In other words, the closer contacts between the Nationalist Government and Singapore's Chinese community, together with the emergence of Chinese journalism, forced the Chinese leaders to take notice of prostitution and the *mui-tsais* problem in the 1920s.

English-medium Education

After the establishment of Singapore, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles planned to set up the Singapore Institution for the education of the Chinese and Malays. Although this plan failed in 1823, the Anglican chaplain F. J. Darrah from the London Missionary Society took over the institution and founded the Free School in 1834. After that, many schools were set up by American and European missionaries. For example, in 1842, Sophia Cooke (1814-1895), - as an agent of the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East, - founded the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, later known as the St. Margaret School, which was considered the first English-medium girls' school in the settlement.[1] Other girls' schools were set up by missionaries, such as the Roman Catholic Church's Covent of the Holy Infant Jesus School (1854), the Fairfield Methodist Girls' School (1889), and the Methodist Girls' School (1894). A different type of English-medium school was sponsored by the government; the first Girls' School established by the Colonial Government was Raffles Girls' School in 1863. This school was separated from the Singapore Institution (1857) and its boys' school was known as Raffles Institution. This school accepted students from different ethnic groups, including Europeans, Chinese, Malays, and Indians.

Generally, The London Missionary Society, the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East, the Roman Catholic Mission, and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were the major organizations in charge of promoting female education in the mid-19th century. The above mentioned girls'

[1] See Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941),* p. 111. There were arguments about the first English-medium Chinese girls' school in Singapore. Song Ong Siang states that the first Chinese girls' school was set up by London Missionary Society's Mrs. Dyer in 1830s. Other people claims that the Miss Grant set up the first Chinese girls' school in 1825. However, this statement had not been confined.

schools were mainly founded by these institutions. They focused on Christian evangelistic work in the settlement and carried out their ideas through education. These schools were mostly attended by European girls, followed by Chinese, Malay and Indian girls, and were subsidized by the British authorities. These schools' goal was to cultivate girls as good wives and mothers. Thus, their courses focused on household management training and paid less attention to educating girls in areas such as social skills.[2] In fact, only the wealthy and prestigious European and Chinese families would send their daughters to schools in the 19th century. As for the Peranakan Chinese parents, their main purposes for sending their daughters to schools was for them to learn English, which would be a valuable dowry for their marriage in the future. Hence, most of the Chinese girls that graduated from the English-language schools did not know how to speak any Chinese dialects and showed little concern for political and social activities.[3]

Before control of Singapore was transferred from the India Office (1851-1867) to the Colonial Office, the government authorities' educational policy was to leave different ethnic groups to manage their own educational systems. After 1867, the Colonial Government set up the Bureau of Education and divided education into two systems: English education and 'Vernacular education'. The former consisted of English and missionary schools while the latter included Chinese, Malay and Indian Schools. At that time, most of the English schools came under the Roman Catholic Church's control while different ethnic groups had their own educational systems. In 1870, the Woolley Committee[4] reported to the legislative council that

[2] *Ibid*., pp. 135-137.
[3] *Ibid*., pp. 137-138.
[4] See Francis H. K. Wong, *Official Records on Education: Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1870-1939* (Singapore: Pan Pacific Books Distributor, 1980), p. 5. The Woolley Committee was established in 1870. This organization aimed at training teachers for the English schools in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States.

education in Singapore was in a poor situation,

> It is evident that the progress of Education has been slow and uncertain…Many of them are under the control of the Roman Catholic Clergy, but all, apparently, having a system of their own, unchecked, as a rule, by the Government supervision…the Education of Females has not been neglected, but the results in this department have, in your Committee's opinion, been very much less satisfactory, generally speaking, than in the education of boys.[5]

The problems presented in this passage revealed the difficulty of promoting education in the colony, especially female education. Missionaries considered that the female education was less important than male education and were therefore only a few girls' schools established during this period. Thus, missionary-operated girls' schools only received limited grants-in-aid from the colonial authorities. The Chinese community appeared to consider that it was unnecessary for their girls to receive an education. The enrolments of students were very low and girls' schools were often sustained for only a few years.[6] Their problems were rooted in the attitudes within the colony and Chinese girls' schools still encountered the same difficulties at the end of the 19th century.

In 1872, the Colonial Government tried to adjust its educational policy by appointing an Inspector of Schools to take control of education. This post was renamed 'Director of Public Instruction for the Straits Settlements' in 1901. The authorities concerned also provided grants-in-aid for most of the private English-medium schools and promoted Christian education among the Malay community at the end of the 19th century. As for vernacular education, the setting up of such

[5] Francis H. K. Wong, 'Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council to enquire into the state of Education in the Colony (the Woolley Report, 1870) ', in Francis H. K. Wong , *Official Records on Education: Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1870-1939*, p. 12.
[6] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, pp. 115-117.

schools was a result of economic trends. The rubber and tin mining industries had brought prosperity to the settlement. In this respect, the Colonial Government had adjusted their educational policy among different ethnic groups, particularly the Malays and the Indians. Its main focus was on the vocational and technical training for the production of clerks and lower ranking officials in the settlement who would staff the rubber and tin industries and related services. Hence, the authorities founded Anglo-Tamil Schools for the Indian community and offered grants-in-aid for both Tamil and Malay schools. This was because the Colonial Government considering the Chinese as primarily either labourers or merchants rather than as potential white collar workers. It was not until the 1880s that the authorities concerned began to pay some attention to Chinese education.

The main aim of setting up vernacular schools was to improve male education. During this period, neither English nor Chinese schools showed much concern for female education. The Woolley Report claimed that the backwardness of female education was largely the result of strong prejudices existing among Asiatic parents against female education.[7] The best solution for this problem, the Report stated, was to allow Chinese males to receive education in the first place and then promote female education through those educated men. However, it was not until the end of the century that the Peranakan Chinese leadership began to take steps to eradicate parents' opposition to female education.

The Emergence of Chinese-medium Education[8]

The Colonial government took a laissez-faire attitude towards Chinese schools

[7] Francis H. K. Wong, *Official Records on Education: Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1870-1939*, p. 14.

[8] Chinese-medium education represents the education for the China-born Chinese in the 19th century.

and provided no grant-in-aid for such schools in the late 19th century. This was because most British officials and British missionaries did not understand Chinese dialects and hence had difficulty in managing their institutions. Moreover, the Chinese community refused to have their schools governed by the colonial authorities. There were two types of Chinese schools: private schools and free schools. Most of the free schools were for children from poor families. Hence, they charged only small tuition fees and were often ill-equipped. As for the private schools, most of them were founded by clan organizations and wealthy merchants. Those schools were established inside the *huiguans*. Each clan organization would set up schools for their children and classes would be taught in their own dialect. Due to the language barrier, the schools set up by clan organizations only accepted students who spoke their dialect. Compared to free schools, private schools often had sufficient financial support from clan organizations and could therefore hire more qualified teachers from China[9]. Generally, Chinese schools followed Confucian lines, which taught students the Four Books and the Five Classics[10]. The course content at these schools was highly conservative and formulaic, and consisted mainly of rote learning of the Confucian classics. However, most Chinese parents only wanted their sons to possess basic reading and writing skills in order to manage family-run businesses. At that time, education for Chinese girls was restricted to domestic activities, such as needle work and sewing, which were taught by elderly female members of the family at home

Before 1877, the Qing government of China did not express any concerns about

[9] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya,1800-1911*, pp. 279-280.

[10] The Four Books were *Confucian Analects*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Works of Mencius*; The Five Classics were *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

its overseas Chinese subjects' education. It was not until the 1870s that the Qing authorities realized that remittances from Chinese overseas could help its government solve economic problems in China.[11] Given this situation, a Chinese Consulate was set up in 1877, and its main purpose was to stimulate Chinese nationalism among the Singapore Chinese community. From then on, Chinese consuls began to cultivate Chinese loyalty to the mainland by setting up schools, literary clubs, and selling titles and ranks in Singapore. Another way to win the support of the Chinese community was to utilize cultural nationalism through a Confucian Revival Movement, something that will be discussed below. [12] In 1882, the Chinese consul Tao Ping Lung[13] (左秉隆 1881-1890) had set up the Celestial Reasoning Society for Chinese who spoke English. This organization often held debates on topics related to the Qing government, and on political, social, and cultural matters[14]. This was because the regime worried that the overseas Chinese would lose their Chinese culture and identity. As one commentator put it in 1891,

> Chinese immigrants married local girls and brought up children to learn western language so as to have contacts with the foreigners. These local-born Chinese are at a loss when asked to read Chinese characters or books. After tens and hundreds of years later, they will forget their Chinese dialects as well. By that time, several hundred and thousand of Chinese will degenerate to become barbarians...[15]

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[11] Followed by the enactment of Covenant of Peking in 1860, the Qing government was forced to allow its subjects to emigrate to the British settlements. Due to the failure of wars with the western countries and natural diseases had led to financial crisis. The Qing government realized the importance of overseas Chinese financial aid to China.

[12] Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 19.

[13] See Yong Ching Fatt *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, p. 6. Tso Ping-lung and Huang Tsun-hsien (黃遵憲 1848-1905) were the most capable Chinese Consul in Singapore. It was during their terms of office that pro-Qing political nationalism and Chinese cultural nationalism were rooted in the Chinese community. Both of them made great efforts in sponsoring and patronizing literacy and debating societies and setting up traditional Chinese schools in Singapore.

[14] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911*, p. 289.

[15] *Sing Po*, 27 July 1891, as cited in *ibid*., p. 292.

From the passage above, it can be seen that the Qing officials' main concern when it came to promoting education was to rebuild the link between China and the overseas Chinese community, and to ensure a closer and more intimate cultural link between China and its overseas subjects.

At this time, the Qing government was particularly concerned about the Peranakan Chinese community, as it was more influenced by western cultures and many members identified themselves as British subjects.[16] Thus, the Qing officials' main aim in carrying out its political and cultural diplomacy was to encourage Peranakan Chinese to become more China-oriented. Nevertheless, the result seems to have been only to make Peranakan Chinese identify more closely with Chinese culture, and they continued to support the policies carried out by the Colonial Government. Conversely, the majority of China-born Chinese, especially the intellectuals among them, regarded themselves primarily as Chinese citizens and were thus more willing to participate in the political and cultural activities sponsored by the Qing regime. The Singapore Chinese intellectuals wanted China to become a strong nation through social and political reforms, as sponsored by the reformist and revolutionary movements in China. In other words, they were more supportive of the concept of 'nation'. In their minds, they wished China could become a strong nation and it did not matter which government was in power. This could be seen in the Singapore Chinese community's support for Qing Government's reformist movement and Nationalist Government's anti- Japanese aggression activities and National Salvation Movement throughout the colonial era. Those movements established by the reformists and revolutionists in China also indirectly hastened the development of Chinese female education in

[16] The term "overseas Chinese" here meant *huaqiao*, which includes China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese.

Singapore. Many Chinese-medium girls' schools were hence established as a consequence of this trend.

Colonial Government Policy within Chinese Society

After the establishment of the Chinese Protectorate in 1877, the Colonial Government began to use educational and political measures to control the Chinese community. In the late 1870s, British officials noticed the importance of the Peranakan Chinese in the economic field. They believed that this community could become a bridge between the Chinese community and the British authorities in business affairs. This was because the Peranakan Chinese had arrived in Singapore earlier than the China born Chinese and thus had fewer contacts with China. Their lack of clan associations also allowed them to have a more open relationship with the colonial authorities.[17] In this respect, the British authorities particularly aimed at setting up schools and offering scholarships to Peranakan Chinese. This was due to the fact that many of them had received an English-medium education and had graduated from Raffles Institution. Some of them even continued their studies in India or Britain. Thus, they held higher office as scholars, merchants and government officials among the Chinese community, and were more often fluent in English and Malay rather than Chinese dialects. The Colonial Government's goal was to cultivate some Chinese leaders to control the settlement more efficiently.[18] In the mean time, the British authorities also trained up British officials to learn Chinese so as to become more familiar with local Chinese affairs. It was believed this would be helpful in strengthening economic ties with the

[17] John R. Clammer, *Straits Chinese Society: Studies in the Sociology of the Baba Communities of Malaysia and Singapore,* p. 9.
[18] Lee Qiong Kuang, 'Shijiu Shiji Xinjiapo de Huawen Jiaoyu' (Singapore Chinese Education in the 19th century), *Hsinshe Jikan,* 3.1 (September 1970), pp. 22-23.

Chinese community.

Under these circumstances, the Colonial Government also set up many clubs, churches, and associations for the Peranakan Chinese. They published speech transcripts in newspapers, magazines, symposiums to propagate the benefits of being British subjects.[19] In 1885, the Colonial Government founded the Queen' s Scholarship to offer boys an opportunity to complete their education in England. The authorities 'main aim was,

1. To allow promising boys an opportunity of completing their studies in England.
2. To encourage a number of boys to remain in school and acquire a really useful education.[20]

From 1886 to 1911, the authorities concerned granted forty-five Peranaken Chinese this award, which thus produced a small group of intellectuals in the political, economic, and social field. Lim Boon Keng was the first Queens' scholar in 1887. While studying at the University of Edinburgh, he experienced the prosperity of Britain in contrast with what he perceived as the backwardness of China. He developed a sense of shame during his time in Edinburgh and expressed disappointment at his own lack of understanding about Chinese culture and history. Hence, he began to learn Chinese and study Chinese culture. After his return to Singapore, he established a reform movement in response to the Confucian Revival Movement in China. In this respect, Lim and other elite Peranakan Chinese recipients of the Queen's Scholarship played an important role in

[19] Lee Guan Kin, *Lin Wen Qing de Sixiang:Zhong Xi Wenhua de Huiliu yu Maodun* (The Thought of Lim Boon Keng: Convergency and Contradition between Chinese and Western Culture), in Hou Kok-Chung (ed.), Chengxi yu Jueze: Malaixiya Huaren Lishi yu Renwu Wenhua Pian (The Intellectual Elites in Malaysian Chinese History). Taipei: Program for Southeast Area Asian Studies, 2001, p. 20.
[20] Wu Lu, 'The Straits Settlements Queen's Scholarships, A Brief Survey', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 8.1 (1904), p. 18.

promoting the modernization of Chinese female education in the 1890s.[21] The measures carried out by the Colonial Government were to lead China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese towards different paths in the early 20th century.

The Peranakan Chinese's Reformation Movement

The reformation movement of the 1890s was initiated by Peranakan Chinese intellectuals in Singapore. Most of them had received a western education and believed that modern reforms could help to eliminate traditional Chinese customs and thus improve women's lives. Conversely, most of the China-born Chinese leaders were merchants, and their importance in promoting female education did not become apparent until the establishment of the Nationalist Government in 1912. It was the establishment of Chinese newspapers, the Tong Meng Hui and KMT's activities and the foundation of Chinese-medium schools that helped Chinese nationalism to take root in the Singapore's Chinese community, enabling them to start addressing Chinese female issues. Against this background, the Perenakan Chinese intellectuals took the lead in promoting female education in the 1890s. In 1895, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao launched the Confucian Revival Movement in China. Their main focus was to make Confucianism the Qing government's state religion and to carry out institutional reforms in the following years.[22] However, their movement, now known as the Hundred Days Reforms,[23] also led Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang to instigate a parallel the

[21] Lee Kuan Kin, *The Thought of Lim Boon Keng: Convergency and Contradiction between Chinese and Western Culture*, pp. 22-23.

[22] See Yen Ching-hwang, 'The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya, 1899-1911', p. 33. The Confucian revival movement was an integral part of the Reform movement, first launched in 1895 by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao together with other measures for institutional reform. It gradually gained momentum in the following years. Kang Youwei made attempts at the climax of 'Hundred Days Reforms' in 1898. It established religious departments and Confucian temples and based the national calendar on Confucius' birthday.

[23] See Wang Ke-Wen, *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, pp. 149-150. In 1898, Emperor Guangxu of the Qing dynasty issued a series of reform edicts, known

reformation movement in Singapore which was related to, but independent of, the social movement occurring in China at the same time. Lim and Song's activities included reviving Confucianism, attacking the use of opium, encouraging Chinese subjects to cut off their braids, eradicating the custom of foot-binding, and promoting female education. The reformists believed that such activities could turn China into a modernized nation. Within the broader movement, the Chinese Philomathic Society was established in 1896 and the Confucian Revival Movement in the following year, both of which included within their remit the reformation of Chinese education, including female education.

The Confucian Revival Movement can be traced back to the Chinese Consuls Tso Ping Lung and Huang Tsun Hsien's efforts to promote Chinese education from the 1880s to the 1890s. By the 1890s, the Chinese community was showing interest in the traditional Chinese customs. At the same time, Lim Boon Keng and Khoo Seok-wan organized the Confucian Revival Movement to respond to the reformation movement led by Kang Youwei in China. Between 1897 and 1911, they gave public talks and published reports in newspapers using both English and Chinese to advocate Confucian ideas among people from different educational backgrounds. They also celebrated Confucius' birthday and held public meetings to raise funds to build Confucian temples and libraries amongst the Chinese community.[24] Their goal was to turn Peranakan Chinese' cultural identity away from Anglicization and 'Malayanization' towards Re-Sinicization through

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as the Hundred Days Reform (11 June-20 September, 1898). This movement was led by Kang Youwei, and his edicts marked the first attempt in China to organize a national reform by the upper classes. The edicts also reflected Kang's interest in education, such as establishing a system of modern schools, an imperial university, and an official newspaper, and revising the civil service system. Under his leadership the decrees were carried out until the Empress Dowager Cixi's coup on September 21, which led to the end of the reformation movement.

[24] Leung Yuen Sang, *Xinjiapo Huaren Shehui Shi Lun* (Studies on the Chinese Leadership in Singapore). Singapore: Bafang Wenhua Chuangzuoshi Lianhe Chuban, 2005), p. 74.

Confucian education. Thus, Confucian ideas became the main ideology for the reformation movement. Lim Boon Keng often used phrases from *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Classic of Filial Piety* to advocate a change in behaviour (for example, giving up smoking or gambling). [25] Hence, the Confucian Revival Movement can be viewed as the main force for initiating the social reform movement among the Chinese community.

Generally speaking, the content of the Confucian Revival Movement in China and Singapore was different in orientation. The former aimed to bring about political reform while the latter focused on the cultural reforms. The greatest influence that this movement brought to Singapore was encouraging Peranakan Chinese to identify with Chinese culture. As Yen noted the increasing number of Chinese immigrants, the rise of modern Chinese journalism, and the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism in line with the development of Confucian Revival Movement also enabled Chinese identity consciousness to become deeply rooted among the China-born Chinese community. It can be seen that the Chinese newspapers also began to show their importance as useful vehicles for disseminating information about the Confucian Revival Movement among the general public.[26] In this respect, the Confucian Revival Movement in both China and Singapore advocated the innovation of Chinese customs by following Confucian lines. Nevertheless, the Peranakan Chinese‘s main focus was on shaping their cultural identification towards China rather than their political intentions. By the 20th century, Singapore’s reformation movement had led to the

[25] Lee Guan Kin, Lim Boon Keng: Men Promoter of Chinese Cultural Renaissance and Modern Education), in Hou Kok-Chung (ed.), *The Intellectual Elites in Malaysian Chinese History*, p. 18.
[26] Yen Ching-hwang, ‘The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya, 1899-1911’, pp. 35-36.

rise of modern education and the flourishing of Chinese schools, which also signified the beginning of the female educational reforms.

The Background to Chinese Female Education

In the late 19th century, the establishment of Chinese girls' schools was proposed initially by the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals. Generally speaking, most Chinese parents in Singapore thought that their daughters did not need to be as highly educated or learned as men. According to traditional Chinese norms, girls were not allowed to attend school. Indeed this was summed up by the widely-circulated phrase: "A girl without talent is therefore virtuous". The woman's traditional role in the family was that of a dutiful wife and loving mother. She did not have the right to be educated, ask for a divorce, or inherit family property. Under these circumstances, only a minority of girls from wealthy Peranakan Chinese families had the opportunity to be educated at that time. However, even girls who were well-educated merely had a better opportunity to marry into a better family,

> It is when they (Chinese girls) reach the age of twelve or thirteen that the school mistress meets with the great stumbling block in her school regime. The parent think that the girls have entered on what I may call the "training for marriage" stage and that instead of wasting any more time on books and figures, the girls should take their place in the kitchen in the morning and evening, and during the day should keep their fingers busy with the needle.[27]

Generally, Chinese girls were no longer allowed to play or associate with their male peers from around the age of eleven. They were also not permitted to show their faces outside their houses. Although most of the Peranakan Chinese were

[27] 'The Correspondence of Lew See Fah- Straits Chinese Maidens', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 6. 22 (1902), p. 44.

educated in English, they still followed traditional Chinese values. Hence, they started to look for suitors for their daughters once they reached the age of 15 or 16. The family therefore became the main focus of life for girls, and their task was to learn the art of household management.[28]

Traditionally, the Peranakan Chinese women's life was restricted to their family and religion gradually became the focus of their life. Some of them believed in Buddhism and combined it with Malay witchcraft. They also worshipped gods and ancestors, but used Malay foods in funeral parlours. Their religion often made *Nyonyas* very superstitious. They often prayed to the gods for blessing and to eradicate illness,

> To their ignorance is attributable, to a large extent, the superstition that troubles and haunts them in each event and concern of their daily life. Superstition is, as you well know, the twin sister of ignorance.[29]

The narrative above shows that the *Nyonyas*' superstitious behaviour affected their life. They would believe anything the fortune-tellers told them. Some of them were willing to pay a large amount of money to change the *feng shui* 風水 of their house. Their superstitious behaviours were also linked to the problem of gambling among the Chinese community. At that time, many women went to temples or cemeteries to ask the deities, ghosts or their ancestor for *chap-ji-ki* 十二支's numbers. However, this card game was a trick. The numbers that the women bet on were unsealed, so the dealers could decide the winning number. Drawing the winning numbers of a lottery was also not available to the public, due to the fact that most of them were illiterates, and their lives were confined within the family.

[28] 'Chinese Female Education', *The Straits Times*, 17 April 1899, p. 3.
[29] *Ibid*.

Thus, their only entertainment was to play *chap-ji-ki*.[30] Since Peranakan Chinese women were not allowed to visit gambling houses, the stake collectors would send the stake to their homes and collected money from them.

In other words, the stake collectors made use of the *Nyonyas*' superstitious behaviour to cheat more money from them. In the long run, many women neglected their domestic duties: children were not properly cared for, houses were not cleaned, and meals were not cooked.[31] What was worse, some wealthy women would sell their valuables or houses to pay off their debts. As for the poor women, many of them were sold to brothels to pay back the debts.

The main reason why the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals became concerned about women's gambling problems was the prevalence of this social ill within Singapore's Chinese community. As Yen stated gambling had a profound social impact on the Chinese community. The gambling farms in Singapore often led to rivalries between the secret society and caused many Chinese residents to lose their property. In the mid-19th century, the Colonial Government failed to ban gambling and hence tried to introduce other alternative scheme to deal with this social ill.[32] Interestingly, it was also the much publicized 'social ill' of gambling amongst the Chinese female population which stimulated greater levels of public debates about the need for female education. In this sense, both the English and Chinese newspapers, such as the *Straits Times* and *Lat Pau*, published reports addressing the severity of the gambling problem among the *Nyonyas*. Those

[30] *Chap-ji-ki* means 12 units in Hokkien. It is a type of lottery in which gamblers bets on a combination of two numbers from 1 to 12. The winners can win as much as 50 times the original stake.
[31] Yen Ching-hwang, 'Gambling in the Chinese Community in Singapore and Malaya, 1792-1911', in *Community and Politics: the Chinese in Colonial Singapore and Malaysia*, p. 137.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 141.

reports illustrated the negative effects that Chinese women's behaviour had brought to the settlement. The British officials suggested that arresting and fining stake collectors might be a solution to this problem.[33] Nevertheless, this social ill was deeply-rooted in the Chinese community and could not be eliminated in the short term. Peranakan intellectuals therefore concluded that the best remedy was to allow women to be properly educated,

> The importance of allowing girls to receive education…The two great qualities which lies at the basis of education are curiosity and observation, and if the Nyonyas are educated properly, they will certainly use their observation to the betterments and guides to their husbands, and they will think less of Chap Joe Kee.[34]

By being educated, it was believed that Chinese women would become more aware of the 'defects' of *chap-ji-ki* and would not become victims of stake collectors. In addition, they would develop other interests instead of confining themselves within the family.

The turning point for the transformation of Chinese females' social status and their position within the family was the reformation movement in China, led by the reformists Liang Qichao and Zheng Guanying. They discussed women's role as a dutiful wife and loving mother. Liang proposed the idea of a 'worthy mothers and good wives' (賢妻良母 *xianmu liangqi*) when advocating female education. He believed that women would be more capable of bringing up their children if they were equipped with a basic education. Zheng Guanying (鄭觀應 1842-1923) also pointed out that education could train girls to become 'virtuous women, virtuous wives and virtuous mothers'. By being properly educated, women could

[33] 'Gambling Among Nyonyas', *The Straits Times*, 22 October, 1907, p. 8.
[34] 'Gambling among Nyonyas', *The Straits Times*, 17 October, 1907, p. 8.

be literate, morally upright and more capable of handling everyday matters, such as cooking and embroidery.[35] These innovative ideas also spread to the Singapore Chinese community.

This can be perceived as the turning point in the educational reforms carried out by both the Colonial Government and within the Chinese community. Lee argued that China, Britain and Singapore formed a complex triangular relationship at the turn of the century. As mentioned above, British culture had a profound influence on the Peranakan Chinese community and many Peranakans sought to emulate certain aspects of British life as they saw it in Southeast Asia. British culture had also been exported to China via the treaty ports, and Chinese intellectuals had set up a reformation movement that combined Chinese and western cultural influences; the reformation movements in China also had an influence on Singapore Chinese society.[36] This was also due to the fact that the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals, Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang, noted these serious problems among their women. They held the opinion that *Nyonyas*' superstitions and gambling habits would harm the family, especially their children's education. The main reason for the *Nyonyas*' behaviour was their ignorance,

> The present generation of *Nyonyas*, with a few exceptions is a generation of illiterate and uneducated women…Not being taught to read or write in Chinese English or Malay, they are deprived all through life of the ordinary means of gleaning or obtaining knowledge from newspapers or journals, or of benefitting by the experience of other people recorded in books and other documents… They become selfish and careless and ignorant, with a propensity for gambling and some even for drinking for the sake of something

[35] Ruth Glen Peterson, Hayhoe, and Ling Lu Yong eds, *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 321-322.
[36] Lee Guan Kin,'Singapore Paranakan Chinese Intellectuals' Ideas on Feminism and Female Education', in Yang Song Nian and Wang Kang Ding (eds), *Literature and Culture of the Overseas Chinese in the Southeast Asia*, p. 273.

that gives them temporary excitement…[37]

Song thought that the only solution to the *Nyonyas*' problem was to allow them to be educated. Newspapers and magazines thus became important tools for the Peranakan intellectuals to use to inform people about the importance of female education in the Peranakan Chinese community. In 1895, Lim Boon Keng delivered a speech entitled 'Education of the Chinese' at Singapore's City Hall. After that, he published a series of papers concerning educational issues, such as, 'The Education of Children', 'Our Enemies', and 'The Education of the Chinese'. These works analyzed Chinese women's problems and their influences on the whole community.

In 1897, Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang co-founded the *Straits Chinese Magazine*. The main focus of this publication was to give guidance to the general public, and promote social and educational reforms among the Peranakan Chinese community. Thus, it contained essays regarding the social life, education, folklore history and religion of the Chinese community. In this respect, the magazine published many essays concerning Chinese female education among the Peranakan Chinese community. It appears that the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals were trying to draw the Chinese community's attention towards the importance of Chinese female education. They demonstrated that the women could be freed from what they classed as 'ignorance' and 'superstition' by being educated. From reports in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, it can also be perceived that the main aim of the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals toward Chinese women was to eradicate what they considered to be 'bad habits' and to develop, instead, well- behaved, dutiful wives and loving mothers through receiving education. This was because

[37] Song Ong Siang, 'The Position of Chinese Women' (March 1897), http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/civilsoc/scm/cwomen.html [accessed 20 Feb 2010].

women's major task was to teach their children basic knowledge and to correct their behaviour. Thus, they needed to be their children's role model within the family,

> The care and upbringing of children are the chief duties of the women…There can be no doubt that when Chinese women are educated and can help the younger generation in the struggles against the old-fashioned men and women, then will the awakening of China be an accomplished fact.[38]

In this sense, Peranakan intellectuals argued that schooling for girls was the foundation for obtaining women's rights. If women did not have the right to be properly educated, then everything was useless.[39] However, the main concern regarding the liberation of women was to release them from ignorance and superstition, which mainly resulted from gambling, instead of encouraging them to take part in social and economic activities.

The concept of sexual equality was also raise during the reformation movement. Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao emphasized on the importance of sexual equality in respect of women's rights and the establishment of girls' schools in China. The Peranakan intellectuals were influenced by these ideas and began to examine similar problems among the Chinese community. The Peranakan Chinese intellectuals thought that the best way to alter Chinese women's situation was through education,

> It (education) ought to be the opening up to the mind's eye of a grand panorama of knowledge which the visitor is invited to view and a partaker of …ought to be such as to give a girl a much higher view of life than she has at present, providing an antidote to the many hard knocks that she will

[38] *Ibid*., pp. 156-57.
[39] Lee Guan Kin,'Singapore Peranakan Chinese Intellectuals' Ideas on Feminism and Female Education', in Yang Song Nian and Wang Kang Ding (eds), *Literature and Culture of the Overseas Chinese in the Southeast Asia*, p. 288.

> afterwards experience in her own house and family circle, and acting as a safety-valve when life becomes almost intolerable.[40]

In this respect, advocating women's rights and establishing girls' schools became one of the major aims of the Peranakan Chinese community. Their quest through the reformation movement was modernization among the Chinese community. Female education was also the key component of this movement. In China, the reformists' quest for improving women's life was to oppose foot-binding and promote the female education movement. Conversely, the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals only targeted the minority of *Nyonyas* in the Chinese society in the beginning of the 20th century. They were unconcerned about the social problems among the majority of China-born Chinese, such as prostitutes and *mui-tsais*. It was not until the 1920s that China and the British authorities took notice of those social problems and worked with the Chinese community to solve them.

II.II The Development of Chinese Female Education

The development of Singapore's Chinese female education was influenced by major events such as the Revolution of 1911 in China, the May Fourth Movement and the intervention by the Colonial Government in the early 20th century. In this section, those events will be investigated in detail to understand how female education attained maturity with the establishment of a sound system in the 1920s.

English-medium Chinese Girls' Schools (1899-1911)

In the 1890s, most Chinese parents held conservative attitudes about allowing their daughters to be educated. As mentioned in the previous section, the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals had noticed this phenomenon among the Chinese

[40] 'The Correspondence of Lew See Fah- Straits Chinese Maidens', p. 83.

community. Thus, they published newspapers articles, arguing the importance of allowing their daughters to attend school. Their main purpose was to eradicate the parents' bias against female education. *Lat Pau* (1881-1932) and the *Straits Chinese Magazine* were the two publications that were most concerned with the issue of female education. *Lat Pau* was founded by See Ewe Lay in 1881, and was the first Chinese newspaper to be published in South East Asia. See Ewe Lay's main aim was to utilize this newspaper to strengthen the cultural ties with China. It can be seen that the layout of *Lat Pau* copied Shanghai's *Shen Bao* in China. There were eight printed pages in *Lat Pau*, and the news reports took up three and half of these. Most of the reports copied the news from China and there were only a few reports about Britain or Singapore.[41]

The greatest influence of *Lat Pau* was to force the Singapore's Chinese intellectuals to keep a closer eye on events in China. The personal contacts between the intellectuals in China and Singapore also became more frequent in the beginning of the 20th century. [42] Another reason why *Lat Pau* was able to exist in Singapore for fifty years was its neutral attitude towards the Colonial Government's Qing regime and the Nationalist Government. This enabled *Lat Pau* to publish articles about the reformation movement in China and provided a platform for the Chinese intellectuals to exchange their ideas in the newspapers.

Under the influence of the reformation movement in China, *Lat Pau* also emphasized the importance of promoting female education. From the 1880s, this

[41] Choi Kwai Keong, *Xinjiapo Huawen Bao Kan yu Bao Ren* (History of Chinese Newspapers, Periodicals, and Journalists of Singapore). Singapore: Hai Tai Wen Hua Qi Ye Si Ren Company, 1993, pp. 6-7.
[42] Christine Doran, 'The Chinese Cultural Reform Movement in Singapore: Singaporean Chinese Identities and Reconstructions of Gender', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 12. 1 (April 1997), p. 97.

newspaper published a series of reports discussing the necessity for setting up Chinese schools for girls, such as ’On Female Education (25 June 1888)’, ’Essay on the Importance of allowing Girls to receive Education’ (1 July 1890), ‘The Necessity of Promoting Female Education in Singapore (2 May 1894)’, and ’Essay on the Promotion of Establishing Girls’ Schools (12 June 1896)’. These essays aimed to promote female education by arguing that the bad habits of Chinese women were due to the fact that they were uneducated. The traditional Chinese value of ‘A girl without talent is therefore virtuous’ was the major reason for this. Hence, these essays provided examples of Japan and western countries where women shared the same rights as men when it came to being educated. In addition, an anonymous author from *Lat Pau* proposed an alternative scheme for women to receive an education without attending schools. In an ‘Essay on the Necessity of Setting up an Organization for the Cultivation of Women's Moral Character’, the anonymous writer stated that,

> The best solution for women to be educated was to send them to girls’ school. Nevertheless, is there an alternative way for them to be educated without attending schools? Can this alternative scheme for women to be educated receive the same results as sending them to schools? The creation of the ‘Xiao Shen Yan Shui Hui’ (脩身演說會 Self-cultivation Lectures Club) for women therefore can reach the same results as sending them to schools.[43]

This passage revealed that *Lat Pau* was advocating a fairly flexible and innovative scheme for Chinese women in the early stage of female education. The reasons for establishing such an organization was because most girls from wealthy families considered learning to read and write was difficult for them while those from poorer families were deprived of education. Hence, the essay argued that the best

[43] ‘Lun Nüzi Yi She Xiushen Yanshuohui’ (Essay on the Necessity of Setting up an Organization for the Cultivation of Women's Moral Character’), *Lat Pau*, 15 December 1906, p. 1.

solution was to hold a series of weekly speeches for both educated and uneducated women to spark their interests in learning new knowledge. The content of such speeches would involve a lecturer telling stories about famous women in history, which would be easy for women of all classes to understand. Gradually, it was believed, they would realize the pleasure of learning and wish to become educated. In this respect, the major aims of these publications in relation to female education were to focus people's attention on female education and released women from ignorance and social ills in the 1890s.

In 'On Female Education' an unnamed commentator noted the backwardness of Chinese women's position within the family. The young girls' parents only showed concern about their sons' schooling and did not allow their daughters to be educated. Like his peers, this commentator cited the achievements of famous educated women in Chinese history to demonstrate that Chinese women could be as successful as men if they were properly educated.[44] Another report entitled 'On Promoting Education for Girls in Nanyang' further stated that if Chinese women were properly educated, they could be liberated from ignorance. Without knowledge, they could not manage the household duties efficiently.[45] From these newspaper reports and the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, many commentators used famous women in Chinese history as examples to encourage women to be educated. These famous women could be classified into two types: queens/ concubines of the emperors and the mothers of famous people. These women played an important role in encouraging their husbands and sons to become good emperors, loyal couriers and dutiful sons. As 'Selected Anecdotes from the

[44] 'Jiao Nü Shuo'(On Female Education), *Lat Pau*, 1 July 1890, p. 1.
[45] 'Zhenxing Nanyang Huaqiao Nüzi Quan Xue Wen' (On Promoting Education for Girls in Nanyang), *Lat Pau*, 13 January 1908, p. 1.

Records of Famous Women' stated, these stories was well-known by Chinese people and could help to liberate their women folk from ignorance, and made them aware that they could also make a contribution to society by being educated.[46]

In general, both the *Straits Chinese Magazine* and *Lat Pau*'s main aim was to draw Chinese attention towards female education. Most of the readers of these sources were literate male Chinese leaders and merchants: i.e., those who could provide funds to support the establishment of Chinese girls' schools. In addition, those publications would report on the development of female education in other countries, such as Japan, the United States, and Britain. Their purpose was to inform the readers that female education was becoming a world trend. This suggests that the Chinese intellectuals regarded China as their motherland and wanted to make it a strong, modernized nation. Thus, their main purpose in promoting female education in the settlement was to make China (i.e., not Singapore) a modernized country.

In June 1899, Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang founded the first Chinese girls' school, the Singapore Chinese Girls' School. They also published an advertisement in the *Straits Times* to announce the establishment of the school. This was the first English-medium school for Chinese girls and Miss Geary was appointed headmistress. Their purpose in setting up schools for girls can be as follows,

> Establish schools for girls, make attendance in them compulsory, educate our women so that they can write a letter in their own language… teach them the

[46] There were several articles entitled as 'Selected Anecdotes from the Records of Famous Women' in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* between 1897 and 1907.

> sciences, so that they may sound the depths of their own ignorance, teach them systematically in all things that they may know the importance of the influence they wield, and wield it to good purpose in the education of their family.[47]

Although the Peranakan intellectuals had high expectations for this school, only a few girls attended it initially. There were only a few students in the first month, increasing to 30 people in the next month.[48] By 1900, the school had become better known among the Chinese community and the enrolment of students had increased to 64.[49] In order to encourage more girls to be educated, the Singapore Chinese Girls' School appointed a matron to take the students to and from school every day.

As for the content of the curriculum, this school followed western lines but combined these with the inculcation of traditional Chinese values. Teoh stated that the contents of the English-medium Chinese girls' curricula were based upon the European and United States' models.[50] This was because Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang were third generation Peranakan Chinese who had themselves been brought up in traditional Peranakan Chinese families but had received a western education during their childhood. Hence, the Singapore Chinese Girls' School's courses were similar to those of English-medium schools, including music, English and household management. Reformers like Lim and Song believed that,

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[47] Education for Chinese Women, *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 5. 20 (1901), pp. 165-66.
[48] Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 305-06.
[49] The Hons. Secretary, 'The Singapore Chinese Girls' School', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 11.4 (1907), p. 165.
[50] Karen M. Teoh, 'Exotic Flowers, Modern Girls, Good Citizens: Female Education and Overseas Chinese Identity in British Malaya and Singapore, 1900s-1950s', *Twentieth-Century China*, 35.2 (April 2000), p. 27.

> It is necessary to teach the girls such practical things as sewing, cooking, and the ordinary household duties in order to convince our detractors that education does not make them less fit as housekeepers. In educating our girls, it is essential to present before them an interesting course of lessons, and to guide them slowly to take an interest in the acquisition of our language and of things in general. Usefulness before ornament is an important fact to bear in mind. Of course music must be taught and I hope a sufficient amount of physical exercise will be gradually introduced so as not to shock conservative parents.[51]

By adopting pragmatic educational methods, the Peranakan intellectuals thus believed they could meet the requests of the conservative parents. This was due to the traditional Chinese value that women's role was to be dutiful wife and loving mother. Hence, the Singapore Chinese Girls' School offered practical courses, such as sewing and, cooking, to conform to the parents' expectations. The Official reports in 1902 also confirmed that the Singapore Chinese Girls' School had succeeded in encouraging Chinese girls to be educated. However, the majority of Chinese females remained uneducated and this became an obstacle to the promotion of education among the Chinese youth in the settlement.[52] From Lim and the official report's perspectives, it can be understood that female education was still unsupported by the majority of the Chinese community. In addition, female education was aimed at Peranakan Chinese girls and did not include China-born girls. It was not until the establishment of Chinese-language Girls' Schools in the next century that female education underwent further development.

Emergence of Chinese-medium Female Education (China-born Chinese)

[51] Lim Boon Keng, 'Straits Chinese Reform III-The Education of Children', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 3. 11 (1899), p. 103.

[52] Francis H. K. Wong,'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the System of English Education in the Colony (the Kynnerseley Report, 1902)' as cited in Francis H. K. Wong, *Wong Francis Hoy Kee and Hean, Gwee Yee, Official Records on Education: Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, 1870-1939,* p. 38.

The Reformation Movement in 1898, revolutionists' activities, establishment of the Nationalist Government, and the financial supports of China-born Chinese merchants promoted the development of female education in Singapore. At the turn of the century, many Chinese-medium girls' schools were set up to meet the needs of the China-born community in the colony. The first Chinese-medium girls' school was Hua Qiao Girls' School- established in 1905. This was followed by Chung Hwa Girls' School (1911), Nan Hwa Girls' School (1917) and Nanyang Girls' Schools (1917). The emergence of Chinese-language schools was a result of the influence of China's Reformation Movement and Revolutionary Movement from the end of the 19th century. Kang Youwei had criticized the traditional Chinese customs which he believed placed bondage on women's lives and did harm to their bodies and minds. He believed that the promotion of female education was the key factor in solving this problem. By being educated, women could broaden their insights and nurture superior descendants. In his *Book of Great Harmony*, he stated,

> If people throughout the world try to abolish the evils of the family, then they should begin by making men and women clearly equal with each person enjoying independence...If people throughout the entire world try to abolish the evil of private property, then they should begin by making men and women clearly equal with each person enjoying independence. This is a right which heaven bestows on humanity. [53]

Although the Reformation Movement failed in the end, the Qing government in China adopted many of the reformists' ideas about female education. In 1901, the authorities allowed girls' schools to be set up in China and in 1907 female

[53] See Joshua A. Fogel, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950* (Stanford University Press, 1978), p. 46.

education was officially incorporated into China's educational system. *Twenty Rules and Regulations for Girls' Primary Schools*[54] and *The Thirty-six rules and Regulations for Girls' Normal Schools*[55] were also enacted in the same year. These two regulations' main aim was to educate women to become skilled and efficient household managers. Thus, the content of the curricula was focused on handicraft skills, domestic chores, needle works, and arithmetic. The reformers believed that girls could acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in household management in the public schools. Bailey asserted that the Chinese reformists, educators, officials, and revolutionists believed that women were the root cause of China's backwardness. Hence, female education played an important role in helping girls to become hardworking, skilful, and efficient household managers.[56] These changes also signified the beginning of public education for girls in modern China.

In the meantime, the Singapore Chinese community took notice of such changes (in China) and began to pay more attention to the importance of promoting female education in Singapore itself by setting up Chinese-medium girls' schools in the colony. From 1900 onwards, the revolutionary movement also played an important role in promoting female education. Qiu Jin (1875-1907)[57] in "A Respectful Proclamation to China's 200 Million Women" urgued,

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[54] See Xiong Xianjun, *Zhongguo Nüzi Jiaoyu Shi* (*The History of Chinese Female's Education*). Taiyuan: Shanxi Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2009, pp. 212-213. The regulations was divided into four chapters, which were general principle of founding schools, levels of discipline, teaching management and system of organizations.

[55] *Ibid*., p.214. The regulations were divided into six chapters, which were general principle of founding schools, levels of discipline, supervisions on teaching administrators, examinations on enrolment, system of organizations and obligations on teaching methods.

[56] Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century*, pp. 32-33.

[57] See Wang, Ke-Wen, *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, pp. 273-274. Qiu Jin (秋瑾 1875-1907) was an anti-Qing revolutionist, feminist and writer. She had studied in Japan for several years and took part in the revolutionary activities after returning to China. In 1907, she was caught by Qing government in an uprising and was executed at the age of 32.

> Girls, no matter what, never have your feet bound. Young women, if possible it's best for you to go to school; but ever if you can't, then read at home and study your characters all the time…If you seek to escape the shackles of men, you must be independent. If you seek independence, you must gain knowledge and organize.[58]

Her main appeal was to allow educated women to become independent and self-supporting, and gradually gaining respects from men. Moreover, she asserted that female education could follow Japan as an example and therefore turn China into modernized country.

The Chinese Republican leader (and later the first president of the Republic of China) Sun Yat-sen (孫中山 1866-1925) also stressed the importance of female education in promoting his revolutionary reforms. In 1906, he went to Singapore to propagate his ideas and to seek funding for his revolutionary movement from wealthy overseas Chinese. The local branches of Tong Meng Hui were thus established in Malaya and Singapore. The major tasks of these organizations were to unify the overseas Chinese and keep them in close contact with China. In order to secure their loyalty to China, reading rooms and Chinese Chinese-medium schools were used to propagate the revolutionists' activities.[59] The former aimed to instil the idea of revolutionary activities in young readers' minds, and hence provided revolutionary books, magazines and newspapers in the clubs, while the latter became an effective tool in disseminating revolutionary messages and spreading the anti-Qing regime among the Chinese community.[60]

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[58] Joshua A. Fogel, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950,* p. 63.
[59] Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914*, pp. 70-71.
[60] See Yong Ching Fatt, T*he Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, p. 15. The main functions of these newspapers were double fold: to counteract the influence of the Chinese reformists in the Singapore Chinese community through political polemics against their papers, such as the *Union Times* and *Lat Pau*, and to establish an anti-Manchu ideological hegemony in Singapore among the Chinese community.

The reforms led Sun Yat-sen to realise that because few Chinese had the opportunity to be educated, they were unable to participate in the revolutionary activities. He encouraged the leaders of the Singaporean Chinese community to establish Chinese-medium schools and promote the importance of education. In fact, the revolutionary movement led by Sun Yat-sen did not succeed in garnering substantial support in Singapore. This was due to the fact that the majority of people in the Chinese community were inclined to be more sympathetic to the Qing regime and considered the activities promoted by the Republican Chinese revolutionaries to be dangerous. This can be seen from the fact that the newspapers established by Sun's revolutionaries only lasted for a very short period. Most of the Chinese intellectuals in Singapore believed that these newspapers conveyed sentiments that were hostile to the Qing regime. However, the ideas about promoting female education that such sources contained took root in the Chinese community and led to Chinese-medium girls' schools springing up all over Singapore in the 1910s.

After the 1911 Revolution in China under the influence of Sun Yat-sen's republican movement, even more Chinese-medium girls' schools were founded by the Chinese community in Singapore. The reasons behind the Republican Chinese's demands for the promotion of female education can be found in newspaper articles written by pro-Sun elements in Singapore. Firstly, it was their belief that women should be liberated from the traditional Chinese values. In a 1919 article entitled 'A Girls School's Graduation Ceremony', a journalist writing in *Lat Pau* appealed to many of the sentiments that the Peranakan reformers had previously argued were important for justifying female education, but did so in much more openly 'Republican'- influenced language, linking female education

with the notion of modern Chinese nation building-,

> There were many famous talented women in history. However, only a few of them existed in each dynasty. The main reason for this phenomenon was that female education was not prevalent in China. The concept of favouring men over women was therefore unbreakable for hundreds of years. 'A girl without talent is therefore virtuous' also became the traditional norm in Chinese society..However, women are now viewed as 'mothers of nation' (一國之母 *yiguo zhimu*), and their responsibility is to help their husband and teach their children. Hence, they needed to be educated to fulfil their duties.[61]

This notion of women as 'the mothers of the nation'[62] was a relatively 'modern' one and showed the clear influence of the Sun Yat-sen's rhetoric of the day, in which ideas of citizenship and the rights and duties of Chinese citizens within a wider Republican nation were stressed. Such concepts originated around the time of China's defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and reflected the reformists' sense of crisis related to the threat of the destruction of China itself, and 'the extinction of the Chinese race' (亡國滅種 *wangguo miezhong*). In this respect, Zhi Qun in 'Women's Education' asserted that citizen education was the mother of progress, which meant that female education is the mother of citizen education. If the women could manage their household duties well then, afterwards, the nation would be governed well. In addition, if women were virtuous and wise mothers, then they would nurture fine children.[63] In the

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[61] 'Nüsheng Biye Zhicheng' (A Girls School's Graduation Ceremony), *Lat Pau*, 4 April 1919, p. 13.

[62] See Ruth Glen Peterson, Hayhoe, and Ling Lu Yong (eds), *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, p. 321. The concept of 'mothers of the nation' may originate from the late Qing period. At that time, many periodical, especially journals published by overseas students in Japan, emphasized the purpose of promoting female education was to train girls to become 'mothers of the nation'. They believed that it was harmful for women to be confined within their home. It would make them ignorant and uninterested in public affairs. Thus, they would waste time and money on superstitious religion devotions and personal adornment, As result, they could not manage household duties well and had bad influence on teaching their children.

[63] Zhi Qun, 'Nüzi Jiaoyu (Women's education)', *Nüzi Shijie* 2.6 (1905), pp. 1-6, as cited in Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century*, p. 57.

Republican worldview, Zhu also asserted that women played an important role in bearing and nurturing healthy citizens, thus making China a powerful modern nation on a par with Japan and the Western powers.[64] Thus, education played an important role in cultivating women to become virtuous mothers and virtuous wives for China's next generation of male citizens.

Similarly, the Chinese elites, such as Liang Qichao and Zheng Guanying, believed that educated women were eligible to teach their children to become the 'future pillars of the nation' (國家棟樑 *guojia dongliang*). After the 1911 Revolution, the political instability caused by the war-lords in China further spread the notion of 'the mothers of the nation'. A report entitled 'Commentary on Yu Ying School's setting up of a Free School and Girls' Classes', by an unnamed author further discussed female education in Nanyang,

> I had participated in education affairs for many years and my goal was to popularize education. Nevertheless, it was a great difficulty of popularizing education in this region. This was due to main focus being on male education and unconcerned with female education; and also favoured elite education over education for ordinary people. There were many Chinese boys' schools established overseas, but only a few girls' schools founded in these regions. [65]

The author therefore asserted that everyone had the same right to be educated, whether they were rich or poor, male or female. The establishment of schools could bring prosperity to China. As for the situation in Singapore's Chinese community, male, elite education was favoured, and less concern was shown for female education. Indeed, the numbers of boys' schools far surpassed that of girls'

[64] Zhu Cai-Xia, 'The Government should Promote the Concept of Hygiene among Their Female Subjects', *Journal of Female Medical Studies*, 12 (1930), p. 12, as cited in Chou Chun Yen, Qiang Guo Qiang Zhong yu Jindai Zhongguo de Funü Weisheng (1895-1949) (Women's Hygiene in Modern China (1895-1949)), PhD thesis (National Chengchi University, 2007) p. 69.
[65] 'Wen Yuying Xuexiao Jiang She Yixue Ji Nüzi Ban Gan Yan' (Commentary on Yu Ying School's setting up of a Free School and Girls), *Lat Pau*, 12 August 1919, p. 6.

schools. Thus, the importance of Yu Ying School in setting up girls' classes was that they were also offering girls from poor families an opportunity to be educated. In the long run, female education would be popularized throughout the colony.

The content of such reports was different from the viewpoints expressed by the Peranakan intellectuals. Their main focus was to allow all Chinese girls in Singapore the opportunity to be educated and their main concern was China, often referring to their ancestral homeland as 'my nation'. This can be perceived as them considering China as the centre of their universe, and perhaps viewing their sojourn in Singapore as temporary. The intellectuals in China often viewed the overseas Chinese as playing an important role in modernizing China. Thus, some of the reports from *Lat Pau* were entitled 'On Promoting Education for Girls in Nanyang' (13 January 1908) and 'Discussions on the Education Method in Nanyang' (16 March 1920) that discussed female education. In addition, the Chinese intellectuals in Singapore also asserted that both men and women shared the same responsibility for social reforms. In the report entitled 'Women should take Responsibility for reconstructing Society', the chief editor of *Lat Pau,* Lim Ke-Xie (林克諧 1892-1954) illustrated how the concept of 'Girls without talents are therefore virtuous' was being criticized in the settlement,

> …In my opinion, the tradition Chinese norm 'a woman without talent is therefore virtuous' should be abandoned, especially in the sphere of female education…This is because women are also citizens of our nation(i.e., China), and following from the idea of sexual equality, women shared rights in receiving education just as men do. Thus, female education should be promoted in the nation (i.e., China). [66]

Hence, the commentator in this article believed that women should have the same

[66] Lim Ke-Xie, 'Nü Xuejie Dang Fu Gaizao Shehui Zeren Shuo' (Women should take Responsibility for reconstructing Society), *Lau Pau*, 4 September 1919, p. 9.

right to be educated as men. Girls' schools therefore needed to be established to meet the needs of society. At the same time, women were deemed equally responsible for the corruption of society and the backwardness of China. This was because the majority of women was uneducated and left everything up to men. If women wish to have the same rights as men, then they should take on the responsibility for introducing innovations in society.

Those reports from *Lat Pau* also emphasized the importance of sexual equality and autonomy for women. A report entitled 'The Ill Effects that the Family has on Society' stated that the promotion of female education could eradicate abuses such as concubinage and the concept of male superiority over women. Without knowledge, women could not develop their talents fully. In addition, they could not make a living without possessing the basic life skills. The author Jing Bing stated in a *Lat Pau* editorial that,

> Men and women were the foundation of family. Thus, family life consisted of life of men and women. If women are uneducated and lose their talent, this will harm her family life.[67]

The commentator provided further examples of western women in European countries who worked as secretaries, teachers and shop assistants because they had learnt basic job skills through their education. They believed that women could be more independent and less reliant on men through receiving an education, and the idea of sexual equality could also put into practice one day. Under such circumstances, the China-born community began to establish Chinese-mediun girls' schools in the settlement.

[67] Jing Bing, 'Jiating Bu Liang Yingxiang yu Shehui' (The Ill Effects that the Family has on Society), *Lat Pau*, 20 September 1919, p. 2.

Development of Chinese-medium Girls' Schools

During this period, the Peranakan intellectuals supported the reformists' activities in China and encouraged their daughters to be educated. However, their attitude towards female education was conservative and they believed that girls only needed to possess basic knowledge. This situation changed after the Revolution of 1911. The new government in China began to advocate using Mandarin in schools in order to centralize and produce uniformity in the educational system. Between 1911 and 1942, the female education reforms were led by the China-born Chinese community leaders. The KMT intended to use Chinese schools to spread the ideas of nationalism. The use of Mandarin in Chinese schools gradually broke down the barrier between the dialect groups, and made the China-born Chinese more China-oriented. In this respect, the KMT's political activities in Nanyang, including Singapore, led the overseas Chinese to realize that China was a nation rather than a district or province. In the 19th century, kinship and dialect ties were the most important social connection tools used for unifying the Chinese community.[68] Hence, introducing Mandarin into Singapore's Chinese schools helped to break down the language barrier among different *huiguans*,[69] which could unify the Chinese community's cultural and ethnic identity towards China.[70] As Yong stated, Mandarin had become a common language at the beginning of the 20th century and it played an important role in

[68] Yen Ching-hwang, 'Class Structure and Social Mobility in the Chinese Community in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911', in *Community and Politics: the Chinese in Colonial Singapore and Malaysia, 1800-1911*, p. 19.
[69] See Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 50. *Huiguans* were smaller organizations that brought individuals together from the same lineage, occupational group or place of origin (whether a village, district, or group of districts. Thus, *Huiguans* began to offer many social services to the new immigrants, such as temporary housing, employment and burials. By the end of the 19th century, they had also set up schools, temples, and cemeteries in Singapore.
[70] Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of Chinese in Singapore and Malaya*, *1800-1911*, p. 304.

unifying the Chinese community in Singapore by providing a common Chinese identity. [71]

In addition, Trocki suggested that the emergence of modern Chinese education also indicated that wealth and entrepreneurship were no longer the only criteria for determining a person's status in the Chinese community. In the 19th century, most *huiguan* elites were merchants, who had been exposed to a limited amount of Chinese-medium education and become the leaders in the Chinese community. By the end of the century, Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang, who had received an English education, stated that education had become an important factor in determining social status.[72] In other words, the reformists took the power away from the old *huiguan* elites, thus symbolizing that Chinese-medium education had been transferred into a modernized educational system. In the 1900s, the establishment of the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA)[73] and Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC)[74] both signified the coexistence and cooperation between the China-born and Peranakan Chinese leaders. The educated Chinese and English leaders from the SCBA and SCCC often helped each other in the economic, political and social fields.[75] It can be seen that these two groups participated in the National Salvation Movement in the 1930s and made donations

[71] Yong Ching Fatt, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949,* p. 4.
[72] Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* , pp. 50-51.
[73] See Yong, Ching Fatt, 'A Preliminary Study of Chinese Leadership', in *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), p. 52. The Straits Chinese British Association was founded by Lim Boon Keng, Song Ong Siang, and Wong Siew Qui (1888-1980) on 17 August 1900. Most of the leaders had obtained university education and studied law and medicine in European countries. That main purpose of establishing the SCBA was to unite the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals and demonstrated loyalty to the Colonial Government
[74] *Ibid*., p. 61. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce was founded on 8 April 1906 by Chang Pi-shih (張弼士) and Shih Chu-ching (時楚卿). Most of the SCCC leaders were from the merchant class and had obtained traditional Chinese education. The main aim in establishing this association was to unite the overseas Chinese in Singapore.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 75.

to the refugees in China.

Under such circumstances, the establishment of Chung Hwa Girls' School represented a new phase in Chinese-medium schools in Singapore. This school was founded under Sun Yat-sen's influence in 1911. All of the lessons in this school were taught in Mandarin, which was the first time that this had occurred in a Chinese girls' school. Before the 1910s, Chinese schools were set up by the *huiguans* and adopted their own dialect as the medium of teaching.[76] In fact, the Chinese schools founded by *huiguan* in the late 19th century aimed to cultivate the younger generation's identification with Qing regime. In 1914, the Association for the Overseas Chinese Schools' Affairs Association was set up and took charge of Chinese schools' affairs. Their main purpose was to unite Singapore's Chinese schools and eradicate the animosity between the clan organizations. In the long term, the Overseas Chinese Schools Affairs Association expected that Chinese schools would start using the same language (i.e., Mandarin) so that they would be more loyal to China as a whole rather than to their specific ancestral provinces within China.[77] Given this situation, many girls' schools were founded in the 1910s, such as Chun-Ben, Chun-fu and Nanyang Girls' School. Most of the names of these girls' schools conveyed overtly Chinese nationalist sentiments- ''Chung Hua'' represented "the Chinese people or China", and "*huaqiao*" denoted overseas Chinese (i.e., those who 'sojourned' overseas but still claimed an allegiance to China). KMT thus utilized Chinese-medium schools to spread Chinese

[76] Chen Guohua, *Three Hundred Years of Overseas Chinese Education, 1690-1990*, p. 128.

[77] See CO 273/615/1, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Monthly Review of Chinese affairs: Sept, Oct, Nov and Dec 1936, pp. 6-8. The use of vernacular language originated from Hu Shi's Literacy Revolution of 1917. In the 1910s, many writers noticed the defects of literary language and asserted that the baihua (白話文 colloquial language) would provide a better medium for literacy composition. In 1917, Hu Shi (胡適 1891-1962) condemned the old style classical writing as a dead language, and stated that the style, rhyme and idiom of this language could not be understood by the general public Hence, he advocated baihua replacing Classical Chinese.

nationalism in the Singapore Chinese community.

Most Chinese girls' schools therefore also adopted Mandarin and were sited close to the city centre by the end of the decade. However, many girls lived in rural areas and found it inconvenient to attend schools situated in the city centre. 'A Ray of Hope for Chinese Women in Xiaopo' stated that this situation would be altered following the opening of the first branch of Nanyang Girls' School, north of the Singapore River (a region that the Chinese referred to as 'Xiaopo'). The commentator from *Lat Pau* stated,

> The women in Japan and European countries have received proper education and are the noble citizens in their nations. Thus, the promotion of female education can cultivate mothers of the nation. Nowadays, many boys' schools have been founded in Xiaopo. However, there have hardly been any girls' schools set up in this region…Nevertheless, Nanyang Girls' School's administrators have noticed the seriousness of this problem and stressed the importance of establishing girl's schools in this area. They stated that many girls' schools were founded in Dapo, but it was inconvenient for girls in Xiaopo to afford expensive fares to attend schools in this area...[78]

The extract above exemplifies how most of Chinese girls' schools had been set up south of the Singapore River. 'Dapo' referred to the districts where most Chinese lived. During this period, some of the Chinese girls' schools offered public transportation for the students. However, as the passage mentioned, there was rarely any public transportation to enable girls who lived in Xiaopo to attend schools. Thus, the establishment of Nanyang Girls' School would be beneficial for the Chinese girls who lived in Xiaopo and further improved the Chinese female education in the colony. This report also revealed the features of female education in Singapore. Firstly, it made direct comparisons with Japan and European

[78] 'Xiaopo Nüjie Fang Yi Si Shuguang' (A Ray of Hope for Chinese Women in Xiaopo), *Lat Pau*, 13 September 1919.

countries in much the same way as other commentators did. The concept of 'the mothers of citizens' was also raised in this report which shows that the idea of promoting female education originated in China. It also signified that female education in Singapore was developing well in the 1910s. It can be seen that the Chinese leaders had founded Chinese girls' schools in the city centre in the 1900s and schools were also set up in the rural area, such as Xiaopo, during this decade.

British Government Intervention

As discussed in the previously sections, after the establishment of China's Nationalist Government, the KMT began to spread the ideas of nationalism to the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Initially, the Colonial Government allowed the Chinese Revolutionary Party to carry out activities in Singapore. However, the KMT and Chinese Revolutionary Party[79] organized fund-raising activities against Yuan Shih-Kai's (袁世凱 1859-1916) regime in the settlement in the 1910s. The Colonial Government became concerned that these activities might lead to social turbulence and so it gradually restricted the CRP's activities in Singapore and Malaya. Hence, the CRP changed their policies in the settlement and set up the Nanyang Chinese General Education Association (1912) to spread nationalism in Chinese schools. In addition, some CRP political refugees fled from China to Singapore after 1913, many of whom settled down and became school teachers in Chinese-medium schools.[80] There, they also spread out ideas of Chinese

[79] See Yong Ching Fatt, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, p. 32. The Chinese Revolutionary Party (CRP) was founded by Sun Yat-sen in July 1914 in Tokyo. Later, the CRP headquarters in Tokyo nominated leaders in Singapore and Malaya to establish new CRP branches and sub-branches in order to carry out political activities and spread Chinese nationalism.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 32.

nationalism to students directly or indirectly in class.

Generally, the KMT's main aim was to maintain a China-centric focus amongst the political and cultural circles in the Chinese community by using Mandarin in Chinese-medium schools. Prior to 1919, such activities carried out by the KMT in the settlement did not pose a threat to the authorities. Yong further stated that it was difficult for the British authorities to control the KMT's political activities within the Chinese community. This was due to both external and internal reasons. The former was the frequent visits of reformists and revolutionists from China and the political literature they brought with them, while the latter was the spread of nationalism by the Chinese press, Chinese-medium schools, and KMT political organizations in the settlement.[81] However, the May Fourth Movement in China, which started in 1919, changed this situation.

The May Fourth Movement[82] was an entire mass movement which started in 1919 following the handing over of the German possessions in China to Japan during the Versailles Peace Conference. Though initially led by Peking University students, the movement spread throughout urban China, and appealed not only to anti-imperialist sentiments but also to the sense of frustration amongst many young Chinese. The promises of the 1911 revolution had been betrayed by an inept, fractured Chinese government. Often referred to as the 'Chinese Renaissance', the movement included everything from calls for an end to foreign (and

[81] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[82] See Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 149. Generally, the May Fourth Movement was associated with the political, social, and cultural liberation reforms in the 1920s in China. It also led to the rise of communism and feminism, and put forth the concepts of patriotism, individualism, and egalitarianism.

particularly Japanese) intervention in China to plans for a radical overhaul of Chinese society to make it more equitable, modern and unified.[83] It is often seen as representing the roots of radical socialism in China, but was also feared by many of the Western powers for the radically nationalist notions that it carried with it.

The May Fourth Movement spread immediately to Singapore and was noted by many of the Chinese community leaders there. Given this situation, Tan Kah Kee and Lim Yi Shun organized fund-raising activities in response to the May Fourth Movement. The subsequent activities such as the anti-Japanese boycotts and anti-imperialist speeches soon became a source of great concern to the British authorities. Thus, they decided to enact the Schools Registration Ordinance to restrict such activities within the schools themselves. According to the Schools Registration Ordinance of 1920, any school which had over ten students needed to be registered and the colonial government held the right to shut down illegal schools. This ordinance also stated that the contents of text books needed to be examined by the authorities,

> All schools, whether old or new, were required to be registered. There were penalties for non-registration but if a registration was refused there was an appeal to the governor in the council. It all required all the teachers and managers of schools shall be registered. The governor had the power to declare unlawful school-where any matters were being taught which were revolutionary or in conflict with the interests of the government.[84]

This ordinance could be perceived as the Colonial Government's direct response to the influences of the May Fourth Movement on the educational activities of the

[83] Choi Kwai Keong,'Overseas Chinese Response to May Fourth Movement in the Straits Settlements', pp. 13-14.
[84] *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 June 1920, p. 12.

Chinese community. This was also due to the fact that the authorities concerned were anxious about some teachers who might have infiltrated the Chinese schools to spread political propaganda and turn them into KMT's schools. It was therefore urgently required that the British authorities should exert tight ideological and political control over the Chinese schools.[85] In this respect, both girls' as well as boys' schools were being targeted under this ordinance.

As for the Chinese community leaders and KMT, this Schools Registration Ordinance seemed to be hampering the development of Chinese education in Singapore. Given this situation, the major Chinese newspapers, such as *Sin Kuo Min Pao*, and *Lat Pau*, began to publish reports discussing this ordinance. The Chinese delegates stressed their viewpoints in 'Conversation between the Chinese Protectorate and Delegates',

> Schools founded by the overseas Chinese are based upon China's educational system. This contains Chinese traditional norms which cannot be registered under Great Britain's educational system. This is due to the fact that Chinese-medium education will be governed by the colonial government…The educational system has been well established and many Chinese choose to further their studies in Great Britain. However, overseas Chinese should take China's education doctrines at the beginning and will be more easily to fit into Chinese society when they finished their studies overseas. [86]

In this passage, 'our nation' meant China. Given this situation, they mentioned that the schools set up by the overseas Chinese were adopting 'China's educational system. Thus, they did not want to be governed by the British government. They also demonstrated that the Chinese should have a basic Chinese education initially and then receive English education later. They felt that, if they

[85] Yong Ching Fatt, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malay, 1912-1949*, p. 19.
[86] *Lat Pau*, 15 July 1920, p. 3.

accepted this ordinance, then Singapore would become a 'second Hong Kong', and the Chinese schools in Singapore would become private schools. In other words, Hong Kong had accepted the School Registration Ordinance a few years earlier, and lost their rights to manage Chinese school affairs. Hence, the Chinese leaders feared that the same thing would happen in Singapore and opposed the intervention of the Colonial Government in Chinese schools.

Another report entitled 'Lim Liang Han Lists the Reasons why Chinese Schools should not be Governed by the Schools Registration Ordinance', further argued that Chinese and English schools could not coexist in Singapore. The majority of Chinese in Singapore were labourers. Hence, most were unable to support their children by providing Chinese and English schools' tuition fees.[87] From these reports, we can see that the Chinese community leaders did not want the Chinese schools to be controlled by the British authorities. In this respect, the Chinese delegates organized a petition movement calling the British authorities to revoke the Schools Registration Ordinance. However, the Colonial Government rejected the Chinese leaders' requests and exiled some prominent Chinese leaders such as, Zhuang Xiquan (庄希泉 1888-1988) and Yu Pei-Gao (余佩皋 1888-1934), from Singapore.[88] The Overseas Chinese Schools Affairs Association was dismissed by the Colonial Government in the same year. In sum, the enactment of the Schools Registration Ordinance in 1920 symbolized the beginning of the Colonial Government's policy on controlling Chinese nationalism and examining the KMT's political activities in the colony.

Conclusion

[87] *Lat Pau*, 21 July 1920.
[88] Yong Ching Fatt, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949,* pp.19-20.

To conclude, the measures that the Qing government adopted in the 1880s, to use education as a means to make the Singapore Chinese China-oriented succeeded. They also brought about the modernization of female education. In China, the women's liberation movement expanded rapidly at the beginning of the 20th century. This was because some women went to study abroad in Japan and European countries during this decade. These intellectual women were actively involved in writing articles and editing journals to address the importance of women's liberation movement. For instance, Yan Bin (燕斌) founded *Zhongguo Xinnüjie Zazhi* (中國新女界雜誌 the New Chinese Women's Magazine, 1907-1908) in Japan to address the concept of the mothers of citizens, and asserted the importance of female education. In addition, many women's associations, such as the Society to Ensure Education for Girls, and the Chinese Women's Society, were established during this period. After the Revolution of 1911, women's liberation activities formed an essential part of the New Culture Movement in China. During this period, many journals in China, such as *New Youth* (新青年 *Xin Qingnian*), *New Tide* (新潮 *Xin Chao*) and the *Ladies' Journal* (婦女雜誌 *Funü Zazhii*) began to discuss women's questions. The Chinese elites in the New Culture Movement asserted that women should be liberated from the family and traditional Chinese norms. Hence, they began to promote female education by establishing normal and vocational schools for girls. Their main demand was to enable women to attain basic skills in order to become independent.

These discourses were also widely discussed in Singapore's major Chinese newspapers, particularly concerning issues related to co-educational schools, freedom of marriage, and liberation from the family, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. In comparison with China, the high illiteracy rate

among the Chinese women hampered the development of the female emancipation movement. Thus, it was mainly the male intellectuals' voices that discussed the issues concerning women in the Chinese newspapers. It was not until the 1920s that women began to publicise their opinions in the newspapers and express their demands about the female emancipation movement within the Chinese community.

Chapter III The Development of Chinese Female Activities in the 1920s

This chapter focuses on the life of both educated and uneducated Chinese women in the 1920s. The connection between the educated women, prostitutes and *mui-tsais* will be explored in order to understand how education and the Chinese newspapers helped to promote the female emancipation movement. The May Fourth Movement and New Culture movement in China introduced the modern ideas of coeducation and freedom of marriage into Singapore, which marked a new stage in Chinese women's activities. The development, activities and difficulties that the Chinese girls' schools encountered during this decade will hence be discussed in order to understand the development in female education. In this decade, the main focus of the Chinese newspapers commenting on Chinese women was whether they should possess equal rights to men in the family and in the public sphere. These discussions offer a different prism for understanding the Chinese community's views on female issues. In the meantime, serious social ills, such as prostitution and the *mui-tsai* problem, still existed, and attracted the attention of the Colonial Government and Chinese leaders. The policies and attitudes of the Chinese community and Colonial Government with regard to these social ills will be examined to see how different views of these female-related problems are reflected by western and Chinese interests and how they worked together to deal with these matters.

III.I Development of Female Education

Progress and Changes: Discourses on Chinese Female Education

In China, the New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement marked the beginning of the women's emancipation movement. It was also the first time that the

public began to show concern about improving women's social status and position within the family, and included educational, socio-economical, and political reforms. The Chinese women's emancipation movement originated from the student movement, cultural activities and westernization that occurred during the May Fourth Movement era. As Mangan noted, that was the first time in Chinese history that a movement succeeded in challenging the patriarchal conventions and attempted to liberate women from the conventional Chinese customs.[1] It also introduced the concept of the 'new woman' who had high self-awareness and who would strive to have her own career and look to have her independence in society. The redefinition of a Chinese woman from a 'virtuous wife and good mother', and the 'mother of citizens' to, a 'new woman' signified the Chinese intellectuals' changing attitude towards Chinese women.

This trend immediately spread to the Chinese community in Malaya, and its intellectuals in Singapore also responded to it. As discussed in the previous chapter, many Chinese merchants, intellectuals, and students participated in boycotts, protests, and demonstrations in support of China's May Fourth Movement. This movement can also be viewed as an intellectual movement, which was primarily joined by educated literate Chinese men in the settlement.[2] The KMT branches used the Chinese language newspapers and Chinese-medium schools to transmit those messages in Singapore. Singapore's Chinese intellectuals hence started to present their ideas related to the New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement through poems, short stories, and essays to the Chinese community. Many educated residents also started to take notice of this intellectual movement and participated in the relevant political, social, and

[1] J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, p. 123.
[2] David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, pp. 13-14.

cultural activities.[3]

In the 1920s, the major Chinese newspapers were *Lat Pau*, *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, and *Nanyang Siang Pau*. Those publications played an important role in introducing the new ideas which originated from the New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement from China. The mercantile press became the new type of newspaper in the Chinese community in this decade, the most successful of which were Tan Kah Kee's *Nanyang Siang Pau* and Aw Boon Hu's *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. On the one hand, the entrepreneurs who founded these newspapers were to promote, advertise, and sell their company's goods in order to save on adverting costs. These newspapers were more China-oriented and published large amounts of news reports for the merchant. On the other hand, the Nationalist Government in China used Chinese newspapers as an important tool for propaganda their information to the Singapore's Chinese community. Their purpose was to obtain the support of the overseas Chinese as well as unify the different dialect groups among the Singapore Chinese community. Moreover, KMT promoted Chinese education to secure its power in Singapore,

> To promote overseas education based on Chinese nationalism, the Commission focused its effort on the following areas (1) Using textbooks as an instrument to instill patriotism among the overseas Chinese. (2) Revising the curriculum in conformity with the standard laid down by the Chinese Ministry of Education. (3) Organizing training classes to imbue overseas Chinese teachers with party ideology (三民主義 *Sanmin Zhuyi*, the Three People's Principles). [4]

Against this background, the Chinese textbooks used in the Chinese schools in Singapore were approved by the Ministry of Education in China in 1926. These textbooks were printed in Shanghai, in line with the aim of drawing the Chinese

[3] *Ibid*.
[4] Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914*, p. 72.

community's attention towards Chinese nationalism. The textbooks thus contained anti-foreign, anti-imperialist and anti-Japanese aggression information. In addition, the Nationalist Government enacted the Chinese Nationality Law which officially declared that all overseas Chinese were regarded as Chinese citizens. It regulated that, unless a Singapore Chinese resident of Chinese origin had taken steps to denationalize himself, he was considered a Chinese citizen. Their children who were born in Singapore were also regarded as Chinese citizens under the Chinese Nationality Law.[5] Those overseas Chinese who were British subjects under the British Nationality Law could possess dual nationality. The main purpose of those measures was to secure the Chinese residents' loyalty to the Nationalist Government in China.

On the contrary, the British authorities continued to focus on controlling and limiting the influence of Singapore's numerous Chinese schools during this period. This was because the anti-Japanese boycott movement in 1919 led to rioting in Singapore and Penang, culminating in the death of several participants. The Colonial Government started to enforce stricter laws to control the KMT's activities in Singapore. The Registration of Schools Ordinance was thus published in 1920 for the purpose of controlling the Chinese-medium schools. The government departments set up a system of financial aid for Chinese-medium education. Their main aim was to improve and standardize all Chinese schools in the settlement. However, most Chinese intellectuals believed that these measures were taken by the British authorities to control the development of the Chinese schools and therefore refused the government's grants. The Chinese community therefore created its own educational system in the settlement.[6] Under such circumstances, the Printing Presses

[5] *Ibid*., pp. 72-73.
[6] Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p. 230.

Ordinance was enacted in March 1920 targeted at controlling the KMT's opinions in the Chinese press. This new Ordinance authorized the Colonial Secretary to determine whether a person had the rights to keep or use a press for the printing of documents, i.e. newspapers. In this sense, a person in the colony needed to have a license in the prescribed form to run newspaper in Singapore. Otherwise, he would be sentenced to jail or heavily fined.[7] Nevertheless, those new measures did not hinder the development of the Chinese press and education in the settlement.

In the 1920s, there were 15 to 20 Chinese girls' schools in Singapore. Those schools adopted the educational system in China. It can be seen that schooling was divided into two stages: primary and secondary education. The latter was further divided into lower secondary and upper secondary education. The Chinese Girls' schools used the same teaching materials and text books from China as the Chinese boys' schools, and syllabi also set up according to the schools in China, including Mandarin, History, Geography, Science, English, Arithmetic, Embroidery, Needlework, Gymnastics, and Household Management. It appears that the Chinese girls' schools in Singapore were influenced by the new ideas related to the May Fourth Movement in China. Teoh argued that the Chinese-medium schools in Singapore played a more important role in promoting modernity for females than the English-medium schools during this period.[8] This was because female Chinese education followed the patterns of educational reforms in China and introduced the idea of sexual equality into Singapore. The Chinese community thus had a more open attitude towards female education in this decade. Traditionally, Chinese parents had believed that 'a girl without talent is therefore virtuous', and rarely sent their

[7] CO 274, Ordinance No.5 of 1920, An Ordinance to Regulate the Keeping of Printing Presses and the Printing of Documents, pp.1-2.
[8] Karen Teoh, 'Exotic Flowers, Modern Girls, Good Citizens: Female Education and Overseas Chinese Identity in British Malaya and Singapore, 1900s-1950s', pp. 34-35.

daughters to school. Most girls were taught by the elderly family members, who instilled the idea of the 'three obediences and four virtues' from classical Chinese literature, as Miss Wu Shu-Wu demonstrated in 'Women's Self-consciousness',

> When women were educated, they read books such as *The Books of Songs* and *Books of Women*… The outcome of this education only made women denied their moral integrity and convinced themselves were an accessory owned by other people. In their whole life, they submit themselves to their parents in her childhood. Once got married, she depended on her husband and her sons...[9]

It can be seen from this passage that this kind of education only turned a woman into a useless person who could not make any contributions to society. On the contrary, girls who refused this kind of education could become independent women. They were able to eat, work and argue with their husband on equal terms. Nevertheless, the idea of sexual equality was only accepted by some Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s. The general public needed to understand that it was a woman's right to receive a proper education, and it was hence reasonable for them to request educational equality. In this respect, it was only when women reached the same educational level as men that they could speak for themselves in the family and society.

Although the idea of promoting female Chinese education came from China, the socio-economic development differed in China and Singapore and hence produced different results in promoting female education reforms. At the beginning of the 20th century, educated women in China, such as Qiu Jin, participated in revolutionary activities, and many female university students staged demonstration in Tiananmen in Peking during the May Fourth Movement. In the 1920s, many well-educated women also participated in the activities of the Chinese Communist Party. Compared with

[9] Wu Shu-Wu, 'Nüzi di Zijue' (Women's Self-consciousness), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 24 November 1923, p. 14.

China, however, few Chinese women received a higher education in Singapore, and the progress of the female education reform was thus slower there.[10] In this respect, the first step towards improving female education was to stress that women had the same right as men to be educated, to release them from the conventional Chinese customs. As Yuan Yuan-Qin, the first Chinese female lawyer in Malaya, suggested that female emancipation should not rely on others' assistance, but allow women to liberate themselves spontaneously. In other words, women should be aware of the importance of being educated and demand this as their right. As for men, their duty was not to accomplish this mission for women but to help them to put this idea into practice.[11] This was because that there were few educated women in the colony and the need to rely on the assistance of men. In fact, prominent Chinese leaders, such as Lim Boon Keng and Tan Kah Kee, began to advocate the importance of promoting women's emancipation activities in the Chinese community. They believed that implementing educational reform for both educated and uneducated women was the best solution to improve their life.

The Discussions on Chinese Girls' Schools' Problems and Solutions

The development of Chinese girls' schools at the beginning of this century gradually attracted the public recognition of female education. Although Chinese parents understood the importance of female education, this did not mean that they were willing to send their daughter to school. This was because the majority of middle and higher class China-born Chinese had received a traditional Chinese education in China. Thus, they still held the opinion that it was more important for their daughters

[10] See Joyce Lebra & Joy Paulson (eds), *Chinese Women in Southeast Asia*, p. 134. Prior to1920, the average literacy rate among the Chinese girls was about 10% while the boys were around 44%.
[11] Yuan Shun-Qin, 'Jiefang Sheng Zhong de Nüzi Qiuxue Wenti', (Women's Educational Problem in the Liberation Movement), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 26 January 1924, p. 14.

to marry into a respectable family than be well-educated. In this sense, it was difficult for the Chinese girls' schools to raise sufficient funding from the Chinese community. On the other hand, most Chinese girls' schools did not want the Colonial Government to interfere in their administrative affairs and therefore refused the grants-in-aid.

These schools gradually encountered financial problems associated with managing the school administration. The school administrators sought help from the Chinese community by holding school performances to raise funds. In order to draw attention to their fund-raising activities, these schools published advertisements in the Chinese newspapers, stating the purpose and content of the school's performance. In this sense, the Chinese newspapers became a channel for the Chinese schools to transmit their information to the Chinese community. Similarly, Chinese intellectuals used newspapers to air their viewpoints on the fund-raising activities of Chinese girls' schools. It can be understood from those reports that the defects of the school administration and lack of funding was the biggest problem Singapore's Chinese girls schools encountered.

As for the school administration, most of the school administrators of Chinese girls' school were businessmen. Most of them had no experience in running schools and hence appointed a board of directors to appoint teachers. Nevertheless, many teachers were not qualified in teaching and resigned in a short period of time. In addition, most budgets were also decided by the board of directors without consulting the principal, which often led to disputes between the principal and directors and the resignation of the former.[12] The principal of Nan Hua Girls' Schools Liew Yuen Sien, outlined the main reason for the problems. She stated that the administrators in Nanyang still held

[12] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p. 151.

the traditional values of female education. They believed that female education was less important than male education. This was reflected in the low enrollment level of girls, and most school property was rented.[13] Not only did Nan Hua Girls' School face this dilemma, but other schools' buildings and equipment also could not compare with that of the boys' schools. In other words, as long as the male administrators retained their old attitudes towards female education, the girls' schools in the settlement could not develop further.

Based upon those discussions, it can be seen that there was a lack of higher institution in Singapore for the Chinese girls to further their studies. At that time, the students from wealthy families who wished to continue their studies would choose to receive a higher education in China. Most of the students from poorer families often could not continue their studies in Singapore. Under these circumstances, the Chinese intellectuals started to publish their opinions in the newspapers in order to find out a solution to solve this problem. Fang Huai-nan, the former *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s chief editor, asserted that Nanyang was very far from China and it would be difficult for Chinese schools to hire qualified teachers there. The best way was to send those students who performed well in Nanyang to further their studies in China and to get them to return to teach in Nanyang after graduating.[14] At the same time, the Chinese girls' schools began to set up the normal classes[15] to train female teachers. By taking those measures, the Chinese intellectuals believed that the problems of Chinese girls'

[13] Liew Yuen Sien, 'Huaqiao Nüzi Jiaoyu Bu Fada zhi Yuanyin'(The Reasons for the Deficiency of Female Chinese Education), *Xingzhou Ribao Zhounian Jiniankan*. 1930, p. 20.

[14] Fang Huai-nan, 'Nanyang Xuexiao ying Ruhe shi neng de Liang Jiaoshi yi Zhenxing Jiaoyu Chuyi
(Discussions on Hire Qualified Teachers to Promote Education in Nanyang Schools) *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 26 November 1920, p.2.

[15] See Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p.132. The normal schools were founded to train high school graduates to be teachers. Most of the schools are now called teachers' colleges. In Singapore, most of the Chinese girls' schools set up normal classes to train students to be primary school teachers.

school would be solved and the students would have a better environment to study.

Another problem that most of the Chinese girls' schools encountered was that they only had a few school buildings, so it was difficult to find sufficient space for all students to attend classes. There was also little equipment to enable the students to exercise after class, due to a lack of funds. Thus, the administrators' fund-raising were important to the Chinese girls' schools. Fundraising allowed Chinese girls' schools to be expanded so that more girls could be educated. The major activities that Chinese girls' schools carried out during this decade were therefore related to fund-raising, including exhibitions, sports competitions and graduation ceremonies. The purpose of these activities was to solicit funds from the Chinese community in order to solve the financial crisis of the girls' schools. As commentator Jiu noted,

> There are far fewer educated women in overseas Chinese society than in China. It is therefore necessary to carry out all kinds of reforms considering family issues….The main purpose of those reforms is to spread education in overseas Chinese society. Thus, the first step is to establish girls' schools and cultivate more educated girls...[16]

This passage demonstrates that the prevalence of female education required sufficient funds to help more Chinese girls to be educated. It was the only way for women to become aware that they had the same rights with men and did not need to depend on men for a living. However, they did not receive adequate support from the Colonial Government or the Chinese society. Unlike the English-medium schools funded by the Colonial Government, Chinese schools' expenses relied on tuition fees, donations and fund-raising activities. Nevertheless, most of the Chinese men in the settlement

[16] Jiu, 'Lun Zhenxing Qiaoxue zhi Xianzi Wenti' (Discussions on Hiring Qualified Teachers in the Overseas Chinese's Schools), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 7 January 1922, p. 2.

still held the attitude of 'favouring boys over girls' in schooling.[17] Thus, Chinese girls' schools received less funding than boys' schools. In other words, most businessmen were more willing to donate to boys' schools rather than girls' schools. As Liew indicated that there were two major types of Chinese entrepreneur who made donations to the activities for public welfare: the reformists and the conservatives. The former received an English education and donated money to the modern schools and revolutionary activities while the latter were entrepreneurs who made donations to the private Chinese schools or orphanages run by China-born Chinese. Nevertheless, both of them were unwilling to offer funds for the Chinese girls' schools.[18] In order to solve the problem of insufficient funds, the suggestion to incorporate Chinese girls' schools was made up in 1922. Due to financial problems, three Chinese girls' schools (Nanyang Girls, Nan Hua Girls, and Chung Hua Girls' School) instigated discussions about merging the three schools into one. This discourse provides a way of understanding the financial problems that Chinese girls' schools encountered and the Chinese elites' viewpoints on female education in the 1920s. Most Chinese intellectuals did not support the idea of merging these schools together. There were two reasons for their standpoint. First, it would discourage girls from being educated. As has already been noted, it was thought that the purpose of promoting female education was to develop a loyal wife and caring mother. Thus, many Chinese girls' schools were set up in Singapore to achieve this goal. However, only a few schools had been established in the past few years. Most of these were private schools and aimed at providing training in household duties. Thus, few girls took part in social affairs after leaving school. However, some Chinese girls' schools,

[17] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, pp. 146-147.
[18] Liew Xun-Yu, *The Voyages of Nanyang* (Shanghai: Kai Ming Publishing House, 1930), p. 44, as cited in Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p. 117.

such as Nanyang and Chung Hua Girls' School were making progress in changing the Chinese community's viewpoint on female education. Some Chinese intellectuals, as mentioned above, also began to support the idea of promoting female education. Thus, if those girls' schools were to merge together, the public might perceive female education as being backward state and not support the development of the girls' schools in the settlement.[19]

Secondly, by incorporating the three schools into one, the development of female education would be limited. A commentator in 'Unsuitable Measures (I)' further indicated that there were few Chinese girls' schools in Singapore. If those three girls' schools were to merge together, there would be fewer opportunities for girls to be educated. Thus, this suggestion would not solve the financial problem but might rather hinder the development of Chinese female education.[20] As the member of SCCC Zhou Xian-Rui (周獻瑞 1887-1964) also stated that those schools must not relocate due to the inconvenience for the students in having to spend extra time and money chose to attend the new school. Some of them may have considered transferring to an English school.[21] In addition, most of the students choose to attend the schools which had been established by their dialect groups. Although most of the Chinese girls' schools used Mandarin in class, they still recognized the home dialect of the students. The teachers could also use the dialect as material for improving the students' Mandarin level. Most importantly, as Zhou noted, the China-born entrepreneurs were more willing to make donations to schools that had been established by their own dialect groups. If the schools were merged together, then many people might shift their responsibilities and stop donating to the school. This

[19] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 'Bu Shiyong de Banfa' (Unsuitable Measures (I)), 21 September 1922, p. 6.
[20] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 22 September 1923, p. 6.
[21] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 23 September 1923, p. 6.

situation would therefore worsen the girls' schools' financial problems.[22]

The anonymous author provided a solution to this problem in 'Discussions on Girls' Schools' Economic Problem'. He indicated that there were about 140 students in Nanyang Girls' School. The monthly expenditure of this school was roughly $1,200. The tuition fees and monthly donations brought in $800, making a $400 loss per month. In this respect, he believed that raising funds thorough the school play might not solve the financial problems. Hence, he suggested that the schools should increase the tuition fees of students from better off families and use the donations to subsidize the middle class and poorer students. In that case, the three girls' schools did not need to merge together and it could also solve the financial problem.[23] Due to the public opposition to the idea of merging the three schools together, this scheme was never put into practice.

In this way, fund-raising activities remained the most important way for girls' schools to maintain the school administration. Those schools that intended to organize fund-raising activities would publish statements over several days in the Chinese newspapers. At the end of the fund-rising activities, the host school would also publish advertisements listing the donors and how much they had donated. In this decade, Chinese girls' held many fund-raising activities to support the school administration. The attitude of the Chinese community towards these activities also reflected how they viewed female education. For example, debate on the so-called "the female receptionists (女招待員, *nü zhaodaiyuan*)" in the school plays in 1923 shed light on the Chinese community's perspectives on the fund-raising activities

[22] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 25 September 1923, p. 6.
[23] 'Nüxuexiao zhi Jingji Tan' (Discussions on Girls' Schools' Economic Problem), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 21 September 1922, p. 6.

regarding the female education issues.

This debate arose from an article which appeared in the Chinese press entitled 'Female Receptionists in the School Play' on 10th January, 1923. Written by Miss Yan Na, and it described the author's experience of attending a school play that was put on to raise funds. Yan Na had arrived at the school around 7pm. There were only a few male students there. At 9 pm, a group of students wearing badges showing to which school they belonged began to sell products to the guests, including were soft drinks, biscuits, cigars, snacks, and cigarettes. The names of those who donated over $5 would be recorded in a book. At that moment, Yan Na understood that the students' real role was to sell snacks and ask the audience to make donations, which turned their role from receptionists into vendors. She argued that the students were being used by their school and should not follow their orders blindly.[24]

Yan Na's article immediately attracted the Chinese intellectuals' attention who issued their opinions on *Sin Kuo Min Jit Pao*, most of which disagreed with Yan Na's argument. On the whole, as Miss Sun Qiong asserted in 'The Duties of the Receptionists', many open-minded Chinese intellectuals advocated the importance of promoting female education and therefore setting up girls' schools. In return, the students participated in fund-raising activities to alleviate their school's financial problems. Sun Qiong also pointed out the mistakes in Yan Na's report where, for example, the word 'vendor' was misused. Students should not be identified as vendors since they were taking part in fund-raising activities rather than seeking to make a profit from the audience. Moreover, she argued due to Yan Na's article might have presented them taking part in such activities again, and therefore lost the chance to

[24] Yan Na, 'Juchang de Nü Zhadaiyuan' (Female Receptionists in the School Play), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 20 January 1923, p. 6.

assist with public welfare.[25] The former *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s editor, Lim Jin-sheng, further argued in 'Discussions' that men and women should share the same rights and fulfil the same duties in society. If Yan Na regarded women as being used for this activity, then men were also being exploited when they requested donations from the public. Such logic would mean that no one would voluntarily participate in fund-raising activities and there would be no more funds for the Chinese girls' schools. Thus, it would be more difficult to ask the residents of the settlement to participate in activities for public welfare.[26] Based upon this discussion, the Chinese leaders held a more open attitude towards female education, but the conventional Chinese customs still remained deeply rooted. It can be seen that most of China-born Chinese parents did not support their daughters' attainment of higher education, and were unwilling to donate to the girls' schools. Thus, it was the main reason that these fund-raising activities did not receive wide support from the Chinese community.

In the 1920s, the major Chinese newspapers began to excerpt many articles from China regarding women's emancipation movement. The main purpose of citing those reports was to make the Chinese community more enlightened in regard to liberating women from the conventional social constraints in society. The Chinese intellectuals believed that the best way to achieve this goal was to rely on school education. This was because education was the key factor in helping Chinese women to become independent individuals. However, the key factor in realizing this goal was women's self-awareness of casting off the shackles of the traditional Chinese values. As Leng Feng indicated in 1929 if women seek opportunities to be emancipated from the family, they must make efforts to learn the skills to enable them to become

[25] Sun Qiong, 'Zhaodaiyuan de Zeren Shi Zen Yang' ('The Duties of the Receptionists) *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 6 February 1923, p. 8.
[26] Lim Jin-sheng, 'Taolun Taolun' (Discussions), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 10 February 1923, p. 8.

independent individuals. Most importantly, educated men and women must also advocate the importance of allowing girls to be educated and make the public understand the necessity of girls learning basic skills at school.[27] Miss Feng Ye Han stated that the main purpose of their demands can be perceived from this passage,

> We need to liberate women and make them become complete people. The concept of 'a girl without talent is therefore virtuous' still exists in society. Thus, the first step is to allow women to receive an education and transform the conventional notion of 'cultivating a dutiful wife and loving mother' into education for independent personhood…Coeducation therefore can elevate women's status and provide proper social interaction for men and women so that they can have married into a good family.[28]

The Chinese intellectuals believed that by advocating those ideas, women's emancipation might succeed one day. The faculties in the schools also needed to help the students to understand the relationship and moral principles between men and women. Gradually, parents and students came to understand that there was nothing strange about coeducation. Thus, sexual morality could be improved and coeducation in universities would produce better results. It can be understood that, men and women sooner or later, would work together in society in the future. Schools therefore became a place for them to become accustom to a certain lifestyle in society.

These discussions therefore further led to the issues of coeducation and opening socializing between men and women in the Chinese community. The idea of coeducation originated from China in the 1910s. The main focus of the Nationalist Government with regard to the educational reform was to guarantee the same

[27] Leng Feng, 'Nüzi Jiefang Wenti de Wo Jian' (My Opinions on Female Emancipation), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 8 January 1929, p. 6.
[28] Feng Ye Han, 'Funü Jiefang Lun' (On Women' s Libration), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 19 January 1928, p. 15.

educational rights to both men and women. The Chinese intellectuals also asserted that there should be coeducation at all levels and no separate classes for girls in schools.[29] In October 1919, the National Federation of Education Association in China introduced a proposal to improve female education, which was to allow universities to become completely coeducational. In this respect, several universities in China, such as Beijing University, gave women equal educational opportunities and allowed them to access higher education. The Chinese newspapers in Singapore hence played an important role in introducing the idea of coeducation to Chinese intellectuals. As De commented in 'My Viewpoints on People who are Against Coeducation',

> The May Fourth Movement had led to the emergence of new cultural ideas. The traditional Chinese values have already been shattered. The idea of coeducation has become a fact in China. Singapore was influenced by China's new movement from the earliest stage. In this sense, the gap between men and women should already have been eradicated in the settlement. The secondary schools should also change into coeducational schools and allow men and women to have the same right to an education.[30]

The passage above encouraged both men and women to participate in social affairs. In this sense, to make a real contribution to society, it requires all people to possess an adequate knowledge of morality and schooling. In other words, it was necessary to carry out open social interactions between men and women in the Singapore Chinese community. In this sense, women could participate in the social activities and receive an equal position with men in society. However, it should be noted that modern conservatism hampered the development of the female emancipation movement in

[29] Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century*, p. 107.
[30] Da, 'Wo Duiyu Fandui Nan Nü Tongxue Shi Shuo Ji Ju Hua' (My Viewpoints on People who are Against Coeducation), *Lat Pao*, 15 September 1923, p.6.

Singapore's Chinese community. Most of the Chinese parents did not encourage their daughters to obtain a higher education or allow them to find a job in the colony. Despite this phenomenon, attitudes towards women grew more positive in general in the 1920s.

In summary, Singapore was influenced by the new trends of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement from China at the beginning of the 1920s. Chinese intellectuals continued to advocate the importance of promoting female education and assert that women should receive the same educational opportunities as men. Unlike in the 1910s, coeducation and the opening up of higher education to women became the main concern of female education during this period. However, it relied on the Chinese Community and educational circles' efforts to liberated women from the conventional Chinese values. In this way, educated women could become independent individuals and participate in social affairs. Moreover, the Chinese newspapers also played an important role in promoting female education. The Chinese intellectuals used the newspapers as a forum in which to exchange their viewpoints on female education, and tried to find the best way to solve of Chinese girls' schools' administration and financial problems.

III.II The Life of Educated Women

The main theme of this section focuses on the discourses on the meaning of women's liberation through education. It will discuss and analyze aspects of the life of educated women in both the private and public spheres. In this period, the major Chinese newspapers, such as *Lat Pau* and *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, began to discuss women's issues, such as, socio-economic activities, female education, and social problems. On 10th January 1925, *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* introduced the supplement,

'Women's Circles' which dealt with women's problems and their activities in western countries, China, and Singapore. Those discussions particularly focused on the issues such as freedom of marriage and economic independence, which were helpful in investigating their social status and position within the family.

Discourses in the Chinese Newspapers: Concerns regarding Female Emancipation

As in China, the New Culture Movement in Singapore's Chinese community could be perceived as the quest for nationalism and enlightenment. It was primarily the China-born Chinese intellectuals and educated elites who embraced such ideas in the settlement. Kenley asserted that they belied enlightenment and cultural change were both necessary steps to save the nation. Thus, Singapore's Chinese elites were targeted in a series of social reforms aiming to make the Chinese community more enlightened. Among these reforms, the Chinese intellectuals indicated that the emancipation of women and their liberation from the traditional family structure were their main aim in making men and women independent individuals. In order to achieve this goal, individuals need to have economic independence and be well-educated in order to cast off the family shackles.[31] In this respect, Chinese leaders and intellectuals began to publish their opinions in the major Chinese newspapers, claiming that people must be enlightened through social reform.

During the May Fourth Movement era, many New Culture Movement publications from China were introduced into Singapore, such as *New Tide*, *New Youth* and *New Women*. Their ideas were adopted by the Chinese intellectuals, and the newspapers therefore became a forum in which they could discuss the ideas related to the New

[31] David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, p. 184.

Culture movement. The main reason why the newspapers attracted public attention

Figure III.1: Circulation rates of Newspapers1919-1930

Year	*Lat Pao*	*Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*	*Nanyang Siang Poh*	*Sin Chew Jit Poh*	*Straits Times*
1919	650	1,500			4,000
1920	650	3,000			4,100
1921	1,250	3,200			4,100
1922	1,350	3,000			4,200
1923	1,500	3,000			4,200
1924	1,500	3,000	2,240		4,300
1925	2,000	2,750	2,700		4,300
1926	2,250	3,710	3,120		4,400
1927	2,500	4,488	3,340		4,400
1928	3,500	4,800	4,560		4,500
1929	3,500	5,424	4,650	7,000	4,500
1930	3,500	5,424	5,700	8,250	4,500

Source: David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore*, 1919-1932 (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 97.

during this period was their low price and ease of production. Most newspapers also had an existing readership and had enjoyed stable circulation rates since the beginning of the century. Thus, the new ideas could spread rapidly among the public. Most importantly, Mandarin became more prevalent among the Chinese community in Singapore, as the newspaper used standard characters and vernacular Chinese which people from different dialect groups could read and understand. In this respect, the newspapers provided a platform through which all literate Chinese could publish and exchange their ideas. They could also create greater a sense of community and group consciousness among the Chinese community in the settlement.[32] Against this background, *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* was established in 1919. The main feature of this publication was introduced a supplement (副刊 *fuzhang*)[33] entitled "Women's Circles" (婦女界 *Funü Shijie*) in 1925 that focused on women's issues in China and Nanyang. Like other Chinese newspapers' supplements, it contained short stories, poetry, political essays, and other works of literature.[34] These supplements provided an open forum for the Chinese leaders or intellectuals, students, and informal literary clubs to discuss their ideas. In addition, issues concerning women's liberation, individual emancipation from the family, education, and social welfare and equality were often discussed in the newspapers.[35] Significantly, some literate women began to publish reports in the newspapers and put forth their ideas about women's issues in the supplements. However, many female writers used pen names and therefore it is

[32] *Ibid*., pp. 186-187.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 77. The supplement was usually a sheet of paper added to the main body of the newspapers, containing prose, poetry, essays, and short stories. In 1907, Singapore's reporters from *Lat Pau* first introduced a supplement, but it was not until the 1920s that these became a standard feature of most Chinese newspapers.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 115.

impossible to know exactly how many of them were writing for the newspapers. Moreover, many men also used female pen names in order to draw public attention to women's problems.[36]

It is also difficult to determine whether it was China-born or Peranakan Chinese women, local residents or female writers from China or Malaya who submitted their work to the newspapers. The fact that female writers' names were not published in the newspapers suggested that women were not treated as independent individuals under their own name.[37] It can be seen from the many publications in Singapore that women were defined as the wife or daughter of prominent Chinese leaders. Nevertheless, those reports about women's issues made the Chinese community take notice of women's problems and women also began to participate in social activities at the end of the 1920s. In the next decade, more Chinese women expressed their opinions on educational and cultural reform in the women's supplements, which signified their increasing literacy rates and the elevation of their social status in Singapore.

Family sphere: The Quest for Physical and Spiritual Freedom

The main focus for those advocating women's liberation in the family was to pursue physical and spiritual freedom. This can also be perceived as women's quest for personal liberty and independent personhood in the family sphere. This can be understood from Luo Jia-lun (羅家倫 1897-1969), principal of Tsinghua University in China, who argued that autocracy within the family should be overthrown to release women from the status of slaves and turn them into citizens. This was the real meaning of women's liberation. Hence, the best way to change the situation was to

[36] *Ibid*., pp. 120-121.
[37] Joshua Fogel A., *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, p. 29.

make women realize that they were also independent people so that they could take part in social activities. Moreover, women should possess knowledge in order to demand an equal status with men. Without knowledge, women still needed to follow men's instructions and could not be independent people.[38] In fact, the key to female emancipation lay in Chinese parents' attitudes toward education.

In the early 20th century, as discussed in the previous section, most Chinese parents gradually came to approve of female education. Better-off parents were willing to send their daughters to school and even to receive higher education. Many parents were educated and understood the importance of education, so they allowed their daughters to receive a higher education. However, some parents only their supported daughter's education if they were in a better economic situation, but showed less concern about female education and believed that their daughters only needed to possess the basic abilities of reading and writing. Their ultimate goal was still that their daughters would marry into a respectable family. Another type of parents was illiterate and against female education. They believed that their daughter would belong to her husband's family in the future and so did not need to receive much education.[39] Under these circumstances, the Singapore's Chinese community's primary objective with regard to female education was still aimed at cultivating a 'virtuous wife and good mother' in order to manage the household duties efficiently. In other words, the purpose of education was to train girls to assist their husband. As Tan Kan Kee asserted,

> Nowadays, not only men but also women need to receive education. Those nearsighted people only considered that educated women would assist with their

[38] Luo Jia-lun, 'Funü Jiefang' (Women's Liberation), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 17 February 1920, p. 14.
[39] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, pp. 156-157.

husband's family's household affairs. They do not know that an educated woman can also teach their brother or relatives' children before she married. Once she is married, she will be treated well by her parents and her future husband's family. [40]

From this passage, it appears that educated women were not to be liberated from the traditional Chinese family. Their life was still confined to the family. Nevertheless, the new ideas of women's liberation in the May Fourth Movement began to encourage women to abandon the family in order to become independent people. In Shanghai, many women worked as journalists, writers, and secretaries. They published journals and wrote books demanding women's individual rights in the field of education, marriage, suffrage and careers. In comparison with China, only a few educated women chose to work after leaving a girls' school. Although there were more job options available to them, they still chose to return to their family and become a wife and mother.

Against this background, the major discussions in the Chinese newspapers began to focus on how to make educated women modern women and elevated their social status and position within the family. It appears that this discourse was influenced by publications from Shanghai, which supported the idea of modern women. During the May Fourth Movement era, *Shen Bao* in Shanghai redefined the term 'housewife': a woman who practised new ideas, collected new information, and was also able to manage domestic matters, including the family budget, relationship with their family members and possess basic educational level.[41] In general, the first step was to make a woman a person who is physically and mentally fit. As Miss Ai Wu argued in 'Self-awareness of Women's Liberation',

[40] See *ibid*., p. 154,
[41] Tsai Weipin, *Reading Shenbao: Nationalism, Consumerism and Individuality in China 1919-37* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 77.

> Most importantly, women needed to have self-awareness of the idea of female emancipation. The first step is to stop wearing high heels and corsets. These outfits could prevent women from being fit so that they cannot have the full strength to pursue knowledge. Without those changes, women cannot be totally liberated.[42]

This excerpt argued that women needed to get rid of the unnecessary accessories on their body and pursue natural beauty. This included having short hair, natural feet, and no make up or bras. Most importantly, those changes needed to be achieved spontaneously by women. In that way, they could have an independent existence in education, employment and other social activities.

The idea of modern women was also discussed in the Chinese newspapers in Singapore. The main theme of the Chinese intellectuals' discussion was to find a way for women to achieve their individual freedom. They concluded that there were two stages that women had to go through in order to obtain their freedom. In the first stage, women needed to develop and cultivate themselves thorough making physical changes. One commentator Wu Meng Qing Nani asserted that women in the traditional Chinese family wasted time dressing to please their husbands. They used delicate accessories and elaborate dresses to decorate themselves and therefore constrained themselves physically to the house.[43] Women's consciousness was required to liberate them from being men's puppets. In this sense, the main aim of the reform was to transform the concept of 'worthy mothers and good wives' into the idea of the 'mother of citizens'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, women were the mother of citizens and needed to have a healthy body to bear children. This echoes Harrison's finding that in China itself,

[42] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 3 February 1921, p. 14.
[43] Wu Meng Qing Nani, 'Nüzi Wenti Di Yi Bu' (The First Step of Female Problems), *Sin Kuo Min Poh*, 14 February 1924, p. 14.

> For during the early years of the Republic, and particularly during the May Fourth Movement, the 'traditional' weak, dependent Chinese women came to symbolize the backwardness and weakness of the Chinese nation itself.[44]

In this respect, the most important way for women to pursue their rights regarding freedom of love and freedom of marriage in the public sphere was to discard traditional Chinese values. The main issue here was that only through education could women choose a spouse wisely. This discussion further brought forward the new idea of the 'virtuous wife and good mother', which meant freedom of love, and freedom in giving birth. In the 1920s, the new meaning of 'virtuous wife and good mother' implied that only when woman and man had an equal position in the family could women become modernized and independent. To reach the goals of freedom of love and freedom of birth, women needed to gain autonomy in marriage in the first place. Under such circumstances, the best way to put marriage autonomy into practice was to improve the marriage system in Singapore's Chinese community.

In the mid-1920s, polygamy and remarriage remained common phenomena among the Chinese community. In the May Fourth Movement era, Chinese intellectuals began to assert that modern marriage was based upon men and women's free will to have a family together. In China, conservative families obeyed the mercenary marriage system and therefore caused many problems. In this new era, model families should advocate the self-consciousness of marriage and freedom of love. Men and women should be educated to the same level and share common interests so that they could build up a harmonious and happy family.[45] Under the influence of May Fourth Movement, the Singapore Chinese intellectuals began to discuss the issues about

[44] Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political, Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*, p. 78.
[45] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 15 September 1927, p. 14.

marriage autonomy and freedom of marriage in the Chinese newspapers. As a female student Qin Han-hua asserted in 'My Opinions on Marriage',

> Marriage requires absolutely autonomy and should not be decided by the parents and the matchmakers. It also does not require terms of equal standing and fortunes between the families. Given this situation, new marriage should depend on freedom of love and the opening of social intercourse between men and women in society. They should share the same interest and beliefs on certain issues then build up a family together. In that way, the traditional Chinese marriage system could be demolished.[46]

From this passage, it appears that sexual equality was a key factor in putting marriage autonomy into practice in Singapore. However, the idea of freedom of marriage did not take root in Singapore's Chinese community in the 1920s. Most of the China-born Chinese were afraid that these new laws of marriage and divorce would destroy the traditional Chinese customs, such as polygamy and concubinage. In fact, the marriage reform in China encountered the same problem. Although the new-style marriages and divorce law existed in the larger Chinese cities in, such as Shanghai and Beijing, only a few people chose to divorce, even if they were unhappily married. Meanwhile, the Colonial Government became concerned that there were no formal laws for dealing with martial issues within the Singapore Chinese community. Dr. Philip Tyau pointed out that Chinese marriages had always been regulated by Chinese customs instead of legislation. Chinese marriage was hence considered a personal contract to live together as man and wife to the exclusion of all others. [47] Against this background, the Colonial Government appointed a Chinese Marriage Committee to discuss the issues of marriage registration and divorce, and to report on the customs, rites, and

[46] Qin Han-hua, 'Hunyin de Wo Jian' (My Opinions on Marriage), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 19 April 1927, p. 11.
[47] CO 273/628/7, Registration of Marriages of Straits Chinese at Chinese Consulates, pp. 32-33.

ceremonies relating to the marriages observed by the Chinese residents of the Straits Settlement. [48]

The Chinese Marriage Committee was set up on 3rd April 1925. It consisted of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, 11 Chinese men, and three Chinese women. Most of them were prominent Peranakan Chinese leaders who were members of the SCBA or Chinese Advisory Board. They represented Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and met to discuss the Chinese marriage reform in the Straits Settlement.[49] The three Chinese female were Singapore's representatives Lim Seng Neo (蔡成娘 1897-1978) and Lee Choo Neo (李珠娘 1895-1947), and Penang's representative, Lee Tian Siew. Lim Seng Neo was the wife of Lim Han Hoe (林漢河 1894-1983), appointed chair and secretary of the Board of Women Justice of Peace; Lee Choo Neo was the first woman medical doctor in Singapore, who established the Chinese Ladies' Association of Malaya in 1915. The participation of females in the discussions on the marriage reform shows that female education had made progress in the Peranakan Chinese community. In comparison with China-born Chinese females, many Peranakan women had obtained a higher education in European countries, and worked in the government institutions. Thus, they had more opportunities to participate in social and political activities in Singapore.

The main aim of the committee was to discuss and analyze which forms or ceremonies of marriage registration would be suitable to create a legal basis for both the old and new-style marriages among the Chinese community. Thus, their report suggested a voluntary registry for Chinese marriage, and legal recognition for both traditional and new marriages. The Peranakan Chinese representatives supported the

[48] Straits Settlement Chinese: Marriage Committee Report (G. P. O., 1926), pp. 1.
[49] *Ibid*., pp. 1-2.

Colonial Government over the implementation of the marriage reform in the settlement. However, the China-born Chinese representatives opposed their proposals, especially the legislation regarding divorce law. In this sense, the authorities concerned decided to seek the Chinese community's opinions on marriage reform. They received replies from the clan associations and their opinions were published in the major Chinese newspapers. Most of those replies objected to the idea of marriage reform and considered that the Colonial Government was trying to place tighter control on the Chinese community. There were several reasons why the Chinese community opposed the Colonial Government's legalization of the marriage and divorce law. They indicated that traditional Chinese society had already set up a sound marriage system. The clan organizations in the settlement could deal with any disputes between husbands and wives. The following passage reveals the view of marriage of the Chinese community,

> Marriage is a sacred function solemnized before heaven and in the celebration of it, the bride and bridegroom stand as equal before their creator and in front of the tablets of their ancestors. The bond thus cemented is not to be broken by any civil authority save for very grave offences.[50]

It appears that the Chinese community considered marriage as a sacred and abiding social bond, and Chinese males rarely brought up a proposal of divorce. They were once the divorce was legalized, men and women might choose to divorce and their disagreements would become public, to the dishonour of both their families. In addition, a divorced Chinese woman who remarried was considered disgraceful and would not receive any respect from the Chinese community, due to the traditional

[50] Lin Meng Cheng, 'Chinese Women', *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 2.8 (December 1898), p. 157.

Chinese value of chastity.[51] It was thus evident that the Chinese community considered the legalization of divorce as a negative meaner that would destroy traditional family values. In this sense, they did not want the Colonial Government to interfere with the Chinese marriage system.

In this sense, the Colonial Government suggested that the Chinese dialect groups could follow the marriage system in their homeland in China. However, this scheme ended in failure. The committee found it impossible to find a way to meet the needs of the various dialect groups that existed within the Chinese community, due to fact that there was no consistent form of old style Chinese marriage that applied to every districts in southern China. As for the new style of marriage, only a few provinces had formal marriage regulations.[52] The discussions of marriage reform also reflected the difference between China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese. The former thought that the reform would destroy the traditional Chinese customs while the latter considered it an opportunity to instil the idea of sexual equality into the Chinese community and gave women the right to choose their spouses. Moreover, the Chinese leaders' opinions also reflected the contradictions in the Chinese Community's ideas. On the one hand, Chinese intellectuals published their ideas in the newspapers, advocating freedom of marriage and freedom of love. On the other hand, China-born Chinese leaders also opposed the suggestions put forth by the Colonial Government regarding marriage registration and legalized divorce. Against this background, the marriage registration and legislation of divorce among Chinese community did not put into practice in the 1920s.

Public sphere: Sexual Equality and Economic Independence

[51] *Lat Pau*, 20 October 1925, p. 3.
[52] Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, pp. 149-150.

As in the public sphere, the women's emancipation movement may be viewed as a quest for educational, occupational, and economic equality. The discussions in the Chinese newspapers centred around the idea that achieving sexual equality relied on women's self-consciousness, which could be achieved through education and economic independence. In 1925, Ning Jing argued that the important elements for sexual equality were women's education and ability to make a living. In other words, women's lack of education meant that they were unable to be self-reliant and still needed to depend on their husband. Under these circumstances, women needed to possess basic skills, such as how to make a living, and gaining enough knowledge in order to share the same rights as men.[53] Establishing vocational schools and business schools could be beneficial for both women's progress and the nation, as a whole. As Yan Qun suggested in 'Equality',

> The most important things were to reconstruct the traditional family values and advocate female education. Women can rid themselves of the conventional restraints when these goals are achieved. This new knowledge needed to stimulate women's minds and sexual equality thus could be realized.[54]

The above passage indicates that due to women's lack of education, they could not become independent people. In other words, they could not make a living in society in which they were often publically despised. In contrast, educated women could seek better job opportunities and perform same tasks as men in society. Provided that they were economically independent, women could cast off the conventional restraints and live a more independent life. In this respect, educational reform was a crucial aspect of the female emancipation movement. The purpose in promoting female education was not only to improve the educational level of illiterate women but also to prepare

[53] Ning Jing, 'Nannü Pingdeng Wenti' (Questions on Sexual Equality), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 3 February 1920.
[54] Yan Qun, 'Pingdeng' (Equality), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 14 June,1922, p. 11.

them for work outside the home.

A further discussion on whether women should leave their family to become economically-independent was proposed in China. In June 1918, *New Youth* published a special issue on the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Hu Shi's essay 'Ibsenism' translated Ibsen's work *A Doll's House* as a basis for discussing whether a woman should seek individual freedom and abandon her family. This play was soon performed on the stage and the phrases "demand freedom", "women should not rely on men" and "demand individual freedom" led to discussions about women's rights with regard freedom in love and economic independence. The intellectuals thought that Nora's leaving home signified that she was an independent individual rather than a self-reliant woman. Nevertheless, a new question was raised by the intellectuals, which was: could women survive without supports from their family? As Lu Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936) speculated that Nora would either return to the family or sink into depravity after she left home, he regarded economic independence an important factor in women gaining a foothold in society.[55] As Fogel asserted, due to society's exploitative system of private property, women had lost their economic independence, and so were unequal to men in the political, legal, educational, and employment fields.[56] In this sense, education played an important role in liberating women from their dependence on men. It was assumed that women could obtain the freedom to choose their own career once they were economically independent.

As mentioned above, the social status of women and their status within the family had been elevated since the establishment of girls' schools at the beginning of the 20th century. The role of women outside the home was also becoming gradually accepted

[55] Joshua Fogel A., *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, pp. 100-101.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

by the Singapore Chinese community after the May Fourth Movement of the 1920s. Under these circumstances, women not only had a right to choose their own career, but could also organize and participate in various social activities at that time. In fact, Chinese intellectuals did not oppose the idea of women going out to work, depending on what kind of job they chose. Basically, teaching and secretarial work were considered respectable jobs while prostitution, dancing, waitressing and singing were despised by the general Chinese community. The modern conservatism was the main reason for this phenomenon. Although there was an increasing public debates about women's rights in the Chinese newspapers, the new ideas produced by the May Fourth Movement still challenged the conventional values among the Chinese community.

During this period, the most important activity that Chinese women participated in was the Shantung Relief Fund-raising. In 1928, the Tsinan Incident[57] occurred in Shungtung Province in China. The Shungtung Relief Fund was thus set up in Singapore to organize an anti-Japanese boycott and raise money for the burial of the dead, and help for the wounded and victims. At that time, the KMT activities in Singapore were under close surveillance by the Colonial Government. The reason why the fund-rising activities could be carried out successfully in Singapore was due to the help of Tan Kah Kee, a British citizen and member of the Ee He Hean Club and Hokkien Association. In this sense, he was considered a non-partisan nationalist who collaborated with the Colonial Government. The authorities concerned thus allowed

[57] See CO 273/579/6, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs: Apr, May and June 1932, p. 23. On 3rd May 1928, the Chinese and Japanese armies clashed in Tsinan, the provincial capital of Shantung. The Chinese Commissoner Tsai Kung Si (蔡公時 1881-1928) and 16 members of his negotiation team were killed. The Nationalist Government decreed 3rd May to be National Humiliation Day. Hence, intense anti-Japanese feeling was stirred up in China co, quickly spreading to Malaya and Singapore. Local Governments Committes were formed to collect funds for those killed or wounded in Shantung.

the fund-rising activities to go ahead under Tan Kah Kee's leadership.[58] In the end, the campaign proved extremely successful in raising large sums of money for the war victims in China.

The Singapore Shantung Disaster Relief Fund-Raising Society also set up a separate committee to enable women to participate which can be viewed as the beginning of Chinese women's participation in anti-Japanese activities. The members of this committee were mainly the wives of the Chinese leaders or middle and higher class educated women, and their task was to assist their husband's charitable work. At the second meeting held on 27th May 1928, the executives agreed to ask Mrs. Lim Boon Keng[59] and Mrs. Lee Choon Guan[60] to organize a committee for women. On 31st May, a public meeting for Chinese women was quickly organized at Nanyang Girls' School, which over 80 women attended. This may have been the first time that Singapore's Chinese women ever held a public meeting for the purpose of raising funds to help war victims in China. Mrs. Lim Boon Keng made a statement to the representatives and emphasized their responsibilities to the public.[61] The result of the public meeting was the formation of the committee of women as a part of the Singapore Shantung Disaster Relief Fund-Raising Society, under the leadership of

[58] Yong Ching Fatt, 'Origins and Development of the Malayan Communist Movement, 1919-1930', in Yong Ching Fatt, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 208.

[59] See Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, *The Biography of Overseas Chinese in Singapore* (EPB Publishers Pte Ltd, 1995), p. 97. Tan Teck Neo (陳德娘 1877-1978) was the daughter of Chinese leader Tan Keong Saik (陳恭錫 1850-1909) and the wife of Lee Choon Guan (李浚源 1868-1924). She was the first Chinese female in history to be awarded to Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) by George V. Mrs Lee Choon Guan was the founding chairman of the Singapore Chinese Women's Association in the World War I.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 165. Yin Bi-xia (殷碧霞 1884-1972), she had studied in the American Methodist Mission School in Fuzhou and taught English in Women's Senior high school in Xiamen. She served as the director of the Shantung Disaster Relief Fund-Raising Society's women section and was a committee member of Po Leung Kuk in the 1920s. In the 1930, she was the director of the The Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas's women's section in 1937 and the chairman of the Singapore Chinese Women 's Organization in 1938.

[61] Yen Ching-hwang, 'The Response of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia to the Tsinan Incident, 1928', in *Community and Publics: The Chinese in Colonial Singapore and Malaysia*, pp. 310-311.

both Mrs. Lim and Mrs. Lee. The major activity carried out by this committee was to sell souvenir flowers and commemoration badges for those who died during the Shantung Disaster. Afterwards, they published a statement in the newspapers listing the names of the donors. In general, the educated Chinese women in the 1920s gradually became more aware of the importance of being independent people. Thus, they made efforts to pursue physical and spiritual freedom within the family. They also demanded greater sexual equality and economic independence in society. Given this situation, they began to participate in the work force and social affairs. Their status in the family and position within society were therefore elevated during this decade.

In summary, Chinese nationalism took root in Singapore's China-born community through the efforts of the KMT in promoting anti-Japanese activities during the 1920s. The Chinese newspapers were used as a platform to disseminate information about the fund-raising activities to the Chinese community. These fund-raising activities also give Chinese women an opportunity to participate in social affairs, which marked the beginning of the women's emancipation movement in Singapore's Chinese community. Nevertheless, only a few uneducated women took part in these social affairs during this decade. The Chinese intellectuals thus aimed to improve uneducated women's life by encouraging them to participate in social activities.

III.III The Life of Uneducated Women

In the 1920s, the majority of Chinese women was still illiterate and had little experience of working outside the home. At that time, many uneducated girls from the poorer families in China were sold to Singapore to work as prostitutes or *mui-tsais*. This often led to social problems, such as the abuse of young girls and the spread of

venereal diseases in the settlement. Both the Colonial Government and the Chinese community were aware of these problems and began to take measures to solve them. They passed laws, and established schools and institutions to help illiterate women to become independent individuals who could make their own livings in society.

Family Sphere: The Quest for Individual Freedom and Educational Opportunities

In the 1920s, the majority of Chinese women in Singapore was still illiterate and uneducated. Most came from the middle or lower-class China-born families. As discussed previously, women's role was perceived as being a virtuous wife, a dutiful mother and an obedient daughter-in-law in the traditional Chinese family. The Chinese community believed that women's social status and position within the family were inferior to those of men. In fact, the Chinese community only allowed men the right to inherit family property. Hence, women could not make a living and had to be subservient to their husbands. As Wu Meng Qing Nian asserted that these conventional values had created an "invisible prison",

> Husbands are like invisible prison warders and the relatives are the soldiers in the prison. Women's life is therefore restrained within the family. Gradually, women thought that they did not have any connections with the outside world and believed that they were only somebody's daughter, wife, or mother...Those women who were not aware of their situation would be in a backward state, and were unable to be a free, independent person. [62]

Such issues were often discussed by Chinese intellectuals in the Chinese press. They held the opinion that most uneducated women came from impoverished families and did not have an opportunity to be educated, so they lost contacts with the world.

[62] Wu Meng Qing Nian, 'Nüzi Wenti Di Yi Bu' (The First Step of Women's Problem (I)), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 15 February 1924, p. 14.

Chinese women were confined to the conventional customs, and their ignorance of the outside world became an obstacle to them in being educated. Chinese intellectuals therefore started to advocate that uneducated women needed to pursue physical and spiritual freedom so that they could get rid of the deeply rooted conventional Chinese customs, and thus become an independent person in society. Nevertheless, only a few intellectuals thought that equal educational opportunities should be available to illiterate women. In this respect, this phenomenon led to the limited growth of Chinese women's schooling in Singapore.

From the discussions of the Chinese intellectuals, it is evident that the basis for regarding males as superior was the preference for male off-spring. Sons carried on the family name. This idea originated from China's ancient patriarchal system and the tradition of holding elaborate ceremonies on feast days for ancestor worship. Only men were allowed to carry out these ceremonies for the future generations. Hence, the patriarchal system was more pronounced among the China-born Chinese families. In the beginning of the 20th century, their children's marriages were arranged by the parents. The parents would chose a suitable family for their child and also seek advice from fortune tellers and matchmakers. Their main concern was to find a family of equal status for their children, which would be beneficial for consolidating their own social status. The tradition of arranged marriage involved an agreement between two families which was decided by the parents without the consent of their children. Thus, this often led to unhappy marriages in which women might be abused by their husbands' families.

Early, arranged marriages were part of the background to polygamy and concubinage. Most men got married at the age of 15 or 16, an age when they were not

yet able to sustain a livelihood. They also often suffered from economic debits and relied on their parents to take care of their children.[63] These problems often led to disputes between husbands and wives. In this way, men often used their rights to the *Qi Chu* (七出 seven grounds)[64] to divorce their wife. Alternatively a husband was unable to end his marriage, he might choose to marry a concubine. His wife could neither oppose his decision nor had the right to request a divorce. The concubinage system in Singapore's Chinese community was a replica of that in China. In theory, it was a measure for preventing the extinction of the male line. In other words, if the principal wife failed to produce a son, her husband had the right to marry a concubine in the expectation that she would produce male off-spring and thus carry on the family name.[65] In fact, many men chose polygamy in order to satisfy romantic or sexual duties, especially if they had become prosperous. It was therefore common for both middle-and upper-class China-born and Peranakan men in the Straits Settlement to have two or three wives.

In the 1920s, some Chinese intellectuals highlighted the problem of concubinage and began to advocate freedom of marriage in order to help uneducated women become liberated from conservative families. They were affected by the new ideas of the May Fourth Movement, and started to advocate sexual equality and freedom of marriage for women in the settlement. The major Chinese newspapers therefore became important tools to draw the Chinese community's attention to issues related to uneducated women. Their main concern was to help women to obtain freedom of marriage and educational opportunities. Although most of their measures were never

[63] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 17 May 1922, p.14.
[64] The seven grounds are adultery, gossip, jealousy, talkativeness, virulent disease, unfilial behaviors, and unable to give birth to son.
[65] Maurice Freedmen, *The Study of Chinese Society in Singapore*, p. 99.

implemented, it still marked the beginning of the women's emancipation movement in Singapore. As discussed previously, the Colonial Government tried to enact laws to codify the Chinese marital system. But the suggestions of the authorities concerned were rejected by the Chinese community and never implemented. Hence, the first step should have been helping the Chinese residents to understand the importance of marital reform. As the Fang Xiang noted that the reason for promoting freedom of marriage was due to the fact that many misfortunes within the family resulted from arranged marriages. The most important step for the Chinese community was to eradicate their deeply-rooted conventional values and help women to understand their rights both in the family and society.[66] Hence, the Chinese intellectuals believed that education was the best remedy for helping these uneducated women to understand their present situation in the family and showed them that they had the ability to change it.

By contrast, most Chinese women in Singapore from lower or middle-class families were not supported by their parents to be educated. Some Chinese intellectuals noted the problem and asserted that the traditional marital system should be reconstructed as women needed to be educated. As Li Yi Mian suggested in 'Forced Marriage and Education', these Chinese elites who wanted to carry out the reforms of female education also needed to eradicate the forced marriage system and changed women's dowries into educational fees. By taking this measure, the prevalence of female education would be therefore realized.[67] Hence, the best way to rectify this phenomenon was to elevate women's educational level and offer them an opportunity to be educated, so that they could get rid of the traditional value of 'a woman without

[66] Fang Xiang, 'Hunzhi di Taolun' (Discussions on Marriage System), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 22 April 1922, p.14.
[67] Yi Mian Li, 'Manghun he Jiaoyu' (Forced Marriage and Education), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 9 January 1929, p.14.

talent was therefore virtuous'. In this respect, education played an important role in ~.

Chinese intellectuals believed that the best way to deal with this problem was to set up educational institutions in the settlement, such as women's reading clubs, Girls' plebeian schools (provided for families who could afford the tuition fees), and Mandarin Training Centre for Girls to improve women's educational level. In general, some Chinese girls' schools provided grants for poorer girls. However, none of the schools provided free accommodation, clothing, or food so that girls might be educated. Given this situation, a scheme for setting up free girls' schools for those from poorer families was proposed in 1922. As Yao Chu stated that women were the mothers of citizens who played an important role in cultivating their children to become useful members of society. Nevertheless, most of the poorer families could not afford to send their daughters to school to be educated.[68] In this respect, some Chinese men began to advocate the necessity of establishing schools for girls from poorer families.

At the same time, Chinese intellectuals also began to set up women's reading clubs and Girls' plebeian schools. The main aim in establishing women's reading clubs was to unite Singapore's Chinese women organizations so that the women could have an opportunity to participate in social activities. This organization also tended to provide a forum for Chinese intellectuals to discuss how to improve women's social status and position within the family. As Miss Qie Wei stated that women were 'the mothers of citizens' and responsible for teaching their children. However, there were few girls' schools in Singapore to help uneducated married women to become educated. The founding of Women's Reading Clubs enabled women to receive a basic education and

[68] Yao Chu, 'Mei Zai Chang Ban Pinü Mianfei Xuexiao' (On the Promotion of Establishing Free Schools for Poor Girls), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 16 November 1922, p. 6.

possess knowledge to teach their children.[69] In March 1928, the Girls' plebeian schools for illiterate girls was also founded in Singapore, the main aim of which was to help girls who had been obliged to discontinue their schooling to acquire the basic skills that would enable them to make a living in society.[70] From this discussion, it appears that the Chinese intellectuals made efforts to help to change uneducated girls' situation in the family. Nevertheless, their main concern remained making girls the 'mothers of citizens' so that they could give birth to healthy babies and offer them a better preschool education.

Public Sphere: Prostitution and the Mui-tsai System

The increasing numbers of Chinese labourers in the tin and rubber factories led to the spread of prostitution in the 1920s. Between the 1880s and 1920s, a natural boundary existed in Singapore's red-light district. The registered Chinese brothels (known brothels) were located south of Singapore River where the majority of labourers were located. The licensed brothels for non-Chinese residents were mainly situated in the north of the city. The Colonial Government's main aim with this policy was to regulate, separate and control prostitution in order to prevent the spread of venereal disease in Singapore.[71] During this period, prostitution was considered a serious public health problem in Singapore. As discussed in the previous chapter, the main route for selling women (as prostitutes) was from Hong Kong to the Straits Settlements.[72] In this way, they were permitted to enter the ports of the Straits Settlement to work in the brothels. Many young single Chinese middle-and upper-classes bachelors frequented brothels and lodging houses in the 1920s. According to

[69] Qie Wei,'Funü Shubaoshe Chouban Zhi Bu Yi Huan' (The Necessity of Establish Women's Reading Clubs), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 19 January 1925, p. 2.
[70] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 13 January 1928, p. 8.
[71] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, p. 38.
[72] Kani Hiroaki, *'Zhu Hua': The Girls who were Sold to Overseas*, p. 135.

statistics from the authorities concerned, many of the unlicensed prostitutes in these places were infected with venereal disease, which they spread among to the Chinese labourers. Another source of infection was from the *pei pai tsai* (sing song girls) who were invited to social clubs, restaurants, and banquets held in the private homes of wealthy Chinese men. Some of these female singers were infected with venereal disease that they then transmitted to Chinese men.[73] Under such circumstances, the Colonial Government tried to introduce a system of medical regulation and inspection on the brothels in the settlement, especially in those places where soldiers, sailors, or coolies might become infected with venereal diseases[74]. Nevertheless, the growing body of Chinese labourers, the unequal sex ratio, and the abolition of European and Japanese prostitution led to an increase in the number of cases of venereal disease in the 1920s. Singapore's Chinese community realized the seriousness of venereal disease caused by prostitution.

Due to the increasing number of people infected with venereal disease, the Chinese community began to be concerned about the seriousness of this contagion. As most Chinese men from the middle-and upper-classes were the elites of the Chinese community, the spread of venereal disease might have a negative impact on the community's development, as infected Chinese men would transmit venereal disease to their wives and children. At that time, there were many cases of congenital syphilis transmitted from infected mothers to their unborn babies, which often led to premature births, still births and miscarriages.[75] Hence, the Chinese community was afraid that this situation might cause them to lose their competitiveness in Singapore. In addition, most Chinese families relied on the man for their livelihood. Once the

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 170.
[74] CO 273/452, John Cowen to the Association for Moral and Social, 18 December 1916.
[75] *Ibid*.

man was infected with venereal disease, he would lose his job and the whole family would find it difficult to make a living. Under such circumstances, there were reports in the Chinese newspapers about prostitution and venereal diseases, such as *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh'*s 'My Opinions on Abolishing Prostitution' (15 March 1924), 'The Battle of Venereal Disease' (27 May 1925), and 'Measures for Preventing the Spread of Venereal Disease' (28 July 1925). Chinese intellectuals asserted that it required cooperation between the Colonial Government and Chinese community to deal with this infectious disease.

Although the Colonial Government and Chinese community began to take effective control of prostitution in Singapore, Chinese prostitution could not be totally controlled in the 1920s. This was because the Colonial Government and Chinese Community could not cooperate with each other to abolish prostitution, and the former completely ignored three very important ways of dealing with venereal disease,

> (1) Compulsory notification of all cases, male and female, with compulsory treatment of all, and penalties both men and women who communicate the disease to others. (2) The inauguration of a large number of free clinics helped by Government grants but not confined in their management to Government doctors. (3) The removal as far as possible of the bad houses from the population and at the same time the providing of other sources of occupation and amusement.[76]

These proposals had been made by the Colonial Government in the 1890s, but most of the schemes had not yet been implemented by the beginning of the 20th century. As Chu indicated, the human trafficking between China and Singapore was the main reason for the public brothels' continuing existence within the colony. The Colonial Government understood the urgency of abolishing prostitution but feared that this

[76] CO 659/13, James Henry Thomas, MP, p. 16.

would drive the brothels underground and make it more difficult to rescue abducted girls.[77] During this period, the prevalence of prostitution provoked several discussions among the government official in Malaya and international and regional meetings were held to address the epidemiology of sexually transmitted diseases. In England, a network of doctors, philanthropists and administrators was set up to control sexually transmitted diseases. Meanwhile, the Traffic of Women Committee of the League of Nation founded a forum to discuss the trafficking of women and children. The members of the committee exchanged ideas on the nature of prostitution, and then discussed several aspects of the topic, such as cultural difference, the nature of gender and sexuality, and the role of women.[78]

Against this background, the Advisory Committee on Social Hygiene was set up in 1923 under the leadership of Lee Warner to discuss the issues of venereal disease in Singapore. The committee took the first step toward making recommendations on various grounds of health and protecting European morality to solve the problems caused by prostitution. Those recommendations included the prevention of the exploitation of women and girls, and the gradual closure of known brothels[79]. Given this situation, the authorities concerned appointed a small committee composed of two medical officers nominated by the government, two medical doctors nominated by the Straits Settlement Association, and a Colonial Physician named by the Municipal Health Department in 1923 to investigate and report on the prevalence of venereal disease and treatment methods.[80] The Colonial Government officials interviewed

[77] Chu Tee Seng, 'The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941', *Journal of the South Seas Society*, .26.1, (1971), p. 21.
[78] Lenore Manderson, 'Colonial Desires: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in British Malaya', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7.3 (Jan 1997), p. 386.
[79] Janet Lim, *Sold for Silver: An Autobiography of a Girl Sold into Slavery in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Monsoon, 2004), pp.103-4.
[80] CO 275/109, Report of Venereal Diseases Committee, Council Paper, NO. 86, Proceedings of the

twelve doctors of various nationalities to seek advice about dealing with venereal diseases.

Based upon these discussions, several proposals were made to deal with prostitution and venereal diseases. Dr. A. B. Simpson suggested that both known and clandestine brothels should be brought under the same law, and that this social ill could be dealt with more efficiently by putting the registration system examination system into practice. In other words, the best way to get rid of this disease was to reach its fountain-head; the prostitutes. This was because Singapore was building a naval base that would host large number of sailors, which might make venereal disease more prevalent in Singapore.[81] Dr. W. G. Stirling, Assistant of Protector of Chinese, also indicated that providing a segregated area for Chinese known brothels might help to reduce the amount of clandestine prostitution hence lowering the rate of venereal disease. Prostitutes who were infected with venereal disease also needed to be segregated from healthy ones and should not engage in prostitution until they had fully recovered.[82] In the end, the Colonial Government decided to take gradual steps to suppress the activities of brothels and then halt the imports of girls from China or Hong Kong with the intention of abolishing prostitution in 1927.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to carry out these proposed measures in the Chinese community: firstly, due to their contradictory attitude towards prostitution. In China, many high-ranking government officials and wealthy merchants had concubines who

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Straits Settlements Legislative Council 1923, p. C280.

[81] CO 659/13, Sixth meeting, 3 April 1923, Dr. A. B. Simpson, pp. 53-54.

[82] CO 659/13, Text of Oral Evidence taken by the Venereal Disease Committee, second meeting, 9 March 1923, p. 16.

were prostitutes from the brothels. This situation originated from the conventional tradition of arranged marriage and favouring men over women. Many men chose to frequent brothels to escape from an unhappy marriage at home, while women could only accept their husband's behaviour. In addition, many poorer Chinese families often sold their daughters to brothels because of their financial problems. As Yin Xin stated in 'Studies on Prostitution (VIII)', that most prostitutes were forced into the profession due to their financial problems, illiteracy, and incapacity to find a suitable job to make a living,[83] since most of them came from poorer families and had not had an opportunity to be educated. Moreover, many men went overseas to find work in Nanyang, so many husbands and wives lived separately, in China and Singapore. The imbalanced sex ratio problem among the Chinese community in the late 19th century further contributed to the prevalence of prostitution there. Given this situation, most of the Chinese residents in the early 20th century admitted that prostitution had a negative effect on the Chinese community, but also assumed that prostitution could not be totally abolished and therefore adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards this social problem.[84] In other words, they believed that it was necessary for prostitution to exist in Singapore and that it could never be abolished.

Secondly, the Colonial Government's laws and institutions could not implement effective measures to abolish prostitution. Although the authorities concerned enacted Contagious Ordinance and Ordinance III of 1890 in the late 19th century to restrict the development of prostitution, these laws could not be enforced effectively, as they failed to meet the needs of the Chinese community. At that time, most of the China-born Chinese did not recognize Singapore as their homeland and therefore considered

[83] Yin Xin, 'Jichang de Yanjiu' (Studies on Prostitution (VIII)), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 13 May 1926, p.14.
[84] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 29 January 1924, p. 2.

it unnecessary to follow the Colonial Government's regulations. In addition, Yin Xin pointed out that the Colonial Government failed to establish a secure system to abolish human trafficking. As for the Chinese Protectorate, the officials often found it difficult to prove whether Chinese women had been abducted or not. Most traffickers would teach the girls to answer the officers' questions in order get through Customs,[85] as the authorities concerned failed to implement specific schemes or policies to prevent these poor Chinese girls from being sold to brothels by their parents in Singapore. At that time, Po Leung Kuk was the only organization that provided shelter for abducted women, although it received insufficient funds from the Colonial Government and Chinese community to accept all abused or abducted women.

Lastly, the brothels and prostitutes refused to accept assistance from the authorities concerned. The major cause of this phenomenon was the ignorance among the prostitutes and their Chinese customers. In the early 20th century, Chinese prostitutes still refused to participate in the periodic examinations offered by the authorities concerned. Instead, they still continued to engage in dangerous sexual activities in order to generate a profit.[86] Most prostitutes were unaware of the seriousness of the disease until they fell victim to it, which was why venereal diseases had spread so rapidly and widely since the 1890s.[87] In comparison with European and Japanese prostitutes, Chinese prostitutes did not attend regular examinations and did not tend to take precautionary measures to prevent contracting venereal disease. In fact, Chinese coolies in Singapore had low moral standards towards prostitutes. Infected Chinese males would not opt to be treated by qualified medical practitioners in hospitals, but instead visited Chinese quacks and used quack medicine. Only when their condition

[85] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 13 May 1926, p. 14.
[86] CO 275/109, Report of Venereal Diseases Committee, Council Paper, NO. 86, Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council 1923, p. C291.
[87] CO 659/13, Dr. James Arthur Scharenguivel, p. 90.

worsened would they go to hospital for treatment.[88] As a result, venereal disease was more prevalent among the Chinese community than among other groups.

In the meantime, the Colonial Government failed to establish any regular or standard examinations for venereal disease, and patients could not receive adequate medical treatment during this period. Prostitutes who lacked adequate, organized medical supervision invariably infected their clients with venereal disease. Although the authorities concerned began to take measures towards abolishing Chinese prostitution, and forced many unlicensed brothels to close down in the 1920s, the traffickers and sly brothel-keepers found other ways to continue their business privately.[89] At that time, the Colonial Government only kept records of the registered prostitutes and therefore could not control the private prostitutes' activities. This situation might have worsened the problem of prostitution and could not prevent the spread of venereal disease.

Against this background, the Colonial Government adopted a stricter anti-prostitution strategy from 1927 onwards. Their main purpose was to limit female Chinese immigration in order to take effective control of prostitution. As there was no restriction on female immigration before the 1920s, the Chinese Protectorate therefore began to check all female immigrants at the point of entry to ensure that there were no avowed prostitutes among them. This strategy would also help to control the brothels in the settlement.[90] According to the amendment of this ordinance, the Colonial Government had the right to give final notice to brothels on certain date and the illegal brothels had to close. In the following years, prostitutes therefore left these

[88] CO 659/13, Appendix I Memorandum, Mr W.G. Stirling, Extra Assistant Protector of Chinese, Singapore, 19 February1923, p. 28.
[89] Peter J. Rimmer, and Lisa M. Allen (eds), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Works* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), p. 173.
[90] *Ibid*.

brothels in increasing numbers.[91] Some returned to China while others moved to different parts of Singapore where they sought work in the unlicensed brothels.

In this respect, the cooperation between the Colonial Government and the Chinese community was the best way to abolish prostitution. The newspapers thus played an important role in transmitting information regarding the Colonial Government's policy, and the Chinese community's viewpoints on prostitution to the public in the 1920s. From these discussions of prostitution in the Chinese newspapers, it appears there were several ways of dealing with this social problem: education for school children and prostitutes, regular medical examinations, a registration system, and establishing a segregated area for both known and clandestine prostitution. As Fang suggested that all Chinese prostitutes and brothel keepers in the public and private brothels needed to be registered with the Colonial Government, and regular medical examinations should held. Those infected with venereal disease must be segregated from others. In addition, the commentator advised that the brothels should be confined to certain districts in the settlement, and not located close to the theatres, restaurants or public houses in order to prevent people from frequenting them.[92]

These suggestions and discussions appeared frequently in the Chinese newspapers of the 1920s. As for the public, the Colonial Government and Chinese community needed to organize the lectures and activities to instruct people on the seriousness of venereal disease. The *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* also frequently published booklets, such as 'Suggestions for Establishing Institutions to Defeat Venereal Disease' (17 November 1925), and 'Elementary Knowledge of Hygiene and Sanitary for the Public: Venereal Disease' (7 July 1927), which outlined the history, source of infection, and treatment

[91] James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*, p. 175.
[92] Fang,'Huaqiao Qiantu yu Yin Ye' (Prospects of the Overseas Chinese and Prostitution (III)), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 31 January 1924, p. 2.

of venereal diseases. At the same time, Chinese intellectuals also advocated that the Colonial Government should establish hospitals where prostitutes could receive medication for venereal disease.[93] In that way, they could receive better treatment and would not transmit the disease to others. Those measures might provide a temporary solution to prostitution and reduce the rate of those infected with venereal disease. However, the best way to get to the root of prostitution was to instill the correct concept into the Chinese community and seek their assistance in abolishing prostitution. In other words, most people identified prostitution as a social ill that could not be eradicated and did not realize that there were many ways to solve this problem. As Ze Min asserted in 'My Opinions on Abolishing Prostitution (II)', it was important for the Chinese community to understand that most women were sold to brothels against their will and they did not wish to become prostitutes. Chinese men should also respect prostitutes and understand that they were human beings, not toys. Gradually, men would not visit the brothels and they would close eventually. [94] Most importantly, the prostitutes also needed to understand that they were not men's slaves or accessories, but had the right to escape that miserable life. Thus, it required the support of the Chinese community and the self-consciousness of the prostitutes to improve their situation in Singapore. Only through those procedures could prostitutes obtain real freedom in society. The importance of education also needed to be highlighted in order to allow prostitutes to understand their situation in the colony.

Next, the Colonial Government and Chinese community needed to send prostitutes to be educated. Traditionally, Chinese people considered prostitutes as ignoble, without any rights to be educated. Thus, the Chinese intellectuals believed that

[93] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 14 June 1926, p. 14.
[94] Ze Min, 'Dui Yu Fei Chang Yundong Shuo Ji Ju Hua' (My Opinions on Abolishing Prostitution (II)), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 2 March 1922, p. 14.

education could help them to break away from that life. In 1922, the Chinese community advocated that there should be a girls' school for prostitutes, where they could learn the basic knowledge and skills and become independent people in society. As E.E. stated in 'Female Education after Abolishing Prostitution', prostitutes were also citizens and it was therefore necessary to allow them to be educated and understand that they could have a better life.[95] Although this scheme was never implemented, it shows that some of the Chinese community had gradually changed its viewpoint on prostitution and begun to help those unfortunate girls to leave the brothels. Given this situation, the Chinese community needed to support the Colonial Government's policies on abolishing prostitution. There should also be complementary measures, such as job opportunities, for those girls who had been rescued from brothels. In that way, they would never return to prostitution again.

Lastly, there should be preventive measures taken in the brothels. Dr. Scharenguivel, a practicing doctor in Singapore, suggested that short, pithy note, written in various dialects should be posted in the known brothels, coffee shops, and eating-houses to warn people of the dangers of venereal disease.[96] Prostitutes should also be taught about cleanliness and washing for the purposes of preventing venereal diseases. In addition, the danger of venereal disease and sexual morality lessons should be instilled in children's minds from an early age of home, by their parents.[97] These educative measures should also be introduced in the Chinese and English schools. At school, students should be taught the correct ideas about sexual morality and the methods for preventing of venereal disease.

[95] E.E., 'Jin Chang Shixing Hou de Nuzi Jiaoyu' (Female Education after Abolishing Prostitution), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 17 January 1928, p. 14.
[96] CO 659/13, Dr. James Arthur Scharenguivel, p. 90.
[97] CO 659/13, Appendix I Memorandum, Mr W.G. Stirling, Extra Assistant Protector of Chinese, Singapore, 19 February 1923, p. 29.

Mui-tsai System

Besides prostitution, another serious social problem in Singapore's Chinese community was the *mui-tsai* system. The suggestions and solutions for improving the life of *mui-tsais* will be examined in this section. In southern China, the term '*mui-tsai*' originated from Cantonese, meaning small girls or young women who were sold by their parents to other families. Unlike adopted daughters, *mui-tsais* were brought for domestic servitude and did not receive a salary from their adopted family. When they grew up, they often became the owners' concubine or were resold to a brothel or overseas.[98] Thus, the *mui-tsai* system could be perceived as a way of trading girls overseas. It was also the traditional Chinese value of 'favouring boys over girls' that made poorer families sell their daughters to traffickers or better-off families to ease their financial burden. In fact, the *mui-tsai* system in Singapore was more difficult to evaluate due to the girls' isolation in private households. In 1922, the number of *mui-tsais* in Singapore was estimated at 7,000 by the Chinese Protector.[99] In the same year, 60-70 *mui-tsais* went to Singapore per month.[100] Most of them identified themselves as servants who had been hired by a Chinese family; the Customs officials did not exercise tight control but allowed themselves to enter Singapore freely.

Kani Hiroaki further asserted that the mui-tsai system was not only a social problem regarding the inferior status of *mui-tsais*, but also related to other social problems in Singapore,[101] because the *mui-tsais* were the property of their owner, who had the right to sell them to brothels or other families. Most *mui-tsais* were sold to

[98] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 14 January 1928, p. 14.
[99] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 190.
[100] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 46.
[101] Kani Hiroaki, *'Zhu Hua': The Girls who were Sold to Overseas*, p. 298.

brothels as this was more lucrative for the owner than selling then to other families or lodge houses. In addition, some *mui-tsais* became their owner's concubines, some middle-class men could not afford to buy a concubine from another house or a prostitute from a brothel, so they chose to take the *mui-tsais* as their second wife. Thus, the *mui-tsais* were connected to the social problems of prostitution and concubinage in the settlement. At that time, most British officials did not understand the customs or family structures of the Chinese community. It was therefore difficult for them to notice the situation of *mui-tsais*, and to rescue these unfortunate girls from their owners.

Given this situation, the Colonial Government and Chinese community needed to take gradual steps towards abolishing the *mui-tsai* system. Firstly, the Chinese community made use of the newspapers to publish reports about the maltreatment of *mui-tsais*. The main concern in publishing these reports was to bring up the issue to public attention as well as to obtain the support of the Chinese community in abolishing the *mui-tsai* system. Those reports in *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, such as 'A 12 year old girl was abused to death' (22 August, 1929), documented the unfortunate experience of the *mui-tsai*, and the measures taken by the officials to punish her owner. Generally, the owners were sentenced to a few months' manual labour and a few hundred dollars as fines. In addition, it was also important for the public to know that it was intended to abolish the *mui-tsai* system was the current trend. In the 1920s, China and Hong Kong had enacted laws to abolish the *mui-tsai* system. In 1923, the Hong Kong Government began to take steps towards abolition the *mui-tsai* system. The authorities concern demanded that all *mui-tsais* should be registered with the government. There would be regular inspections to check the conditions of the registered *mui-tsais*. Their main aim was not only to protect these *mui-tsais*, but also

to protect the Hong Kong government's ability to supervise the *mui-tsai* system.[102] At the same time, the southern provinces or cities in China, such as Amoy and Guangdong, also enacted laws to abolish the *mui-tsai* system. In the meantime, the Colonial Government decided to issue laws of abolishing the *mui-tsai* system in of the Straits Settlement also on 1st January, 1926.

Secondly, the Colonial Government started to enact laws to protect the *mui tsais*. Prior to the 1920s, the *mui tsais* were categorized under the Labour Ordinance and Labour Code as domestic servants, and under the Women and Girls' Protection Ordinance. Under the Labour Ordinance, the *mui-tsais*' master or mistress were considered their lawful guardian, while the latter was regarded as the law to deal with cases of the *mui-tsais*' maltreatment. The Chinese Protectorate's inspection of women and girls was not directed against the *mui tsai* system but aimed to rather to deal with ill-treatment and slavery. Under such circumstances, the Legislative Council passed the Female Domestic Servants Bill on 24th August, 1925. This ordinance sought to regulate and control the employment of female domestic servants in the Straits Settlement. It gave *mui-tsais* a new definition,

> A female domestic servant whose employer for the time being shall have made, directly or indirectly, within or without the Colony, any payment to any person for the purpose of securing the services of such female as a domestic servant or whose services have as a matter of fact been secured by the payment of money to any third person; or a female domestic servant whose employer for the time being shall, within or without the Colony, have acquired the custody, possession or control of such female, or upon the death of, any employer who made any such

[102] Karen Yuen, 'Theorizing the Chinese: The Mui Tsai Controversy and Constructions of Transitional Chineseness in Hong Kong and British Malaya', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 6.2 (December, 2004), p. 103.

payment as aforesaid.[103]

From this passage, it appears that the *mui-tsais* were being employed as domestic servants and were under the protection of the Chinese Protectorate. The Chinese Protector was given the right to demand photographs and the security of girls under 10 years old who were suspected of being used as domestic servants. Their main purpose was to prevent these girls from being trained or sold as prostitutes. Employers who violated the law faced up to six months' imprisonment and a fine of up to $200. In addition, employers had to provide wages, sufficient food, clothing, and medical treatment to their employed *mui-tsais* under the age of 18.[104] Although this new ordinance aimed to improve *mui-tsai*s' lives in Malaya and Singapore, the deficiencies of this legislation could not protect them from being abused or sold to another Chinese family. It should be noted that most of the *mui-tsais* were purchased from their parents in China and it was difficult for their employers in Singapore to obtain accurate information about their ages. Thus, this provided a loophole that enabled employers not to provide a salary for their *mui-tsais*.[105] The Female Domestic Servants Bill hence failed to provide effective measures to protect the *mui-tsais* during this period.

Lastly, there should be organizations to accept and educate the mui-tsais. Most of the mui-tsais rescued by the authorities concerned would be send to Po Leung Kuk. This organization therefore played an important role in providing shelters for mui-tsais and prostitutes. As stated in the previous chapter, Po Leung Kuk was established for the purpose of taking care of Chinese girls who had been sold overseas and teach

[103] CO 274, Ordinance No. 24 of 1925, An Ordinance to Amend Ordinance No. 143 (Women and Girls Protection), p. 1.
[104] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, pp. 194-195.
[105] Chu Tee Seng, 'The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941', *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 26.1, (1971), p. 23.

them basic skills to enable them to make a living on their own or helping them to find a suitable husband. By the early 1920s, there were 60-70 people in Po Leung Kuk, which gradually could no longer meet the need of society.[106] In addition, the abolition of prostitution and the mui-tsai system began during in this period. Many prostitutes and mui-tsais were therefore sent to Po Leung Kuk. Under these circumstances, the Chinese Protectorate decided to extend the Po Leung Kuk. Their main aim was to enable the new Po Leung Kuk to accept approximately 150 females.[107] However, Po Leung Kuk did not receive sufficient funding from the government, and therefore published statements in the Chinese newspapers requesting help from the public in the form of donations. This organization therefore obtained sufficient funds from the Chinese community and was restructured in 1928.

Conclusion

In summary, the Chinese community became a stable grouping in the 20th century. This was due to the fact that female Chinese immigrants went to Singapore in large numbers during this period. The imbalanced sex ratio problem in the Chinese community was also alleviated in the 1920s. During this period, the Chinese community underwent a transformation: Chinese intellectuals regarded education as a tool for nation building (China), while the local residents still maintained their loyalty to their homeland (家鄉 *qiaoxiang*) rather than the concept of a modern China. The used of Mandarin in Chinese newspapers and Chinese-medium schools during the May Fourth era broke down the barriers between the dialect groups, and gradually unified them under the concept of Chinese nationalism. Against this background, ideas of sexual equality, freedom of love, and freedom of marriage were transmitted

[106] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 20 July 1924, p. 8.
[107] *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, 17 November 1925, p.14.

from China to Singapore's Chinese community. The Chinese intellectuals therefore began to advocate female education for girls from different classes. They held the opinion that only by being educated could Chinese women acquire the rights of economic independence, and freedom of marriage, and therefore share equal rights with men in society. Under such circumstances, many educated girls began to express their opinions in the Chinese newspapers and took part in the fund-raising activities for the Tsinan Incident in this decade.

In the meantime, both the Colonial Government and Chinese community looked up the problems of prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system, and started to take gradual steps to eradicate these social ills. However, most of their measures ultimately failed, because the Colonial Government and Chinese community could not cooperate over solving these social issues. Most British officials did not understand the traditional Chinese customs and were unable to take effective control by reforming the marriage system, prostitution and *mui-tsai* system in the Chinese community. In contrast, the Chinese community was influenced by the KMT's activities related to spreading nationalism in the early 20th century, and showed their loyalty to the Nationalist Government in China. Thus, the Chinese community considered that the reforms advocated by the Colonial Government interference in their interior affairs. In this respect, it took many years for both authorities to solve this problem, so that prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system could be eradicated in the settlement.

Chapter IV The Development of Chinese Female Activities in the 1930s

This chapter focuses on the activities of both educated and illiterate Chinese women in the 1930s. The Great Depression and Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) were the most important events that pushed forward the women's emancipation movement, which brought further advancement to the educational and social reforms. There were more educated women who used Chinese newspapers as an instrument to publicise their ideas about the female emancipation movement. Chinese newspapers will hence be used to analyze Chinese women's participation in social activities, such as the National Salvation Movement and fund-raising activities, and examine how these activities elevated their social position and status within the family. The measures and legislation enacted by the Colonial Government and Chinese community regarding the abolition of prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system will also be explored to understand how they worked together to deal with these matters. These changes and improvements in female education, social affairs, and social schemes marked the advancement of the women's emancipation movement in Singapore, which increased Chinese women's socio-economic involvement in the public sphere, gradually enabling them to challenge traditional Chinese conventions regarding women's roles within the family.

Chapter IV.I Progress and Changes in Female Education

The number of Chinese immigrants in Singapore increased from 421,821 to 567,453 in 1931,[1] as Malaya was the only British colony in Southeast Asia that allowed people of any nationality to enter without any restriction by law. However, when the world-wide Great Depression struck the development of the economy in the

[1] Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p. xi.

settlement, making many enterprises bankrupt. Against this background, the Colonial Government started to adjust its immigration policy to limit the number of immigrants entering Singapore each year.

The Measures of the Colonial Government and Chinese Community

In 1928, the Colonial Government enacted the Immigration Restriction Ordinance to limit the number of male immigrants entering Singapore to 6,016 per month. The number of immigrants was reduced to 1,000 per month during the last five months of 1932.[2] This ordinance was replaced by the Aliens[3] Ordinance on 1st January, 1933, which aimed to regulate aliens' admission to and residence in Malaya, since an economic crisis would lead to social unrest as well as political turbulence. Hence, the Colonial Office needed to consolidate its regime by restricting the number of immigrant aliens entering the settlement.[4] The main aim of the Alien Ordinance was to control the entry of aliens focusing on the registration and control of Chinese immigration into British Malaya. Indian immigrants from British India were not considered aliens and were not affected by this ordinance. This situation of restricting Chinese male immigrants continued until the invasion into British Malaya by the Japanese in December 1941.

The authorities still allowed Chinese females and children under twelve to enter the colony freely in the 1930s. Due to the economic recession and later not till after 1937, many female Chinese immigrants flowed into Malaya and Singapore seeking work.

[2] CO 273/579/5, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs: Jan, Feb and March 1932

[3] See CO 273/585/5, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs: Feb, Mar and Apr 1933, p. 31. The 'Alien' was someone who was not a British subject or the subject of a British protected State. Chinese people who were born in the British territories were considered British subjects and hence were not aliens.

[4] Chen Xiwen,'Ying Shu Malaya Banbu Wai Qiao Dengji Lu' (Enactment of Aliens Ordinance in British Malaya), *Nanyang Qing Poh*, 1.4 (January 1933), pp.135-137.

As Lai indicated, various types of Chinese women went to Singapore. One category of female immigrants went to the settlement on a voluntary basis without being indebted. Most of these were the wives and relatives of resident Chinese merchants and traders. Many single workers from the silk and textile factories in Guangdong also went to Singapore to seek work. Another category was those imported to the settlement through human trafficking, namely the prostitutes or *mui-tsais* trafficked by brothel-keepers, pimps or brokers.[5] The influx of female immigrants continued until 1937 when severe unemployment and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War led to immigration restrictions being applied to females also. Overall, the number of female immigrants increased from 101,573 to 158,630, and thus improved the sex ratio rate in the Chinese community between the 1920 and the 1930s.[6]

Discourses on Educated Women: Educational Reforms, Career Options, and Marital Autonomy

By 1930, about 14 Chinese girls' schools had been set up in the settlement.[7] These schools were mostly found by the prominent China-born Chinese leaders in Singapore. As discussed in Chapter III, female education followed the same pattern as the educational system in China. The number of female students was steadily increasing in the 1930s. Against this background, those new schools required many qualified, Mandarin-speaking female teachers to meet the requirements for teaching staff. Many unemployed teachers in China therefore came to Singapore to apply for posts such as teachers or principals in the Chinese girls' schools. The development of female

[5] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, pp.15-16.
[6] See Swee Hock Saw, *Singapore Population in Transition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 60. The sex ratio in the Chinese community was 3.9 in 1901, 2.8 in 1911, 2.1 in 1921, and 1.7 in 1931. Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), p. 25.
[7] Tang Qing and Song Shemei (eds) *Research Papers on Education in Singapore & Malaysia*, p. 125.

education was therefore promoted. Due to the growing female literacy rate, the prospects for those female graduates became a major topic of discussion in the Chinese newspapers' women's supplements, such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s 'Discourses on Female Education'(18 October 1940) 'This is the Future for Women!'(15 May 1938), and *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s 'Career Options for Women in Nanyang' (8 September 1935). Based upon those discussions, female graduates' choices after finishing their secondary education were to continue their studies, to look for a job, or to return to their family.

At that time, it was more difficult for girls than boys to continue their studies in Singapore. Most girls possessed an elementary school educational level, and few completed middle school. Only a few girls from wealthier families had the opportunity to continue their studies in Europe or in China. For girls from impoverished families, it was impossible for their parents to fund their studies abroad. Their low educational level also made it impossible for them to find a proper job in order to make a living for their family. In this respect, there was an urgent need for the Chinese community to set up girls' high schools for students who wished to continue their studies. As the wealthy businessman Boon-haw Aw stated it was a necessity to set up a girls' high school for Chinese girls in the settlement. This new school should provide new buildings and equipment for the students, and the efficiency of female education would therefore be improved.[8] The administrators of Nanyang Girls' School therefore decided to set up a high school teacher training branch in 1930. The principal, Liew Yuen Sien started to raise funds for the new school in Malaya and Singapore. In the following year, Nanyang Girls' School

[8] Aw Boon-haw, 'Dui yu Nanyang Nuxue Zeng Ban Gaozhong Zhi Yijian' (My Opinions on Nanyang Girls' School Establishing a High School Section), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 22 June 1931, p. 6.

relocated to the newly completed school building, and was renamed Nanyang Girls' High School. It began to offer girls' secondary education as well as advanced teacher training courses, with three years of junior and senior middle school courses, respectively.[9] Another contribution made by Liew Yuen Sien to the Chinese-medium education was to establish the common examination for primary schools students, which was known as the model of Primary School Leaving Examination (PLSE) set up in the 1960s. This new system thus standardized the courses of the Chinese schools and offered Chinese girls an opportunity to continue their studies in middle school.

By the end of this decade, Nanyang's Chinese Education Bureau had enacted a new regulation for normal schools. It required all students to possess a secondary education, in order to be qualified to teach in the Chinese schools. As Jia Chun argued that the normal schools should play an important role in cultivating qualified teachers, and he suggested that they should instil the ideas of responsibility, diligence and self-sacrifice into students'minds in order to elevate their levels of education.[10] In this respect, it increased the educational opportunities for female students, allowing them to be independent people in society. In fact, most girls wanted to find work to make their own living. However, there were few job opportunities for students to choose from after they graduated from middle school; namely, teaching, nursing and clerical work. Thus, there was a contemporary saying that "to graduate is to be unemployed" (畢業即失業 *biye ji shiye*). Girls were aware of the reality that they would confront upon graduation, which would be the challenges of finding a job and attaining economic independence in the society. Most students were only 15 years-old when

[9] *Nanyang Nüzi Zhongxuexiao Chuang Xiao Qishiwu Zhounian Jinian Tekan* (The Magazine of the Nanyang Girls' High School, Commemorating 75th Anniversary), 1992, p. 65.
[10] Jia Chun, 'Nan Qiao *Nüzi* Shizi Wenti' (Questions on the Female Teacher Education in the Nanyang Overseas Society), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 4 September 1938, p.11.

they graduated, with only a lower secondary, upper secondary or normal classes educational level. Nevertheless, the most important factor when hiring employers for schools or enterprises was based upon the candidate's educational levels.[11] For example, it can be seen from wanted ads in the Chinese newspaper such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s Advertisement on Hiring Female Reporters (11 June 1937), *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*'s Advertisement on Hiring Female Principals (6 December 1929) and *Lat Pau*'s Advertisement on Hiring Female Teachers (24 October 1930), that the basic requirement for the applicants was to possess the educational background of middle school or high school. As a result, many graduates were not qualified as potential employees by those institutions due to their educational levels.

At that time, there were other job opportunities in the factories, restaurants and coffee shops but, most students felt reluctant to work in these places because of the low salary and ill treatment of employees. As the columnist Jia Chun asserted, the majority of intellectual women held negative attitudes towards working as a waitress or hairdressers, and were unwilling to apply for these jobs even when poverty-stricken. Thus, those girls who were unable to find a suitable job in a school often choose to return home and married.[12] Originally, these well-educated girls' ideal life imagined a life of study and work. In the long run, economic strain and the social norms restricted their career options, and kept their life located squarely within the home and family. The introduction of schooling hence became an important element that made contribution to opening of the outside world to Chinese women.

[11] Karen Teoh, 'Exotic Flowers, Modern Girls, Good Citizens: Female Education and Overseas Chinese Identity in British Malaya and Singapore, 1900s-1950s', pp. 43-44.
[12] Jia Chun, 'Xinjiapo Zhishi Nüzi yu Zhiye Wenti' (Educated Women and Their Employment Problems in Singapore), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 14 August,1938, p.11.

As discussed in Chapter III, the Peranakan Chinese and China-born Chinese held different attitudes towards female Chinese education. Most of the Peranakan Chinese parents preferred to send their daughters to English-medium girls' schools, thus allowing them to receive a higher education, and making it easier for them to find jobs in schools or enterprises. Conversely, most China-born parents still believed that their daughters only needed to gain knowledge of a wide variety of domestic skills, and that it was unnecessary for them to receive a higher education. Hence, they often deprived their daughters of possible educational and employment opportunities. It appears can be seen that a form of conservative modernism still existed in the Chinese community. On the one hand, they believed that women shared the same rights as men to be educated. On the other hand, they believed that women's codes of conduct still needed to adhere to the traditional Chinese custom. Given this situation, for women who wanted to pursue financial independence and lead an independent life, the concepts of the traditional Chinese customs first needed to be changed.

In China, new terms representing the housewife were brought into the New Culture Movement. The definition of the modern housewife was that she should be a good wife and mother as well as energetic, well-educated, and intelligent. She should also be equipped with substantial modernity and domestic knowledge, which meant that the social status of housewives was being recognized. [13] The women who possess the above conditions could be identifying as the new women or career women. As Lien noted, the definition of 'new women' was they had autonomous access to employment and education in society. [14] It can thus be concluded that the basic

[13] Tsai Weipin, *Reading Shenbao: Nationalism, Consumerism and Individuality in China 1919-37*, pp. 81-82.
[14] Ling-Ling Lien, 'Leisure, Patriotism, and Identity: The Chinese Career Women's Club in Wartime Shanghai', in Peter Zarrow and Wong Young-Tsu (eds), *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang Publisher, 2006), p. 215.

requirements for becoming new women were to possess knowledge, perseverance and acknowledge to social affairs in the public realm. It should be noted that female emancipation was making greater process in China's coastal cities. For example, Shanghai was one of the treaty ports that opened up to foreign trade in 1842 and became an important commercial and industrial centre in the Far East in the early 20th century. The rise of modern Chinese journalism also signified the growing importance of Shanghai as the cultural centre of China in the 1920s. In this respect, many women's associations were founded in Shanghai, such as China's Women Education Association (1897) and Shanghai Women's Federation (1921), which aimed to promote women's welfare in China. The proposals made by the female intellectuals, namely educational equality, freedom of marriage and sexual equality, directly or indirectly influenced the female emancipation movement in Singapore's Chinese community.

Against this background, it can be concluded that the best way to achieve sexual equality was to allow women to become economically independent. Women hence should not restrict their life to managing the household duties and taking care of their children. To that extent, it was important to liberate women from the shackles of traditional values, and thus all problems could be readily solved.[15] It was also the most efficient way to enable women to gain their rights in society. However, it was difficult to improve women's position immediately. It required the Chinese community to take the gradual steps needed to elevate women's social position and status within the family. This situation had improved following the growth in literacy rates in the 1930s. Hence, the Peranakan Chinese leaders, such as Lim Boon Keng

[15] Ye Ren, 'Funü Bu Ying Hui Dao Jiating Qu' (Women Shall not Return to the Family!), *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 4 June 1937, p.19.

further discussed ideas for improving women's situation by giving them the right of freedom of marriage. As discussed in Chapter III, the proposal brought up by the Colonial Government regarding implementing marriage reform among the Chinese community was rejected by the China-born Chinese leaders in Singapore. Once divorce was officially recognized in China, and the new legislation granted women equal legal rights to their husbands in 1931, the Peranakan Chinese members of the legislative council, such as Tan Cheng Lock (陳禎祿 1883-1960) and Lim Cheng Ean, brought up the proposal of carrying out the marriage reform in the settlement.

Although the marriage reform did not succeed in the late 1920s, the Peranakan Chinese leaders still consistently asked the Colonial Government to enact laws to deal with marriage reform. On 16th October 1939, the colonial authorities introduced the Divorce (Amendment) Ordinance, which regulated the laws regarding divorce, nullity and judicial separation for those who were married according to any system of monogamous marriage. The Civil Marriage Bill was also introduced in 1940, providing an alternative way to reform Chinese marriage. It stated that Chinese people who chose to register marriage under this regulation needed to observe monogamy. Those Chinese did not do so were not affected by this legislation could still practice polygamy.[16] These changes in legislation helped to bring about marriage reform in the post-war period.

As a result of marriage reform and the growth of literacy, some intellectual women began to advocate their rights to cast off the shackles of traditional marriage. Thus, they made attempts to oppose the arranged marriages by running away or posting a matrimonial notice in the newspapers. Those events were often reported by the

[16] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p. 329.

Chinese newspapers and so were brought to public attention. In April 1937, an 18-year-old woman Yang Pei-Yu, refused to accept a marriage that had been arranged by her parents, and wished to marry Li, the boy she loved, instead. Thus, she went to the Chinese Protectorate for assistance. The Chinese Protector summoned her parents so that they might understand the situation more clearly. Both parents came from traditional Chinese families and felt that it was shameful to accept a marriage or proposal without the help of a matchmaker. After negotiating, both sets of parents allowed them to marry, but the wedding ceremony had to follow the traditional Chinese customs. [17] Another case took place in January 1939: the marriage of two members of staff of Yu Xian Chinese School was opposed by their parents due to the traditional Chinese reason that couples with the same surname were forbidden to marry.[18] The couple eloped and their parents made a complaint to the court. The Chinese Protector acted as a mediator in persuading their parents to revoke their appeal. Finally, the girl's father approved their marriage, and donated the dowry to refugees in China. In both of these cases, the girls were well-educated, and believed that women had the right to choose their spouse. Thus, they opposed their parents by seeking freedom of love and freedom of marriage. As a commentator from *Sin Chew Jit Poh* asserted, these cases show that educated women were capable of speaking for themselves, and had the rights to pursue their own happiness. [19] In this respect, they set good examples to encourage women who still abided by the traditional customs, and were confined within the family.

[17] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 25 April 1937, p. 13.
[18] In the Chinese community, it is thought that the same surnames indicates the possibility that the couples' ancestors came from the same patriarchal clan, which meant led to consanguineous marriage.
[19] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 11 February 1939, p. 11.

In the 1920s, the newspaper industry witnessed an explosion in the number of journalists. The papers of this time actively sought submissions from the public, allowing many more people to air their views in print. The supplements created an expansive arena for the discussion of new ideas and the promotion of literacy. Not only could poets, playwrights, and short-story writers present their art, but political activists, social commentators, and workers could also propagate their ideas in the newspapers.[20] By the 1930s, more educated women used supplements as a forum in which to discuss or exchange their ideas on marriage reform and economic independence. They held the opinions that education was the best solution for improving women's lives.

Education for Illiterate Women: Literacy Classes and Literacy Advice Offices

The main focus of Chinese female education was to reduce the illiteracy rate among the Chinese community. The illiteracy rate in the Straits Settlements was about 70% in 1931, and was higher among women than men.[21] Unlike educated women, the career options and freedom of marriage for illiterate women were more limited. In the 1930s, most of them worked as coffee shop waitress, servants, and labourers in the factories. The only way for them to live a better life was to acquire literacy and work-related skills through basic schooling.[22] Suggestions were made in the Chinese community, such as setting up vocational training centres or job centres. However, it was not until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war that the Chinese community realized the importance of mobilising uneducated women in the National Salvation Movement. In response, the Malayan Chinese Literacy Movement started in the late

[20] David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, p. 98
[21] CO273/508/1, Chinese Literacy and Education in Malaya (Based on 1931 Census Report), p. 29.
[22] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 18 June 1933, p. 6.

1930s. The mission of this movement was to allow illiterate women to gain basic literacy skills, and engage in anti-Japanese activities, as Miss Ron wrote,

> The aim of this movement was to eradicate illiteracy, popularize education and enable illiterate women to have the opportunities to possess basic reading and writing ability. My expectation was to make every school, club, property, and cultural organization useable as the classes for literacy movement.[23]

From the passage, it appears that the best way for women to become literate was through listening to speeches and songs, and watching plays, and viewing paintings. It could make them aware of their responsibilities with regard to educating their children, and therefore it was necessary to allow women to obtain new knowledge to meet their everyday needs. School teachers could also spend their free time instilling the ideas of nation and national consciousness into their minds, and make them understand that it was their duty to encourage their children to devote themselves to their nation, and guide them to take part in the National Salvation Movement.

In these circumstances, the women's associations decided to organize door-to-door visits to housewives in the settlement. Their main aim was to survey the housewives' living conditions, and inform them of the literacy classes. The originators believed that this scheme could provide a channel for the housewives to make contact with the outside world as well as help them to develop basic literacy. As Zhi Fang and Jian Qing suggested that this scheme could be implemented by dividing the women into small groups which contained five to twelve people, and selecting one person as the group leader. The teaching materials of the literacy classes were designed by the propaganda department, which aimed to teach the students stories and tales that were

[23] Ron, 'Wo Dui Yu Xing Hua Funühui de Ji Dian Jianyi' (My Suggestions on Singapore Chinese Women's Association), *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 5 May 1939, p. 20.

easy to read and understand.[24] In the long run, they believed that these educated women would voluntarily identify with them in social affairs, and make efforts to help in the National Salvation Movement.

Another scheme was also brought up to reinforce the literacy movement, namely literacy advice offices for women in the Chinese community. As Zheng Man-Zhu, the director of Singapore Chinese Women's Association, indicated housewives were often occupied with domestic duties, and were unable to study to a fixed schedule. It was therefore decided to offer them an alternative way to attend the literacy classes. [25] In this sense, the women's associations came up with the idea of organising classes once or twice a week for housewives, who could practice the lessons they learnt during the classes in their spare time. Given this situation, the women's associations decided to set up the word meaning inquiring offices for them to ask questions that had arisen during their independent studying at home. For instance, they could go here when they encountered difficulties, or to ask the meanings of words. The advocates of this scheme believed that it could increase the women's interest in learning new words as well as allowing them to make contact with each other to discuss the new lessons they had learnt.

In sum, the ideas of May Fourth Movement continued to promote female Chinese education in Singapore. It raised the ideas of sexual equality and co-education in Singapore, and thus urged the Chinese community to reform female education. Most educational reform was carried out by the China-born Chinese leaders, who introduced China's school system by using the Chinese text books and curriculum as

[24] Zhi Fang and Jian Qing,'Women Dui Yu Nüzi Jiuwang Xuanchuan Gongzuo de Yijian' (Our Opinions on the Tasks of the National Salvation Movement for Women), *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 18 February 1938, p. 12.
[25] Zheng Man-Zhu, 'Funü yu Jiaoyu' (Women and Education), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 30 November 1941, p. 5.

the teaching materials. It appears that Chinese nationalism was deeply rooted in the Chinese community, and tended to promote ethnic and national strength by controlling the Chinese schools. These measures therefore directly or indirectly promoted female Chinese education in the settlement. In this sense, the development of female Chinese education in the 1930s provided more educational opportunities and career options for Chinese girls in Singapore. Those reforms were helpful in elevating Chinese girls' educational levels as well as cultivating a group of intellectual women in the public spheres of schools and work. In addition, the marriage reform implemented by the Peranakan Chinese and Colonial Government also helped to improve Chinese women's social position and status within the family during this decade.

Chapter IV II Chinese Women's Participation in the National Salvation Movement

During the 1930s, the major social activities in which Singapore's Chinese women participated were the wartime fund-raising activities in support of the Sino-Japanese War. The resistance against the Japanese in China can be regarded as the turning point in giving Chinese women an opportunity to participate in the public affairs. Their involvement in these activities was also helpful in elevating their family position and status within society. In addition, the women's supplements of the Chinese newspapers became an important platform for women to address or exchange their ideas about the National Salvation Movement and social reforms that took place during this decade.

Foundation and Development of the Chinese Women's Associations

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Chinese leaders began to take notice of women's issues. Educated women also started to demand the same rights as men with regard to economic independence and freedom of marriage in the 1920s. However, most women were illiterate labourers or housewives, who seldom received information about the women's liberation movement in China, and did not demand their rights either in employment or at home. In this respect, the women's emancipation movement stagnated in the late 1920s, but entered a new phrase in the next decade. The Sino-Japanese war pushed forward the integration of the National Salvation Movement and the women's emancipation movement. These two movements differed in nature, but the new ideas which originated from the May Fourth Movement, the concept of Chinese nationalism, the activities carried out by KMT, and the demands proposed by intellectual women for sexual equality and economic independence brought these activities together into one movement. In this sense, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War enabled these movements to have a mutual influence on each other.

The Chinese language newspapers in Singapore also became an important tool for spreading national sentiment to the Chinese community, and encouraged them to make efforts to participate in anti-Japanese activities. In the 1930s, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* employed string correspondents in the major cities of China, such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Xiamen, and Hong Kong, and used the form of feature stories to publish these reports. There were also reporters in charge of gathering news in Nanyang and Singapore, covering social, political, economic and cultural matters.[26] The main purpose of Tan Kah-Kee and Aw Boon-haw was to use the newspapers to unify the Chinese community in order to encourage them to support

[26] Choi Kwai Keong, *History of Chinese Newspapers, Periodicals, and Journalists of Singapore*, p. 37.

anti-Japanese aggression in China. In other words, they tended to use their newspapers to disseminate information on the war situation in China and to stir up anti-Japanese feeling among the readers. They also helped to make the Chinese residents aware of China's national crisis and become more China-oriented.[27] The newspapers have been seen as an important propaganda tool in the war, as Barrett asserted,

> The press was extremely effective in disseminating information to a wide audience, shaping their minds and swaying their emotions. It was a powerful instrument for spearheading social change and raising public consciousness.[28]

In can be seen that the women's supplements in the Chinese newspapers served the same purpose as the function of the newspapers in the passage above, Hence, it became an important forum for discussing the women's emancipation movement and the National Salvation Movement. Unlike in the 1920s, the women's supplements of the 1930s contained more specific discussions on the women's emancipation movement, and began to focus on Singapore's Chinese women's activities and problems. It can be seen from the content of Advertisement on *Sin Chew Jit Poh*' s Women's World Soliciting Articles to the Public (4 January 1932), the purpose of setting up this supplement was to study and discuss women's everyday lives in order to improve their social status and position within the family. Thus, these supplements set aside special columns for discussing women's topics, such as marriage, economic equality, sexual equality, and social problems. Their aim was to gather different perspectives from the public on female issues, and they encouraged educated women to publish their views in the newspaper. Under the influence of the May Fourth

[27] Yong Ching Fatt, 'A Preliminary Study of Chinese Leadership', in Yong Ching Fatt, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 69.
[28] David P. Barrett, *China in the Anti-Japanese War, 1937-1945: Politics, Culture, and Society* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), p.47.

Movement, the introduction of women's supplements, and the increasing number of educated females, the women's own voices began to appear in the newspapers. This signified the advancement of the female emancipation movement in Singapore.

There were as many as 14 women's supplements in the Chinese newspapers during this period, which provided an open forum for Chinese intellectuals to discuss their ideas about female issues. Of those supplements, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*' s Women's World (*Fu Nü Jie*), *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s Today's Women (*Jin Ri Fu Nü*), and *Sin Chung Jit Poh*'s Women's Section (*Fu Nü Jie*) paid most attention to women's issues, including female education, occupations, economic status and the women's liberation movement in Europe. On 5th November, 1938, *Sin Chung Jit Poh* launched a column entitled 'Famous Women', which illustrated the life and achievement of well-known women in Singapore and China, namely Mrs. Lim Boon Keng, Huang Su-Yun, and Wang Ying-Xia. *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s Women's World (*Fu Nü Jie*) also set up a forum called 'Lectures on Women's problems' on 12th January, 1941, which published the Origins of Female Problems, Questions on Women's Occupations and Economic Problems (19 January 1941), and 'Education, Love, Prostitutes' (2 February 1941). Their major demands were to broaden Chinese women's views by publishing reports about their everyday lives. It addition, they intended the women's supplements to stir up their sense of patriotism and encourage them to take part in the National Salvation Movement.

The Features and Demands of the Women's Associations

In this decade, Chinese women's social affairs could be divided into two periods: from 1930 to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and from July 1937 to the fall of Singapore in 1942. In the late 1920s, Chinese women began to take part in

public affairs, which were the anti-Japanese activities carried out by the Singapore Shangtung Disaster Fund-raising Society. Most of the activities were organized and carried out by intellectual women and career women. Only a few housewives participated in social affairs during this period. In 1928, the women's branch of the Singapore Shangtung Disaster Fund-raising Society was renamed the Women's Mutual Assistance Association. Nevertheless, this organization seldom took part in the social affairs in the settlement. Huang Su-Yun further asserted that those women's organizations in the settlement only had its name, and it was a pity that a place like Singapore did not have a strong, unified institution for organising women to take part in the National Salvation Movement,

> In China, many cities have set up women's associations, and therefore had the strength to gain women's rights…In Nanyang, several women's associations established in Malaya. Those associations had begun to carry out work for the National Salvation Movement. On the contrary, Singapore is a commercial city and a trading port. It also had many excellent women intellectuals, but it was a pity that their progress in the women's liberation movement could not match that of China.[29]

From the excerpt above, it can be understood that it was necessary for the Chinese community to set up the women's organization in Singapore. Prior to 1937, there were only the Singapore Chinese Women's Associations and the Chinese women's section of the Young Women's Christian Association, which organized English and Mandarin cram schools for women. In other words, there was never a really unified organization for Chinese women in the early 1930s. It can be seen that the women's supplements focused mainly on the women's emancipation movement in China, and asserted that Singapore's Chinese women should follow the pattern of those activities.

[29] Huang Su-Yung, 'Xingzhou Huaqiao Nüjie Ying You de Zuzhi' (The Women's Associations should be Established in Singapore), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 10 January 1932, p. 9.

Nevertheless, the Chinese intellectuals rarely considered whether the educational and cultural reforms in China could be applied to the women's emancipation movement in Singapore. There were also few Chinese women who spoke for themselves in the newspapers; they simply followed the Chinese male leaders' orders when taking part in the social activities during this period. It was therefore important for the Chinese community to organise and unify those women's associations to participate in social affairs as well as offer them opportunities to become independent members of society.

Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July, 1937, the Chinese leaders immediately activated the 'Save China' movement and started to set up fund-raising activities in Singapore. At that time, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese *huiguans* played an important role in starting the National Salvation Movement as well as spreading Chinese nationalism. This was due to the fact that overseas Chinese were considered as 'The Mother of the Revolution' in China. Thus, they made great contributions to the fund-raising activities, sending monthly subscriptions to the National Salvation Movement to support China's military supply fees. Members of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce frequently participated in those activities. As discussed in Chapter II, As Pang indicated, these Chinese dialect leaders often had substantial wealth, and close connections with *huiguans*. This could be seen as a positive effect of dialect parochialism in the Chinese community, which unified the Chinese dialect groups and played an important role in mobilizing the relief fund activities of the 1930s.[30]

On 15th August, the Chinese Hokkien Huiguan's leader Tan Kah Kee established the United China Relief Fund of Singapore, which aimed to collect funds to support

[30] Pang Wing Seng, 'The 'Double-Seventh' Incident, 1937: Singapore Chinese Response to the Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 4.2 (September 1973), p. 273.

China's war effort. The Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas was formed on 10th October, 1938 with the purpose of mobilizing the Chinese throughout Southeast Asia. As discussed in Chapter III, Tan Kah Kee was approved by the Colonial Government to carry out fund-raising activities in the 1920s. In the 1930s, the authorities concerned realised the rapid growth of the National Salvation Movement and feared that the KMT or the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) might take control of these activities in Singapore. The Colonial Government thus chose Tan Kah Kee as the leader of the National Salvation Movement, and stated that the Chinese community could not hold boycotts of Japanese goods or anti-Japanese activities in the colony. In that way, the KMT or the Malayan Communist Party would not threaten the reins of the Colonial Government in Singapore under the leadership of Tan Kah Kee in the National Salvation Movement.[31] In these circumstances, the wives or daughters of those Chinese leaders also began to set up women's relief fund organizations in the settlement. Most of them had been well-educated in Singapore and were supported by the *huiguans* or the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce.[32]

In September 1938, Wu Shun-Zhu (吳舜珠) and Huang Su-Yun established the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association, which aimed to activate fund-raising activities to aid the National Salvation Movement in China. This organization became the most effective women's organization in the Chinese community. Its main

[31] Yong Ching Fatt, *Tan Kah-Kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 204.
[32] See Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p. 272. These women's organizations can divided into three categories: the independent women's associations, such as the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association and Singapore Chinese Women's Associations; the women's sections of fund-raising organization; and career clubs, such as the housemaids and dancing girls' associations. Those organizations were founded for the same purposes to assist with the fund-raising activities to help refugees in China, and to educate women in Singapore.

task was to activate fund-raising activities such as selling flowers, setting up refugee children's shops (in aid of children who were homeless or had lost their parents in the war), and collecting winter clothes.[33] In March 1939, the Singapore Chinese Women's Committee (also known as the Singapore Chinese Women's Association) was founded by the female intellectuals Huang Dian-Xian (黃典嫻) and Tain Cui-Yu (田翠玉).[34] It aimed to improve and elevate women's social status as well as encouraging them to take part in the National Salvation Movement. Moreover, it also encouraged women from different classes to join in the activities of the women's associations. Their guidelines stated that the membership fee for Chinese women over sixteen years old was $1, and the monthly fee was 40 cents. Membership for labourers and poor students was free, and the monthly fee was 2 cents. This association's ultimate goal was to mobilize Chinese women at all levels of society. In this respect, the women's associations used Chinese newspapers as an instrument to publicise the importance of encouraging women to participate in social affairs.

As discussed in the previous section, most Chinese women were illiterate, and could not obtain the latest information regarding the Sino-Japanese War and activities of the women's associations from the newspapers. In this respect, the mission of these newly founded women's associations was to educate the illiterate women in simple but direct language to help them to understand the meaning of the National Salvation Movement. As the first issue of *Women's World* points out main aims in setting up this supplement were,

[33] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 26 November 1938, p. 7.
[34] Huang Dian-Xian was the daughter of Chinese entrepreneur Huang Ya-fu (黃亞福 1837-1918). She was the founder and principal of the Hua Qiao Girls' School in 1905; Tain Cui-Yu was the faculty of Chung Hua Girls's School, and the co-founder of the Singapore Women's Vocational School in the 1950s.

> 1. To discuss every aspect of women's problems. 2. To study their daily life in the home. 3. To introduce famous women's stories. 4. To elevate women's social position. 5. To improve women's life. [35]

From the passage above, it appears that the Chinese community had begun to take notice of women's problems, and decided to take measures to improve the situation. Its Chinese leaders also realised that it was important to mobilise women's strength to support the war in China. This was due to the fact that the Sino-Japanese War needed large amounts of money from the overseas Chinese to support the home front. Thus, the Chinese community leaders expected women to make efforts to assist with the fund-raising. It could also be viewed as the first time they were given the same rights as men to participate in the social affairs of Singapore.

Given this situation, the women's associations made use of the women's supplements as a forum for discussing how to mobilize women more efficiently. As the chairman Huang Su-Yu pointed out, less than 20% of women participated in the National Salvation Movement in Singapore. Chinese women should be encouraged and not give up their rights and duties. The best way to mobilize all levels of women was to set up a propaganda department in order to carry out the activities systematically. As long as those organizations were opened to the public, the idea of organizing a travelling propaganda team, drama troupes, literacy classes, and chorus groups, and publishing periodicals and pictorial publications could be put into practice one day. [36] In this sense, the content of these publications also elaborated the tasks that women should carry out in the National Salvation Movement.

[35] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 4 January 1932, p. 7.
[36] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 18 February1938, p. 12.

As discussed in the previous chapter, middle class housewives were in charge of their family's budget and kept private funds for themselves. These private funds were accrued from their daily savings or derived from their dowries. Thus, if they saved the cost of seeing plays or gambling, and donated the money to the National Salvation Movement, that would constitute a significant contribution to the fund-raising activities. In other words, those fund-raising activities were viewed as potentially helpful in enabling Chinese women to devote time and money to the National Salvation Movement. Hence, it was important for the women's associations to inform the housewives that every cent was helping to support the war. Miss Zi Zhi demonstrates the importance of organising home visits to housewives in 'Singapore Chinese Women Symposium' as follow,

> It is untrue to consider housewives as unpatriotic to their country…This is due to the fact that most of them did not receive proper education, and therefore spend most of their times seeing plays and gambling…However, they are the majority of the female population, and played an important role in managing the household expenditure, and educating children…It is therefore important for us to visit their house, and to educate them. In that way, they are able to make a contribution to the war. [37]

In this respect, intellectual women needed to take responsibility for educating illiterate women. Their main task was to enable uneducated women to possess basic literacy, and instil the meaning of the Sino-Japanese war in their mind. To that extent, it could stir up their patriotic spirit and also convey these ideas to their family members. Hence, the next step for the women's associations was to put their goals into practice in the most efficient way. In this respect, the women's associations intended to mobilise women by using pictures, photos, words, and speeches to arouse their sense

[37] Zi Zhi, 'Ji Xing Hua Funühui Zuotanhui' (Singapore Chinese Women Symposium), *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 22 May 1939, p. 20.

of justice and patriotism. The scheme of setting up a weekly house visit team was therefore proposed in 1939. As illustrated in the previous section, members of the women's associations would visit housewives at weekends, and used pictorial publications from the newspapers or books as tools to read and show them the atrocities committed by the Japanese. Moreover, the women's associations would invite housewives to take part in their meetings. For instance, as Miss You Lan suggested that it was necessary to invite these housewives to become members of the associations, and let them choose the work that they were good at, such as soliciting for funds, sewing winter clothes, cooking, singing, performing plays, or selling paper flowers.[38] Taking these measures, the Chinese intellectuals believed, could enhance their knowledge and stir up the housewives' national sentiment regarding China, and they would voluntarily take part in the National Salvation Movement.

Content of the Activities: International Women's Day, Soldiers and Refugees

The focus of the women's associations' activities can be categorized into three areas: International Women's Day, soldiers, and refugees. Those activities follow the pattern of the National Salvation Movement in China. Firstly, the women's associations celebrated International Women's Day on 8th March every year. From the beginning of March, the Chinese newspapers' supplements would provide special issues concerning the women's emancipation movement worldwide, and propagated the importance of women taking part in the National Salvation Movement. These special editions included *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s special edition of International Women's Day'(7 March 1937), Declaration on the commemoration for International Women's Day and the Historical Meanings of International Women's Day (3 March 1940), and *Nanyang*

[38] You Lan, 'Kangzhan yu Huaqiao Funü' (Sino-Japanese War and Overseas Chinese Women), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 1st February, 1939.

Siang Pau's 'Special Edition on International Women's Day' (8 March 1939). The main aim of these activities was to garner the support of all levels of women for the war,

> To promote the ideas of nation to the housewives as well as to raise the public consciousness of female labours…It is necessary to encourage them to work with the intellectual women in boycotting Japanese goods. In other words, if people purchase Japanese products then we are helping them to buy weapons to kill our people. We must boycott Japanese products and do harm to Japan's economy. In this sense, all levels of women must be united and work together with a determined spirits for the National Salvation Movement.[39]

From the passage above, it appears that the purposes of these activities were to help women to understand the meanings of International Women's Day, and use this opportunity to notice that women in Europe had already worked hard to promote women's emancipation movement. The women in those countries had already striven for their rights and asked for the same opportunities as men in society. By the same token, Singapore's Women's Association called upon Chinese women to seize the opportunity to take part in the National Salvation Movement as a chance to show their ability to engage in social affairs to the public.[40] In fact, prior to the Sino-Japanese War, the women's associations still needed to follow the male Chinese leaders' orders when carrying out fund-raising activities. In this sense, Chinese women could use this opportunity to promote the strength of female citizens, which meant that their associations could be like men's in taking up the responsibility of saving the nation.

Secondly, there were activities for providing material aid for soldiers. The main activities were collecting and making winter clothes for the soldiers on the frontline.

[39] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 March 1939, p. 24.
[40] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 2 March 1939, p.7.

In 1939, the Nation-wide Collecting Winter Clothes Committee in China sent out a notice to the whole country and the overseas Chinese community of the need to collect three million items of winter clothing.[41] Thus, the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association, and the Chinese girls' schools, such as Chung Hua, Nan Hua, and Jing Fang, began collecting winter clothes. Initially, the branches of the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association issued notices to all levels of women about the importance of making and collecting winter clothes. The next step was to send their members out to encourage women to participate in this activity. At the same time, all of the branches of the women's association sent people out to collect fabric donated by the trading companies and enterprises, which the women's associations then made into winter clothes.[42] As a commentator described this activity followed the principle of donating whatever you can: wealthy people could donate winter clothes for the home front soldiers while the women's associations could organize a committee to collect winter clothes in the settlement. In the meantime, this committee could encourage other national salvation organizations in Malaya and Singapore to join in this activity, and send letters to maintain the morale of frontline soldiers.[43]

Lastly, the women were involved in organising financial aid for the refugees in China. The major activities were the thrift movement, the refugee children's shop, and the bowl of rice movement. The main purpose of these activities was to raise money for China's refugees. Hence, it was important to increase Chinese women's national

[41] *Sin Chung Jit Poh*, 29 October 1939, p. 6.
[42] Wu Liu-Si, 'Ma Hua Funü Gankuai Zhi Mianyi Ji Wang Qianxian Ba' (Women in Malaya! Send the Winter Clothes to the Frontline), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 31 October 1937, p. 11.
[43] Qing Ying, 'Ma Hua Funü Dangqian de Poqie Renwu' (The Urgent Tasks for Singapore and Malaya Chinese Women in the Present Day), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 3 December 1939, p.11.

sentiments, and encourage the women's associations to organize relevant activities.[44] In 1938, Chung Hua, Nan Hua, and Jing Fang Chinese Girls' Schools announced the Declaration on Economizing Movement, and enacted twelve doctrines to fulfil their duties regarding making daily savings. Thus, they encouraged housewives to take part in this activity by practicing thrift by not purchasing luxury goods or foreign products, and turning the saving into monthly donations for the National Salvation Movement. This phenomenon matched the important tradition of women as political or ethical consumers in the National Salvation Movement which helped to strengthen the women's associations' support of the Sino-Japanese War. Another activity, the operation of the refugee children's shop was carried out by the students of Jing Fang Chinese Girls' School in 1940. This aimed to raise funds for refugee children in China by selling confectionery, including ice cream, curried beef rice, and sweet squash cakes. The main purpose was to publicize the importance of giving relief to refugee children who were the future of China, so it was therefore necessary to help them to become the reserved armies for the Sino-Japanese War.[45] In August 1941, the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association and its branches launched the 'Bowl of Rice Activity'. This activity was organized by Rice Mercantile Labour Union in response to the annual anniversary of 918. From 18th to 20th September, 'a bowl of rice activity' was held in the local restaurants. Six restaurants participated, and their revenue on those days was sent to the Singapore Chinese Women Relief Funds Association.[46]

In sum, men supported women's participation in the resistance movement against the Japanese because they could raise more money by playing an important role in

[44] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 12 July 1938, p. 11.
[45] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 22 February 1940, p. 9.
[46] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 7 August 1941, p. 9.

such activities as selling flowers and acting in plays. In fact, the meaning of women's participation in the National Salvation Movement was to provide them with an opportunity to express their opinions as well as to unite them in pushing forward the women's liberation movement. It appears that women participated in public affairs for two reasons: to become part of society, and to pursue individual freedom. The female advocates of those activities also believed that it would help to save their motherland as well as push forward the women's emancipation movement.

Discourses on Women's Association Activities

Firstly, the activities organized by the women's associations in the National Salvation Movement did not reach all districts of Singapore. In fact, most of the women organizations' fund-raising activities were only carried out in the urban areas. They were mainly aimed at merchant' wives and seldom requested donations from housewives or labourer women in the rural areas. In fact, many middle-class housewives who lived in rural areas had lot of savings and jewellery. However, most of them did not hear any information about the anti-Japanese war, and were thus unwilling to make donations to the National Salvation Movement. In addition, the contacts between students and intellectual women were also very weak, and they rarely cooperated with each other over fund-raising activities, as Jia Chun from *Sin Chew Jit Poh* noted,

> The former has the courage but lacks clear, definite concepts on the Sino-Japanese War; while the latter lacks courage but are equipped with knowledge on the National Salvation Movement. However, intellectual women seldom explained to

the public the details of their activities. This passive attitude was the major problem that existed in the women's associations. [47]

From the passage above, it can be seen that the fund-raising activities organized and carried out by the women's associations were still restricted to the group of intellectual women. However, most of them did not understand the genuine meaning of the National Salvation Movement or its relationship with the Sino-Japanese War in China. Some of the women who took part in those activities were to spend only their spare time on social affairs instead of being keen to improve their situation in the family. In this sense, they would hold an indifferent attitude towards pursuing or assisting illiterate labourers or housewives to take part in social affairs. The next step for the women's association to fulfil their ideas of sexual equality was to persuade more intellectual women to participate in those activities, and took advantage of their assistance to encourage women from the lower classes to take part in social affairs.

Secondly, the National Salvation Movement encountered the difficulty of mobilizing all classes of women in the Chinese community. In fact, the organizations organised by the overseas Chinese occupied only a minor place within the National Salvation Movement. Besides selling flowers, fund-raising activities, and the refugee children's shop, other activities concerning propaganda, education and integration did not function well. As discussed in the previous section, only a few women were intellectuals. The lives of most of the labourers, housewives, and working women were confined within the kitchen and factory. Moreover, it was difficult to unite women from the different levels to participate in the fund-raising activities, as they came from different dialect groups within the Chinese community. As Ri Guang

[47] Jia Chun, 'Ma Hua Funü Jiu Wang Ggongzuo de Jiantao' (Critics on Women's Tasks in the National Salvation Movement), *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 21 August 1938, p. 11.

points out some intellectual women despised labouring women from the lower classes, and therefore could not put the tasks of the National Salvation Movement into practice. In other words, most of them were reluctant to teach labouring women and rarely gave them an opportunity to participate in the National Salvation Movement.[48] As for the labourer women themselves, they did not understand the content of the activities carried out by the women's associations. Hence, they often prohibited their husbands or children from making donations to those associations or participating in the relevant activities. In this sense, intellectual women should have taken responsibility for promoting, educating and organising these women in the rural areas to join the National Salvation Movement.

Lastly, the Chinese patriarchal system impeded the development of the women's liberation movement. From the late 1920s to the 1930s, the growth of literacy among Chinese women enabled them to have more options regarding choosing a job or making efforts to assist the National Salvation Movement. Most of the female participants in the fund-raising activities were the wives or daughters of Chinese leaders or merchants. In this respect, only a minority of the women from the middle or higher classes were encouraged by their family to express their opinions about their educational, economic, and political rights in the newspaper supplements. As Fan indicated, this was due to the fact that Chinese intellectual men and women had different aims for the National Salvation Movement. The former considered that women should raise more money through the fund-raising activities, such as acting in plays and selling flowers; while the latter tended to push forward the women's

[48] Ri Guang, 'Gei Gongzuo Zhong de Jiemei Men' (For those Sisters at Work!) *Sin Chung Jit Poh*, 3 December 1939, p.6.

emancipation movement. [49] It appears from the discussions regarding the improvements in women's lives in the women's supplements that the commentators often engaged in idle theorizing, and did not in the long run put their ideas into practice. In other words, the women's emancipation movement during this period still relied on the support of the Chinese male elites. Otherwise, the activities of the women's association could not succeed. It was not until the 1950s that women were empowered with more rights in the political and economic arena.

In conclusion, the establishment of women's associations and the emergence of women's supplements in the Chinese newspapers enabled women to publish their opinions and participate in social affairs. Those improvements helped to elevate women's social position and status within the family. In other words, anti-Japanese activities became the turning point for Chinese women to participate in social affairs, and pushed forward the women's emancipation movement in the 1930s. Nevertheless, there were still many problems within the women's emancipation movement, such as: women's associations did not succeed in mobilising women at all levels to take part in the National Salvation Movement, and most of their activities still relied on the Chinese male leaders' assistance. In addition, the Colonial Government did not approve of or support the Chinese community's anti-Japanese activities in the settlement, and adopted strict examinations of publications from China. Under this background, the main aim of the National Salvation Movement in Singapore was to raise more money to support the war in China by utilizing the strength of the women's associations as well. This could therefore be perceived as the main reason why the women's emancipation movement could not be carried out successfully in the 1930s.

[49] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, pp. 307-308.

Chapter IV III Solutions to Chinese Women's Social Problems: Prostitution and the Mui-tsai System

In this decade, many educated women held the same opinions as the male advocates that women should share the same rights as men to be educated and have the right to choose their spouse and occupation. Nevertheless, they seldom debated the public morality of the exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system. The abolition of prostitution led to the increasing number of clandestine prostitutes in the 1930s which raised public debates among the Colonial Government and the Chinese community. Another social ill, the *mui-tsai* system, was also brought to the attention of the public and the Colonial Government set up the Mui-Tsai Committee in 1936 to investigate the situation of *mui-tsais* in Malaya and Singapore. Chinese intellectuals also voiced concerns about these social ills by publishing their ideas in the newspapers. This provided a way to explore the different views of female problems as reflected in western and Chinese societies and how they work together to deal with these matters.

Discourse on Clandestine Prostitution: Emergence, Development and Solutions

In the late 1920s, the Colonial Government adopted a more restrictive policy on prostitution in Singapore. The first step was to close down the known brothels steadily from March, 1927. Forty-five brothels were closed down in 1927, and 50 in 1928.[50] By 1929, nearly all of the known brothels had been forced to close in the settlement. In the meantime, the Chinese Protectorate along with the local police was requested by the authorities to rescue the abducted or sold girls from those brothels. Most of the

[50] CO 273/581/16, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Effects of Abolition of Known Brothels in Malaya, p. 2.

rescued girls or women were sent to the Po Leung Kuk (Society for the Protection of Women and Children) while others were advised by the Colonial Government officers on how to find other jobs, such as becoming waitresses, servants, or labourers. The abolition of prostitution also helped to reduce the conflict between the secret societies. In the 1930s, prostitutes could be categorized into two types: voluntary and forced. The former were mainly local residents in the Chinese community while the latter were females who had been sold or abducted through human trafficking from China. Even though the Colonial Government had enforced stricter laws banning prostitution, human trafficking still existed in Southeast Asia. This can be seen from the considerable number of reports in the Chinese newspapers about the lives of abducted or sold girls who worked as prostitutes in Singapore, such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s headline 'A Large Number of Poor Women were Sold from Hong Kong to Malaya, and were Engaged in Prostitution. Singapore Chinese Protectorate Claimed that will take Stricter Control on Prostitution' (27 February 1937), 'Lim Er-Yin was Deceived and Forced to be come a Prostitute. She was Found on the Streets, and Sent to the Chinese Protectorate after Telling Her Life Experience' (17 July 1936), and 'Four Female Workers in the Yang-Cheng Textile Factory were Abducted to Singapore and Three Persons were Forced to become Prostitutes.' (20 February 1937). As for the voluntary prostitutes, most of these were local women whose husband or father had lost his job or who were unemployed themselves due to the economic recession. Women who worked as servants or labourers only received a limited salary, not enough to support the whole family. The ex-prostitutes also could not find work and voluntarily worked as illegal prostitutes. In this respect, clandestine prostitution became a serious social ill in this decade.

Initially, the abolition of prostitution led to the reduction in the rate of venereal disease, but the economic recession following the Great Depression affected Singapore severely, driving many women into clandestine prostitution.[51] Under pressure from the Colonial Government's anti-prostitution policy and the economic depression, many poor women and ex-prostitutes could not find a proper job in the settlement and therefore had no choice but to return to prostitution. Although ex-prostitutes were advised by the officers to find a new job or marry after the brothels were forced to close, and some of the ex-prostitutes did find new jobs in the coffee-shops, dance halls, and factories, such opportunities were extremely limited, due to the Chinese community's hostility towards prostitutes and the social stigma surrounding them.[52] Under the pressure of public opinion, many ex-prostitutes had no choices but to resume their old profession. As discussed in Chapter III, the number of clandestine prostitutes was comparatively small in the 1910s in Singapore. The abolition of European prostitutes in 1916 and the removal of Japanese prostitutes in 1920-21 led to the increasing number of clandestine prostitutes in the late 1920s. There were about 1,500 clandestine prostitutes in 1925 chiefly Eurasians, Japanese, Malays, and Chinese.[53] This was because the rapid economic development brought more Chinese labourers to Singapore and hence led to the prevalence of prostitution in the early 1920s. In 1930, 'An Ordinance to amend and consolidate the law relating to the protection of women and girls and to make provision for the suppression of brothels' to deal with clandestine prostitution' stated,

[51] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, p. 227.
[52] CO 273/581/16, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Effects of Abolition of Known Brothels in Malaya, p. 8.
[53] CO 659/13, Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Social Hygiene (18 February 1925), p. 27.

> Any person who (a) keeps a brothel or assists in its management, or (b) being the tenant or premises knowingly permits their use as a brothel, or (c) being the owner or premises of his agents, lets them in the knowledge that they are so being used shall be liable to imprisonment of either description not exceeding of either description not exceeding six months, or a fine not exceeding $500.[54]

The new legislation authorized the Secretary of Chinese Affairs with the assistance of the police, to undertake stricter surveillance to prevent young girls from being cheated or sold as prostitutes, and to prosecute brothel-keepers or pimps who made a living from prostitution. Initially, the abolishment of the toleration of brothels in 1931 prohibited the entry of new prostitutes, but it also drove many ex-prostitutes to continue prostitution in clandestine brothels.[55]

In the beginning, clandestine prostitution occurred in the coffee shops and lodging houses. The economic recession forced the owners of these places to find alternative ways to earn money. Thus, they found out that waitresses working as prostitutes could bring prosperity to their business, and the waitresses could also make extra money to make a living. The Colonial Government also noticed that clandestine prostitution had been steadily increasing since the abolition of prostitution, as documented by the authorities concerned,

> There has been a residue of prostitutes who did not wish to follow any other measures of livelihood or to enter clandestine brothels but who were determined to continue prostitution and they caused the authorities a good deal of troubles. In Singapore, there was an enormous increase in prostitution in hotels and lodging houses, which increased enormously since the known brothels were closed.[56]

[54] CO 273/628/8, Ordinance No.15 of 1930, p. 15.
[55] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, pp. 90-91.
[56] CO 273/581/16 Straits Settlements Original Correspondence. Effects of Abolition of Known Brothels in Malaya, p. 3.

Given this situation, it was therefore urgent for the authorities concerned to carry out their policies efficiently. As Lai further indicated, it was the legislation which made prostitutes transfer their business from public to private brothels. These brothel-keepers used coffee-shops, lodging house, hotels, and dance-halls as the new form of workplace for clandestine prostitution. The clandestine prostitutes would rely on the help of rickshaw pullers to bring them customers, who received some commission from them.[57] The clandestine prostitutes also disguised themselves as singers and were invited to clubs and dinners held in private Chinese houses or at restaurants. It was difficult for the authorities concerned to identify whether those girls were used for the purpose of prostitution or not. Most of the clandestine prostitutes did not undergo any medical examination and were more likely to have venereal disease than the licensed prostitutes.

Under these circumstances, the authorities decided to take measures to crack down on clandestine prostitution. In 1933, the Singapore government started to restrict and control coffee shop waitresses for the purpose of maintaining social order. Hence, it stipulated that coffee shop waitresses needed to be registered at the Ministry of Work Bureau's Coffee Shops Licenses Administration Office, and asked the Chinese Protectorate to authorize their licenses. In addition, the government prohibited the coffee shops hiring girls who were under 22-years-old as waitresses or cashiers. Both the employees and shop owners' photographs were kept on record at the Chinese Protectorate. The shop owners were therefore their employees' guarantors. If it was detected by the Chinese Protector that waitresses were engaged in prostitution, they would be sentenced to a $100 fine, and their licenses would be revoked.[58] Another

[57] CO 659/13, Text of Oral Evidence taken by the VD Committee, Second meeting 9 March 1923, pp. 16- 17.
[58] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 30 May 1931, p. 7.

proposal made by the Chinese community was to restore public prostitution so that venereal diseases could be eradicated in Singapore. This scheme was discussed in the Chinese newspapers. From these discussions, they realized that the public prostitute system could not eradicate venereal disease, as there were not enough doctors to examine all the prostitutes. On 5th February, 1941, Doctor Chen Shu-Nan (陳樹楠) gave a speech on 'Could Venereal Disease be Prevented by Carrying out the Registration of Prostitutes?'. He analyzed the origins of venereal disease, and concluded that reopening the public brothels would only worsen the problem. He indicated that there were about 2,500 public prostitutes and countless clandestine prostitutes in 1930. If public prostitution were to be reinstated, there might be 4,000 prostitutes. At that time, there were about 300 western doctors, 130 of whom were hired by the Colonial Government. According to the statistics, the average number of prostitutes examined by doctors was 50 women per day in this decade. Chen assumed that the authorities concerned could send ten doctors to carry out the examination of prostitutes. Each prostitute was required to be examined weekly, which meant that each doctor needed to examine 65 prostitutes per day. In this respect, it was difficult to put this scheme into practice.[59]

Given this situation, this proposal was rejected by the Colonial Government which turned to enacting stricter laws on preventing human trafficking and putting and end to the spread of venereal diseases. As Yeh asserted that the best solution for eradicating clandestine prostitution was to give women the same economic, political, legal, and social rights as men. He suggested that the Colonial Government should enforce stricter laws to prohibit human trafficking, and punish brothel-keepers who

[59] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 6 February 1941, p. 11.

forced women into prostitution.[60] In the meantime, the Colonial Government rectified the marriage laws regarding the rights of women. This new legislation was influenced by the customs of the Chinese community, and admitted that the Chinese had the right to have concubines. It granted women the right to request divorce from their husband if the latter committed adultery. Husbands were also prohibited from dealing with prostitutes, as the law did admit the existence of prostitution in Singapore. Thus, a wronged wife had the right to request a divorce as well as alimony.[61] From the discussions in the Chinese newspapers, it appears that the root cause of prostitution was the conventional Chinese values, such as the belief in women's inferiority to men, that led to the prevalence of this social ill. In this respect, the best way to elevate women's social status, promote sexual equality, and eradicate clandestine prostitution was through legislation granting women equal rights to men within the family.

The Mui-Tsai System

In southern China, *the mui-tsai* system treated women and children as a marketable commodity in transferring them for a price from their natal home to their employers' house. This system was transferred to Hong Kong and Malaya although it was never recognized by the law in those areas. It was not until 1923 in Hong Kong and 1933 in Malaya that the Colonial Government began to challenge with the *mui-tsais* issue.[62] The system was regarded as a form of domestic service in the Female Domestic Servants Bill of 1925. In this respect, m*ui-tsais* in Malaya were defined as female domestic servants in the early 1930s,

[60] Yeh Shao-Chun, 'Xingzhou Dangju Zhi Fei Chang yu Quid Nü Zhaodai Wenti' (Questions on the Colonial Government's Abolition of Prostitution and Coffee Shop Waitresses), *Nanyang Qing Poh* (October, 1933), p. 9.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 113.

> The term *mui-tsai* would be generally understood to refer to a girl who has been transferred from her own family, either directly or through a third party, to another family with the intention that she shall be used as a domestic servant, not in receipt of regular wages and not at liberty to leave her employer's family of her own free will or at the will of her parent.[63]

Nevertheless, it was difficult to survey *mui-tsais*' situation and many owners lied to the government officials about the girls' ages. In addition, as Leow indicated, many owners of *mui-tsais* would use the term *yeung lui* (養女 adopted daughters) to evade the need to register these girls.[64] It was therefore difficult for the Colonial Government to distinguish *mui-tsais* from prospective daughters-in-law, domestic servants and adopted daughters.

In order to solve the *mui-tsai* problem effectively, the Colonial Government needed to find the root cause of this system. The official report of the Mui-Tsai Commission in 1936 identified, ignorance, the policy of semi-toleration, and unregistered immigration as the major causes of the *mui-tsai* system. Before the 1930s, the Colonial Government adopted the semi-toleration policy for dealing with the *mui-tsais*, whereby, if unregistered *mui-tsais* were found, they had to be removed from their employers' house and sent to a safe place. The authorities concerned often felt that it was troublesome to find a suitable place for these girls.[65] In this sense, it was not until unregistered *mui-tsais* were seriously abused or neglected by their employer that the latter were punished severely under the Women and Girls' Protection law, the Children's Law or the Penal Code. Otherwise, the Colonial Government would

[63] *Ibid*., p. 22.
[64] Rachel Leow, 'Do you Own Non-Chuinese Mui tsai? Re-examining Race and Female Servitude in Malaya and Hong Kong, 1919-1939', p. 1744.
[65] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 73.

probably leave these cases to the Chinese leaders in the Chinese community.[66] As for the Chinese community, they did not feel ashamed about the existence of the *mui-tsais* system. The Mui-Tsai Committee pointed out that it was this attitude among the Chinese residents that hampered progress toward abolishing the *mui-tsai* system. Thus, they urged the Chinese leaders to take action to support the Colonial Government in carrying out the *mui-tsai* registration.

The Mui-Tsai Committee also compared the differences between the *mui-tsai* system in Malaya and Hong Kong in order to find out a way to improve the *mui-tsais*' situation. In comparison with Hong Kong, the registration system of *mui-tsais* in Singapore was incomplete. The legislation in Singapore against the employment and obtaining of *mui-tsais* had also not been strictly enforced in the 1930s. This was because the Chinese leaders in Hong Kong worked together with the Colonial Government to detect the illegal employment of *mui-tsais* and reduce their numbers in the colony.[67] In addition, the Cantonese took charge of Chinese community affairs and it was easier for them to reach an agreement on the *mui-tsais* issue. By contrast, the Chinese community in Singapore was composed of five major dialect groups and it was difficult to produce agreement among the Chinese leaders with regard to the *mui-tsai* problem. The Mui-Tsai Commission also pointed out that the economic conditions of Singapore's Chinese community were the main reason why *mui-tsai* registration progressed far more slowly than in Hong Kong. In fact, most of the *mui-tsais* worked for well-to-do families, and only a few lived with really poor families.[68] Some of the owners also allowed their *mui-tsais* to receive a basic education, which seemed less conservative that the Chinese employers in Hong Kong. The cases of ill-

[66] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[67] CO825/22/11, The Report on Mui Tsai: Two Pictures Given by Commission, *Times*, 1 March.
[68] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 70.

treatment were also fewer than in Hong Kong and the *mui-tsais* in Singapore knew that they could run away from their employers' house and go to the Protectorate for assistance.[69] Such cases were reported in the Chinese newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s 'The Poor Girl Chen Zhu-Wei Described in the Court how Her Employers Abused Her at Home' (25 January 1938) and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*'s 'Yang Da-mei uses boiling water to abuse the *mui-tsai'* (3 July 1933).

Based upon this discussion, it appears that it was difficult to enforce *mui-tsai* registration or abolish this system in a short period in Singapore. Sir Cecil asserted that this would not occur until the Chinese community supported the laws relating to *mui-tsais* in Singapore and considered that this legislation was necessary, so it was difficult to prohibit the unlawful employment of *mui-tsais* in the colony.[70] Against this background, the Colonial Government decided to take gradual steps towards abolishing the system. The Ordinance number 5 of 1932 was enforced on 1st January, 1933 to regulate that the owners of the *mui-tsais* needed to register with the Chinese Protectorate. In the meantime, the Chinese newspapers published the procedures for the registration of *mui-tsais*. The ordinance stated that the registration period was from 1st January to 30th June, 1933. The authorities stated that the Chinese community could not purchase *mui-tsais* during this period. The owners of *mui-tsais* registered during this month would pay a maximum fine of $200. According to the Mui-tsai Ordinance of 1932,

> Employers needed to pay their *mui-tsais* a minimum salary of $1 per month, 10-15 year-olds $2 dollars and 15-18year-olds $3. The *mui-tsais* could complain to the

[69] *Ibid*., pp. 188-189.
[70] CO825/22/11, 'Mui-tsai and the Public', *Straits Times*, 25 May.

Chinese Protectorate if they were not properly paid. On reaching the age of 18 could choose to marry or continue to work at their owner's house as servants. [71]

In comparison with the Female Domestic Servants Bill of 1925, the new legislation gave a wider definition to the *mui-tsai* system, asked the owner to provide evidence regarding the acquisition and status of the *mui-tsais*, and simplified the method for proving the girls' age. The Colonial Government believed that the ordinance would provide a solution to the varied forms of acquired girls in Malaya.[72] In addition, the Mui Tsai Bill authorized the Chinese Protectorate to deal with the registration, acquisition and transfer of *mui tsais*. This new legislation also aimed at make the *mui-tsais* paid workers who received a salary from their owner every month. If they were not properly paid, they were allowed to leave their employer. Nevertheless, most of them did not receive the wages that the law required. In fact, it was difficult for the officials to obtain information about the wages and working conditions, or manage the detention of cases of ill-treatment and their prosecution, and the inspection of *mui tsais* in their owner's house. Hence, this legislation proved ineffective in checking the abuse of the *mui-tsais*, and most of the abused girls still lived with their employers until they were sold or married.

At the same time, the Colonial Government also came under pressure from Christian quarters, demanding the abolition of the *mui-tsai* system. Another reason for the failure of the strict enforcement of the Mui Tsai Bill of 1932 was the defects in the immigrant checking system. During this period, traffickers often disguised *mui-tsais* as their adopted daughters at the immigration points. Only a few traffickers were detained by the officers. In addition, the majority of unregistered *mui-tsais* were

[71] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 1 March 1933, p. 6.
[72] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 199.

unaware that they were illegal immigrants, let alone that they could seek help from the Chinese Protectorate.[73] Against this background, in 1936, the Secretary of State for the Colonies set up a Commission to visit Hong Kong and Malaya to investigate the situation of *mui-tsais* between 11th June and 18th, 1936. The main aim of the commission was to investigate the *mui-tsai* question and survey whether women or children were being exchanged or sold for the purpose of adoption, marriage or prostitution.[74] Their activities were published every Tuesday in the major English and Chinese newspapers, such as the *Straits Times*, *Singapore Free Press*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, and *Nanyang Siang Pau*. The main aim of the authorities concerned was to obtain knowledge about the social structures of the Chinese community. The purpose of establishing the Mui-Tsai Commission was,

> To investigate the whole question of *mui-tsai* in Hong Kong and Malaya and of any surviving practices in those territories of transferring women and children for valuable consideration, whether on marriage or adoption, or in any other circumstances, and to report to the Secretary of State on any legislative or other action which they may consider practicable and desirable in relation to these matters.[75]

It appears from this passage that the purpose of the authorities concerned in investigating the *mui-tsai* system was to find a solution that suited the Chinese community. In this sense, the Mui-Tsai Committee's investigation aimed to obtain knowledge about various aspects of the Chinese social structure and family life. Thus, the investigator consulted the Secretary of State about the following questions: Chinese marriage, concubinage, the transfer of young girls as prospective daughters-

[73] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 52.
[74] Chu Tee Seng, 'The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941', p. 23.
[75] Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commissio*, p. 1.

in-law, the adoption of both boys and girls, and the employment of *mui tsais* among the Chinese community.[76]

In fact, it was difficult for the *mui-tsais* to leave their employers even if they were granted permission to do so, as most of them had been brought from China, and had already lost contact with their natal parents. It was also difficult to send a registered *mui-tsai* back home. These *mui-tsais* would have to be sent to the Po Leung Kuk or to any approved home or orphanage that was provided by the Colonial Government. Most importantly, the isolation of most *mui-tsais* within the household further prevented them from learning of such alternatives. Thus, only small changes were achieved, and most *mui-tsais* still lived with their owner until they got married or were sold.[77]

Against this background, the Mui Tsai Commission produced different proposals to solve the *mui-tsai* problem: the Majority Report and The Minority Report. The former raised ideas about improving the *mui-tsais*' situation. It proposed that a campaign could be launched to detect cases of unregistered *mui-tsais*, and employers should be punished if they did not register their *mui-tsais*. In other words, the employers would lose the custody of their *mui-tsais*, and those girls would be moved to a place of safety. The Majority Report took an optimistic view and asserted that *mui tsais* were generally well-treated and that the Chinese Protectorate's measures were effective in restricting the *mui-tsai* system.[78] They also believed that the *mui-tsais* in Malaya and Singapore were more self-reliant and could seek help from the Chinese Protectorate if they were abused or mistreated, as the Chinese newspapers repeatedly published the

[76] *Ibid*., p. 7.
[77] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p.51.
[78] Chu Tee Seng, *'*The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941*'*, p. 24.

policy of the *mui-tsai* ordinance together with news of the abolition of the *mui-tsai* system. However, the authorities concerned neglected the facts that only a minority of *mui-tsais* were literate, and so it was difficult for them to stand up for their rights. In fact, most of the *mui-tsais* were forbidden to leave their owners' house and thus wound have been unaware of the legislation.

Meanwhile, one of the Commission members, Miss E. Picton-Turbevill held a different attitude towards the issue of the *mui-tsai* system, and therefore proposed the Minority Report. Firstly, she indicated that the status of Chinese women was generally very low in China. It was thus difficult to detect whether the *mui-tsais* were being abused or exploited by their employers or not. In addition, Picton-Turbervill pointed out the difficulty in distinguishing between the different kinds of transferred children; namely foster daughters, child brides, and *mui-tsais*. Given this situation, she suggested that all transferred girls under 12-years-old should be placed under the protection of the Chinese Protectorate.[79] Gradually, she believed that the legal status of *mui-tsais* could be recognized and that this system would be eradicated one day. Only through this procedure of registering and supervising every child transferred from their natal families could the authorities concerned ensure that none of them became *mui-tsais* or were sold into prostitution. Subsequently, the Colonial Government adopted the Minority Report. In 1938, it further enacted the Child Act to guarantee *mui-tsais*' rights. The Mui Tsai Committee adopted this law and ordered the mandatory registration of transferring children under the age of 14.[80] In other words, the purposes of the authorities concerned were to regulate the administration of *mui-tsais* as well as guarantee the welfare and well-being of all children who did not live

[79] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 25.
[80] Leow Rachel, *Context of Abolition: the Mui Tsai controversy in British Malaya*, pp. 11-12.

with their natal family. In this way, their living conditions and rights could be guaranteed.

Measures to address Social Problems

In the 1930s, the Colonial Government continued to adopt the methods of eradicating venereal disease by giving speeches and sending out leaflets and pamphlets in the settlement. They also showed films introducing the prevention of venereal disease to the public. Those films illustrated the routes of infections of venereal diseases, patients' lives, and treatment for the public. According to the statistics, the Colonial Government would also send out an average of 2,000 copies per month in Malay, English, and Mandarin to the public. The contents of these publications described the symptoms and treatment of venereal disease. The authorities concerned also called upon the parents to instil the correct ideas about sexual behaviour in their children. In addition, they sent people out to display an average of 1,000 posters in different languages and dialects each month at the major roads and tourist spots to inform the residents about venereal disease, including the speeches, and places that provided free treatments.

Another way to solve women's social problems and eradicate venereal disease was to establish shelters for mistreated *mui-tsais* and prostitutes. In this decade, the most important organizations were Po Leung Kuk[81] and the National Salvation Army. In the 1930s, Po Leung Kuk was divided into two sections: the women's section and the girls' section. The average age of these girls adopted ranged from a year to 18-years-old. Once there, the girls needed to work to earn their livings, such as by sewing

[81] See Sir Wilfrid Woods and Edith Picton Turbervill, *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of Commission*, p. 87. Po Leung Kuk was controlled by a committee of Chinese gentlemen and was financed by endowment funds raised from the general public. In fact, Singapore's Po Leung Kuk was the only one to require and receive government contributions.

clothing for children, prisons and mental institutions. In 1930, there were two faculties in Po Leung Kuk teaching sewing, nursing, cooking and cleaning in Mandarin, English and Malay.[82] In addition, Po Leung Kuk often organized open days and exhibitions for the public, the purpose of which was to raise funds, as a large amount of money was required to run this organization. According to the statistics in 1932, there were about 230 people in Po Leung Kuk, and the average monthly expenditure was $2,000 subsidy each year. The Colonial Government gave it 20,000 dollars as subsidies each year, but the actual expenses were about $30,000. Po Leung Kuk therefore required donations from the Chinese community in order to operate.[83] In 1939, the number of female staff increased to nine, including five teachers, an administrator, and babysitters. Hence, the girls were subdivided into three categories based on their age. The babysitters took care of children aged from one to five-years-old; girls aged from six or seven to 13 or 14-years-old received basic lessons in English, Mandarin, and household management; and older girls aged from 15 to 18-years-old took courses related to learning how to be a house wife, such as sewing, cooking, and embroidery.[84] This organisation remained very important from the late 19th century onwards in rehabilitating abused or adopted Chinese females in Singapore. It also offered courses that trained them how to be wives or workers, and therefore gave them an opportunity to start a new life. [85]

In 1936, the National Salvation Army set up the Women's Craft Training Institution. The founder considered that no organization had yet been established in Singapore to provide shelter for abandoned or homeless girls, such as abandoned

[82] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 1 October 1930, p. 8.
[83] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 30 May 1934, p. 2.
[84] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 27 October 1939, p. 3.
[85] Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya*, p. 40.

babies, orphans, abused girls, and prostitutes. The prostitutes needed to be separated from the other girls in order to receive treatment for venereal disease. These girls could stay there until they reached the age of 16, and the older had to undertake six months' training on how to earn a living.[86] In 1938, about 60 people were taken into the shelters.[87] The basic principle was that the contents of the work should not conflict with the Po Leung Kuk. Women aged under 20 needed to attend courses in such skills as, sewing, embroidery, and household management. The intention was to encourage the girls to become maids or nurses, and this allowed them to be self-reliant in society. The major difference between Po Leung Kuk and the Women's Craft Training Institution was that the former only paid a salary to those who performed well at work, while the later gave wages to all women who worked. They believed that it was important for the prostitutes to understand that they could earn money from their manual labour. After these women had finished their training courses, they could either choose to find a job or get married.[88] The organization would also offer job opportunities in factories to those prostitutes who wanted to work after leaving the institution. As for those who wished to get married, the Women's Craft Training Institution would also introduce suitable potential husbands to them.

Conclusion

In summary, the National Salvation Movement played an important role in pushing forward the women's emancipation movement in the Chinese community. It brought advancements to the social and educational reforms for both educated and illiterate Chinese women in the 1930s. The women's supplements from the Chinese language newspapers thus provided a forum for the Chinese intellectuals to discuss and

[86] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 November 1940, p. 22.
[87] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 30 March 1938, p. 6.
[88] *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 November 1940, p. 22.

exchange their ideas on the women's emancipation movement. In the mean time, the Colonial Government and Chinese community began to work together in dealing with the matters regarding prostitution and *mui-tsais*. These changes and improvements in educational, cultural and social reforms gradually improved the life of Chinese women in the inter-war period.

Epilogue

As the activities of the women associations began to make progress in raising money and setting up literacy classes for uneducated women, the Japanese Army invaded British Malaya at the end of 1941. Against this background, all fund-raising activities ended and the Chinese newspapers ceased publication. On 8th December 1941, the Japanese 25th Army invaded Malaya from Indochina, and bombed Singapore in the following weeks. The British forces lacked air and naval support, and retreated from the Malay Peninsula to Singapore. On 15th February, the Allies surrendered to Lieutenant General Yamashita Tomoyuki (1885-1946) of the Japanese Army. Singapore was renamed *Syonanto* (the Light of the South) during the Japanese Occupation.[1] The main purpose of the Japanese Armies was to turn *Syonan* into the hub of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.[2] In this respect, their primary task was to eliminate and punish the anti-Japanese activities that occurred before the fall of Singapore. They particularly targeted the Chinese community, who provided financial support for China during the National Salvation Movement.

Against this background, the Japanese Military Administration decided to carry out *Sook Ching* (purification through purge) among the Chinese community. The main purpose of the Japanese Military Administration was to eliminate elements in the Chinese community that posed a directed threat to the Japanese, and to punish the Chinese for their pre-war and wartime anti-Japanese resistance.[3] On 18th February

[1] Kay E. Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman Publishing Ltd, 2005), p.103.

[2] The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere's main aim was to promote the economic and cultural unity of East Asian countries. These countries included Malaya, Singapore, Burma, Thailand, the Philippines and the Indonesias.

[3] See Cheah Boon Kheng, 'Japanese Army Policy toward the Chinese and Malay-Chinese Relations in Wartime Malaya' in Paul H. Kratoska, *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empir*e (Routledge Curzon, 2002), p. 100. As the Singapore Chinese recalled the big 'Operation Clean-up' was actually carried out in three stages: 9-16 February, 16-25 February, and 28 February- March 8,

1942, the Japanese Military Administration established several 'screening and registration' centres in Singapore. The Japanese selected people who were communists, English-speaking Chinese students and teachers, employers of the Colonial Government, civil defence workers, Chinese members of the Singapore Voluntary Corps (SVC), and supporters of the National Salvation Movement.[4] Their main aim in executing these people was to warn the Chinese community that this was the punishment for resisting the Japanese Army and to secure their rule of the colony.

After *Sook Ching*, prominent Chinese leaders and businessmen, such as Lim Boon Keng and Wong Siew Qui, were detained and ordered by the Japanese to set up the Overseas Chinese Association (OCA). They were selected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the OCA, and ordered by the Japanese Army to collect $50 million as a 'gift of atonement' from the Chinese community. Thus, it appears that this association was used as a channel of communication between the Chinese and the Military Administration, demonstrating the Chinese community's willingness to cooperate with the Japanese Army.[5] The Japanese Military Administration also used newspapers and education to administer *Syonanto*. *The Straits Times* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* were renamed *Syonan Times* an *Syonan Jit Poh*. Schools resumed operation in April 1942, but only a few Chinese and Malay schools received the approvals of the Japanese Military Administration, and English schools were not allowed to function at

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1942. The Japanese ordered males between the ages of 18 and 50, and in some cases women and children as well, to gather at several locations in the city. By the end of *Sook Ching*, about 50,000 Chinese had been killed by the Japanese Army.

[4] Ralph Modder, *The Singapore Chinese Massacre, 18 February to 4 March 4 1942* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2004), p. 5.

[5] See Ralph Modder, *The Singapore Chinese Massacre, 18 February to 4 March 4 1942*, p. 41. The Japanese *Kempeitai* (secret military police) would select prominent members from the Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian communities to become the leaders of their community. They were forced to read speeches prepared by the Propaganda Government of the Japanese Military Administration. The content of these speeches was mainly praise for the invincible Japanese Army and condemnation of the British Government. Those who refused to cooperate with the Japanese would be sent to a detention centre to be tortured or killed.

all.[6] Their main purpose was to restrict public opinion and utilize the economic sources in Singapore. On 15th August 1945, the Japanese formally surrendered to the Allies. Singapore was returned to the British military administration. As for the Chinese language newspapers, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* resume publication in 8th September 1945, and became the major newspapers in the post-war period. Unlike the Chinese language newspapers published in the pre-war period, these newspapers not only focused on the Chinese community but also other ethnic groups' everyday life in Singapore. Those newspapers also discussed the women's issues in the columns or supplements, such as education, employment, social problems in the public realm.

The increase in number of local-born Chinese in the post-war period also brought changes to the Singapore's Chinese community. As Lynn indicated, there were about 2/3 local-born Chinese in the 1950s. Unlike their parents or grandparents, they did not have much allegiance towards either China or Britain. In this sense, the term *huaren* (ethnic Chinese) gave a new definition to the Chinese descent in Singapore, both China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese who identified Singapore as their host nation rather than the Colonial Government or China was considered as Singaporean Chinese.[7] It can be seen that there were no clan organizations to be found after the independence of Singapore, and few activities were carried out by those organizations since the 1960s. In addition, intermarriage between the different dialects groups became common among the Chinese community, and the younger generation often used English or Mandarin interchangeably to communicate with each other. Those changes gradually dissolved the Chinese dialect groups and led to a more consolidated

[6] Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (Hurst & Company, London), p. 123

[7] Phyllis Ghimlian Chew, 'The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 25.1(March 1994), pp. 143-144.

community.

Most importantly, the establishment of the Singapore Government intended to reshape Singapore‘s national identity in the late 1950s. The People’s Action Party (PAP) was established in 1954 by a group of English-educated young men who returned to Singapore after finishing their studies in British universities. Their main aim was to attain immediate independence from the Colonial Government. The PAP brought up proposals in solving the housing and unemployment problem, improving the education system, imposing a National Service programme, and using the media to instil the national consciousness into the different ethnic groups in Singapore. Moreover, PAP also intended to improve the status of Singaporean women by enacted election manifesto in May 1959. The main aim of carrying out the reforms on women were,

> 1. Encouraging them to take an active part in politics. 2. Helping them organize a unified women’s movement to fight for women’s rights. 3. Encouraging women to play their proper part in government administration. 4. Opening up new avenues of employment for women. 5. Insisting that married women be given an opportunity to live a full life, including the right to work on level terms with others. 6. Insisting that the welfare of widows and orphans must be the responsibility of government. 7. Encouraging factories employing large numbers of women to provide crèches on factory sites. 8. Passing a monogamous marriage law.[8]

It can be seen from the passage that this manifesto applied to for all women citizens of Singapore. This was because the PAP intended to create a new sense of nation identity and to unite the ethnic groups of different origins under the newly elected government. The social reforms regarding women thus aimed at education and marriage in order to improve their lives and gave them the equal status as men.

[8] *The Tasks Ahead, PAP’s Five Year Plan 1959-64, Part I* (Singapore, 1959), p. 7, as cited in Phyllis Ghimlian Chew, ‘The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement’, pp. 134-135.

In this respect, the improvement in female education accelerated the progress of the female emancipation movement in the post-war period. The increasing literacy rate in Singapore enabled women to hold higher positions in employment from the 1960s. The illiteracy rate among Singaporean women aged 15-24 was 15.5 % in the 1960s and falling to 3.8% in the 1970s. As for the enrolment of female students in higher education institutions, this was about a third that of males (34:100) in 1960. This ratio improved to 59: 100 in 1981 and 73:100 in 1991. Moreover, the attendance of female students at primary schools was 9:10, and at secondary schools, 1:1 by 1991.[9] Under such circumstances, educated women from various dialect groups thought that there should be an organization to guarantee women's rights in the colony. Hence, the Singapore Council of Women (SCW) was established in 1952, with main aim of uniting the different women's associations in Singapore, and striving to promote women's rights in the public sphere.[10] By 1952, the first executive committee boasted seven Chinese, four Indians, two Malays, one Indonesian and one British person. Most of the members of the committee had received a high level of English education, and came from upper or middle-class families in Singapore.

Meanwhile, the Singapore Chinese leaders were also aware that the old Chinese marriage system was the main barrier to women's emancipation movement and thus their primary aim was to implement marriage reform and improve women's life in Singapore. The abolition of polygamy had been an important issue discussed by the Colonial Government and the Chinese community throughout the colonial era. However, it was not until the 1960s did this scheme put into practice. After the PAP

[9] See Singapore Department of Statistics (1983), Figure 14.6, p. 238; Singapore Yearbook of Statistics 1991, Figure 15.9, pp. 304-305, as cited in Aline K. Wong and Wai Kum Leong, *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change*, p. 7.

[10] Phyllis Ghimlian Chew, 'The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement', pp. 112-113.

won the election in 1959, the new government began to carry out the marriage reform in Singapore. Against this background, the Women's Charter was brought into force on 15th September 1961 by the Singapore Legislative Assembly. This charter was designed to ensure monogamous marriage through the requiring registration of all marriages. Chinese marriages, formed under the customary rites performed at home or in the clan associations, were required to be registered at the Registry of Marriages. Polygamous marriage was considered illegal by the charter, although the law had no effect on concubinage or the keeping of mistresses. In practice, this new legislation improved the status of women by introducing monogamous marriage as well as signifying that women legally enjoyed the same rights as men to be educated; participate in all forms of social, economic and political activities.[11]

This new legislation also allowed wives to retain their maiden name, and to choose their occupations. The law regulated that husband and wife had an equal right to own property, and that women were empowered to acquire, possess and dispose of their property. [12] Most importantly, husband and wife were required to share the responsibility for managing the household duties, and had an obligation to look after their children together. The new legislation regarding divorce made women legally better off than men. A wife could sue her husband for not paying her maintenance during the marriage and had a right to ask for alimony after they divorce. However, there was no equal legal provision provided for men.[13] The changes in the divorce law reflected the improvement in women's status within the family, which meant that they were no longer restricted by the conventional Chinese customs and were considered an independent people in society.

[11] Joyce Lebra and Joy Paulson, *Chinese Women in Southeast Asia*, pp. 25-26.
[12] *Ibid*., pp. 25-26.
[13] Cheng Siok-Hwang, 'Singapore Women: Legal Status, Educational Attainment, and Employment Patterns', *Asian Survey*, 17.4 (April 1977), p. 360.

In addition, prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system remained important issues for the authorities concerned to deal with in Singapore in the late 1940s. The Social Welfare Department was established in 1946 to replace the functions of the Chinese Protectorate in the pre-war period. It took charge of managing family disputes, adopting children and the illegal trafficking in females for prostitution or as *mui-tsai*. In the following year, the Women and Girls Protection Section of the department took over the duties of protecting women, girls and children in Singapore. Their main task was to rescue and rehabilitate juvenile prostitutes, detect ill-treatment cases, and screen female immigrants under 18 years of age. Against this background, the Assistant Secretary of the Department started to recruit and train three female investigators who were educated to a high level educational level. As Chin recalled, the Assistant Secretary was previously the Lady Inspector at the Chinese Protectorate during the pre-war period. The author and her colleagues knew seven Chinese dialects, and took part in the interpretation work. Initially, they accompanied the Lady Inspector on home visits to *mui-tsais* and to learn how to deal with cases concerning the adoption of these girls. They also learnt how to interview, and master the bus routes and streets in every sections of Singapore during the training stage.[14] After their training, Chin and her colleagues started to work independently to rescue girls in need in Singapore.

In the meantime, the Government of the Republic of China was defeated in the civil war with the Communist Party of China, and moved the government to Taiwan in 1949. Thus, Chinese immigrants stopped arriving from China in 1950. The Children and Young Persons Ordinances was enacted in the same year, and changed the term

[14] Koh Choo Chin, 'Implenting Government Policy for the Protection of Women and Girls in Singapore 1948-66: Recollections of a Social Worker' in Maria. Jaschok and Suzanne. Miers, (eds), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude, and Escape*, pp. 122-123.

mui-tsai to 'transferred children', which referred to children under 14 who did not live with their natural parents. They came under the supervision of the Social Welfare Department until they reached the age of 14 or were legally adopted. However, there were still some girls who were used as unpaid labourers and suffered ill-treatment by their employers. Such girls were put under the supervision of the Women and Girls Protection Section until they found a job or got married. The officers of this section would check whether their marriage was genuine before closing the case.[15] In 1960, the Women's Charter replaced the Women and Girls' Protection Ordinance. The age for detention of girls was raised from 18 to 21. The government launched the family planning scheme by carrying out ligation and even abortion, and the cases of adoption decreased. Most importantly, Chinese parents developed a more open attitude toward sending their daughters to school, and allowed them to take jobs in factories. Chinese girls were hence no longer regard as a burden on their families, but as an asset that could help to sustain the family livelihood.[16]

Prostitution was another social problem that the SCW sought to solve in the post-war period. Their main focus was on the problem of girls and women from Hong Kong and China who had been sold to brothel-keepers against their will. The SCW decided to highlight the problem at international women's conferences such as the Afro-Asian Conference in Colombo, and the Pan Pacific Southeast Asian Women Association conference in 1958, in order to put pressure on the government to launch reforms in Singapore. In this respect, the SCW brought forward proposals to establish a centre where women who wished to leave the brothel could be rehabilitated and taught useful skills to enable them to make a living on their own. However, this scheme was never put into practice due to the lack of sufficient funds and

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[16] *Ibid*.

governmental support. The Women and Girls Advisory Committee was established in the same year, which aimed to keep prostitution under government control through the suppression of brothels in Singapore. By 1960, the Social Welfare Department had set up the Women and Girls Welfare Section for dealing with matters concerning the rehabilitation and welfare of prostitutes.[17]

The Singaporean government also improved the screening of female immigrants system in the late 1940s. When the Social Welfare Department Officers suspected that females had been bought as prostitutes or *mui-tsais*, the buyer would be punished severely, and the girl would be placed under supervision to ensure that she would be well treated. Under such circumstances, many organizations to support these needy girls were established between the 1950s and 1960s. In 1950, the Women and Girls Protection Section was divided into the Women and Girls Protection (Protection) and Women and Girls Protection (Welfare). These organizations took charge of the Girls' Home for juvenile prostitutes and the Girls' Home Craft Centre that provided shelters for abandoned babies, young girls, prostitutes, and *mui-tsais*. The Girls' Home Craft Centre was formerly Po Leung Kuk in the pre-war period. These orphans or girls who had lost contact with their family would be sent to this organization. At that, the girls would be sent to school and attend training in skills such as sewing, cookery or hairdressing. Most of them would find a job after graduating.[18]

To conclude, the improvement of the educational, legislation and marriage system elevated Chinese women's social status during the post-war period. Despite the lower presence of women in the political arena in

[17] Phyllis Ghimlian Chew, 'The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement', p. 120.
[18] Koh Choo Chin, 'Implenting Government Policy for the Protection of Women and Girls in Singapore 1948-66: Recollections of a Social Worker' in Maria. Jaschok and Suzanne. Miers, (eds), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude, and Escape*, pp. 124-125.

Singapore, some of them were actively involved in political activities. For instance, Chan Choy Siong (1934-1981) was a member of PAP and the Legislative Assembly, who led the PAP Women's League in the 1960s, while Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (1950-) became the first women to be appointed mayor of Singapore in 2001. The rising educational level also reflected the increasing number of females in the work force. Although Chinese women in the present day still face the problem of creating a balance between family and work, being a career woman gives them a certain level of economic independence. Under such circumstances, the educational and social reforms promoted the female emancipation movement during the post-war period.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to use Chinese language newspapers as a way to explore Chinese women's social position and status within the family in the early twentieth century. From the late nineteenth century, Chinese-language newspapers were used as a primary tool for disseminating the idea of Chinese nationalism among the Chinese community in Singapore. The attempts made by the reformists and revolutionists under the Qing regime, and by the Nationalist Government, made the Singapore China-born community became China-oriented in the cultural, educational and political sphere. The New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement signified the turning point for the Chinese newspapers in the 1920s. What can be observed is that the newspapers provided a forum for middle-and upper-class Chinese intellectuals to discuss and exchange their ideas on the cultural, educational and social reforms in China. On the one hand, they asserted that Singapore's Chinese community should follow the pattern of China in carrying out the reforms. On the other hand, as Kenley noted, Singapore Chinese intellectuals adopted a more 'local colour' culture which was not an overseas Chinese culture, but was closer to Nanyang or *huaqiao* culture.[1]

The Chinese newspapers increased the reports of local news, and introduced supplements to discuss issues concerning all aspects of the Chinese community. The newspapers thus became an important forum in which the all Chinese dialect groups could discuss Chinese affairs. The major change in the Chinese press resulted from the use of mandarin, which enabled the readers to read and understand the content of the newspapers more easily. In this respect, Chinese-medium education was a key factor that made the Chinese community more China-oriented, and the use of

[1] David Kenley, *The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932*, p. 185.

Mandarin began to unify the different dialect groups in the Chinese community during this period.[2]

In the 1930s, the invasion of China by the Japanese turned the Chinese newspapers into a major instrument for stirring up patriotic sentiment among Singapore's Chinese community. In this context, *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, and *Nanyang Siang Pau* published a large number of reports about the Japanese invasion of China, and urged the Chinese residents to assist their motherland by donating their money to the relief fund associations. The fund-raising organizations in Singapore successes in raised a large quantity of funds from the Chinese residents. Between November 1938 and December 1940, the Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas collected 19.5 million Chinese dollars from the Singapore Chinese community, constituted a total of 45.3 million Chinese dollars donated by the Southeast Asian countries. The fund-raising activities served as a way of pledging their loyalty to the Nationalist Government in China.[3] It can also be considered that the Chinese nationalism had successfully taken root in the China-born Chinese community in Singapore.

Although Singapore's National Salvation Movement was China-oriented, there were several differences between Singapore and China. In China, the Nationalist Government established a nationwide network of communication for the purposes of mobilizing every citizen and utilizing every resource. The urban popular culture, namely cartoons, newspapers, and spoken dramas, was used as a tool for disseminating information about the Sino-Japanese War among the public. The Chinese government intended to utilize those propaganda tools by using direct, simple language, such as 'resisting until the end' and 'the nation above all', to stir up

[2] *Ibid*., p. 184.
[3] Stephen Leong, *'The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941'*, p. 307.

people's patriotism.[4] In Singapore, the Chinese newspapers occupied a central position in disseminating information about the National Salvation Movement, but there were only a few cartoons published in the newspapers to convey the idea of supporting for the war in China. This was because the Colonial Government prohibited the Chinese community from organizing political activities in the settlement, and the Nationalist Government in China simply wished to receive financial support from the overseas Chinese community. Under such circumstances, the National Salvation Movement in Singapore was relatively small scale and limited to fund-raising activities.

Likewise, most of the Chinese women's associations in China were founded by prominent women, such as Soong Mei-ling's (宋美齡 1898-2003) Chinese Woman Community and Chinese Wartime Child Care Association and Soong Qing-ling's (宋慶齡 1893-1981) Chinese Women's Defence League, which aimed to recruit women to participate in fund-raising activities, and assist soldiers with delivering mail, washing clothes, cooking and nursing behind the frontline. These women's associations also published periodicals, such as *Fu Sheng* (婦聲 *Women's Voices*), *Kangzhan Funü* (抗戰婦女 *Women at War*) and *Zhanshi Funü* (戰時婦女*Wartime Women*) to encourage women to made efforts in the Sino-Japanese War. On the contrary, the women's associations in Singapore were mainly subordinated to the organizations established by the male Chinese leaders. The male leaders and educated women held different opinions about the National Salvation Movement. The former believed that women could raise more money through the fund-raising activities and thus encouraged them to participate in the National Salvation Movement; while the educated women considered the fund-raising activities as an opportunity for them to

[4] Hung Chang-Tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*, p. 3.

take part in social activities.[5] In this regard, some of the intellectual Chinese women in Singapore began to publish their opinions about educational and social reforms in the newspapers. They asserted that the women had the same responsibility as men in the National Salvation Movement, and that it was educated women's duty to organize and train illiterate women to take part in their activities. The Chinese women intellectuals' ultimate goal was to improve Chinese females' lives, and elevate their social status and position within the family through those activities. Thus, it can be considered that the National Salvation Movement offered Chinese women the opportunities in entering the previously male public realm and allowing them to speak for themselves in those social activities.

The greatest influence of the Japanese administration was to dissolve the structure of the Chinese community. This was because many Chinese Community leaders were arrested, and many clan and dialect organizations were dissolved during the Japanese occupation. In the pre-war period, two patterns of loyalty had co-existed in the Chinese community throughout the colonial era: China-oriented and British-oriented. The former was shaped by the Qing regime and revolutionists through making use of the Chinese Diaspora in the China-born Chinese community.[6] Thus, their feelings toward their motherland China gradually became attached to the political, economic, and cultural affairs in China in the late 19th century. By the 20th century, the use of Mandarin in the Chinese-medium schools and newspapers, the New Culture Movement, the May Fourth Movement, and the National Salvation Movement had made a great contribution towards unifying the Chinese dialects groups. Nevertheless, it should be understood that the Nationalist Government did not intend to make

[5] Fan Ruolan, *Immigration, Gender, and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese Women in Malaya (1929-1941)*, pp. 2-3.
[6] Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 74.

Singapore a province of China, but to obtain the financial support of Singapore Chinese for its political and social activities. In this sense, the spread of Chinese nationalism in Singapore was seldom directed against British rule.[7] In turn, the Colonial Government rarely interfered with Chinese affairs throughout the colonial era. It was only when those activities threatened the social orders and economic activities in Singapore did the authorities concerned banned the Chinese community's activities. For example, the KMT encouraged China-born Chinese to participate in boycotting Japanese goods and making protests during the May Fourth Movement.[8] Thus, the Colonial Government mainly relied on the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals' assistance in managing Chinese affairs. This was because most of them received English-medium education and were more supportive of the British authorities' policies.[9] However, the 'divide and rule' policy adopted by the Colonial Government in ruling the Chinese community prevented them from having a comprehensive and cohesive policy with regard to governing this ethnic group. This became the main reason why the Colonial Government could receive full support from the Chinese community throughout the colonial era.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Chinese community was considered as a rapidly changing society between the 1920s and 1930s. The notion of modern women was also in a transforming stage from the aims of preparing students to be virtuous mothers and dutiful mothers to self-confident new women. The modern conservatism thus reflected how the

[7] Yong Ching Fatt, 'British Attitudes towards the Chinese Community Leaders in Singapore, 1819-1914', in *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 304-305.
[8] See Mary Constance Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975*, p. 149. The Peranakan Chinese regard themselves as the British subjects and were not deeply involved in Chinese politics or in the KMT's activities. Their main aim was to seek for better education opportunities and more political power through the SCBA and their representatives on the Legislative Council.
[9] Yong Ching Fatt, 'British Attitudes towards the Chinese Community Leaders in Singapore, 1819-1914', in *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 308-309.

Chinese community viewed the female emancipation movement in the pre-war period. From the 1920s onwards, some of the Chinese parents allowed their daughters to receive higher education while most of the conservative parents still thought that the main reason for sending their daughter to school was to marry her off into a better off family or so that she could to find a job and to lessen the family's economic burden. Conversely, some educated Chinese women had different ideas, believing that, through receiving education, they could obtain economic independence and freedom of marriage.

The process of conservative modernization thus reflected the development of female education in the early 20th century. Initially, the Peranakan Chinese intellectuals supported the idea of cultivating 'worthy mothers and good wives', believing that women should obtain a proper education to enhance their household management skills. Under the influence of the May Fourth Movement, an increasing number of Chinese leaders gradually began to accept the ideas that women should obtain a higher education and allowed them to participate in the fund-raising activities in the late 1920s. The changing concepts of conservative modernization enabled female Chinese intellectuals to publicise their opinions about the female emancipation movement in the Chinese newspapers and to organize fund-raising activities in the 1930s. Against this background, prostitution and the *mui-tsai* system were brought to public attention, and relevant discussions were published in the Chinese newspapers. From these discussions, it emerged that the best way to improve prostitutes and *mui-tsais*' life was through education. Education was regarded as the key factor that linked the three archetypes of women: educated women, prostitutes, and *mui-tsais*, which explains why they all

came to prominence during the colonial period.

As Teoh noted, Chinese-medium girls' schools opened up a new range of economic and social possibilities, bringing Chinese females in Singapore into greater contact with the transnational process of modernization in the early 20th century.[10] The introduction of education hence made a contribution to the opening of the outside world for the women of all classes. In other words, the women's schooling can be considered as the best way in liberating women from the conventional Chinese values and enable them became the independent individuals in the society. It can be seen that many educated women started to publish their opinions in the women's supplements of the newspapers and participate in the National Salvation Movement in the late 1930s. These changes gradually led the Chinese community to accept that women had the same rights as men to be educated and that female education should not be restricted to merely managing the household duties or serving the nation.

In summary, the formation and development of the Chinese community reflected the progress of the Chinese female emancipation movement throughout the colonial era. My thesis uses the Chinese newspapers as the primary source to provide perspectives on how it introduced modern ideas from China and transmitted the notion of sexual equality, freedom of marriage and economic independence into the Chinese community in the early 20th century. Although Singapore's female emancipation movement followed the pattern of China, the divergences between the China-born Chinese and Peranakan Chinese, and conflicts between the Chinese community and the Colonial Government led it to take a different path in the pre-war

[10] Karen Teoh, 'Exotic Flowers, Modern Girls, Good Citizens: Female Education and Overseas Chinese Identity in British Malaya and Singapore, 1900s-1950s', p. 49.

period. In addition, the Chinese press and Chinese schools were mainly established and run by male Chinese leaders, whilst only limited number of educated women had the opportunities for participating in social activities. Most of the Chinese women's lives still confined within the family, and it were not until the 1930s that the issues regarding prostitution and *mui-tsai* system was widely discussed in the Chinese community. For this reason, the Colonial Office records were used to examine those social problems from another angle in order to understand how the measures carried out by the Colonial Government changed Chinese women's lives. In fact, it was not until the 1950s that social reforms were put into practice for women of different ethnic groups in Singapore.

Given the wide-ranging scope in the study of the overseas community and female emancipation movement in Southeast Asia, there are areas of further research that could be explored in the future. For instance, the issues concerning *mui-tsai* system and prostitution in the Colonial Office records could be compared with related issues in other Southeast Asian countries in the same period. In addition *the Monthly Chinese Affairs* from the Colonial Office records could also examine the KMT's activities from a different perspective. As for the Chinese newspapers, the issues in the women's supplements could be categorized into different topics, such as education, culture, social activities and social problems. It is possible to compare the women's supplemens from the major newspapers in China, such as *Shen Bao* (1872-1949) and *Xinwen Bao* (新聞報 1893-)**,** which could provide a fresher angle for exploring the female emancipation movement in Singapore and China in the early 20th century.

Glossary

Ah ku (C)	Prostitutes
Baba	Peranakan males
Baihua	Colloquial language
Biye ji shiye	To graduate is to be unemployed
Chap-ji-ki (C)	Chinese lottery
Chap Joe Kee (C)	Chinese lottery
Coolie	Cheap menial labourer
Du Qing Lüli	Great Qing Civil Code
Fan Qing fu Ming	Overthrowing the Qing regime, restoring the Ming Dynasty
Funü Jie	Women's World/ Women's Section
Funü Shijie	Women's Circle
Funü Shenghuo	Women's Life
Funü Yuandi	Women's Circle
Funü yu Qingnian	Women and Youth
Funü Zazhi	Ladies' Journal
Fü Sheng	Women's Voices
Fuzhang	Supplement
Guojia dongliang	Future pillars of the nation
Guominzhimu	Mothers of Citizen
Guoyu	Mandarin
Hai Wai Yuekan	Overseas Monthly Magazine
Huaqiao	Overseas Chinese
Huaren	Ethnic Chinese
Huiguan	Clan organization
Imperium in imperio	A state within a state
Jinjit Funü	Modern Women
Ji Qi	Raise
Kangzhan Funü	Women at War
Kaptain cina (C)	Captain
Karayuki-san (J)	Prostitutes

Kempeitai (J)	Japanese secret military police
Kuomintang	Chinese Nationalist Party
Lat Pau	Straits News
Luo ye gui gen	Falling leaves return to their roots
Mui-tsai (C)	Domestic servant
Nanyang Siang Pau	Nanyang Mercantile Newspapers
Nü zhaodaiyuan	Female receptionists
Nyonyas	Peranakan females
Pei pai tsai	Sing song girls
Po Leung Kuk	Society for the Protection of Women and Children
Qingming	Tomb Sweeping Day
Qiujie	The Autumn Ceremony
Samsengs (C)	Fighting men of the Chinese secret society
Sancong Side	Three filial and four virtues
Sanmin Zhuyi	The Three People's Principles
Sin Chew Jit Poh	Singapore Daily Newspapers
Sinkhehs (C)	New arrivals
Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh	New Republican Daily Newspapers
Sook Ching	Purification through purge
Syonanto (J)	The Light of the South (Singapore)
Tsae mui (C)	Sworn sisters
Tsai (C)	Secondary wife
Tong Meng Hui	Revolutionary Alliance
Wangguo miezhong	The extinction of the Chinese race
Xiang	Hometown
Xianmu liangqi	Worthy mothers and good wives
Xiao Shen Yan Shui Hui	Self-cultivation Lectures Club
Xin Chao	New Tide
Xing Han Hui	Revive Han Society
Xing Zhong Hui	Revive China Society
Xin Qingnian	New Youth
Yiguo zhimu	Mothers of nation

Zhanshi Funü	Wartime Women
Zhongguo Xinnüjie Zazhi	New Chinese Women's Magazine
Zhu hua	Prostitutes (Japan)

Glossary of Chinese Names

Aw Boon Hu	胡文虎
Chen Shu-Nan	陳樹楠
Chang Pi-shih	張弼士
Hong Xiuquan	洪秀全
Huang Dian-Xian	黃典嫻
Huang Tsun-hsien	黃遵憲
Huang Su-Yung	黃素雲
Huang Ya-fu	黃亞福
Hu Shi	胡適
Kang Youwei	康有為
Khoo Seok-wan	邱筱園
Lee Choon Guan	李浚源
Lee Choo Neo	李珠娘
Liang Qichao	梁啟超
Liew Yuen Sien	劉韵仙
Lim Boon Keng	林文慶
Lim Han Hoe	林漢河
Lim Ke-Xie	林克諧
Lim Seng Neo	蔡成娘
Lin Zexu	林則徐
Lu Xun	魯迅
Luo Jia-lun	羅家倫
Qiu Jin	秋瑾
See Ewe Lay	薛有禮
Shih Chu-ching	時楚卿
Sng Choon-Yee	孫崇瑜
Song Ong Siang	宋旺相
Soong Mei-ling	宋美齡

Soong Qing-ling	宋慶齡
Sun Yat-sen	孫中山
Tain Cui-Yu	田翠玉
Tan Cheng Lock	陳禎祿
Tan Kah Kee	陳嘉庚
Tan Keong Saik	陳恭錫
Tan Teck Neo	陳德娘
Tao Ping Lung	左秉隆
Tsai Kung Si	蔡公時
Wu Shun-Zhu	吳舜珠
Yan Bin	燕斌
Yee Ji-Yun	葉季允
Yin Bi-xia	殷碧霞
Yu Pei Gao	余佩皐
Yuan Shih-Kai	袁世凱
Yuan Shun-Qin	袁舜琴
Zheng Man-Zhu	鄭曼珠
Zheng Guanying	鄭觀應
Zhou Xian-Rui	周獻瑞
Zhuang Xiquan	庄希泉

Appendix 1 Chinese Language Newspapers Published in Singapore

Title	Publisher	Publishing Date	Circulation number	Supporting Group
Lat Pao	See Ewe Lay	10 December 1881-31 March 1932	1900: 550 1920: 650	Qing Government → Nationalist Government
Sing Poh	Lim Heng-Nan	14 February 1890-1898	1896: 970	Qing Government
Tian Nan Sin Poh	Khoo Seok-Wan	1898-1905		Qing Government
Jit Shin Pao	Lim Boon Keng	5 October 1898-1903		
Thoe Lam Jit Poh	Chen Chor-Nam, Teo Eng-Hock	1904-1905	1,000 copies	Revolutionist party
The Union Times	Zhu Chu-Pei	1905-1947	1911: 1,430 1921: 1,600 1929: 4,200 1938: 8,000	Qing Government → Nationalist Government
Chong Shing Jit Pao	Chen Chor-Nam, Teo Eng-Hock	20 August1907-1910	1000 copies	Revolutionist party Tong Meng Hui
Singapore Chinese Morning Post		1908-1910		Revolutionist party Tong Meng Hui
Nan Chiau Jit Poh	Huang Ji-Tan, Lu Yao-Tang	1911	900 copies	Revolutionist party Tong Meng Hui
Zhen Nan Jit Poh		1 January 1913-30		Duan Qirui in China

		September 1920		
Guo Min Jit Poh	Tan Xin-Zhang, Qiu Wen-Jue	20 May 1914-5 August 1919	2000 (1918)	Kuomintang
Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh	Xie Wen-Cheng	1 October 1919- December 1940	1921: 3,200 1930: 5,424 1938: 8,000	Kuomintang
Nan To Jit Poh	Chau Chi-San	4 May 1923- 16 April 1925		
Nanyang Siang Pau	Tan Kah-Kee, Lim Qing-San	6 September 1923- 15 March 1983	1925: 2,700 1931: 7,000 1938: 30,000	Nationalist Government
Sin Chew Jit Poh	Aw Boon-Haw	15 January 1929- 15 March 1983	1933: 12,000 1937: 60,000	Kuomintang Tong Meng Hui
Min Kuo Jit Poh	Teo Eng-Hock	1 January 1930-5 January 1935	1933: 2,200	Kuomintang
Sin Chung Jit Poh	Aw Boon-Haw	11 September 1935-1941		Kuomintang

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[1] Choi Kwai Keong, *History of Chinese Newspapers, Periodicals, and Journalists of Singapore* (Singapore: Hai Tai Wen Hua Qi Ye Si Ren Company, 1993), p. 15.

Appendix 2 Women's Supplement in the Chinese Language Newspapers (1925-1942)

Newspapers	Title	Publishing date
Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh	Funü Shijie (Women's World)	10th January, 1925- 5th October, 1929
	Jindai Funü (Modern Women)	13th June 1937- 12th June 1938
	Funü yu Qingnian (Women and Youth)	19th June 1938-26th March 1939
Nanyang Siang Pau	Jinjit Funü (Modern Women)	15th January -14th August 1937
	Nanyang Funu (Women in Nanyang)	16th January-4th September 1939
	Funü Shenghuo (Women's Life)	3rd May-27th December 1940
	Funü Jie (Women's World)	12th January-16th July 1941
Sin Chew Jit Poh	Funü Jie (Women's World)	10th January, 1932-- 6th February 1938
	Funü Yuandi (Women's Circle)	20th February-25th December 1938
	Funü Jie (Women's World)	8th January 1939-16th July 1941
Sin Chung Jit Poh	Funü Jie (Women's World)	1st November-31st December 1938
	Funü (Women)	8th January 1939-28th April 1940

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