

# The Contribution of the Vietnamese Chinese to the 1911 Revolution in China

By

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## Introduction

The founding father of the Chinese Republic, Dr. Sun Yat Sen once remarked that, "the Overseas Chinese is the mother of revolution". This statement was not an overstatement, as the Overseas Chinese were the main financial supporter to Dr. Sun's revolutionary activities in China, beside from supplying arms and manpower as well as offering refuge for revolutionaries abortive uprisings. The Overseas Chinese, who were part of the Chinese diaspora, responded enthusiastically toward efforts in bringing changes to the political structure in their country of origins. In the same way, many Chinese in Vietnam were a part of this revolutionary movement. The geographical proximity between Vietnam and the Guangxi, Guangdong and Yunnan provinces in southern China, made it a favourable and strategic base for revolutionary activities.

This essay aims at providing an overview on the role of the Vietnamese Chinese in supporting the 1911 revolution in China. Efforts will be made to examine

the various of contributions made by these Chinese from 1900 to 1911, in which, some even participated in the ten uprisings including the uprising at Zhenankuan and the Huanghuakang uprising in Guangdong.

### **The Chinese in Vietnam**

Vietnam is the only country in Southeast Asia that was sinicised. The sinicisation process was a result of a long historical relationship that could be traced as early as the 3rd century B.C. In 257 B.C., during the closing stage of the Warring States period in China, Vietnam, or rather the civilisation in the Red River Delta was invaded by the Prince of An Yang, a ruler of Shu in southwest China. The indigenous Van Lang (Hung Kings) state was conquered, and a new state emerged in the form of Au Lac which lasted until 207 B.C. when it was incorporated into the political map of Chin Shih Huang Ti's China. The territory, now called Nam Viet, was freed from Chinese domination for almost a century from 207 to 111 B.C. before being annexed by China again, this time through the Han Dynasty. Thus, began one thousand years of Chinese colonisation. The Vietnamese only managed to overthrow the Chinese rule in 939 A.D. when a noble man, Ngo Quyen led a rebellion against the weakened Chinese garrison. In that year, Ngo Quyen founded the Ngo Dynasty, and ever since then, except for a brief period from 1414 to 1427 when a Ming Dynasty army from China reestablished their rule in Vietnam, Vietnam was independent until it was fully colonised by France in 1883.

The independent Vietnamese nation though fully in control of its destiny, remained however, a tributary state of China, and was compelled to send tributes to the Chinese court in Beijing. This practice was the essence of the official relationship between China and Vietnam. However, unlike other Chinese tributary states, this bilateral relationship went beyond the level of court diplomacy, for through the two thousand years of mutual contacts and interaction, the Sino-Vietnamese people had a rather common past; both adhering to Confucianism in life and political outlook, and there was a constant movement of people between the two nations, particularly from China to Vietnam.

The human migration from China to Vietnam usually took place during the movement of Chinese armies to Vietnam. The brief reoccupation of Vietnam under the Ming Chinese for instance, resulted in the migration of families and followers

of the 800,000 Chinese army. These new immigrants were reported to have involved in agricultural, mining and fisheries. When the Chinese emperor decreed for the retreat of this army from Giao-Chi (Chinese name for Vietnam during that period), only 86,000 returned to China. The majority that stayed behind were called the 'Ming people' (or Ming Huong in Vietnamese), most of whom have established themselves in Vietnam. The 'Ming People' were also encouraged to stay on by rulers of the newly independent Le Dynasty. The definition of the 'Ming people' was later extended to cover offsprings from Sino-Vietnamese marriages.<sup>1</sup>

When Nguyen Hoang established his domains in the region of Thuan Hoa, around present day Quang Nam in 1558, he gave permission to the Chinese to choose a site in his territory to conduct trade with the incoming European traders. The town of Hoi An (Faifoo) was chosen for this purpose. As the years passed by, a Chinese quarter was established in Hoi An, with its own governor, beside the Japanese quarter. In 1768, there were nearly 6,000 Chinese in Hoi An<sup>2</sup>.

The Chinese of Vietnam played a very important role in the southward expansion of the Vietnamese civilisation and nationhood. This was particularly so after the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644, when many able Chinese escaped to Vietnam to avoid serving the new dynasty. In 1679, the seaside town of Da Nang received the arrival of 3,000 soldiers of the former Ming Dynasty, led by their leaders Yang Yandi ( 楊彥迪 )<sup>3</sup> and Chen Shangchuan( 陳上川 )<sup>3</sup>. The Nguyen ruler of Quang Nam, appointed them officials in the Vietnamese court with assigned garrison post in the region bordering the Cambodian nation in the south (present day Gia Dinh), Yang led his men to take control of Mytho, whereas Chen took over the area around Dong Nai in Bien Hoa. With the help of the fertile land watered by the Mekong River, the two Chinese settlements prospered, and there was an increase in the number of foreign traders stopping in southern Vietnam, including Javanese, Chinese, Japanese, and westerners. This prosperity allowed the Chinese to dedicate time for preserving their distinct Ming culture. By

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1. Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 179.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

3. The new Hanyupinyin spellings will be used throughout this essay except for names available in the accepted English transcribe, using Wade-Gilles spellings. Vietnamese names will be used for Vietnamese names and institutions.

1698, at least four Chinese associations existed in the south, including the Ming Xiang Hoi or Ming Homeland Association ( 明鄉會館 ), and the San Shan Hoi Guan ( 三山會館 )<sup>4</sup>.

It was through the service of a newly arrived Chinese family by the name of Mac Cuu that eventually extended the Vietnamese national boundary to present day Hatien. Mac Cuu was the head of a noble family that had escaped to Vietnam in 1671 for refusing to serve the Manchu Court in China. The patriarch of the clan, Mac Cuu was initially appointed to be the commander for the Hatien region by the King of Cambodia. Mac mobilised his forces to clear the land around Hatien, and opened new settlements to as far as Kompong Som through the coastal area. In 1708, Mac shifted his allegiance to the Nguyen Lord at Hue, and with the incorporation of Hatien, the Vietnamese nation was extended to the farthest possible south<sup>5</sup>. The successors of Mac Cuu who were also appointed commanders for Hatien directed their efforts in upholding Chinese culture by building a shrine for Confucius, establishing schools and inviting Chinese scholars to teach at these schools. They also fortified Hatien and erected garrisons at strategic points.

In northern Vietnam, the Chinese led a more restricted life under the rule of the Trinh Lords, who were the *de facto* rulers over the weakened Le Dynasty. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty to the Manchu in 1644, many Chinese began to migrate to North Vietnam. Even though the Le Court and the Trinh Lords were apprehensive towards the Manchu rulers in China, they were also strict towards them. This was probably due to the harsher life condition in the north where it was overpopulated with limited arable land. Thus the immigrant Chinese could be a burden to the economic life of the Vietnamese. Nonetheless, the Chinese were important in many specialised professions that made them rather indispensable. One example was in the area of coin-minting for the Le Dynasty.

4. 呂士朋, "二千年來華人對越南開發的貢獻", 辛亥史論文集  
Lu Shipeng, "Er Qian Nian Lai Hua Ren Dui Yue Nan Kai Fa di Gong Xian", (Two Thousand Years of Vietnamese Chinese contribution to Vietnam) in *Xian Hai She Lun Wei Ji (Papers on the 1911 Revolution)*, pp. 85-86.

5. There is a conflicting accounts of Mac Cuu's occupation of Hatien. Charles Maybon in his *Histoire du pays d'Annam* (Paris, 1920), p. 119, mentioned the surprised seizure of Hatien from the Cambodian king in 1715 by Mac Cuu, and paid homage for the province to the Hue court.

In 1778, the Nguyen court in southern Vietnam was destroyed by the Tay Son rebellion<sup>6</sup>; and the Le Dynasty, together with the Trinh Lords was overthrown in 1788. In the process, Cholon, which is five kilometers from Saigon was founded by the Chinese who were ordered by the Nguyen Lords to flee Bien Hoa for a safer place near Saigon in the face of the advancing Tay Son rebels. The Tay Son however, caught up with the Chinese in 1782 and massacred more than 10,000 of them who fled to Saigon and Cholon area<sup>7</sup>. Cholon or Taignon ( 堤岸 ), as the Chinese called it, was to rise again from the ruin, and became the single largest China town in Vietnam. When Nguyen Phuc Anh, the surviving member of the Nguyen Lord family campaigned against the Tay Sons, he had among his lieutenants, two Chinese who played very important roles in overthrowing the Tay Son, and the subsequent establishment of the Nguyen Dynasty. The two, Trinh Huai Te (Zheng Huaide/ 鄭懷德 ) and Ngo Nhan Di (Wu Renjing/ 吳仁靜 ) were also sent as delegates to Beijing to obtain official recognition for the newly established Nguyen Dynasty; both were later admitted into the Shrine of the Heroes.

The Nguyen rulers were very tolerant towards Chinese, particularly during the reign of Nguyen Phuc Anh, who ruled with the title of Emperor Gia Long. The Chinese community was left on its own to organise their own administrative institutions. The Chinese were divided into different 'Bang', or what the French colonial rule characterised as 'congregation'. The Bang system was organised according to the dialect grouping or the province of origins for the Chinese. Initially only four Bangs were started, namely, Cantonese, Hokien, Teochew, and Hailam. Each Bang elected its own council members led by a Bang Truong, with approval from the Nguyen court. Like their counterparts, the kongsis in Malaya and Singapore, a Bang council has arbitrary authority in matters such as marriages, family disputes, and minor financial disputes. The Bangs also served as intermediaries between the government and the Chinese community, and mutual concerned organisation<sup>8</sup>.

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6. For a study on the Tay Son rebellion, see Thomas Hodgkin, *Vietnam: the Revolutionary Path*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1981, pp. 78-99; see also, Truong Buu Lam, *Resistance, Rebellion, Revolution*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1984, pp. 10-15.

7. Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, p. 184.

8. For some function of the Bang, see Alfred Schreiner, *Les Institution Annamites en Basse-Cochinchine*, Tome II, Claude & Co, Saigon, 1901, pp. 64 & 66.

By 1879, there were more than 44,000 Chinese in Cochinchina, excluding other parts of Vietnam<sup>8</sup>. The majority remained in Cholon-Saigon area. The Chinese of this area was able, in a short span of twenty years after the founding of the Nguyen Dynasty to turn Cholon into the most bustling city in the whole of Vietnam. In 1819, the Chinese of that city contributed both money and human labour in digging two canals that linked Saigon and Cholon. The road from Saigon to Phnom Penh was also constructed with the help of the Chinese<sup>9</sup>.

On the eve of the arrival of the French colonisers, the Chinese in Vietnam had firmly established themselves in this adopted country. The Chinese traders were in control of the rice, salt, liquor, sugar and tobacco industries. The annual rice surplus were exported to Canton via the Chinese business connections, including using Chinese transportation. The French colonisers however, in their eagerness to reap greater profit, created monopolies over some of the industries previously under Chinese control. French businessmen brought in new products from France, weakening the cottage industries which was controlled by the Chinese, and making life difficult for the latter<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, the French colonisers began to realise the value of having the Chinese as a medium in dealing with other Vietnamese. Thus, many were given government concessions and eventually prospered.

By the turn of the century, the Chinese in Vietnam, (many of whom who had left China due to political persecutions and harsh economic life) were excited and a roused by the events that were taking place in China, particularly the many uprisings against the Manchu rulers, and the reform movement led by the revered Kang Yu Wei. Along with Kang Yu Wei's reformation effort was Dr. Sun Yat Sen's

9. Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, P. 186

10. 呂士朋, "越南華僑對辛亥革命之貢獻" 辛亥革命與南洋研討會  
Lu Shipeng, "Yue Nan Hua Qiao Dui Xin Hai Ge Ming Zi Gong Xian" (Contribution by the Vietnamese Overseas Chinese to the 1911 Chinese Revolution) in *Xian Hai Ge Ming Yu nanyang Yen Tau Hoi Lun Wen*. (Proceeding on the Overseas Chinese in Nanyang and the 1911 Chinese Revolution), Taipei, 1986, p. 277.

11. For a study on the Chinese under French rule, see Luong Nhi Ky, "The Chinese in Vietnam: A study of Vietnamese-Chinese relations with special to the period 1802-1901". PhD, University of Michigan, 1963; see also Alain G. Marsot, *The Chinese Community in Vietnam under The French*, EM Text, San Francisco, 1993.

Hsing Chung Hui(Xing Zhong Hoi), the revolutionary organisation which later became the Tung Meng Hui(Tong Men Hoi) which was responsible for the overthrow of the Manchu rule, and the setting up of a Chinese republic.

Due to its geopolitical proximity to the southern provinces in China, Vietnam became an important base in launching new revolutions against the Manchu rule, out of which five revolts were planned and started in Tongkin.

### **Chinese Revolutionary Set-Up in Vietnam**

As the wind of revolution was sweeping through China in the late nineteenth century, the Chinese in Vietnam could best be summed as fence sitters who had a life to live, with very little time to spare. Although the Chinese were favoured in terms of commercial activities, the French colonial authority imposed heavy levies on the Chinese and held strong prejudices against them. Most of the time, they were left untouched by the French authority<sup>12</sup>. Ever since 1862, the Chinese in Vietnam witnessed a strong current of Vietnamese nationalism and anti-colonial movements that were geared in overthrowing the French power and to usher independence. Nonetheless, the Chinese did not get themselves involved in the Vietnamese nationalist struggles.

Vietnam was first linked with Dr.Sun Yat Sen during his first trip to Hanoi in 1900. During his brief stay, which was basically a reconnaissance mission to identify prospective Chinese supporters and sympathizers, Dr.Sun was introduced to Li Zhujie ( 李竹癡 ), Zeng Xizhou ( 曾錫周 ), and Ma Peisheng ( 馬培生 ) who were businessmen who would later played important parts in the revolution. In 1902, Dr.Sun was once again in Hanoi, this time, at the invitation of Governor Paul Doumer<sup>13</sup> to visit the Grand Exhibition in Hanoi. When Dr.Sun arrived in Hanoi in autumn that year Governor Doumer had returned to

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12. Victo Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia.*, p.189.

13. Paul Doumer was the Governor General of French Indochina from 1897 to 1902. Responsible in turning Indochina from a poor French colony to the most valuable. Chief architect of modernization and colonial economic development of Vietnam. Assassinated in 1930 while serving as the President of France. See Danny J. Whitfield, *Historical and Culture Dictionary of Vietnam*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., New Jersey, 1976, p.77.

France in March. Doumer's departure though did not jeopardise Dr. Sun's plans; it did however, reduce the flexibility of having Hanoi as the main base for revolutionary movement.

During his few months stay in Hanoi in 1902, Dr. Sun was able to come into contact with several Chinese residing in Hanoi, namely Huang Longsheng (黃隆生), a Vietnamese Chinese textile merchant who originated from Tai San district in Guangdong, and a keen reader of the China Press (Zhong Guo Ri Bao / 中國日報) which was published in Hong Kong. Through the enthusiasm of Huang, several other Chinese were introduced to Dr. Sun, and a branch for the Hsing Chung Hui was duly formed in Hanoi. The earlier members included Yang Shouoeng (楊壽彭), Lo Chun (羅鎔), Zhen Keqi (曾克齊), Zhen Jiting (甄吉廷), and Zhang Huanchi (張煥池). Due to the small size of the organisation, there was no permanent premise for meetings. Most of the meetings were held in the shop lot of Wong Lung Seng. The name of the organisation was changed to Tung Meng Hui in 1907.

The development in 1902 marked the beginning of Vietnam as an important base for the Chinese revolutionaries. Not only did it signify the arrival of Dr. Sun Yat Sen to Hanoi, the year also witnessed the meeting of Dr. Sun Yat Sen with Pham Boi Chau, the main Vietnamese revolutionary of his time in Japan. For Chau, the meeting served as the beginning of an important departure in his political orientation. It provided him with an opportunity to contact more Chinese revolutionaries, to learn some of the techniques of revolutions, and to obtain fund for his newly organised Vietnam Quang Phuc Hoi, or the restoration movement.

The formation of a Chinese revolutionary organisation in Saigon area came about only three years after the formation of the Hsing Chung Hui in Hanoi. In 1905, Dr. Sun came to Saigon together with Li Zhongshe (黎仲實), Hu Lisheng (胡毅生), and Deng Motian (鄧慕韓). They were met by Zhen Xizhou (曾錫周), Ma Peisheng (馬培生), and Li Zhujie (李竹癡), all of whom Dr. Sun had met in Hanoi three years earlier. Both Zhen and Ma were important agents for the Bank of France in Vietnam, thus, they were influential and important to the revolution, particularly pertaining to fund raising efforts. From Saigon, Dr. Sun went to Cholon which had the largest concentration of Chinese in Vietnam. There, he was warmly received by the Chinese community. In Cholon,



Dr. Sun was looked after by the Cantonese leaders, including Liu Yichu( 劉易初 ), Huang Jingnan( 黃景南 ), Guan Tang( 關唐 ), Zhen Taihen( 顏太恨 ), Li Zhuofeng( 李卓峰 ), and Li Xiaochu( 李亦愚 ), showing the closeness of Dr. Sun with the Cantonese congregation<sup>14</sup>. A branch for the Tung Meng Hui was immediately started with Liu Yichu and Li Zhuofeng as Chairman and vice-chairman respectively. A communication station was established at a shop called Chong Ky( 昌記 ) in 304 Mytho Street.<sup>15</sup>

The establishment of Tung Meng Hui in both Hanoi and Saigon-Cholon, particularly in Hanoi, marked the beginning of an alternative avenue for launching uprisings against the Manchu Government. Prior to the existence of the Hsing Chung Hui and later Tung Meng Hui in Hanoi, most of Dr. Sun's revolutionary activities were launched from Hong Kong and Japan, both of which were getting difficult each day. This was particularly so for Hong Kong where, even though Dr. Sun was a western medical practitioner, he was not allowed to enter Hong Kong after the Manchu government protested to the British Consul concerning Dr. Sun's leadership in the anti-Manchu movements<sup>16</sup>. Thus, with the opening of the Hanoi and Saigon-Cholon branches of the Tung Meng Hui, revolutionary activities could be carried out from another base, and with new targets in the three provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan, and Guangdong.

The Tung Meng Hui branch in Saigon-Cholon area was actually superseded by the setting up of a reading Club in 1902, immediately after a brief visit by Dr. Sun to Saigon that year. The reading club was named 'Cui Wu Jing Lu' Reading Club ( 萃武精廬書報社 ), and became the nucleus for revolutionary propaganda activities in Saigon-Cholon area, laying seeds for future uprisings in China. Initially, the leading Chinese in Saigon and Cholon were contemplating the idea of forming a revolutionary squad to fight against the Manchu in China, but decided against the

14. Some authors including Yen Ching Hwa argued that Dr. Sun did discriminate against Chinese of other origins other than his fellow Cantonese. See Yen Ching Hwang, *Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Chinese Revolution*, Oxford University Press, London, 1976, p. 28.

15. Huang Zhenwu, *Hua Qiao Yu Zhong Guo Ge Ming* (Overseas Chinese and the Chinese Revolution), Hua Qiao Zhong Su, Taipei, 1963, p. 37.

16. Dr. Sun Yat Sen was barred from entering China and Hong Kong in 1895 for five years.

move as it was thought to be a futile sacrifice. The reading club was first presided over by Liu Yichu, but later on took over by Zhen Taihen when Liu was reported to be threatened by extradition to China by the local authority.

In 1908, the name of the reading club was changed to Jiang Xue she ( 講學社 ), when Chinese secret societies in Saigon-Cholon became active. This was done to avoid the attention of the French Surete. A restaurant and a tailor shop was also set up to serve as communication centres and revenue generators for the revolution in China. The two enterprises were headed by Qiu Fuxiang ( 丘福祥 ) and Zhao Fusheng ( 趙扶生 ) respectively. A mutual concern organisation called the Bao Huai Tang ( 胞懷堂 ) was set up as the operational office for the Tung Meng Hui. In order to ensure greater access to Chinese in the two cities, a study class was opened at No.31 Hospitale street with He Guochai as head. The class was named as the Zhong Xingshe ( 中興社 ); English language was taught at the class coupled with propaganda to agitate the Chinese in Saigon-Cholon area. Another restaurant cum hotel called Hoa An Khach San ( 華安客棧 ) was also opened, serving the dual purposes of communication centre and to generate revenue for the revolution. Thus, by 1909, the Chinese revolutionary machineries in Hanoi and Saigon-Cholon were firmly established, and would facilitate some of the crucial uprisings across the northern border throughout the subsequent years.

In 1909, the Vietnamese revolutionary machinery was expanded to attract more Chinese patriots for the revolution. Luo Lanqing ( 陸蘭清 ) a close associate of Dr. Sun Yat Sen was dispatched to Singapore to get the consent of Dr. Sun to broaden the revolutionary base in Vietnam by incorporating other Chinese groups including the various Chinese secret societies to participate in the revolution. Upon obtaining the approval, Luo returned to Saigon and immediately put the plan into action. First, a new body, the Wei Sheng She (Healthy Society/ 衛生社 ) was formed, and moves were made to encourage the Triads (Hong Men) into the fold of the revolution. Through the service of Li Rong, a Triads leader, many former Triads members were accepted into the revolutionary party. After the Triads' embracement of the revolution ideal, many other Chinese secret societies followed; these included Wan Xing ( 萬興 ), Hua Sheng ( 華勝 ), Dong Xie ( 同協 ), the New and Old Yi He ( 新舊義和 ), Yi Qin ( 義群 ), Xiang Sheng ( 祥勝 ), Guan Ti Peng ( 關帝廟 ), Dong Sheng Tang ( 東勝堂 ), and

Pan Yi Tang ( 番邑堂 ). The incorporation of the secret society elements into the Chinese revolution movement was not something new, as most of these so-called secret societies were initially set up to overthrow the Manchu rule in China. Dr. Sun in his earlier uprisings had also made use of secret society members<sup>17</sup>. In fact, Dr. Sun himself became a member of the Triads in Hawaii in 1904 in order to gain access to the organisation<sup>18</sup>. Thus the proposal made by the Vietnam Tung Meng Hui was accepted as part of Dr. Sun's greater revolutionary plans. Nonetheless, the presence of the secret societies in the revolutionary movement did bring about some complications as some of the former secret society members were unruly people and posed some trouble in the ranks of the revolutionaries. Many of these societies had long ceased to adhere strictly to the cause of overthrowing the Manchu, and their activities had since, deteriorated into various vices and undesired activities.

After the failure of the uprising at Guangzhou on 27 April 1911, the Chinese revolutionaries in Vietnam decided to dissolve all subsidiary bodies under the Tung Meng Hui in Saigon-Cholon area, so as to mobilise all energies and manpower toward a single goal of staging future uprisings in China. Dr. Sun Yat Sen dispatched Hu Han Min ( 胡漢民 ), one of his closest associates to Vietnam to direct the revolutionary movement there. A single body called the Xing Ren She ( 興仁社 ) was formed with headquarter situated at Yunnan street in Cholon. With the setting up of the Xing Ren She, the structure of the revolutionary movement in Saigon-Cholon area was tightened and more united.

A branch of the Tung Meng Hui was also being set up in the busy port of Haiphong, with the headquarters situated at the Shop lot of Wan Xing Luo at No.32, Taiwan Street. The leaders for the Haiphong branch were Liu Zhisan ( 劉岐山 ), Lin Huanting ( 林煥廷 ), Zhen Pi ( 甄璧 ) and Zhen Gengfu<sup>19</sup>. The branch in Haiphong however, only managed to operate under the cover of a school called Yu Chi Che Xue She

17. Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, Oxford University Press, London, pp. 460 & 462.

18. C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat Sen: Frustrated Patriot*, British Columbia University Press, New York, 1976, p. 41.

19. Huang Zhenwu, *Hua Qiao*, p. 37.

( 益智學塾 ), or Xing Xue She ( 興學社 ). An information centre was opened under the guise of the Wan Xing Tea House ( 萬新茶樓 ). A secret storage room for arms and ammunition was also set up at a member's house. During his visit to Haiphong in 1907, Dr. Sun Yat Sen was lodged at either the home of Zhong Nienchu ( 鍾念祖 ) or the two leather factories of Nan Xing ( 南興 ) and Yi Xing ( 怡興 ) at the suburb area of the city. This was mainly to avert the attention of the local colonial government and Manchu spies. The owners of these factories, Liang Shaoyuan ( 梁少垣 ) and Huang Lizhou ( 黃荔洲 ) were strong supporters of Dr. Sun, and remained to be two of the most generous donors to the cause of the revolution<sup>20</sup>.

In the Mekong delta town of Vinh Long, a Tung Meng Hui branch was formed in July 1910, with Li Qiyu ( 黎其玉 ) and Guan Huikang ( 關惠康 ) as leaders. The branch was named the Vinh Long Chen Ming She ( 永隆振明社 ) to avoid unnecessary attention. The formation of the Vinh Long branch was prompted by the earlier activities of the branch at Mytho, another town on the Mekong Delta. The Vinh Long branch, however, did not receive overwhelming response from the Chinese residing there. Although most of the Chinese residents responded favourably to the revolutionary movement idea, many well to do merchants refused to subscribe to the activities of the revolutionary movement. Many still harbored desire of being conferred rewards and decorations by the Manchu Dynasty. Nevertheless, the activities of the Vinh Long Chen Ming She was later broadened when a reading club called the Kai Chi Shu Bao She ( 開智書報社 ) was opened. By the summer of 1911, there were already 60 members on the roll of the Vinh Long revolutionary movement. By then, the movement was concentrating in obtaining donations and loans, from the population of Vinh Long needed for the revolution in China from the population of Vinh Long<sup>21</sup>.

In 1908, the revolutionary movement decided to set up a supply bank in Lao Cai, the border town between Vietnam and Chinese near the Red River. The revolutionary machinery in Hanoi sent Li Zhongshe ( 黎仲實 ), Gao Deliang, ( 高德亮 ), Xiao Zhangfu ( 饒章甫 ), Mai Xiangchuan

20. Lu Shipeng, *Contribution of the Vietnamese Overseas Chinese*, p. 282.

21. *Ibid.*,

( 麥香泉 ), Liang En( 梁恩 ), and Chen Erhua( 陳二華 ) to set up the base which would facilitate the supplying of arms and ammunition, and materials. Their activities were discovered by the French colonial police who arrested them as bandits. They were later deported to Hong Kong after their true identities were discovered.<sup>22</sup>

### **Vietnamese Chinese and the Revolutionary Uprisings**

From 1900 to 1911, eight uprisings were staged by Dr. Sun's revolutionary party; five of which were planned and staged from Hanoi. Throughout this period, the various Hsing Chung Hui and later, the Tung Meng Hui branches in Vietnam played significant roles in these uprisings.

The first uprising that was staged from Vietnam was the battle for Fangcheng (City of Fang), a city in southern Guangxi in September 1907. The uprising was preceded by civil unrest in the Guangdong province, prompted by oppressive rule of the Manchu government in that area. In May that year, the people of Qinzhou ( 欽州 ) sent a delegation to petition at the yamen for a reduction of the sugar tax imposed on them by the Manchu Government. The delegation was arrested, and an attempt to free the delegates was met by volleys of rifle shots from the Manchu army causing death to a number of civilians. The governor of Qinzhou, Wang Bingbi( 王秉必 ) went a step further and occupied Nasi ( 那思 ), Napeng( 那彭 ), Nali( 那黎 ), and Nachen( 那添 ). All these district towns were burnt and many more lost their lives. A delegation was sent by the people of Qinzhou to Dr. Sun Yat Sen in Hanoi asking him to intervene<sup>23</sup>. The event in Qinzhou coincided with Dr. Sun's plan of launching a new revolution in southern China, and the incident at Qinzhou provided an opportunity for an uprising. Dr. Sun dispatched Wang Heshun ( 王和順 ), a native of Guangxi and a Tung Meng

22. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

23. Dr. Sun had moved his base to Hanoi following his expulsion from Japan. He stayed in Hanoi from March 1907 to January 1908, before being deported by the French authority there.

Hui member in Hanoi to attack the provincial city of Fangcheng<sup>24</sup>. Fangcheng fell to Wang and his forces on 27th July. The revolutionaries even managed to capture the governor of the city and his entourage. With support from the people in the city, the uprising received impetus to further capture Hengzhou and Yongning, two districts in the prefecture of Nanningfu on 12th and 13th September. By then, the revolutionaries' supplies ran out and the planned shipments of arms and ammunition from the Tung Meng Hui in Tokyo failed to arrive in time<sup>25</sup>. The revolutionaries suffered another setback when they lost to the Manchu army in an engagement at Lingshan. Wang and his small army was forced to retreat to Qinzhou, and on 17th September, to Vietnam.

The setback at Qinzhou was overcome after a short while, and within three months, a second uprising was planned from Hanoi, this time to capture the fortress at Zhennankuan ( 鎮南關 ) in Guangxi. Dr. Sun thought it was necessary to follow up the initial success of the Qinzhou uprising. Thus, an uprising at Zhennankuan was planned. Once again, Dr. Sun sent Wang Heshun into Guangxi to generate interest and support for the uprising. Wang however, did not manage to gain enough support for the uprising. Thus, another revolutionary, the Huang Mingtang ( 黃明堂 ) was summoned by Dr. Sun to carry out this task. Huang, who was also a member of Tung Meng Hui in Hanoi was assisted by Li Youqing and He Wu. Huang led his forces into Guangxi on 1 December 1907, and captured the base on the same day.

After receiving news of the successful uprising, Dr. Sun set out immediately from Hanoi to Zhen Nan Guan on 3 December 1907. In his entourage were famous revolutionaries including Huang Hsing (Huang Xing/ 黃興), Hu Han Min ( 胡漢民 ), Hu Lisheng ( 胡毅生 ) and two Vietnamese Chinese, Lu Zhonglin ( 盧仲琳 ) and Zhang Yiqu ( 張翼樞 ). The latter two were students who took leave from their school to participate in the revolution. At Zhen Nan Guan, Dr. Sun received the surrender of Luo Rongyen

24. Wang Heshun was formerly the leader of an uprising in Guangxi during 1902-1903. He escaped to Saigon via Hong Kong following the failure of the uprising, and was induced into Tung meng Hui by Dr. Sun in 1905, after which, he moved to Hanoi.

25. According to Lu She Peng, this was due to an internal strife within the party branch in Tokyo. See Li Shipeng, *Contribution of the Vietnamese Overseas Chinese* p. 285.

( 陸榮廷 ), the Manchu commander of the garrison. A second attack was immediately planned by Dr. Sun on Longzhou. Sun decided to return to Vietnam to raise sufficient fund for the attack, leaving Huang Mingtang to defend Zhenankuan.<sup>26</sup> An attempt to smuggle rifles and ammunition for the rebels at Zhenankuan was foiled by French custom officials. Although the shipment was later allowed to proceed into Zhenankuan, it was too late. Huang Mingtang and Huang Hsing's small forces was defeated and forced to retreat to Indochina<sup>27</sup>.

Unknown to Dr. Sun, his visit to Zhenankuan was to cost him dearly. After receiving information of Dr. Sun's whereabouts, the Manchu government demanded the French authority in Vietnam to deport him for instigating revolts in China, while residing in Vietnam. On his way back from Lang Son to Hanoi, Dr. Sun was shadowed by a member of the Surete, the French security service, and his actual whereabouts was disclosed by Yang Shoupeng, the Cantonese Bang Truong in Hanoi, who was summoned by the French officials. Dr. Sun was arrested on 15 January 1908, and was deported to Singapore on 25 January.

The Vietnamese Chinese's role in supporting the two revolts of Fangcheng and Zhenankuan was extremely important, without which, it is doubtful if both Wang Heshun and Huang Mingtang were able to create such an impact. Beside playing an active role as members in the small revolutionary forces in the two uprisings, the most significant contribution by the Vietnamese Chinese was their generosity to give to the cause of the revolution. This was significant as Dr. Sun's reputation in Nanyang (Southeast Asia) was still rather unknown. Furthermore, many were unable to accept his revolutionary ideas and actions. This was particularly true for Singapore, an important base for revolutionary after 1908, but was at that time, controlled by the conservative reformists under the influence of Kang Yu Wei. Thus, support from the pro-Sun Yat Sen Tung Meng Hui in Vietnam, particularly that of Hanoi and Haiphong was vital. The revolutionary idea only caught up in Singapore and Malaya after the expulsion of Dr. Sun from Vietnam to settle in Singapore.

One of the most steadfast supporters for Dr. Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary activities was a Vietnamese Chinese by the name of Zhang Renjie (Chang Ching

26. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

27. C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat Sen: Frustrated Patriot* p. 64.

Chiang/ 張仁傑 ) whose family originated from zhejiang. Zhang, who was the owner of a prosperous business in Paris, first met Dr. Sun in Saigon during the latter's visit in 1905. Although no exact figure is available on the total sum of Chang's contribution to the revolution, it was estimated at around two and a half million dollars or more<sup>28</sup>. Without Chang's contribution, most of the uprisings would not have been possible, especially during emergencies when arms and ammunition were required to reinforce the revolutionary forces at Fangcheng and Zhenankuan. Another example of the generosity of the Vietnamese Chinese toward the Chinese revolution was related by Dr. Sun in his memoir, where a Chinese sprout seller from Cholon by the name of Huang Jingnan decided to donate all his life savings which amounted to three thousand dollars to the revolution for the purchase of arms<sup>29</sup>.

After the retreat from Zhenankuan, the revolutionaries retreated to Hanoi and Haiphong. They were reported to be restless while awaiting orders for future actions. During this period of waiting, some of the revolutionaries became involved in a local Vietnamese plot to poison some French troops in a garrison<sup>30</sup>. The action infuriated the French colonial government who thus far, had been tolerable and had shown a friendly attitude to the presence of the revolutionary force and their leaders<sup>31</sup>. The French authority began to negotiate with the Manchu government for extradition of the revolutionaries back to China, and an agreement was reached in early 1908 between the two governments to jointly suppress the activities of the Chinese revolutionaries in French Indochina and to extradite all the Chinese revolutionaries as criminals back to China.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

29. Memoir of Dr. Sun Yat Sen as quoted by Chang Wenser, *Yue nan Hua Chiao Si Hua (History of Chinese in Vietnam)*, Taipei, 1975, p. 121.

30. The poison case or "arsenic case" was a plot designed to capture arms and ammunition from the French troops for a planned revolt. Arsenic was poured into the drinks of the troops by employees at the garrisons. 200 troops were poisoned and 70 killed before the plot was discovered. French retribution was swift and brutal, more than 1,000 persons were arrested including some Chinese revolutionaries.

31. The amicable attitude was in no way a sign of sympathetic to the Chinese revolution but because the French government could use the presence of the revolutionaries to bargain with the Manchu government for more concessions. See Yen Ching Hwang, *Overseas Chinese*, p. 306.



Before the French Government in Indochina could carry out its plan, the revolutionaries staged another two more uprisings in China. Largely through the initiatives and efforts of the Vietnamese Chinese such as Huang Keqiang, Luo Zhongxhe, Liu Meiqing, Liang Jianchai and Liang Ruiting, the revolutionary machinery in Vietnam began to plan for a new uprising, this time at Qinzhou. Arms and ammunition were purchased from French dealers in Hanoi, and extra ammunition were procured from Hong Kong by Feng Ziyu ( 甲目猷 ). The attack was launched on 27th March 1908, and the revolutionaries under the leadership of Huang Keqiang, captured Qinzhou, Shangsi ( 上思 ) and Zhoulihen Zhou ( 周歷廉州 ). But the effort was once again let back fired plue to the failure of the logistics to reinforce the small force with more arms and ammunition, thus, all the strategic gains were abandoned, and the revolutionaries were forced to return to Vietnam<sup>32</sup>.

The failure of the March 27th uprising was quickly put aside as the revolutionaries once again launched a fresh uprising at Hekou ( 河口 ), the city bordering Vietnam and China in Yunnan province. The city was a strategic point in the Sino-Vietnam communication line, linking Lao Cai in Vietnam across the Red River with Meng Zi ( 甯安 ), Lin An ( 蒙自 ) to Kunming. It had also access into other areas in the province. The attack was launched on 29th April 1908, barely a month after the failure at Qinzhou. The revolutionary force took Hekou without much problem, but faced the challenge of sustaining their presence there. Although efforts were made by Huang Longsheng and Zhen Jiting to dispatch supplies to Hekou, the smuggling was blocked by the French authority. After holding out nearly for more a month, Huang Keqiang and his depleted force had no choice but to abandon Hekou on 26 May 1908. Huang and his 600 men retreated into Son Tay in northern Vietnam, planning to enter Yunnan once more from there. The revolutionary force however, was stopped by the French army which demanded their surrender. A fight broke out, only to be stopped by orders from the revolutionary machinery headquarters in Hanoi asking Huang and his men to comply to the French demand<sup>33</sup>. The force was arrested and was due to be extradited to China, but were later deported to Singapore.

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32. Lu Shipeng, *Contribution of the Vietnamese Overseas Chinese*, p. 288.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

Many Vietnamese Chinese including those who were associated with the revolutionaries were also deported. Among those prominent Vietnamese Chinese who were deported for their parts in supporting the revolutionary uprisings were Huang Longsheng, the textile merchant from Hanoi, Yang Shoupeng, the Bang Truong for the Cantonese community in Hanoi, Yang Chisheng, Zhen Jiting, Mai Xiangchuan, Gao Deliang, Rao Zhangfu, Chen Erhua and Liang En. As a result of their expulsions, these Vietnamese Chinese suffered great loss in terms of their careers and business, together with their properties.

Dr. Sun, who received news of the threatened extradition to China, pleaded with the French Governor General Paul Beau to deport the revolutionaries to Singapore and Malaya instead of China. After repeated pleas, the French authority in Indochina accepted the fact that the revolutionaries were not criminals but revolutionary soldiers who became political refugees. This resulted in the deportation of the revolutionaries to Singapore<sup>34</sup>. The group though defeated and demoralised, remained to be valuable assets to the Chinese revolution as the revolutionaries owned no other army.

The deportation of more than 600 members of the Chinese revolutionaries from Vietnam greatly depleted the revolutionary strength in Vietnam, particularly in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. With the revolutionary machinery in the northern region shattered, no further uprisings were planned from Vietnam. In fact, the blow was so devastated that, for the next three years no uprising was staged by Dr. Sun's revolutionary movement. This only clearly demonstrated the importance of the Vietnamese Chinese connection in the revolution, as well as the strategic value of Vietnam as a revolutionary base.

34. The first batch of 60 arrived in Singapore in May 1908, and were joined later by 400 others. Their sudden arrivals however, caused a number of problems to Dr. Sun and his revolutionary organisation in Singapore and Malaya as it was necessary to accommodate and feed the newly arrived political refugees. Jobs were also needed to keep them occupied. These were some in the group who later, resorted to armed robberies and other crimes out of restlessness. The group was finally peacefully settled after being provided with jobs at the newly opened "Chung Hsing" quarry in 1909. See Yen Ching Hwang, *Overseas Chinese* pp. 306-308; see also Lu Shipeng, *Contribution of the Vietnamese Overseas Chinese*, pp. 289-290.

The uprising at Guangzhou, or more famously known as the Huang Hua Kang Uprising was the last of the revolutionary uprisings before the Wu Chang (武昌) revolution of 10 October 1911. The Guangzhou episode was also the last one participated by the Vietnamese Chinese. Upon receiving a message from the revolutionary headquarter, members of the various branches of Tung Meng Hui in Vietnam began to organise a force to participate in the uprising. Donations were received, and arms and ammunition were purchased from French arms dealers, and were sent to Hong Kong<sup>35</sup>. A force of about thirty men was raised and dispatched to Hong Kong. Unfortunately for the force and the uprising, their arrival was delayed by thick fog along the journey, thus, unable to participate in the uprising. The Guangzhou uprising broke out on 27 May 1911, but due to the unfamiliarity of the streets layouts many of the overseas Chinese, (including Vietnamese Chinese), the force was defeated by the Manchu army on 29 May. Among the 72 martyrs of the first official count, there were 10 Vietnamese Chinese whose names were later enshrined in the Huanghuakang Memorial<sup>36</sup>. A further five were added to the list in 1932.<sup>37</sup>

### Concluding Assessment

When Dr. Sun Yat Sen first arrived in Vietnam, he had two intentions, namely to mobilise support from the overseas Chinese in Vietnam to participate in the revolution in China; and to launch revolutionary uprisings in the three southern Chinese provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong via Vietnam. Dr. Sun was extremely successful in his first task, where apart from Zhang Renjie's most generous personal contribution, the Vietnamese Chinese contributed more than 16% of the total sums collected by Dr. Sun's revolutionary movement<sup>38</sup>. Although second only to the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, the Vietnamese Chinese's contribution came much earlier, and also at a crucial time when response from

35. Lu Shipeng, *ibid.*, p. 290.

36. For a list of the ten and other Vietnamese Chinese Martyrs, see Lu Shipeng, *ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

37. *Ibid.*

38. The figure however, was a combination of contributions from Vietnam and Siam. See Lu Shipeng, *ibid.*, p. 292.

other areas including Malaya and Singapore toward Dr Sun's revolutionary movement was still lukewarm, a result of the strong pro-reformist sentiments at these places. Prior to 1908, the Chinese of Vietnam remained to be the most important donors to the Chinese revolution.

In terms of active involvement, the Chinese of Vietnam ranked only second to the many political exiles from China; many also gave their lives to the revolution. The proximity of Vietnam to the southern Chinese border was the main reason behind the Vietnamese Chinese's participations. Nonetheless, the willingness of these overseas Chinese to play a part in bringing about political changes in their ancestral land remained a testimony to their contribution.

There is however, a question over the extent of the involvement of the Vietnamese Chinese who have chosen the path of revolution. Although their contribution was significant, not all Vietnamese Chinese contributed to the revolution. In fact, the pro-revolution group constituted only a small fraction of the total number of Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. Wang Gungwa has argued that like their counterparts in other Southeast Asian countries, where the majority of the Overseas Chinese were particularly faithful to their traditions, clans and associations, the Chinese in Vietnam were fence sitters when it came to the question of nationalism. This overwhelming majority would only react to the call of nationalism when strongly provoked, though their loyalty was unmistakably tilted towards China<sup>39</sup>. So, in the same way, the majority of the Chinese in Vietnam were slow to react to the calls made by the revolutionary movement.

The sensitivity of the French Colonial administration in Vietnam towards revolutionary activities was another reason for the lukewarm response by the majority of the Vietnamese Chinese towards nationalistic movements in China. French colonial administration had the reputation of swift and brutal actions against those who were suspected of political activities, particularly of anti-French nature. This had made many potential supporters for the Chinese revolution to have second thought. While it was undeniable that, without a lenient attitude from

39. Wang Gungwu, "The Limits of Nanyang Nationalism, 1912-1237", in C.D. Cowan & O.W. Wolters (eds), *Southeast Asia History and Historiography: Essays Presented to D.G.E. Hall*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1976, pp. 410-413.

the French Colonial administration, Dr. Sun was not be able to carry out his revolutionary activities in Vietnam. Attempts to keep secret of Dr. Sun's whereabouts or the existence of the revolutionary organisations would be futile under the ever watchful eyes of the Surete' of the French Colonial administration. Most Chinese scholars held the impression that the two Governors General, Paul Doumer and Paul Beau were particularly sympathetic to Dr. Sun and the Chinese revolution. The truth however, proved to be otherwise. While on the one hand, the two Governor General, especially Paul Beau was tolerant to Dr. Sun's activities; on the contrary, as pointed out by Wilbur, he was hoping to capitalise on the presence of the revolutionaries on French Indochina soil to bargain with the Manchu court for concessions in return for the suppression of the revolutionaries. Apart from that, the French administrators in Vietnam "were aware of the potential dangers represented by a modernized China on Vietnam's frontiers. Among them, China could support the Chinese immigrants in Vietnam, or even to Vietnamese nationalists..."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the French policy toward the Chinese revolution was rather ambiguous, but could generally be agreed that France would shift towards any party which could serve French interest in Vietnam and China.

After the formation of the Chinese Republic in 1912, and the political turmoils that ensued in China for many decades, the Vietnamese Chinese maintained a close link with China. Throughout this period, the French Colonial administration made several efforts to curb the influx of Chinese into Vietnam, and to assimilate the Chinese into the Vietnamese community. The cultured and traditional bondage of the Vietnamese Chinese with their ancestral land however, was too strong to be broken. Even though the Chinese in Vietnam no longer played a direct role in the affairs of China as they did prior to the 1911 revolution, China remained to be their focus of attention.

While it was true that the Vietnamese Chinese's role in the 1911 Chinese revolution was only a part of the larger picture of the overseas Chinese participation in that event, it had its own distinct uniqueness for being the largest contributor in terms of manpower for the various uprisings; and for the financial and material contributions at a crucial time when response from other areas were still lacking not

40. Alain G. Marsot, *The Chinese Community*, p. 45.

41. For a detailed study, see Luong Nhi Ky, *The Chinese in Vietnam*

forthcoming. Looking back at the contributions made by the Chinese in Vietnam towards the Chinese revolution, Dr. Sun Yat Sen maintained the stand that the Chinese revolution would have succeeded at a much earlier date had it possessed more revolutionaries like those from Vietnam.