Elites, angi-yi, and Chinese nationalist movements in Bangkok's Chinatown, 1903-1949

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Abstract

Sampheng, the Chinese quarter of Bangkok, was a site of political activity among the overseas Chinese from the early twentieth century until the Chinese revolution in 1949. This article traces the main events and main characters involved. Opposition to the Japanese and secret societies were major tools that Chinese elites in Sampheng used in order to foster Chinese nationalism.

History of Sampheng

In 1782 at the start of the Bangkok period, Sampheng was founded as a town for the overseas Chinese. Its extent covered approximately 1,950 rai along 1.5 miles of Sampheng Road (Piyanart, 1993: 28). Situated on the right bank of the Chaophraya River, Sampheng was a port where Chinese junks unloaded goods and Chinese travelers disembarked to settle. Adjacent to the Royal Palace in the north, Sampheng expanded as far south as the Calvary Church built by the Portuguese, and eastward to the New Road or Charoen Krung Road cut in 1862–4. Sampheng was considered the “Beijing of Siam.” During the reign of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn, Sampheng expanded as more roads were cut and more canals dug (Van Roy, 2006: 40–3).

Sampheng was later called Yaowarat (young prince) after a road cut in 1889 and opened by King Chulalongkorn to celebrate his first Crown Prince Vajirunhis (Piyanart, 1993: 28). It took ten years for Yaowarat Road to be completed. There were many obstacles to the construction of this road, mainly because of land expropriation in the crowded area. The road cut through palaces...
and mansions of rich people who reluctantly allowed the road to go through their land. This made Yaowarat a long winding road, later perceived as shaped like a dragon, and interpreted as an excellent location according to feng-sui.

Apart from being a port for overseas trade in rice, sugar, and pepper, Sampheng was a market, a financial and banking center, transportation hub, and entertainment area with gambling and opium dens, Chinese opera houses, teashops, and prostitution. But one rarely explored aspect of Chinatown was its role as a venue of political and ideological confrontation among the overseas Chinese. This article traces the political activities of the overseas Chinese in Sampheng between 1903 and 1949 in the broader context of politics in China and Siam. The role of overseas Chinese elites, secret societies, and nationalist movements will be analyzed. Events in Sampheng over this period took place against the background of the nationalist movement, civil war, and Japanese aggression in China. The elites and secret societies (ang-yi) were engaged both in nationalist movements and anti-Japanese activities up to the communist revolution of 1949.

Political movements in China and their impact in Siam

At the beginning of the twentieth century, China was under the reign of the weakening Ching Dynasty. The 1911 Xin-Hai revolution against the Ching Dynasty had its origin in earlier years among the overseas Chinese. Since 1903, Sun Yat-sen, a prominent leader of the revolution, had visited countries in Southeast Asia where there were many overseas Chinese to gain support for his revolutionary idea and to arouse nationalism among these people. In 1894, he became a member of the Anti-Ching Dynasty Secret Society in Honolulu (Khien, 2004: 88).

The pro-revolution movement in Siam started in 1906 with the T'ung Meng Hui (TMH) Association, literally meaning “alliance,” a formal grouping of ang-yi which had existed in Chinatown since 1809 (Suppharat, 1985: 70–113). Later, the THM was transformed into the Kuomintang (People's Party, KMT), according to Sun Yat-sen’s policy. At its inception, TMH could raise two hundred members, including Siew Hut-seng, an intellectual from Sampheng.
The TMH played a pivotal role in promoting nationalism and mobilizing funds from the overseas Chinese to support revolutionary activities in China. The Chinese in Vietnam and Siam donated more than 60,000 yuan to TMH in 1907–8 and another 30,000 yuan in 1909. Some went back to China to join the revolutionary war or sent arms to support revolutionary soldiers (Xia Guang, 2003: 12–4).

After the revolution in China in 1911, the movement split into three factions: a warrior group based in Guangdong, a pro-communist group based in Wu Han, and a pro-republican group based in Nanking. Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, his successor, were with the Nanking group. The three factions fought with each other to gain hegemony in the 1920s (Khien, 2004: 99, 107, 120). Also, there was a split between the pro-democracy advocates and the pro-constitutional monarchy supporters among the Chinese activists. Both factions came to Siam to promote their ideologies. Yi Kaw-hong, a Sino-Siamese, supported the constitutional monarchy, and Siew Hut-seng, another Sino-Siamese leader, supported the pro-democracy group (Xia Guang, 2003: 3). However, after the 1911 Revolution, Yi Kaw-hong changed to support the pro-democracy group. Both groups campaigned intensively in Siam and strong nationalistic feelings were aroused among the Sino-Siamese.

The internal politics of China were complicated by the intervention of Japan. The Japanese government decided to protect the last Ching Emperor and established a new capital in Nanjing in 1911. On the revolutionary side, Sun Yat-sen became the temporary president of the Chinese Republic in 1912. He united all branches of TMH into the KMT. The Siamese TMH was thus changed into the KMT Siamese branch with Siew Hut-seng as the president. Sun Yat-sen failed to suppress the warriors led by Yuan Su Kai, who in 1915 appointed himself the new emperor of China with support from Japan. He signed an agreement with Japan which angered the overseas Chinese for being too favorable to the Japanese. Fighting between Sun Yat-sen and other factions continued over 1915 to 1922.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921 by Chinese intellectuals who embraced “biblical socialism, social democracy, anarchism, and various shades of Communism”
(Kisselev 1928 quoted in Rostow 1954). The Society for the Study of Marxism at Peking University played a vital role in this movement (Rostow 1954: 18–9). Members of the CCP came to Siam in 1923. Hainanese were active in the activities of the CCP in Siam. The arrival of the CCP split the Sino-Siamese into pro-KMT and pro-CCP groups (Xia Guang, 2003: 26).

To revive the KMT in China, Sun Yat-sen in 1922 invited CCP members to join the KMT. However, after Sun Yat-sen’s death in 1925, the cooperation became minimal. Some Sino-Siamese intellectuals started to be interested in communism. A second pro-communism branch of the KMT was opened in Siam in 1924 (Xia Guang, 2003: 33).

Conflicts between China and Japan continued. In 1925, 35,000 Chinese workers in twenty-one Japanese cotton factories in Shanghai went on strike because Japanese foremen hit female Chinese workers. British policemen shot to death ten protesters in Shanghai and fifty-two protesters in Guangzhou. Overseas Chinese in Siam were incensed by the news. Some Chinese laborers and Chinese newspapers in Bangkok started to react to British employers. The Siamese government controlled the situation by ordering the closure of three Chinese newspapers. The government suspected the second branch of the KMT was involved in the agitation, and some leaders were deported to China in 1927.

In China, the KMT and CCP separated in 1926, as determined by Chiang Kai-shek, the new KMT leader. The KMT could defeat the warrior faction but continued to fight with the communists. The Siamese KMT also eliminated pro-communist members.

The 1928 Jinan massacre, when Japanese troops killed more than 6,000 Chinese in Shandong, and women were raped and villagers robbed by Japanese soldiers, swelled the anti-Japanese movement. Overseas Chinese in Siam held large rallies against the Japanese. The “Blood and Iron” ang-yi organized a boycott of Chinese businessmen who continued to trade with the Japanese in Siam (Xia Guang, 2003: 45).

In the following year, at the cremation of Sun Yat-sen, overseas Chinese wanted to hoist the revolutionary flag at half-mast, but the Siamese government was suspicious about the political motivation of the KMT and the Bangkok Chinese Club. It declared that the
two bodies were not registered under Siamese law and could not conduct any political activities including hoisting a flag. However, the KMT insisted that all Chinese should hoist the Chinese flag at half-mast and organized a gathering at the Bangkok Chinese Club to mourn Sun Yat-sen. Police were sent to disrupt the mourning, and KMT branches were raided. Members of the KMT had to go underground. In 1931, Siew Hut-seng decided to join the southern (anti Chiang Kai-shek) group of the KMT in China.

The anti-Japanese movement became active again in 1931 after Japan invaded northeast China and established Pu Yi as the emperor in March 1932. This time, the anti-Japanese movement in Siam was led by the pro-communist and the nationalist Chinese (Xia Guang, 2003: 49–51). The pro-communist group was more active. Trade unions, youth groups, women groups, and Chinese schools were associated with the communist branch in Siam. Many of the communists were Hainanese and some of them were from upcountry. The Siamese government tried to suppress the Chinese communists and deported many of them. Between 1930 and 1936, Chinese and Vietnamese communists in Siam founded the Siamese Communist Party, resulting in the Communist Suppression Act in 1933. In 1932, overseas Chinese in Siam hoisted the Chinese flag to celebrate a victory against Japanese troops in Shanghai. They also attacked Japanese shops in Bangkok. Between 1932 and 1936, the government tried to suppress both the KMT and the communists.

In China, Chiang Kai-shek did not want to cooperate with the CCP against the Japanese but was forced by other KMT members. In 1935, the Chinese in Siam conducted a broad anti-Japanese movement and a strike for forty days. Anti-Japanese ang-yi had more than 100,000 members (Xia Guang, 2003: 80–1). The Chaozhou Association of Siam and the Po Tek Tung Foundation were also founded during this period.

**Legal status of the overseas Chinese in Siam**

While China changed from absolute monarchy to a democratic republic in 1911, Siam remained a monarchy. King Vajiravudh was aware of the change in China and the nationalistic feeling among the overseas Chinese in Siam. He rightly considered the Chinese
nationalist movement and overseas Chinese allegiance to China as a threat to the throne (Supang, 1997: 245). In early 1910, a week-long protest against an increase in taxes on the Chinese had resulted in people in inner Bangkok having nothing to eat because they depended heavily on Chinese merchants, shops, and markets for their daily consumption. King Vajiravudh wrote a series of articles in his own newspaper criticizing the Chinese in Siam.

Two leaders in Sampheng

Yi Kaw-hong

Yi Kaw-hong became rich from tax-farms on gambling dens and lotteries. He was a Portuguese subject by legal status. His real name was Tae Ti-Yong, of the Tae clan from Chaozhou, born in the Chinatown of Bangkok in 1851. He was well respected by the Chinese in Sampheng, partly because of the benevolent protection and assistance he gave to his compatriots, and partly because of his power as the founder of the ang-yi called Sa Tiam (meaning three scores). Yi Kaw-hong meant Second Big Brother Hong, leaving the identity of the First Big Brother unknown. Sa Tiam was set up in 1911 in order to mobilize nationalistic feelings among the overseas Chinese in Siam mainly against the Japanese who had invaded China since 1904.

Yi Kaw-hong led the Chinese community in Sampheng to set up a quality Chinese school called Pei-Ing and a hospital called Tien Fa or Tien Hua to function as social welfare for Chinese not covered under the welfare systems of that time. Later, he set up a steamship company to operate between Siam, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. At that time, German companies, especially Windsor-Rose and Markwald, dominated the shipping routes and charged passengers and client a high cost, making Chinese traders in Siam (in Sampheng in particular) feel exploited. After some years of fierce competition with the Germans, the company failed, Yi Kaw-hong went bankrupt, and his community leadership was finished. He lived a quiet life until his death in 1935.

Siew Hut-seng

Siew Hut-seng was of Fujian background. His father lived in
Malacca and married a local wife, making Siew Hut-seng a “ba-ba” (half Chinese, half Malay). His parents moved from Malacca to do business in Bangkok. Unlike Yi Kaw-hong, Siew Hut-seng was an intellectual rather than a trader. He was born in 1863 and attended school in Malacca and Siam. In 1907 he set up a printing house and issued a Chinese newspaper called Hua Siam Sin Po in Sampheng. When King Vajiravudh used the pen-name “Asvabahu” to attack the overseas Chinese in Siam as “Jews of the East” and questioned their allegiance to Siam, Siew Hut-seng replied through Chino-Siam Warasap, the Thai version of his newspaper, arguing that the overseas Chinese were loyal to Siam but had to assist their homeland when it was in trouble. The debate continued for some years. Siew Hut-seng’s newspaper was closed down by the government in 1930.

Siew Hut-seng was also involved in setting up the overseas Chinese Club of Bangkok or Tong Hua Huay Kwan, located in Sampheng. It served as a welcoming place for many VIP Chinese visitors including Sun Yat-sen. Siew Hut-seng started to support Sun Yat-sen and the KMT in 1903. He coordinated with Sun Yat-sen on the latter’s four visits to Bangkok and arranged for him to give a speech in Chinatown in 1908. Siew Hut-seng started as an intellectual Chinese nationalist, became a pro-revolution and pro-republican with the KMT, and later transformed into a pro-communist activist using his newspaper to support the Siam Communist Party. He was appointed head of the KMT in Siam in 1924, and president of the Overseas Department in 1926. He did not attend the cremation ceremony of Sun Yat-sen in 1928. In 1931, he became a member of the Central Committee of Guangdong Province and a member of the KMT (Southern Faction). After five years in China, he returned to Siam in 1936 and lived a quiet life until his death in 1939.

Nationalist movements and ang-yi in Sampheng, 1911–49

Nationalist movements

The Chinese nationalist movement started in Sampheng in the early twentieth century. The Chinese Club of Bangkok was the center of the movement. Raising donations from overseas Chinese
in Sampheng was the major activity of the movement at the beginning. Money was sent to China to assist the army to fight against the Japanese. Yi Kaw-hong donated as much as 50,000 yuan for the Club (Penpisut, 2004: 83). Donations from all Southeast Asia were as high as a million yuan. In this same year, Sun Yat-sen visited Siam for the first time and met with Siew Hut-seng in Sampheng. They discussed how overseas Chinese in Siam could support the revolution in China.


In 1912, there was a split between the two leaders. Siew Hut-seng expressed his support for the KMT while Yi Kaw-hong supported the Ching dynasty (Penpisut, 2004: 149). Siew Hut-seng tried to get rid of his rival by recommending to the Siamese government to confiscate Yi Kaw-hong’s assets which led to his bankruptcy. After that, Siew Hut-seng became more powerful intellectually and politically among the overseas Chinese. When the conflict between China and Japan exacerbated during the 1920s, nationalist feelings again united the overseas Chinese against Japan.

The tradition of flag-raising to express Chinese identity started in 1912 when shops and schools in Sampheng hoisted the republican national flag to celebrate the victory of the KMT revolution (Penpisut, 2004: 78). The Siamese court considered this showed that the overseas Chinese in Sampheng had no allegiance to Siam. In the same year, hundreds of Chinese cut their pigtails as a symbol of liberation from the Ching dynasty after the victory of the Revolution. The Chinese Club of Bangkok and Chinese schools urged Chinese in Sampheng to hoist the Chinese flags on various important occasions: at half-mast to commemorate the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925; to celebrate the (incorrect) news that the Chinese army had defeated the Japanese at Shanghai in 1932; and to decorate schools with Chinese flags on Chinese Nationalist Day in 1934. Flag-raising emphasized the estrangement between the overseas Chinese and the Siamese Thai (Supang, 1997: 247).
Sun Yat-sen’s speech and its implications

Sun Yat-sen visited Siam four times—in 1903, 1906, early 1908, and November 1908. On 11 December 1908, he gave a speech in a lane near Sri Ratchawong theatre on Yaowarat Road (Xia Kuang, 2003: 6–10). Siew Hut-seng arranged the venue. In this famous speech, Sun Yat-sen criticized the Ching government and called on the patriotism of the overseas Chinese.

I have read from the *Siam Observer* newspaper that the Chinese in Siam suffer a lot as the lowest rank of people in society. The [Siamese] government is not concerned about their well-being. It uses violent measures against the Chinese. I am sorry to learn about this. Are we that low-ranked that it treats us like this? [Siamese] newspaper also mock us. We are here in large numbers. We must think about such disdainful attitudes. [In the past] the poor Chinese were laborers in many countries in the world. They worked hard to make savings and finally could set up big businesses. This proved our ability and our intelligence. Many destination countries of overseas Chinese prospered economically because of us. But then, they became aware of our power and became unfriendly with us. We should consider why our own government could not protect us and save us from this undesirable situation. Some of us still think positively about this inefficient [Ching] government.

If we are united, we can have strength to negotiate with other nations [where we live]. Why should we let them control us like this? Some Chinese might think that it is not our business to raise the issue. Actually, if we are smart we have to consider how we can regain our freedom from the governments of destination countries just as the Westerners did in China. It seems that the British were born to be masters but the Chinese to be slaves. The fact that our government and our people do not have such a notion has led our nation to be under Western domination and to be looked down upon by them. Japan is a small country. But it did not let the Western countries dominate it. Thus, it is our duty to restore our nation. (My translation)

The Siamese government was very concerned about this speech which was considered to be a direct challenge to the monarchy. King Vajiravudh’s representative went directly to discuss with the American consulate in Bangkok to pressure Sun Yat-sen (an
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American subject, born in Hawaii) to leave Siam immediately. Under pressure from the consulate, Sun Yat-sen promised to leave within seven days, but then asked to stay until the end of December. Finally, he left after staying for twenty-three days in Bangkok, leaving behind a strong feeling of patriotism among the overseas Chinese in Siam.

Ang-yi

Ang-yi or triads had been active in Sampheng since 1809 under the cover of neighborhood clubs, clan associations, occupational guilds, and religious cults (Van Roy, 2008: 9). Originally they gave their members social support including employment and housing, and acted as mutual aid groups called Tua-hia meaning “elder brother” (Baffie, 2007: 11–4). But many later engaged in racketeering and turned into gangs, leading to gang warfare between the Taechiu and the Hokkian ang-yi in 1889 (Van Roy, 2008: 15). The Secret Societies Act of 1897 required all Chinese association leaders to be registered.

Despite the Siamese authorities’ efforts, at least thirty ang-yi lodges were operating in Bangkok in 1903: thirteen Taechiu, two Hakka, eight Cantonese, and seven Hainanese with two-thirds of them located in Sampheng (Piyanart, 1993: 31–2 cited in Van Roy 2008: 16). In 1910, the Siamese government increased the alien tax imposed on the overseas Chinese. The triads organized a general strike and closed down Sampheng. The protest lasted three days and military units were brought in to calm the situation. Strike leaders were deported and protesters were imprisoned. The role of ang-yi as protesters or rioters became known to the Siamese authorities.

In 1925, a large-scale strike by Chinese laborers and members of ang-yi took place in Sampheng. This time, it was against the Japanese and also British employers in Siam who adopted strict and exploitative labor measures with Chinese workers (Murashima, 1996: 3). The strike was part of an anti-Japanese movement. The ang-yi “Blood and Iron” was established in 1924 to kill Chinese traders who disagreed with the anti-Japanese movement and continued to trade with the Japanese. This ang-yi was pro-communism and the Chinese communist movement in Siam was
started in the same year. Two Chinese schools in Sampheng and one Chinese newspaper became centers of the communist movement. A committee was set up later. It was not clear who were members of the movement but Siew Hut-seng was supposed to be one of the founders (Murashima, 1996: 4–8).

Anti-Japanese feelings, nationalism, and communist ideology were mixed up in the perceptions of many overseas Chinese in Sampheng.

The Special Committee in Siam of the Chinese South Sea Communist Party was set up in 1929. Members of the Party were spread all over the central part of Siam, not only in Sampheng. During 1929 and 1930 members were arrested in Uttaradit, Ayutthaya, and Phetchaburi for distributing leaflets. Most were laborers and many were Hainanese (Murashima 1996: 80–103). This pro-communism movement marked the second wave of nationalist and anti-Japanese movements. The Jinan massacre in 1928 aroused a strong feeling of hatred towards the Japanese. The overseas Chinese used Chinese newspapers, posters, and leaflets to promote a boycott of the Japanese. In 1932, there was a second massive strike by Chinese laborers led by triads, and over a hundred strikers were arrested by the police.

The ang-yi played a significant role. Two pro-communist ang-yi, Khang Lian and Shae Khang, were established in 1935 and 1939 respectively and used severe measures against Chinese traders who did not follow their guidance. They considered those who continued to trade with the Japanese as "traitors." Khang Lian injured seven Chinese traders for such reason in 1937. It sent letters requiring the "traitors" to make public apologies in the Chinese press and pay fines (Murashima, 1996: 128–9). In 1939, Shae Khang killed a Chinese banker who had given a loan to the Japanese. In revenge, the son of the banker ordered the assassination of the chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Murashima 1996: 137). Altogether during 1939 and 1940, sixty-one Chinese traders were killed by the ang-yi (Murashima 1996: 142). After 1932, the new political regime decided to suppress all the Chinese secret societies, and to close down all Chinese newspapers and Chinese schools in Siam. A number of politically active Chinese were deported. The traditional
ang-yi started to disappear from Chinatown. Yet in 1944, Kang Lian set up an armed group called Min Sian to enforce measures against the Japanese (Murashima, 1996: 132). All open political activities in Chinatown terminated after the communist victory in China in 1949, and the active role of the ang-yi diminished.

Discussion

Chinese immigrants created their own social networks in Chinatown. Businesses were based on clan informal associations and secret societies. New arrivals were organized as low-wage workers by the ang-yi. Newspapers and Chinese temples in Sampheng confirmed Sampheng as an ethnic enclave similar to the Cuban enclave in the United States:

...the [Cuban] enclave consists of business located in and around Miami that are owned and operated by Cuban entrepreneurs.... The existence of a large, concentrated Cuban population creates a demand for specialized cultural products and services that Cuban entrepreneurs are uniquely qualified to fill.... Immigrants working in the enclave are apparently willing to trade low wages upon arrival for a greater chance of advancement and independence later on. This implicit contract between employers and workers stems from the norm of ethnic solidarity, which suffuses and support the enclave. (Massey et al., 1994: 718–19)

Both tycoons and laborers played a role in the consolidation of the community. Rich tycoons like Yi Kaw-hong and intellectuals like Siew Hut-seng played the role of elites who could bargain with the Siamese authorities because of their economic power. They were also influential in Sampheng due to their provision of welfare to compatriots. Nonetheless, Chinese elites competed among themselves for dominant roles. The laborers were poor but numerous. They came under the protection of their rich compatriots and joined in the Chinese nationalist movements led by the elites. Sampheng became a fully fledged Chinatown with its own social institutions and leadership. Both before and after 1932, the Siamese state promoted official nationalism in part against the overseas Chinese. Finally the Chinese were forced to be assimilated into Thai society while retaining multiple identities (Supang, 1997: 245–9). First, they shifted from a historical-cultural identity
towards a more Chinese nationalist oriented one. Then, after the changing political circumstances in Siam in 1932 and in China in 1949, they downplayed overt Chineseness. As a result of outside pressures, and the need for a close relationship with the state, the line between what is Chinese and what is indigenous became increasingly blurred (McVey, 1992: 20). As a result, the overseas Chinese in Siam developed a three-tiered identity: a secret Chinese nationalist identity; an overt Thai nationalist identity; and a Chinese ethnic and cultural identity.

The *ang-yi* and opposition to the Japanese were the two tools that Chinese elites used in order to create Chinese nationalism. After 1911, the Japanese was presented as the national enemy of all Chinese due to their interference in China's internal politics, while the British were demoted to a subsidiary role in the pantheon of enemies.

The *ang-yi* initially acted as a type of trade union that provided informal welfare such as paying for the defense of Chinese suspects in lawsuits or looking after those who were in jail (Loetphanitkun, 2525: 5, cited in Baffle, 2007: 15). Later they developed into political associations. T'ung Meng Hui (1905) and Khang Lian (1935) were examples of this type. The Siamese authorities feared that these *ang-yi* would provide an excuse for Western powers to take over the country (Baffle, 2007: 18–9). Using their mafia type power, the *ang-yi* forced the Siam-based Chinese to conform to their anti-Japanese strategies. Disobedience meant death. Later the *ang-yi* became involved with the pro-communist movement in Siam, and engaged more in underground or grey activities.

In early times, the main divisions among Chinese were dictated by origin, i.e., by clan or dialect group or village of origin. Clan and dialect groups provided a social safety net for new arrivals. As a result, Chinatown could be mapped into Taechiu, Hokkien, Hakka, and Guangdong quarters, each with its own temple. For example, San Jao Rong Geurk Nang was located in the Hakka quarter to the south near Talat Noi. However, the original groupings by dialect group became less apparent in the 1910s when a Chinese hospital was founded to treat Chinese from all dialect groups and when all Chinese schools taught in Mandarin. Simultaneously, the first Chinese nationalist movement started in
Sampheng. The movement amalgamated the different dialect groups into a single Chinese nation. Later factionalization followed political and ideological rather than social cleavages. Some conservative Chinese tycoons like Yi Kaw-hong were still in favor of constitutional monarchy while intellectuals like Siew Hut-seng preferred republicanism. After republicanism triumphed, communism appeared to act as another source of political division. The suppression of communists in China in the mid 1920s dispersed activists from China into Southeast Asia including Siam. Consequently, Sampheng became a site of ideological confrontation. Hainanese, who were fewer in number than Taechiu and also on average poorer, were in the forefront of the communist faction and its strikes and boycotts. They put posters and leaflets on walls in Sampheng. The composition of various ang-yi by dialect group is not known, but the Hainanese probably formed a majority of their members. Sampheng has seen a transformation from ethnic solidarity to ideological factionalism (Van Roy, 2008: 22).

Though the overseas Chinese might split into different ideological groups, they always reunited at times of intense nationalism. After 1948, when China became a communist country, Sampheng ceased to be a political hub. Rather than joining political factions, overseas Chinese who could not contact their relatives in China prayed at temples asking the gods and goddesses to protect their loved ones in Thailand. The elites, the ang-yi and the nationalist movements faded away from Sampheng.

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Chronology of political activities among the overseas Chinese in the Chinatown of Bangkok, 1903–1949

1903  Sun Yat-sen first visit to Siam
1904  Sun Yat-sen met Yi Kaw hong in his second visit to Sampheng and invited him to join the T'ung Meng Hui movement which was officially set up in 1906
1906  T'ung Meng Hui Siamese branch was set up by Sun Yat-sen
1908  Sun Yat-sen gave a speech at Chinese club of Bangkok.
1911 (10 Oct)  The Revolutionary Movement won and set up the Nanjing government.
1911  Yi Kaw-hong, a Portuguese subject born in Siam, started the ang-yi Sa Tiam against the Japanese.
1910  Siamese government increased the tax for aliens. overseas Chinese protested by conducting a strike, 1–5 June.
1911  Yi Kaw-hong donated 50,000 yuan to the Chinese Club.
1911  Siew Hut-seng started to support Sun Yat-sen and KMT.
1912  Siew Hut-seng reported to the government about Yi Kaw-hong and proposed to confiscate the latter's assets.
1912  Split in ideologies between two Chinese leaders: Siew Hut-seng supported the republican revolution (T'ung Meng Hui), Yi Kaw-hong supported the Ching dynasty (at the beginning).
1916,  Three boycotts of Japanese products by Chinese traders and
1919, blacklisting of five disobeying traders in Sampheng.
1923
1916 Convert gambling den into Chinese opera house in Sampheng.
1924 Siam communist movement started.
   "Blood and Iron" pro-communist angi-yi set up.
1925 Strike against Japanese and English companies by Chinese laborers.
1929 Establishment of the South Sea Communist Party Special Committee in Siam. Most members were Hainanese laborers. Distribution of leaflets and arrest by Thai police.
1931 Siew Hut-seng's house and newspaper closed.
1932 Strike against Japanese started in Sam Yaek and spread through Yaowarat. More than a hundred laborers were arrested by Thai police.
1932 Chinese schools hoisted the flag of Chinese Revolution to celebrate the victory after the Japanese was defeated.
1936 Siamese Chinese split into two groups: Siew Hut-seng, Western group, pro-communist; Tan Siu Meng, Central group, pro-republican KMT.
1935 Ang-yi Kang Lian was established as a secret organization to protest Japanese and promote Chinese nationalism.
1935 Distribution of leaflets in front of a cinema Nam Sae in Yaowarat.
Oct 1937 Seven Chinese traders were injured by the ang-yi that sent letters of warning, demanding traders to publish their apologies in the Chinese newspaper and pay fines to the society for violating to trade with Japanese
Feb 1938 Siamese government started to arrest ang-yi members
Aug 1939 A Chinese banker was killed by ang-yi Sae Khang. Hia Kwang Iam (Chairman of Chinese Chamber of Commerce) was suspected to be the leader of Sae Khang.
Nov 1939 Hia Kwang Iam was assassinated by a gunman hired by the banker's son.
Oct 1939 Another Chinese businessman was shot dead. He was from Lamsam family
1939-40 61 Chinese businessmen were killed by the secret societies.
Phibun announced that secret societies must be suppressed. Members of Chinese Communist Party were sent to teach in Chinese schools in Sampheng and upcountry. They used schools as the base of their ideological propaganda.

Kang Lian established Min Sian as an armed group to enforce anti-Japanese measures.

China changed into a communist regime.