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Governing the Chinese in multi-ethnic colonial Burma between the 1890s and 1920s¹

Yi Li

Abstract: This article analyses the development of the governing mechanism in British Burma relating to one particular ethnic group, the Chinese, between the 1890s and 1920s. Recognizing its limited knowledge of China and the Chinese, British Burma relied in the early days on experiences from other colonies to govern its Chinese immigrants and to handle Sino-Burmese border issues. The transfer of colonial knowledge, however, proved insufficient when the state witnessed increasing localization at the turn of the twentieth century. Interlocutors and communal elites therefore replaced imperial expatriates to form the main governing body, and in turn to some extent undermined and reconstructed colonial knowledge, as well as practice.

Keywords: colonialism; migration; overseas Chinese; Burma; British India

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After three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824–26, 1852 and 1885), the Kingdom of Burma was annexed. It became a province of British India in 1886, and its multi-ethnic indigenous and migrating populace became the subjects of the British monarchy. Like other contemporary European colonies in South East Asia, colonial Burma was a destination for Chinese emigrants. Chinese connections with what was to be British Burma arguably started at least two millennia before.² The frontier between northern Burma and south-west China, situated at the heart of ‘Zomia’ with ‘distinct social configurations’ and ‘transnational flows’,³ has witnessed multi-ethnic

¹ Much of the research for this article was conducted during my PhD studies at SOAS between 2007 and 2012. I thank Michael Charney for his supervision and encouragement. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

² According to *Han Shu*, in circa 129 BCE, a Han envoy to Central Asia found south-west Chinese products – cloth and bamboo sticks – in local markets, which had been imported from India. Ban Gu (1962), *Han Shu*, 61: *Zhangqian Liguangli Zhuan* [Book of Han, Vol 61: Biographies of Zhang Qian and Li Guangli], Zhonghua Shuju, Beijing. This suggests the existence of an overland trade route linking India and China, very possibly via Burma. Sino-Burmese interaction was not confined to the frontier, and excavations of Chinese ceramics of the second millennium along the southern ports and coastal towns attest to the maritime connection between China and southern Burma. See, for instance, Maurice Collis (1935–36), ‘Fresh light on the route taken by export porcelains from China to India and the Near East during the Ming period’, *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, Vol 13, pp 9–29; Pamela Gutman (2001), ‘The Martaban trade: an examination of the literature from the seventh century until the eighteenth century’, *Asian Perspectives*, Vol 40, No 1, pp 108–118.

³ Willem van Schendel (2002), ‘Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 20, pp 647–668.

interactions ever since.⁴ However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century, when the region of South East Asia (including British Burma) was brought under European colonial rule, that it experienced significant waves of Chinese immigration (mainly from present-day Fujian and Guangdong provinces along the southern coast) to Nanyang (the 'South Sea' in Chinese). Despite being located at the western periphery of Nanyang, the Chinese migrant community in Burma provides a distinctive case for our understanding of the Chinese diaspora in South East Asia as well as of colonial policies and imperial advances in Asia. Unfortunately, scholars have yet to pay due attention to the colonial experience of the Burmese Chinese, apart from a small and fragmentary body of works by post-war researchers.⁵ This has remained a missing link for historians of Burma, of the British Empire and of modern South East Asia, as well as for other social scientists who are interested in migration, diaspora and ethnicity; and last but not least, for scholars of Chinese overseas studies. My intention in this paper is to initiate an improvement in the current situation and pave the way for future investigations in this under-studied field. The paper also calls for a better recognition of, and a fuller examination of, primary sources in Burmese, Chinese and English languages, now scattered in British, Myanmar and Chinese archives.

The Burma case provides several unique insights, thanks to the country's geographical location at the junction of South, East and South East Asia. Throughout the colonial era, Chinese immigrants had been overwhelmingly outnumbered by their Indian counterparts because of the easy access from Bengal, the Coromandel coast and other South Asian ports to Burma, and the administrative framework that situated Burma under the India Office. Census data between 1891 and 1911 show that about half of the population of Rangoon was born in India. Of the entire population in Burma in the same period, about 4% were born in India and between 0.3% and 0.6% in China.⁶ This was in sharp contrast to the situation in British Malaya, the Straits Settlements, Dutch East India and Siam, where the Chinese were an absolutely dominating force commercially, if not demographically. Furthermore, the millennium-long caravan routes and a long border with south-west China meant that the Chinese in Burma, together with their counterparts in French Indochina, could maintain an overland connection. The Burmese Chinese thus had an opportunity to assume both overseas and overland links reaching

⁴ For the region's multi-ethnic dynamics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see C. Patterson Giersch (2006), *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

⁵ One of the earliest studies is Victor Purcell (1965), *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 2 ed, Oxford University Press, London. It has one chapter dedicated to Burma. Notable studies on this subject by post-war Myanmar and Chinese scholars, often with a specific focus, include Chen Yi-Sein (1966), 'The Chinese in Rangoon during the 18th and 19th centuries', *Artibus Asiae, Supplementum*, Vol 23; 'Essays Offered to G.H. Luce by His Colleagues and Friends in Honour of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday', Vol 1: Papers on Asian Religion, Languages, Literature, Music Folklore, and Anthropology, pp 107–111; U Thaw Kaung (2004), 'Preliminary survey of Penang–Myanmar relations from mid-19th to mid-20th centuries', in *Selected Writings of U Thaw Kaung*, Historical Commission, Yangon, pp 163–186; Yin Wenhe (2003), *Yunnan Heshun Qiaoxiangshi Gaishu* [A Brief History of Yunnan Heshun Village as Homeland of the Overseas Chinese], Yunnan Meishu Chubanshe, Kunming.

⁶ Government of India (1892), *Government of India Census 1891, IX, Burma Report*, Government Printing, Rangoon; Government of India (1902), *Census of India, 1901, XII, Burma*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Rangoon; Government of India (1912), *Census of India, 1911, IX, Burma*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Rangoon.

out into three major Asian regions, which had been strategic sites of European colonial expansion from at least the eighteenth century onwards.

This article examines the development of British Burma's governance over the migrating Chinese,⁷ an ethnic minority and non-indigenous community, in a multi-ethnic colonial state in nineteenth and twentieth century South East Asia. It investigates a period between the 1890s – when colonial rule had recently been established and power was still under consolidation – and the 1920s, when the Diarchy, an India-initiated political reform programme encouraging local participation, was applied in Burma. This 30-year period, between the final annexation and the height of the Burmese nationalist movements, was a period when the colonial government, by and large, enjoyed sufficient resources and domestic stability to concentrate on the governance of its multi-ethnic subjects. Over these three decades, the official position went through three distinct phases involving: the Adviser on Chinese Affairs, whose office-bearer was a British expatriate with considerable experience in China; the Examiner in Chinese, whose office-bearer was familiar with Burmese, Chinese and English cultural protocols but could hardly claim a true belonging to any; and a Chinese Advisory Board that was made up of elite Chinese merchants and professionals in Rangoon, the centre of the Chinese community in Burma, hence representing the Burmese Chinese in general.

The close relationship between the formation and dissemination of knowledge, and colonial powers in South East Asian colonies, has been examined in the case of French Cambodia and the Philippines under American rule,⁸ both of which indicate influences from recent scholarship of 'cultural construction of Empire'.⁹ Likewise, colonial governance in British Burma has also been scrutinized through the colonial regime's manipulation of textual, material and bodily knowledge in a less coercive style, sometimes as imaginary notions, and often intertwining with existing, indigenous perceptions.¹⁰ This article furthers this approach to unearth the root of colonial Burma's knowledge of its Chinese subjects, as reflected through the changing administrative mechanism.

The change of practice was closely linked with the development of colonial knowledge on China and the Chinese. The long history of the British acquisition of knowledge on China and the Chinese is another example that uses information-collecting as an integrated part of 'any "centralization" of military and fiscal resources' and 'useful adjuncts to power and legitimation'¹¹ to maintain the Empire.

⁷ When referring to the Chinese in British Burma, this author includes the Chinese who migrated from Yunnan, Fujian and Guangdong with significant regional differences and internal competitions.

⁸ The construction of an 'Original Khmer' through French colonial institutions is examined by Penny Edwards (2007), *Cambodge, the Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, HI; and the cultural influences on US policies in the Philippines by Anne Foster (2010), *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919–1941*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

⁹ Foster, *supra* note 8, at p 12.

¹⁰ Maitrii Aung-Thwin (2011), *The Return of the Galon King: History, Law, and Rebellion in Colonial Burma*, Ohio University Press, Athens, OH; Atsuko Naono (2009), *State of Vaccination: the Fight against Smallpox in Colonial Burma*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad; Chie Ikeya (2011), *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, HI; Jonathan Saha (2013), *Law, Disorder and the Colonial State: Corruption in Burma, c.1900*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

¹¹ C.A. Bayly (1993), 'Knowing the country: empire and information in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 27, No 1 (Special Issue: How Social, Political and Cultural Information is Collected, Defined, Used and Analyzed), p 5.

Along with coastal China, South East Asia was an accessible field for the British to gather first-hand information on the Chinese in the early years of the Sino-British encounters.¹² As this article will show, Burma, albeit a late entry to the Empire, made its due contribution to, as well as benefited from, this Empire-wide knowledge-sharing. Both the colonial experiences in and beyond the country and the local input from the subject community helped to make colonial rule possible, if not efficient.

The development of colonial knowledge is, at the same time, the formation of a community 'distinguished by the style in which they are imagined',¹³ or by how it was governed, in this case. Instead of investigating the institutional composition from within the overseas Chinese community,¹⁴ its relationship with outside actors¹⁵ or its location in a transnational network,¹⁶ this paper sets out to understand the Burmese Chinese community in the context of a multi-ethnic colonial state, which was itself located in a closely knit intra- and inter-imperial network integrating metropolis, dominions and colonies. The notion of a colonial state as an administrative entity had as much impact on the community as it had on officials in Rangoon, Calcutta and London. Consequently, the 'Burmese Chinese' community, with all of its internal factions and variations originating before and during the colonial era, firmly established itself in Burmese society and lasted well after the period under this study.

Like their counterparts in other South East Asian countries, the Burmese Chinese tended to concentrate in urban centres, especially the provincial capital of Rangoon. They largely came from the three major provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Yunnan. While the Yunnanese historically resided in Mandalay and Upper Burma, and the Hokkien and the Cantonese in Rangoon and the Delta, there were plenty of exceptions to this common notion. Likewise, the Burmese nicknames *leq-she* (long-sleeves) for the Hokkiens, and *leq-to* (short-sleeves) for the Cantonese, indicating the former's involvement in trade and the latter's in artisanship and manual labour,¹⁷ also constituted an inaccurate, if widely accepted, generalization.

Governing the Chinese was not a completely unfamiliar issue in British Burma

¹² Ulrike Hillemann (2009), *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

¹³ Benedict Anderson (1991), *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, p 6.

¹⁴ For classic works on Chinese diaspora studies, see, for instance, Anthony Reid, ed (1996), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: in Honour of Jennifer Cushman*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards; Wang Gungwu (1991), *China and Chinese Overseas*, Times Academic Press, Singapore; Wang Gungwu (1981), *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, published for the Asian Studies Association of Australia by Heinemann Educational Books (Asia), Singapore.

¹⁵ For instance, Paul Siu (1987), *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, New York University Press, New York.

¹⁶ Adam McKeown (1999), 'Conceptualising Chinese diasporas, 1842 to 1949', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 58, No 2, pp 306–337.

¹⁷ For detailed discussion of these norms and their implications, see Chen Yi-Sein (2004), 'Guoqu Sangeshiji (Sanbainian) Qijian Zai Miandian de Guangduongren' [The Cantonese in Burma over the past three centuries], in *Yangguang Guangdong Gongsi (Guanyin Gumiao) 179 Zhounian ji Chongxiu Luocheng Jinian Tekan [Special Memorial Edition for the 179th Anniversary of the Rangoon Cantonese Company (the Ancient Temple of Guanyin) and its Renovation]*, Yangon, p 111. However, an alternative explanation is suggested by some Burmese speakers with Chinese ancestry: the 'long-sleeves' stands for the outdoor workers, the Cantonese, who wore long sleeves as a protection from possible damage caused by the sun (a type of 'sun-block' costume); and the 'short-sleeves' stands for the indoor clerks, the Hokkien, who wore a minimum of clothes to keep cool in a tropical country.

from the very beginning. In Tenasserim, one of the first two Burmese territories under British rule, the first two Commissioners, A.D. Maingy (1825–34) and E.A. Blundell (1834–43), both had experience of working in the nearby British settlement, Prince of Wales Island (Penang), where an established Chinese community was already thriving and had close connections with its counterpart in Tenasserim. On one unsuccessful occasion in the 1830s, Maingy considered importing over 150 Chinese as traders and miners through a ‘very respectable Chinaman’,¹⁸ an agent in Penang, by paying him a handsome advance. For a short period, Maingy also managed an opium farm in Moulmein to supply the drug to the Chinese labourers working in the tin mines in southern Tenasserim.¹⁹ Overall, earlier British administrators were preoccupied by other pressing issues such as governing (for the first time) Tenasserim’s indigenous population, rather than its limited number of Asian and European immigrants, and managing an uneasy relationship with Calcutta from this new outpost of the Empire. Consequently, dealing with the Chinese might not have been a priority during the first years of British rule in southern Burma. This was soon to change after two more wars between Britain and Burma, and the final annexation.

Between the 1890s and 1920s, the issue faced by British Burma relating to China and the Chinese demonstrated two distinct areas of interest: one concerned with external expansion along the Sino-Burmese border, and the other regarding internal order when dealing with the migrating Chinese population. The focus of the first two parts of this article is on the evolution of a designated government position in charge of Burma’s Chinese affairs as an institutional interface between the colonial administration and the subject community. Holders of this high-ranking position often exerted control coercively, particularly on issues related to border security and imperial expansion. The change of office-bearers from British expatriates to local interlocutors, however, indicated an irreversible trend towards political localization when negative reception from the subject community was mounting. From the turn of the twentieth century onwards, concern about the border declined. New governing procedures were introduced to pay more attention to the local situation, often seeking cooperation from within the community, and the community was allowed more space on the political stage of the colony. This was in parallel with the persistent internal competitions within the community, who divided themselves by, among others, hometowns, occupations, and increasingly in the twentieth century, political outlooks based on contemporary domestic politics in China. Nevertheless, in response to colonial policy-changing, the Burmese Chinese community, previously a passive observer, found a new opportunity to participate in colonial politics and facilitate the creation of its own communal (and intra-communal) images. This communal cooperation and conflict will be discussed in the last part of the paper.

The Adviser on Chinese Affairs

A permanent post to deal with China and the Chinese, the ‘Adviser on Chinese Affairs’ in Burma, was established in 1891, several years after the Third Anglo-

¹⁸ J.S. Furnivall (1991[1939]), *The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginnings of British Rule in Burma*, Dept of Anthropology, Australian National University in association with the Economic History of Southeast Asia Project and the Thai-Yunnan Project, Canberra, pp 64–65.

¹⁹ Ashley Wright (2014), *Opium and Empire in Southeast Asia: Regulating Consumption in British Burma*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, p 24.

Burmese War and the final annexation. By then, a border of considerable length was shared between northern British Burma and south-west China. Scholars of Burmese history generally agreed that, 'the search for trade ... is a constant factor in the story of British relations with China in South-East Asia',²⁰ and in Burma, 'after the First Anglo-Burmese War, commercial interests in Britain increasingly saw Burma as the backdoor to the potential riches and markets of China'.²¹

It was not a coincidence that the creation of this particular post fell in the decade of the pacification campaign, when the British consolidated its control in Upper Burma, including the Sino-Burmese border area. Also in this decade, the British and Chinese governments started the demarcation – a long-term project that lasted well into the 1930s.²² All these territorial advancements meant improved access to the Chinese hinterland, and the need for sufficient knowledge to handle this strategic move was evident. While the regional imperial competition, especially with French Indochina on building railways to Yunnan,²³ pushed for the creation of this post, the British nevertheless drew upon lessons and experiences from their imperial rivals on their respective policies dealing with the Chinese.

Ever since the First Anglo-Burmese War, the British administration had made considerable efforts to explore possible routes between British-ruled areas and the Chinese border, often following well established local caravan routes.²⁴ However, information collected by these expeditions, which were often led by Burma-based colonial officials and supported by British Indian specialists and local (Burmese, Chinese, Shan, Kachin or other indigenous groups) labourers, was far from adequate and systematic. Around the late 1880s, Robert Douglas, a London-based scholar of Chinese studies, after years of working for the Chinese Consulate Service,²⁵ advised the government on issues related to the Sino-Burmese relationship in his capacity as the 'then Chinese Adviser to the Government of Burma'.²⁶ In 1891, correspondences concerning the creation of a permanent

²⁰ Dorothy Woodman (1962), *The Making of Burma*, The Cresset Press, London, p 1.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 2.

²² Joint Demarcation Commissions started from 1897. However, due to various disputes and later the Japanese occupation, the Sino-Burmese border was never finalized between the British and Chinese governments.

²³ During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, imperial competition on their respective frontiers in South East Asia and the rights to access to Yunnan were at their peak, with the French being on the winning side. The British never managed to extend their Burmese railways to China, stopping short of the Yunnan border at Myitkyina (1898) and Lashio (1903), while the French started their rail construction between Kunming and Haiphong in 1904. For Anglo-French railway competition, see J. Chandran (1971), *The Burma–Yunnan Railway: Anglo-French Rivalry in Mainland Southeast Asia and South China, 1895–1902*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, Athens, OH.

²⁴ Notable instances include Dr Richardson's mission between Moulmein and Kenghung (present-day Xishuangbanna) via Burmese, Siamese and Chinese Shan states in 1837, in 'Copy of papers relating to the route of Captain W.C. McLeod, from Moulmein to the frontiers of China, and to the route of Dr Richardson on his fourth mission to the Shan provinces of Burma, or extracts from the same', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1868–69 (420), East India (McLeod and Richardson's journeys); and Sladen's expedition between Bhamo, a historical frontier market town between Upper Burma and Yunnan, and Tengyueh (present-day Tengchong) in 1868, in E.B. Sladen, Robert Gordon and Albert Fytche (1869), *Official Narrative of and Papers Connected with the Expedition to Explore the Trade Routes to China via Bhamo*, British Burma Press, Rangoon.

²⁵ R.K. Douglas (1886), 'China and Burmah', *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol 1, pp 141–164; F. Legge (1913), 'Obituary notes Sir Robert Kennaway Douglas', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, pp 1095–1099.

²⁶ J.L. Christian (1945), *Burma and the Japanese Invader*, Thacker & Company, Bombay, p 270.

post, an Adviser on Chinese Affairs within the Burma Commission, were circulated around Rangoon, Simla, London and Peking, and W. Warry was subsequently appointed to this post. The Burma Commission expected him to be 'an adviser on Chinese matters, as a medium of communication between the Chinese and the Government, and as a source of intelligence on Chinese affairs so far as they relate to Burma'.²⁷ Like Douglas, Warry obtained first-hand knowledge of China and the Chinese people, along with Chinese-language skills, from his work in the Chinese Consular Service. He had been 'on loan' to the Government of India since 1885, to join frontier missions in India, Tibet, Burma and China,²⁸ with special attention on jadeite mines in this area.²⁹

This position was perhaps also inspired by similar positions in other colonial governments in the region despite their different, sometimes competing, governing frameworks from those of the British. A recent study on the US colonial policy on opium in the Philippines demonstrates the importance of regional peer learning and study visits among colonial powers for their policy making and implementation.³⁰ This, however, had been well practised by the British long before the Americans. In the Dutch East Indies, following Malay Sultans' and early European colonizers' examples of dealing with the Chinese, the Chinese *Kapitein*, *Luitenant*, and *Majoer der Chinezen* were responsible for the governance of the Chinese community. In French Indochina, the Chinese were grouped into *congrégations* according to dialect. The Chinese heads of these administrative units, much like the Dutch *Kapitein der Chinezen* and the Malay *Kapitan Cina*, functioned as an interface between the migrant communities and the government.

The administrative strategy of the British colonies had developed a more proactive, or interfering, attitude, at least since the late nineteenth century, by appointing Europeans to manage Chinese community issues directly. The Chinese Protectorate was set up in 1877 in the Straits Settlements, and W.A. Pickering was appointed the first Protector of Chinese, after serving in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service in Foochow in 1862 and in Taiwan from 1863.³¹ His job was 'to deal with every matter connected with Chinese life and customs':³² that is, to monitor and discourage practices such as those of secret societies and other forms of 'abuses' in the community. Unlike Burma, which had an external dimension due to its geopolitical adjacency to China, the Chinese Protectorate in Singapore dealt solely with Chinese migrants within the Settlements. This approach was probably used to exert a more enhanced control over this ethnic group, whose internal factions seemed to be particularly undecipherable to European

²⁷ 'Proposed permanent appointment of Mr W. Warry as Adviser on Chinese Affairs in Burma', British Library India Office Records (BL IOR) L/PJ/6/304, File 1443, Letter No 198–21P, 10 April 1890, Public and Judicial Department.

²⁸ 'Enclosure, Foreign Office to India Office', BL IOR L/PJ/6/304, File 1443, 10 June 1890.

²⁹ Mandy Sadan (2013), *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*, published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 88–89.

³⁰ Anne Foster (2003), 'Models for governing: opium and colonial policies in Southeast Asia, 1898–1910', in Julian Go and Anne Foster, eds, *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, pp 92–117.

³¹ W. Makepeace, G.E. Brooke and R. St. J. Braddell (1921), *One Hundred Years of Singapore, Volume 1*, John Murray, London.

³² S.Y. Ng (1961), 'The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877–1900', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol 2, No 1, p 80.

governors, especially before the 1867 Penang Riots.³³ In an inter-Empire context, it reflected the anxiety following the 1857 India Mutiny to take increasingly tighter control of the indigenous subjects. In the case of overseas Chinese, it was also part of a probable effort to solicit loyalty from Chinese subjects and thus counterbalance the growing China-oriented outlook, brought over by an increasing number of new China-born immigrants since the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁴

The position in Burma to some extent reflected a hierarchy within the Empire relating to Chinese issues, not only in the colonial administrative system, but also in terms of knowledge formation and dissemination between Burma and other colonies in the East. British knowledge of China and the Chinese, like its expansion in Asia, was initiated by the ubiquitous East India Company. Early encounters involved religious and secular personnel with informal or formal connections with the Company,³⁵ which were inevitable due to the absolute domination of the Company in the East. However, the role of Calcutta was rather awkward. The College of Fort William, the Calcutta-based educational institution that produced colonial administrators, did include Chinese-language teaching at one point. However, its contribution to the dissemination of Chinese language and Chinese knowledge, up until its dissolution in 1854, could not be sufficiently proved. Early British sinologists in the middle of the nineteenth century, such as Staunton, Legge and Douglas, often followed a similar pattern, skipping Calcutta despite their unavoidable association with the Company. After having first-hand experience in China or South East Asia, they returned to Britain and continued to engage in this field based in the metropole.³⁶ If Calcutta was the hub of colonial knowledge of South Asia, and to some extent South East Asia, this was certainly not the case for knowledge of China and the Chinese.

Therefore, it was unrealistic to rely on Calcutta, Burma's immediate superior, to supply capable officials. Realizing this, Burma had to look elsewhere in the Empire's administrative system, such as the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, which specialized in China and South East Asia, and had sufficient experience of governing the Chinese.

Putting Burma under a colonial regime that had originated from, and was designed for and oriented towards India, was fiercely debated by contemporary Burmese nationalists and Burma-based British officials alike, who listed numerous incompatibilities between India and Burma.³⁷ At least in terms of its capacity to govern the Chinese, this was very true. To design a convincing governance, imperial colleagues, even rivals from other European colonies in South East and East Asia, provided much-needed experience.

In practice, the post in Burma might not be a desired career for a limited number of qualified personnel who transferred, for example, from the Foreign Office. In the case of Warry, it took the government several months to reach an agreement

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Edwin Lee (1991), *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867–1914*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, pp 179–202.

³⁵ Hillemann, *supra* note 12.

³⁶ N.J. Girardot (2002), *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA; Legge, *supra* note 25; G.T. Staunton (1856), *Memoirs of the Chief Incidents of the Public Life of Sir George Thomas Staunton*, L. Booth, London.

³⁷ H.T. White (1931), *A Civil Servant in Burma*, E. Arnold, London.

that satisfied all the parties involved. Existing correspondence indicates that there were difficult negotiations and calculations to be made between the Indian Civil Service and the Chinese Consular Service over matters as mundane as pensions and furloughs. Warry took a furlough immediately after his new position was secured. To fill the temporary vacancy, the Burmese government looked to the east once again. This time, it borrowed E.H. Parker, the Consul in Kiungchow, on Hainan Island south of Canton. In 1892, Parker temporarily transferred to Burma to serve as the acting Adviser.³⁸

The information obtained and opinions formed in other parts of the Empire were actively sought and eagerly transplanted to Burma, affecting their application in this corner of the Empire.³⁹ Therefore, we see frequent requests and transfers among different outposts across the Empire when a specific skill was needed, but not available locally, to help exercise control over a specific group. Underlying this personnel and knowledge transfer was not only administrative convenience, which unquestionably saved considerable overheads, but also an understanding of the static nature of different human races, regardless of external environs. Therefore the change of location and climate did not affect the superior qualities of the British serving as governors in remote and tropical India.⁴⁰ In line with this hypothesis, the characters of the Chinese would also remain the same, regardless of whether they were in China, in Hong Kong, in Singapore or in Rangoon, and so did the method of governance relating to them. Based on this assumption, the colonial state designed a universal model for its governance, and applied it on a wide range of colonial stages from India to Burma, from Malaya to Hong Kong, in a static fashion without much consideration given to local variation. The assessment, naturally, was based on the unilateral perception after notes were compared between internal state actors from different colonies and consultations took place with intellectuals from the metropole. In the mid-nineteenth century in some parts of India and Burma, military conquests had yet to give way to administrative efficiency or ideological reasoning as a convincing channel through which to display colonial legitimacy. Feedback from the subjects, who were often in a vulnerable position, was overlooked. In the case of British Burma, the uniqueness of the Burmese territory and peoples, the mutated characters of the Burmese Indian and the Burmese Chinese, and the different experiences of the Anglo-Burmese and Anglo-Indians, in addition to its adopted mechanism to govern its minority Chinese subjects, eventually contributed to the failure of the British colonial project in Burma in later decades.

Given the strong external interest in the creation of the post, and the fact that Warry had spent considerable time in Bhamo, a market town not far from the Sino-Burmese border where there was a sizeable Yunnanese population, intelligence on China would be important, if not dominant, under Warry's office. However, his responsibilities went further than handling the frontier negotiations and guarding

³⁸ Parker would later join the Victoria University of Manchester as the Professor of Chinese, following a similar life pattern to British sinologists of his generation.

³⁹ C.A. Bayly (1996), *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁴⁰ Drawing on medical history in British India, Harrison suggests an institutional belief among the Indian administrators in the static physical composition of race. Mark Harrison (1999), *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600–1850*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

the border. When creating this post in 1891, the Burma Commission described the Burmese Chinese community as follows:

‘The feelings of the Chinese in Upper Burma towards the British Government were undoubtedly not altogether satisfactory at first. Now ... there is a really good understanding between the Chinese community and the Administration, even in connection with the imposition of an excise on opium and the restrictions on its sale, a matter which was approached with some anxiety.

In Lower Burma also, although there was less room for improvement, improvement has taken place, and the Chinese are contented and loyal, knowing that they can have their wants and grievances impartially and carefully represented by an officer of rank who studies their interests.’⁴¹

Three years after his appointment, Warry explained ‘[m]y principal duty has been to visit the different Chinese communities in the Province from time to time and to report upon their grievances and needs. I have thus been brought into close contact with all classes of Chinamen.’⁴² Even so, it was still questionable how productive Warry’s work on Burmese Chinese communities actually was, despite his recognition of his duty ‘to study the interest of the Chinese communities in Upper and Lower Burma and to represent their grievance directly to the Head of the Local Government’.⁴³ The Chinese of Singapore amicably cooperated with both Pickering and his successor, G.T. Hare, and respectfully addressed them as *Tai Jin* [the great man, in Hokkien dialect], a title traditionally reserved for the Mandarins in China.⁴⁴ In contrast, the Burmese Chinese community hardly remembered Warry, Pickering and Hare’s contemporary and counterpart in Burma. If official reports had occasionally mentioned Chinese-initiated activities encouraged and handled by colonial officials in Burma, such gestures were almost performative in nature, resulting in either very little or, at best, superficial improvement. For example, two petitions, signed by about 600 Chinese ‘traders and artisans’⁴⁵ from Rangoon and Moulmein, were handed to the members of the Royal Commission on Opium in 1893 when they visited Burma. Nowhere during this episode did we see the presence of Warry, who would have been expected by the mandate of his post in a situation like this. This may further explain the absence of Warry’s work in the Chinese community’s publications and in their collective memory. Otherwise, the fact that as early as the 1890s there was a government officer whose full-time job was to understand and represent the Burmese Chinese was something worth noting by the community involved. Similarly, Parker’s association with the Chinese was not well documented by the subject community either, apart from his investigation into the secret societies of Rangoon and Moulmein.⁴⁶

⁴¹ ‘Proposed permanent appointment’, BL IOR L/PJ/6/304.

⁴² Royal Commission on Opium (1894), *Volume II, Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission on Opium*, printed for Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, p 536.

⁴³ ‘Abolition of the appointment of Advisor on Chinese Affairs in Burma and arrangements regarding the duties of the Examiner in Chinese’, note by W. Warry, Esq, Adviser on Chinese Affairs, Burma. BL IOR L/PJ/6/731, File 2424, 17 August 1903, Public & Judicial Department.

⁴⁴ Ng, *supra* note 32, at p 6.

⁴⁵ Royal Commission on Opium, *supra* note 42, at p 240.

⁴⁶ Chen Yi-Sein, *supra* note 17.

Soon afterwards, the circumstances that had once favoured a dedicated colonial position for Chinese affairs changed. To outperform the French in this area was no longer as urgent as it had once been. An 1896 treaty between Britain and France, and further Siamese territorial cessions to the French over the next decade, stabilized the situation in mainland South East Asia. In 1897, British Consulates were established in Ssu-mao (Si'mao), north of the Southern Shan state; in 1899, in Tengyueh (Teng Chong), north of Bhamo; and in 1902, in the provincial capital, Yunnanfu (Kunming). The intelligence on China became comfortably sufficient for the British. For instance, the correspondence between the Government of Burma and the Yunnan Viceroy, which had previously been translated by Warry, was now sent in English to the Consul-General in Yunnanfu, and then translated and forwarded locally. This was the same protocol that was used between the Government of Hong Kong and the Canton Viceroy.

Within Burma, the situation also changed, at least as far as Warry understood it, despite there being no echoes from within the subject community. Close to his own retirement in 1903, Warry challenged the necessity of this designated position on its function to oversee the Burmese Chinese community:

'From time to time I still visit the chief centres of Chinese population in this Province and in place of receiving sheaves of petitions as formerly I now very rarely hear any complaints at all, and for many years past I have heard none which seems to me deserving of direct representation to the Government. Any interference now, on the part of a new Adviser, with the affairs of Chinese residents in Burma would, in my opinion, only be productive of mischief.'⁴⁷

Whether it was a misjudgment or simply a superficial impression that Warry gained due to his lack of a close relationship with the community, this was the only official feedback the government could garner and recognize. In response, when Warry completed the service required for a decent pension and retired in 1904, the government decided to abolish this permanent post. Before delegating most tasks to the Consular Service in Yunnan, a post with a lower profile seemed sufficient to conduct the remaining Chinese-related duties. These included functions such as organizing Chinese-language examinations and being able to:

'[r]eadily consult on questions which may from time to time arise in connection with Chinese law or custom, the proper procedure in the case of Chinese criminals or debtors taking refuge in Chinese provinces other than Yunnan, and other miscellaneous matters.'⁴⁸

The Examiner in Chinese, and the emergence of localized knowledge and governance

With both the duties and the allowances significantly reduced from those of the Adviser on Chinese Affairs, the post of Examiner in Chinese was created. The change reflected the colonial government's changing priority, its knowledge of its Chinese subjects and what was the most efficient way to govern this multi-ethnic state, showing recognition of local reactions. The new position was a mixture of

⁴⁷ 'Abolition of the appointment', BL IOR L/PJ/6/731.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

colonial administrative interests and Chinese influences. British expatriates with Chinese experience, supplemented with models from other colonies under similar conditions, were now replaced by interlocutors of Chinese descent in Burma with mixed outlooks. The position was offered to Taw Sein Ko,⁴⁹ the Government's Chief Archaeologist, who would occasionally carry out this extra duty when such necessities arose.⁵⁰

We do not know whether or not Taw Sein Ko was eager to take on this extra duty. A few years before, as the Government Archaeologist, Taw was reported as 'working under difficulties in the past, owing to the want of a proper staff of expert assistants',⁵¹ although this issue was partly solved later. His salary as the Archaeologist was Rs6,000, which made the extra income of Rs250, from being the part-time Examiner in Chinese, rather insignificant. However, there might have been more concerns regarding Taw, other than the lack of time and energy, or a disproportional momentary potential.

As the title indicated, Taw's most important duty was to organize Chinese-language examinations. Like Warry's, it was also designed as the sole point of contact in the government for its Chinese community. However, it is difficult to imagine the response from the Chinese communities to the appointment of Taw Sein Ko. In this official capacity, he was rarely mentioned in the Chinese-language newspapers or in the publications of the various communal associations. Both by family connection and by educational background, Taw Sein Ko was well qualified for this position, perhaps overqualified, as a member of the conservative and classical Chinese scholar-gentry class. Culturally, he modelled himself on an eighth-century Chinese patriotic poet who had the same surname.⁵² Nonetheless, his appointment to handle Chinese affairs might have also hindered his involvement in Chinese communal activities. There was barely any room for the expression of his cultural identification as he was supposed to devote himself to the job as a dedicated state actor and strictly follow the official lines. Neither his employer, the government, nor his Chinese subjects would have wanted him to become too personally involved. It would serve them all better if he watched from a distance, as an informed observer, rather than as an insider. As Warry pointed out in 1904, '[M]ore harm than good would be done by an Adviser who might pose as the advocate and champion of the Chinese residents in their ordinary dealings with and representations to the Local Government and its officers'.⁵³

⁴⁹ When Warry took furlough between 1899 and 1900, Taw Sein Ko performed his duty as Adviser on Chinese Affairs temporarily for one-and-a-half years.

⁵⁰ Biographic information on Taw Sein Ko from: Anonymous (1926), *Who's Who in Burma*, Indo-Burma Publishing Agency, p 123; Arnold Wright, ed (1910), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources*, Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Co, London, pp 100–101; Taw Sein Ko (1913), *Burmese Sketches*, British Burma Press, Rangoon, pp 143–145; Chen Yi-Sein (1961), 'Qianren Miandian Kaogu Diaochaju Juzhang Duchenggao' [Taw Sein Ko, the ex-Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma], *Nanyang Wenzhai*, Vol 2, No 11, pp 24–25.

⁵¹ Burma, Archaeological Department (1903), *Report on Archaeology Work in Burma, for the Year 1902–03*, Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Rangoon, p 3. I thank Francois Tainturier for pointing this out to me.

⁵² Penny Edwards (2004), 'Relocating the interlocutor: Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930) and the itinerancy of knowledge in British Burma', *South East Asia Research*, Vol 12, No 3, pp 277–335, at p 283.

⁵³ 'From the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department', BL IOR L/PJ/6/731, File 2424, Letter No 1058–1C–6, 28 December 1904.

If Warry's problem was his possible disconnection from the community, Taw Sein Ko ran the potential risk of being too intimate. His government position required comprehensive knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, while simultaneously discouraging any essential intimacy with the subjects in question. Taw Sein Ko, in switching between his official duty and his communal background, had to walk a fine line. This might help to explain the fact that, as a significant official in colonial Burma, Taw's fame within the Chinese community was disproportionately insignificant, much less than that in Burmese and English circles. He was neither the head of the Taw clan nor an active donor to the Rangoon Hokkien temple; he was not a significant member of any secret societies or important communal associations. Even as a conservative intellectual, he was seldom spotted at the community's cultural events, apart from one notable exception in 1903 when he became a trustee of the Teong Hwa Chinese School, the first Chinese school in Burma. The school was established by a group of Rangoon Chinese who supported the imperial Qing court in China, a vision that was shared by Taw himself. But it was not fair to say that Taw was personally indifferent to communal activities. In 1920, when the clan house of the Liu-Tang-Du (Taw) Clan Association in Bassein was in trouble, it was presumably Taw, a high-ranking official, who intervened to solve the problem for his fellow clan members.⁵⁴

Taw's father was an Amoy native who engaged in shipping (presumably the Chinese junk) operations along the Burmese coast in the 1840s.⁵⁵ His mother was probably a Mon, and Taw Sein Ko was born in 1864 in Moulmein. Later, the family moved up north. Taw received his English education first in Prome. In 1871, he entered the famous 'Dr. Marks School' of Mandalay, set up by the English missionary John Marks. His classmates included the last Burmese King Thibaw and several of his royal siblings. Almost half a century later, Marks still held a fond memory of this 'Burmo-Chinese boy'.⁵⁶ Taw was a young assistant to a small group of British officials that entered the Royal Palace in Mandalay in 1885 during the Third Anglo-Burmese War,⁵⁷ thus starting his decades-long service in the government. After returning from Cambridge in 1893, Taw undertook various positions such as Assistant Secretary to the Government of Burma, Government Archaeologist (later Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey, Burma Circle), Government Translator, and Chinese Language Examiner in different stages of his long ICS career.⁵⁸ Being the pioneer of archaeological and religious studies in Burma, Taw was also involved in scholarly activities in Rangoon, Calcutta and London.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Taw Sein Ko was self-styled as *zongdi* ('the younger brother [whose lineage is from] the [same] ancestor') in his 1904 handwriting of the Clan House's name ('Peng Cheng'). The banner bearing his handwriting still hangs on the wall of the building today. Author's observation, Bassein, May 2014. However, the name of this high-ranking official as mentioned by this association and written on the banner was '杜成魁', not '杜誠誥', the Chinese name of Taw Sein Ko as commonly known. It is possible that the former is an alias, or courtesy/clan name, of Taw Sein Ko. The author suspects that these two names referred to the same person (Taw Sein Ko) as no evidence so far suggests the existence of a second Chinese person who worked for the colonial government at a high level and shared the same surname of Taw around this period.

⁵⁵ C.M. Enriquez (1916), *A Burmese Enchantment*, Thacker, Spink and Co, Calcutta, pp 213–214.

⁵⁶ John Marks (1917), *Forty Years in Burma*, Hutchinson and Co, London, p 130.

⁵⁷ White, *supra* note 37, at p 144.

⁵⁸ Wright, *supra* note 50, at pp 100–101.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p 101.

Like the case in India, local information collected by colonial scholar-officials laid the foundation of Britain's control over remote and unfamiliar colonies with relatively limited resources; and this was often done with the help of interlocutors.⁶⁰ However, the role of interlocutor played by Taw Sein Ko was more complicated than that of his counterparts in India.⁶¹ As the child of a mixed-race union (and neither of his parents was Burman, the major ethnic group of this colony), Taw Sein Ko belonged nowhere, as his awkwardness with his father's community and his aspired ancestral link indicated. At the same time, he could easily claim associations with almost everyone in this colonial state – the British colonial/intellectual elite, the old-fashioned Chinese gentry-scholars, the ex-aristocrats of the Burmese court, and the reverend Buddhist monks. To a certain extent, Taw Sein Ko might have been comparable with another contemporary colonial elite of Chinese descent, Lim Boon Keng of the Straits Settlements, five years his junior.⁶² But the similarities ended at family and educational backgrounds, cultural aspirations and a close relationship with the colonial governments. In terms of community leadership, representation and influence, Lim, a founding member of the Straits Chinese British Association, and the President of the University of Amoy (Xiamen University) in China, was representing, officially and communally, the Chinese community in Singapore and China as one of its well recognized leaders. In contrast, Taw was chosen not because of his influence among the Burmese Chinese, but based on the fact that he was designated, often through government-funded training courses, as *the* person who knew China and the Chinese better than anybody else in the Burmese government. In fact, Lim Boon Keng might have been more comfortably identified with the members of the Chinese Advisory Board in Rangoon (to be discussed shortly). The government in Rangoon, eager learner that it was, could only borrow certain mechanisms, with local adaptations facilitated by government-sanctioned interlocutors at this stage,⁶³ and the time for communal participation was yet to come.

The government position on Chinese affairs, like that of its charges, experienced a fundamental change in the early decades of the twentieth century, with the focus inevitably moving away from British expatriates to Chinese interlocutors. The arbitrary infrastructure and non-interactive implementation in previous years had been confronted. Subsequently, inputs from the subjects were increasingly taken seriously and collected through interlocutors in order to bring the universal governing model up to date and to prepare for the eventful decade of the 1920s.

Communal participation through the Chinese Advisory Board

The reality in 1923 was far more complicated than in the earlier years when Douglas was consulted or when Warry and Parker were appointed. Internal inter-racial tensions had intensified, and external political influences, such as from China and

⁶⁰ Bayly, *supra* note 39.

⁶¹ Edwards, *supra* note 52.

⁶² Su Lin Lewis (2013), 'Between Orientalism and nationalism: the learned society and the making of "Southeast Asia"', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol 10, No 2, pp 353–374.

⁶³ The only other visible Chinese figure in the colonial government during this period was Lim Chin Tsong, a Hokkien merchant and an appointed member of the Burma Legislative Council between 1909 and 1922.

India, had increased, making governing multi-ethnic subjects in Burma even more difficult. Partly a response to the increasing nationalist demands that emanated from a subjected population, a reformed political framework was introduced by the colonial government to Burma, and made participation possible for members of the Chinese community, often representing subtly competing interests within the community.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Burma's two influential neighbours, India and China, both saw the development of indigenous nationalism. In China, the revolutionary Tongmenghui (or the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu Emperor in 1911 and established the Republic of China. In India, the same decade saw anticolonial campaigns inspired by Gandhi and his colleagues at the National Congress. Both Indian and Chinese nationalists eagerly sought and received generous support from their respective diasporic communities across the world, including those in Burma. The Burma Provincial Congress Committee was established in 1908 by Gandhi's long-term supporter, Rangoon-based merchant P.J. Mehta.⁶⁴ Also in that year, the Tongmenghui Burma Branch held its first meeting in the Dalhousie Park in central Rangoon.⁶⁵

All these events no doubt provided valuable lessons and great encouragement to the Burmese. Acknowledging the increasing pressure, diarchy was applied to Burma from 1923, based on the Indian Council Act 1919 and its applications in other provinces of India a few years earlier. British India's policy changing was, as in the previous century, in accord with other colonial powers in the region who introduced limited political autonomy and local representation during the same decades.⁶⁶ As an India-wide political reform within the imperial and colonial framework, diarchy provided a platform for the political participation of non-European subjects in the colony, including the migrating population of the Burmese Chinese.⁶⁷ As a result, the public demonstration of internal diversity within this community was possible. Regional groups were until then oblivious to the colonial administration. For instance, the petition letter presented to the 1893 Opium Commission was composed in English by Leong Shain Tuck, possibly a Cantonese, although his origin was not explicitly indicated.⁶⁸ If, in the eyes of policy makers and high-ranking officials in Rangoon, the Chinese community was a singular group and needed only one straightforward governing method, the space introduced by the reformed system paved the way for an emergence of cooperating and competing subgroups. Each had its own respective interests, hitherto confined within the community and seldom attracting

⁶⁴ Penny Edwards (2007), 'Struggling with history: Gandhiji in Burma, and Burma in Gandhiji', in D. Ganguly and J. Docker, eds, *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives*, Routledge, London, p 166.

⁶⁵ Xu Zanzhou (1928), 'Miandian Huaqiao Gemingshi' [Revolutionary history of the Burmese Chinese], in Feng Lidong (2002), *Mianhua Bainian [A Hundred Years' History of the Burmese Chinese]*, The Mirror Inc, Hong Kong, p 325.

⁶⁶ Dutch East Indies in 1916, French Indochina in 1922, and the Federated Malay States in 1923.

⁶⁷ The complexity of diarchy and its effect on Burma is a subject of debate and is beyond the scope of this article, which is confined to the procedural change it introduced and the resulting outcome of Chinese members in the administrative positions. For a detailed discussion on diarchy and self-government in Burma, see John F. Cady (1958), *A History of Modern Burma*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, pp 242–281.

⁶⁸ Royal Commission on Opium, *supra* note 42, at pp 525–526. The author assumes it to be Cantonese, based on the spelling of the name and the fact that the Cantonese often had better English skills than other Chinese in Burma.

attention beyond Chinatown in Rangoon and other Chinese quarters in the country.

Aware of this changing political climate, the colonial state's focus on Chinese affairs shifted, in keeping with the internal social order among the Chinese immigrants, both to discourage the spread of revolutionary ideas and practices based on experience from immigrants' homelands and to integrate Burmese Chinese interests into its governing body. Input from local communities had more of a chance to be heard and considered, often through their own agents, the Chinese communal, commercial and political elites in Rangoon. A general working knowledge of the Chinese language and people, which was previously obtained from other parts of the Empire, proved insufficient when facing increasingly localized problems. Solving these new problems often required insiders' 'know-how' and informal networks. Despite the imperial notion of the static nature of human races, the colonial state had to adjust itself, at least in practice. As the Home Minister reluctantly admitted in 1923, the intended training and appointment of a Chinese Adviser was postponed by the 'financial stringency and assistance given by the leaders of the Chinese community'.⁶⁹ Here he was partly referring to the Chinese Advisory Board in Rangoon, the local agency for the Rangoon Chinese.⁷⁰

In October 1909, the Chinese Advisory Board was established in Rangoon. At its inauguration, Lieutenant-Governor Herbert White, the highest-ranking official in Burma, expected that, through its creation, 'The Government would be brought into closer touch with the feelings and opinions of the Chinese Community in Burma'.⁷¹ In addition, White expected that 'The Chinese would themselves welcome the constitution of such a body, by which they would be enabled to give voice to their sentiments and aspirations'.⁷² As with other policies in this colony, the practice of organizing a Chinese committee to support the colonial administration was pioneered in the Straits Settlements. Both Penang (1890) and Singapore (1899) had created their own Chinese Advisory Boards several decades earlier.⁷³

In Rangoon, the Board worked closely with the Rangoon Police. The Commissioner of Rangoon Police was the President of the Board, and attended meetings coordinated by the police. The Chinese Advisory Board provided a much-needed platform where colonial administrative forces (especially those with internal concerns regarding domestic order) and Rangoon Chinese elites could communicate, negotiate and bargain on issues most dear to their own. Even in this unequal relationship in which one side, the colonial state, was in an absolute position of domination, it was possible to interact with the former who had long been used to

⁶⁹ 'Proceedings', BL IOR V/9, 24 March 1923, pp 447–448.

⁷⁰ For a detailed investigation on the Chinese Advisory Board and its activities in the early years, see Noriyuki Osada (2014), 'Discovery of "outsiders": the expulsion of undesirable Chinese and urban governance of colonial Rangoon, Burma, c. 1900–1920', *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, Vol 32, pp 79–96; for a list of Board members in 1909, see Noriyuki Osada (2014), 'Shokuminchiki Biruma Ranguun niokeru Kajin Tochi: Tsuihou Seisaku no Tenkai wo Chushin ni' [Expulsion of undesirable Chinese in colonial Rangoon, Burma], *Kakyo Kajin Kenkyu* [Journal of Chinese Overseas Studies], Vol 11, p 23.

⁷¹ 'Appendix X', 25 August 1924, BL IOR V/9, Resolution No 10CI, 20 October 1909, Police Department, Government of Burma, p 1091.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ J. DeBernardi (2004), *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community*, Stanford University Press, CA; Sikko Visscher (2007), *The Business of Politics and Ethnicity: A History of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, NUS Press, Singapore.

governing alone. By then, a designated post dedicated to Chinese affairs had virtually disappeared in departmental reports and officials' memoirs, and the work of the Chinese Advisory Board, along with politicians of Chinese descent, formed the major apparatus for the government to deal with its Chinese subjects.

To meet White's expectation, 'a recognised body of Chinese gentlemen from which Government could obtain authoritative information and advice in regard to any matter affecting the Chinese Community'⁷⁴ was needed. Candidates were recommended by the Commissioner of Rangoon Police, and were to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor for a fixed two-year term.

In 1924, this 'recognised body' was composed of 13 members, including individuals of both Hokkien and Cantonese origin (Table 1).⁷⁵ Almost all of the identifiable members were merchants or proprietors from a few big clans in Rangoon, such as the biggest Hokkien clans of Chan-Khoo (3), Yeo (3) and Tan (2), and the Cantonese Li brothers (3). Probably all of them were clan heads and were considered community leaders. At least one identifiable member, Li Ah Lye, was the head of the Cantonese Triad, Ngee Hain (also known as Moh I Myew or Hong Shun Tang), as well as several other Cantonese associations.⁷⁶ Another Cantonese, S. Poo Young, was the President of the Cantonese Association/Temple. Given the fact that the Hokkien Association/Temple was under an annual presidency rotating among its members, it was most probable that one of the Hokkien members was the sitting President of the Hokkien Association/Temple of 1924, and that the others were the heads of important clans serving in the Temple's Trustee Committee. These 13 persons, acting as agents representing the community's interests, formed an assemblage of communal power and wealth.

This 'recognised body' could be seen as the result of a generation of South East Asian Chinese communities undergoing a transition from 'gangsters to gentlemen'⁷⁷ and the sons and adopted sons of that generation. All of them were happily addressed as successful and respectable local gentry (magistrates in a few cases) instead of big brothers of competing secret societies. It was a common practice, even a necessary one, for community leaders to hold multiple positions in both legal and underground associations. These newly joined non-state actors, positioning themselves strategically, knew how and when to speak suitable lines in order to avoid any embarrassment on the stage and to comply with the official discourse when acting in a joint show.

Frequently overlapping with community leaders, commercial interests also found their own agents in the form of successful Chinese merchants. A 1910 publication, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources*, was then one of the popular encyclopaedia series that supplied 'full and reliable information with reference to the outlying parts of the Empire'⁷⁸ to an English readership at home and abroad. In this Burma edition,

⁷⁴ 'Appendix X', BL IOR V/9, p 1091.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Anonymous (1952), *Miandian Yangguang Hongshun Zongtang Baizhounian Jinian Tekan* [Special Memorial Edition for the 100th Anniversary of Hong Shun Tang in Rangoon, Burma], Rangoon.

⁷⁷ Engseng Ho (2002), 'Gangsters into gentlemen: the breakup of multiethnic conglomerates and the rise of a Straits Chinese identity in Penang', paper presented at *The Penang Story International Conference, 18–21 April, Penang, Malaysia*.

⁷⁸ Arnold Wright, ed (1908), *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources*, Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Co, London, p 9.

Table 1. Members of the Chinese Advisory Board, 1924.

Name	Occupation	Place of origin^a	Other positions^a	Family^a
Tan Cheng Oon	Merchant	Hokkien		Son of Li Nai Hee
Li Ah Lam	Honorary magistrate	Cantonese-Burmese		Son of Li Nai Hee
Li Ah Yain, M.L.C.	Barrister-at-law	Cantonese-Burmese	Future Minister of Forests, Agriculture and Public Works (1925), Board member of the Corporation of Rangoon, member of the Burma Legislative Council (Rangoon West, 1923)	
Yeo Eng Byan	Honorary magistrate	Hokkien	Committee member of the Yeo clan	
Tan Kin Chye	Merchant	Hokkien		
Yeo Chow Kow	Merchant	Hokkien	Head of the Chinese Educational Association, Committee member of the Yeo clan	
Chan Chor Khine, M.L.C.	Merchant	Hokkien-Burmese	Member of the Burma Legislative Council (Chinese Chamber of Commerce, 1923)	Son of Chan Mah Phee
Chan Phoyay	Proprietor, Messrs Kong Moh	Hokkien		Adopted son of Chan Mah Phee
Yeo Moh Seong	Proprietor, Messrs Kong Moh	Hokkien		
Li Ah Lye	Honorary magistrate	Cantonese-Burmese		Son of Li Nai Hee
K. Beng Chong	Manager, Messrs Sin Chip Moh & Co	Probably Cantonese	Future member of the Burma Legislative Council (Rangoon West, 1925)	
Khoo Seng Byan	Merchant	Hokkien		
S. Poo Young	President of the Cantonese Chinese Association	Cantonese		

Note: ^aAdded by the author with reference to Xu Huili (1964), 'Miandian Lifa Jigou yu Huaqiao' [The Burmese legislative system and the Chinese], *Nanyang Wenzhai*, Vol 5, No 4, pp 47-48.

Source: 'Appendix X', BL IOR V/9, p 1091. The names are listed according to the order in the document.

ethnic communities were introduced along with their most 'prominent' members. Four out of 23 'prominent' Chinese in *Impressions of Burma* were Board members in 1924.⁷⁹ Considering the gap of more than 10 years between the book's publication (1910) and the Board's membership as of 1924, the overlap would have been higher had some of the 'prominent' Chinese still been alive in 1924.

In addition to community leaders and commercial representatives, this Board included all high-ranking officials of Chinese descent, which was a direct result of the diarchy. In 1924, this meant two Chinese Legislative Council members, Li Ah Yain (a sibling of Li Ah Lye) of Cantonese–Burmese descent and Chan Chor Khine (of the Chan-Khoo clan, the son of a Chinese merchant who was listed as a 'prominent' Chinese, but who passed away before 1924) of Hokkien–Burmese descent. In the Legislative Council, Li and Chan were elected members representing either the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, an influential ethno-commercial organization, or the general constituency of Rangoon West, where Rangoon Chinatown was located. Li and Chan were joined by Taw Sein Ko, still one of the most senior experts on Chinese affairs in the government. Unlike his young colleagues, Taw entered the Council not by election but by appointment to seats especially reserved for the colonial government even after the diarchy.

The Board of 1924 not only brought Rangoon Chinese elites to the foreground of colonial rule, but also exhibited competing Chinese regional identities to observers outside the community. The composition of this Board marked strong communal identities along regional/dialect boundaries that were normally only meaningful in an internal, Chinese context. Thirteen members were either of Cantonese or Hokkien origins, the two most numerous dialect groups among the Chinese in southern Burma. The fact that no Yunnanese was included indicated this group's weak presence in Rangoon, whose traditional geographical dominance lay in Upper Burma. By accepting a list of mixed Cantonese and Hokkien notables, even the government acknowledged the irreconcilable regional divisions of this migrant community. The Chinese therefore presented the state with their own models and in turn restructured the prevailing colonial knowledge and its governing framework.

As a joint effort of all the important stakeholders with Chinese concerns in the colony, the Chinese Advisory Board functioned well in terms of advising 'generally upon matters connected with the welfare of the Chinese Community in Rangoon'.⁸⁰ This success was much to the satisfaction of the administration that had initiated this supplementary apparatus, especially when dealing with some typical problems such as gambling clubs, brothels and prostitutes in Rangoon's Chinatown. Understandably, every party involved applauded it via its own media, including the Rangoon Police reports.⁸¹ Its achievement was positively commemorated by Chinese newspapers and communal memories, down to extremely fine details. For instance, during the 1931 anti-Chinese riot in Rangoon, the Chinese Advisory Board sent Chan Chor Khine, on horseback, to join the police force on its street patrol in Chinatown to stabilize the situation. The

⁷⁹ Wright, *supra* note 50, at pp 307–326.

⁸⁰ 'Proceedings', BL IOR V/9, 8 March 1926, pp 204–205.

⁸¹ Report on the Rangoon Town Police, 1913–1926, BL IOR V/24/3245–46, Police Department.

scene on the street must have been quite spectacular because it is remembered clearly by repatriated Burmese Chinese even today.⁸²

Over the years, governing the Chinese became less a production of government initiative than of communal negotiation, as the Chinese Advisory Board exemplified from 1909 onwards. It worked in tandem with the contemporary colonial practice towards localization. Limited as the diarchy was, this new political infrastructure created an opportunity for aspiring members of the Chinese community to get involved in the colonial authority, holding government posts at all levels of the administrative hierarchy. An unofficial body such as the Chinese Advisory Board further mediated between the government and the subjected community, within which Chinese opinion was represented and communal competition was publicized, no matter how insignificant it was. The increased visibility further reflected an ongoing process of the formation and consolidation of a diversified image of the Burmese Chinese, both within and outside the community. In response to the government-defined administrative entity, the imagination of the community was realized in terms of both policy and perception through everyday practice and, in critical times such as 1931, when ethnic boundaries were contested and reinforced.

Conclusion

This article examines colonial governance at a micro level in the case of governance over the Chinese in British Burma. Between the 1890s and 1920s, the procedures and practices of British Burma relating to China and the Chinese changed significantly. The evolution of the mechanism indicates a change of governance from being Empire-oriented to community-based. With limited knowledge of the Chinese communities under its charge, the government in Rangoon relied heavily on the previous experiences of other colonies in the east, where large Chinese communities were studied and governed. However, with the increasing establishment of the Burmese Chinese communities, and the stabilized border in the north, the general practice slowly adopted a less coercive and more cooperative approach with the help of interlocutors and agents from the subject community. As a result, the interests of the community and its subgroups became increasingly visible in and beyond the colonial state.

Being part of the British Empire, Burma witnessed the effectiveness and limitation of an Empire-wide knowledge-sharing and peer-learning network and its implementation in colonial governance. The notion of the Burmese Chinese, at the same time, also contributes to the formation of a 'Burmese Chinese' community, a long-forgotten member of the Nanyang Chinese. The perceived image of the Chinese in multi-ethnic Burma thus illustrates the complexity of knowledge formation, community construction and governing practice in nineteenth and twentieth century South East Asia.

⁸² Zeng Guanying (2002?), 'Midandian Huaqiao Zeng Guangpi Fuzi Shiji' [Stories of the Burmese Chinese Chan Ma Phee, and his son], in Zeng Guanying, ed, *Mianhua Zawenji* [Essays on the Burmese Chinese], Xiamen (?), p 58.