

East River Column

Hong Kong Guerrillas in the Second World War and After

Chan Sui-jeung



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2 Birth of the East River Column

The Overseas Chinese and the Anti-Japanese Resistance

For quite a few years after the Japanese imposed the infamous “21 Demands” on China in 1915, students and workers all over China and Hong Kong waged a campaign to boycott the use and purchase of Japanese goods and Japanese shops. Overseas Chinese communities, particularly those in Southeast Asia, joined in enthusiastically. Such activities outside China had a definite effect on Japan, as Southeast Asia was the dumping ground of Japanese textile and light industrial goods.

In Singapore and Malaya alone, there were over 2.3 million overseas Chinese in 1941. Because of their relatively better income than their Chinese counterparts in China and Hong Kong, these overseas Chinese became a source of strong financial support for China, in war preparation.

A significant factor in the relative ease and success in mobilizing so many overseas Chinese was the Hakka culture. The Hakka and the people from Fujian and Guangdong in general made up more than half of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries. The Hakka identified as their homeland Meixian, Guangdong and the neighbouring towns and counties such as Huizhou, Bao’an and Huiyang, and most of the other towns in the East River areas, a tributary of the Pearl River Delta. The Hakka, who made up over ninety percent of a number of the guerrilla groups, therefore enjoyed a great advantage in material and kinship support from other Hakka in Southeast Asia and, for that matter from the East River region in south Guangdong. Throughout Chinese history, Hakka have been well known for their independent spirit and hardworking culture. Another distinct characteristic of this ethnic group is they are exceptionally clannish. In countries outside China, one can always find Hakka clan associations, which carry the names of Huizhou or Huiyang Clansmen or Jiaying Clansmen Association.¹

In October 1938, when the news of the fall of Guangzhou and other towns in the East River area spread to Southeast Asia, overseas Chinese, particularly those of Hakka origin who lived in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, formed the Nanyang Dutch/British Territories Huizhou Compatriots Relief Association, on 30 October. They sent representatives on an inspection tour to the East River area of the Pearl River Delta. They arranged this through their contact with Lian Guan and Liao Chengzhi, the most senior Chinese Communist cadres in Hong Kong then. Liao was the son of Liao Zhongkai, a contemporary of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and a senior member of the left-wing faction of the KMT. Liao Chengzhi had the additional advantage of being Hakka himself. Lian Guan was a Hakka born in a peasant family in a poor village of Dapu, in the mountainous area in east Guangdong. From an early age, he was a casual worker in a tobacco factory near his hometown. He did not start school until he was almost nine, and he was admitted into a teacher training school after he completed primary schooling. Subsequently, he became a primary school teacher himself in Meixian. He came under the influence of a Chinese Communist Party member when the latter was a member of Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition. He joined the party in 1927. He moved to Hong Kong with the help of his clanspeople. From the 1930s, he was involved in Anti-Japan and Save the Nation activities.

Liao Chengzhi was born in Japan, where he went to primary school and secondary school. Subsequently he studied in the missionary-founded Lingnan University in Guangzhou, where he joined the KMT. When the KMT and the Communist Party split in 1927, he joined the Communist Party. Because of his command of foreign languages, he was sent by the party to foment strikes among Chinese seamen in Holland and Germany in 1928. Expelled by the Dutch authorities, he returned to China and did underground work for the party in Shanghai in 1932. He was arrested by the KMT authorities in Shanghai when he was discovered. But due to his parents' previous standing in the KMT and Soong Ching-ling's intervention, he was released and went to Hong Kong where his mother had relatives and connections.

After the tour, the association met up with other Hakka residents in Hong Kong. Through the encouragement of Liao and Lian, the association joined up with the Hong Kong Huiyang Youth Association, the Hailufeng Residents Association and the Yu Sian Le Association to form "service teams" to visit various towns and counties in the East River area of the Pearl River Delta. Young people from Hong Kong and overseas Chinese from Singapore, Vietnam, Malaya, the Philippines, Thailand, and Macao, particularly those of Hakka origin, were recruited. Even in a small place like Macao, eleven groups of such young people were mobilized to join in the work of the service teams. The work of such service teams was mainly propaganda, indoctrination and relief. Within six months, separate teams had been organized to serve Huiyang, Hailufeng, Boluo, Zijin, Heyuan, Longchuan

and Houping. In addition, there was a mobile and roving song and dance troupe that went from county to county in the unoccupied areas in the Pearl River Delta in south Guangdong, to spread the Anti-Japan and Save the Nation propaganda message.

In the meantime, the Hong Kong Huiyang Clansmen Association, together with a few other similar groups, began to mobilize their clanspeople from Southeast Asia to form the East River Overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) Service Team. In Southeast Asia alone, excluding Vietnam and Thailand, there were the Singapore Overseas Chinese Wartime Service Group, the Overseas Chinese Hui Xiang Service Team, the Dutch East Indies Overseas Chinese Ambulance Team, the Malaya East River Overseas Hui Xiang Service Team and the Northwest Overseas Service Team.

In addition, various small-time traders like stevedores, trishaw coolies and shopkeepers formed their own small fundraising committees. One person who, not a Hakka himself, instigated all such activities was Tan Kah Kee. He was born in Fujian Province in China but immigrated to Singapore at the age of seventeen in 1890. Initially he worked as a shopkeeper at his father's small grocery store. Then he branched out to operate his own provision store by selling imported canned food. By maintaining a thrifty and hardworking lifestyle, he accumulated sufficient wealth to go into business in rubber plantations and other business all over Southeast Asia. He was a millionaire by 1911 and a multi-millionaire at the end of the First World War. During Dr. Sun Yat-sen's fundraising campaigns in Southeast Asia, he helped Sun and joined him as a member of the Xing Zhong Hui, the precursor of the KMT.

As a leading member of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, he was the person who organized all such activities. In addition to fundraising activities, he recruited about 3,200 lorry drivers and motor mechanics throughout Southeast Asia to work on the road connecting Kunming in Yunnan with Lashio in Burma. After the fall of Shanghai and Guangzhou, China's only transport link with the outside world was by this road.

Initially, Tan and other members of the Singapore Chinese Relief Fund Committee and the Southseas China Relief Fund donated the funds and the materials raised mainly to the KMT government in Chongqing. In December 1939, Tan organized a "comfort mission" to China. The objective of the mission was to console the combat soldiers, to inspect and scrutinize the actual war conditions in China. Some of the fifty members of the mission who came from Singapore, Malaya, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Burma and Indochina went by way of Saigon and Hanoi to Kunming. Other members gathered in Singapore and sailed to Rangoon. On arriving in the wartime capital of Chongqing, Tan was appalled by the substantial budget prepared by the KMT government for entertaining the mission. What he discovered was summed up by a saying circulated among the people that described the situation, *qianfang chi jin, houfang jin chi*, translated

roughly as “while the frontline was fighting a tense and bitter battle, the officials in the wartime capital were engaging in intensive and indulgent pleasure seeking”. Despite Tan’s dismay and disappointment, he did not openly criticize the KMT government, except for the fact that he lamented to General Bai Chongxi, the deputy chief of staff, that he was saddened by the “rift between the two parties.... And that it would be tantamount to suicide should there be a civil war”. Subsequently, when he had the opportunity of meeting with Ye Jianying and Dong Biwu, he expressed the wish to visit Yan’an. Later on he received a formal invitation from Mao.

Next to Mao Zedong, both Ye and Dong were highly respected senior members of the party. Ye was Hakka, born in Meixian, where his father ran a small grocery store. He went to a primary school run by missionaries where he excelled in school work. During his younger days, he went to work as a primary school teacher in Ipoh, Malaya. He joined the Yunnan Military Academy in 1917, and graduated in late 1919 with distinction. When the Huangpu Military Academy was opened in Guangzhou in May 1924, he was appointed one of the instructors in weaponry when he was barely twenty-seven. He joined the Communist Party around the same time, in 1927, and staged the Guangzhou Uprising in December. Despite its ultimate failure, Ye made his name because the revolutionary soldiers that he commanded formed the Guangzhou Commune that existed for a few weeks. He then joined Mao and Zhu De in Jinggangshan, Jiangxi, via Shanghai.

Dong Biwu was one of the few party members to be veteran of both the 1911 Revolution and the civil war between the KMT and the CCP. Born in Hubei, he was one of the founders of the CCP. As a communist, he had a most unusual background, as he was a Chinese classical scholar. He was the son of a classical scholar who was a teacher of rich families in Wuhan. During the split between the KMT and Communist Party in 1927, he had to escape to Japan and then to Russia in September 1928. He studied for a few years at Lenin University and returned to China in 1932. He joined the Jiangxi Soviet by going through Shanghai and Shantou. He joined the Long March and was appointed the head of the party school in Yan’an.

Mao Zedong was born into a moderately well-off landowning family in a village in Hunan in 1893, when China was crumbling in degradation and despair, having lost a series of battles with foreign powers. As a student, Mao did quite well in school, particularly in the Chinese classics. But what affected him more was the May Fourth Movement which was undoubtedly a national awakening of China, particularly among young people of that generation.

After graduating from Teachers College in Changsha, Mao and some Hunan students went to Beijing, initially with the intention of going to France to join the work-study programme. But he got a job as an assistant librarian at Peking University, where he came under the influence of Professor Li Dazhao. A brilliant

intellectual, he was the first to introduce the ideology of Marxism-Leninism to China. After staying in Shanghai for four months, Mao returned to Hunan and obtained a job as a primary school teacher. By then he was already a party member who was busy recruiting new members for the party.

In 1926, he was asked by the KMT government based in Guangzhou to run training classes for peasants at the Peasant Institute. He used this as a base, not only to train cadres from among peasants who came from other provinces and from Guangdong, but also to recruit members for the Communist Party despite the fact that he was occupying a post in the Propaganda Department of the KMT government.

In July 1927, Mao and a few of his close comrades planned an uprising in his own province, Hunan, to be co-ordinated with similar uprisings in Guangdong and Hubei. The uprising began on 8 September and ended in October. In military terms, it was not a success. But it left a myth that Mao was a capable organizer and a leader. He then led a group of some 800 soldiers comprising peasants, students and miners and marched to Jinggangshan.

From the time of his arrival until 1934, a “soviet government” was established in Ruijin, Jiangxi, a relatively large market town near Jinggangshan, where Chiang Kai-shek launched a series of extermination campaigns. In October 1934, the entire Jiangxi “soviet” went on the legendary 25,000-*li* Long March. When about 30,000 of the original group of 80,000 who set out from Ruijin arrived in Zunyi, Guizhou, the entire politburo of the party rested and held a large meeting. It was at this meeting that Mao established his leadership position when he proved the strategy of the Russian-trained intellectuals was wrong and had caused immense loss. When Tan met him in Yan’an, it was a few years after Mao and the remnants of his soldiers had arrived and settled.

During his stay there, Tan was impressed by what he saw. At his first meeting with Mao, they were interrupted by students who came to visit Mao, and then by members of the Communist Party who were junior to Mao in rank and years. Such visitors came without any prior appointment. When they entered the chairman’s house, they did not bow to or salute him.

To Tan, Mao was an approachable and honest man. The Communist leadership, Tan found, was hardworking, frugal, honest and led simple lives. Before he left China for home, Tan had a further meeting with Chiang in Chongqing. What Tan did and his favourable comments about the Chinese Communists did not please the KMT regime and Chiang in particular. When Tan and his party returned home via Burma in early December 1940, he lost no opportunity to tell overseas Chinese communities that China would win the war with Japan and that KMT and Communist conflicts would flare up. Despite the fact that Tan was a member of the Tong Meng Hui, after the visit he was completely disenchanted with the corrupt regime in Chongqing. From that point onward, the funds and materials

that he and his organizations managed to raise were sent mainly to the New Fourth Army and the Eighth Route Army. Both armies were created after the KMT and the Communists came to an agreement to cease their civil war in December 1936 and Communist armed forces were given KMT military designations in the overall KMT government military establishment. In rank and uniform, they were indistinguishable from regular KMT soldiers. But Chiang Kai-shek seldom allocated them adequate resources during the Anti-Japanese War.

Within a year, from 1938 to 1939, the Singapore Chinese Relief Fund Committee and the Southseas China Relief Fund, both under the direction of Tan, managed to raise nearly HK\$5 million worth of goods, which included 300,000 suits of warm clothing and pharmaceutical items, such as vitamin and quinine tablets for the central government in China and the Communist-led guerrillas. In order to coordinate and consolidate the various organizations that were engaged in similar kinds of activity, a Southeast Asia Federation of China Relief Funds was formed on 10 October 1938. The representatives were Tjung Siengan from Jakarta, Lee Chengchuan from the Philippines and Tan Kah Kee from Malaya and Singapore.

The Response in Hong Kong

The Shenyang Incident occurred on 18 September 1931, when a bomb exploded on the Southern Manchurian Railway outside Shenyang. It was only a minor incident, and normal railway service was not disrupted. But the Japanese, who engineered the incident, used the excuse that Chinese soldiers fired on them after the explosion, so they fought back in self-defence. The Japanese crack Kwantung Army quickly moved in and occupied most of the three north-east provinces. For a long time, Chiang was so preoccupied with his “pacification campaign” in fighting the Communist forces in Jiangxi that he directed the commander in the north-east not to engage the Japanese.

But the Japanese aggression, and even more Chiang’s policy of “non-resistance” against the Japanese, angered the entire population. There were massive demonstrations by students in all major cities, particularly in Beijing and Shanghai. Their main demands were that the central government should stop its campaign against the Communist regime in Ruijin and unite all the resources to resist the Japanese. The movement came to a head on 9 December 1935, when students from all the schools, including primary schools, in Beijing boycotted their classes and demonstrated all over the city. The central government reacted by sending anti-riot police to beat up the demonstrators. Over a hundred students were injured and over thirty were arrested. But the anti-Japanese movement soon spread to every major city.

During this period, quite a few of the Chinese Communists and their sympathizers in the literary circle moved to Hong Kong, e.g. Qiao Guanhua and Zou Taofen.

Qiao Guanhua was born into a family of landowners in Suzhou, in 1913. Exceptionally bright as a student, he was successfully admitted to Qinghua University when he was barely sixteen. Graduated at twenty, he enrolled in the Imperial University in Tokyo. But he was involved in anti-Japanese imperialism activities organized by the Japan Communist Party and soon deported. He then went to Germany in 1935 where he successfully obtained a Ph.D.

Zou Taofen was born into a family of scholars in Fujian, in 1895. His father was a patriot who hoped that his son would one day qualify as an engineer or a scientist as a means to serve the country. The family was not financially well off. Zou Taofen managed to study in good schools in Shanghai by winning scholarships every year. Eventually, he was admitted to the prestigious St. John University, where he graduated in 1919.

After graduation, he worked for a few years as an English teacher at the YMCA in Shanghai. Because of his good command of both English and Chinese, he was offered the job of editor-in-chief of the weekly journal *Life* in 1926. Deeply disappointed with the KMT government's corruption and incompetence, he was highly critical of the central government in his editorials.

Later on he also openly attacked the Japanese government's aggression against China. He was personally involved in many student demonstrations and boycott movements of Japanese goods. Eventually, his journal was banned by the government. Knowing that the government was after him personally, he went to Hong Kong in March 1936.

Since the Shenyang Incident, when Japan launched an undeclared war on China, every year on the anniversary, Hong Kong Chinese have waged different kinds of protests and meetings to commemorate what they call National Humiliation Day. On 18 September 1936, some secondary school students joined hands and formed an organization called the "Hong Kong Resist Japan and Save the Nation Society" in secret, after having observed a National Humiliation Day commemoration ceremony at the Lap Tak School. The object was to rouse Hong Kong Chinese to join the society's anti-Japanese activities with their propaganda. As the society was not properly registered in accordance with the colony's *Societies Ordinance*, it was clearly illegal. Eighty of the society's members were arrested by the police. While some officials in the Hong Kong government were sympathetic towards the Chinese anti-Japanese activities, they did not wish to antagonize Japan openly. Therefore, the eighty who were arrested were treated leniently and released. The office bearers of the society quietly disbanded it.

Some undergraduates of the University of Hong Kong teamed up with the Chinese Pharmaceutical and Relief Association and appealed to about 300 schools,

primary and secondary, to form an umbrella group called the Hong Kong Students Relief Association in September 1937. An undergraduate, Lee Chingyiu, from the university, was elected chairman. From the 300-odd schools, students from some of the most élite schools like King's College, Queen's College and St. Paul Secondary School (founded by the Anglican church) joined in. Parents of such students helped their children in raising funds and organizing patriotic anti-Japan activities throughout the colony. Within three days in the first week of October, 1937, the association managed to raise forty individual teams to visit practically every school in Hong Kong to spread the message. Concerts were organized to raise funds by the Diocesan Boys' School. Most other students raised funds by forgoing their lunches. Some of the funds raised were donated to the New Fourth Army, the Eighth Route Army and other guerrilla groups, through Soong Ching-ling's contact and channels in China.

Soong was one of the three daughters of Soong Yaoru, known to his foreign friends as Charles Soong, who went to Vanderbilt University in 1882. He became quite affluent by importing American tobacco to China.

He sent all six of his children, three sons and three daughters, to American universities. Ai-ling eventually married Kong Xiangxi, the finance minister of the KMT government. Ching-ling, the middle one, married Sun Yat-sen. The youngest one, Mei-ling, married Chiang Kai-shek. The Soong sisters went to Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. Ching-ling graduated and sailed home in 1913. She had met Sun when she was a little girl, as he had visited her parents in Shanghai. When Sun relinquished his presidency for Yuan Shikai, she re-established contact with him in 1913, when her father took her to see him in Japan. Sun was actually on the run from the warlords. He stayed in Japan to launch a new form of the KMT Party called the Zhonghua Gemingdang or Chinese Revolutionary Party. While her father was helping with Sun's finances, Ching-ling became Sun's English language secretary. Despite the difference in age, and that Sun was a married man with children, the two fell in love in Japan and decided to marry after Sun obtained a divorce from his wife, who was then in Macao.

In 1925, Duan Qirui, the premier of the regime, and other warlords in Beijing took the initiative of inviting Sun to Beijing to "discuss the affairs of the State". Sun could not possibly refuse. So Sun and Soong set sail for Beijing, via Shanghai in November. Shortly after their arrival in January 1925, Sun passed away. Soong was a widow when she was barely thirty-two.

With Sun out of the way, Chiang Kai-shek, who as the commandant of the Huangpu Military Academy, had the advantage of having armed forces under his command, made plans to consolidate his control over the country. In the meantime, a left-wing group of KMT members in Wuhan elected Soong to the central executive committee of the party in 1926. When Chiang led his army on the Northern Expedition, the split between the two wings of the party was inevitable.

When Chiang's army arrived in Shanghai in 1927, he enlisted the support and help of the Green Gang, the secret society of underworld thugs, and unleashed a massacre of Communist party members, students and workers in Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou.

Firmly on the side of the left wing of the party, Soong condemned Chiang for having betrayed Sun's ideal and principles in April 1927. Among those who signed a circular written by her, addressed to the whole nation were left-wing members of the KMT, and Mao and Dong Biwu of the Communist Party.

In July 1927, Soong Ching-ling decided to visit Moscow. In her own words, this was not a "flight" but she came to "express appreciation for what the people of the Soviet Union have done for revolutionary China...". She returned home in May 1929. For the next few years, until 1937, she led the China League for the Protection of Civil Rights in Shanghai. Because of her prestige and help from many foreign friends, she was deeply involved in the protection and rescue of political prisoners who were not on Chiang's side.

Against this background of strong patriotism and popular demand, Soong Ching-ling played an active part as a leader in the political scene because of her prestige and courage in standing up to Chiang Kai-shek and the right-wing warlords. Concurrently, she assisted and encouraged the student movement and other similar groups in arousing anti-Japanese sentiments, first in Shanghai and then in Hong Kong, in 1937. During the Japanese occupation in Shanghai, Soong's house was in the technically neutral French concession. But she was being watched by spies not only from the Japanese but also by the KMT. With the help of her New Zealand friend, Rewi Alley, she escaped, and landed in Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1937.

In January 1938, Zhou Enlai negotiated with the British ambassador in Chongqing, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, and obtained his agreement to set up a liaison office of the New Fourth Army and the Eighth Route Army under the CCP, in Hong Kong. The office was staffed by Liao Chengzhi, who operated behind the façade of a tea trading and import-export firm called the Yue Hua Company, right in the heart of the city at Queen's Road, Central. Because of his Cantonese background and his mother's extensive network of friends and relatives in Hong Kong, he was particularly active and successful in raising funds for the Eighth Route Army, the New Fourth Army and the embryonic guerrilla force.

Zhou Enlai, unlike Mao, came from a well-educated mandarin family in Zhejiang. He went to élite schools in Tianjin and Shenyang when he was young. After graduating with flying colours in 1917, like many of his contemporaries, he felt that acquiring a foreign education was necessary for the salvation of the nation. Therefore, he went to Japan. Initially he studied the language with a view to entering a teacher training college. He returned to China in 1919. It was the time of the May Fourth Movement, when most Chinese students were involved in anti-government activities.

Li Dazhao, a professor and librarian of Peking University and one of the founders of the CCP, saw the need to recruit new members for the party. A work-study programme was launched to send young men to France. In November 1920, Zhou was one of a group of 196 students who sailed for France. By then there was already a small cell of the CCP. It was not long before Zhou became a member of the party.

In 1924, his political career took an unusual turn. Sun set up a rival regime in Guangzhou as an opponent to the warlords based in north China. Counselling by his Russian advisers, Sun allowed Communist Party members to join the KMT in their personal capacities. Zhou was summoned to China and took the post of head of the Political Department of the Huangpu Military Academy in Guangzhou. This was the period of the First United Front.

In Hong Kong, Soong and her many friends, both foreign and Chinese, founded the China Defence League in March 1938. Prominent among the leaders were Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, Liao Chengzhi, Norman France, Liao Mengxing, Deng Wenzhao, Israel Epstein and the New Zealand journalist and writer, James Bertram.² Because of his command of foreign languages and engaging personality, Liao was elected secretary general and Deng was treasurer. John Leaning, a young Englishman who was the editor of a monthly magazine called *Democracy* with Edgar Snow in Beijing before he came to Hong Kong, was in charge of publicity. Later on, this role was taken up by Epstein.

Epstein was born in Warsaw in April 1915. He came with his parents to China when he was only two. His parents settled in Tianjin after having fled Poland when the German army was approaching the city. He began his career as a journalist when he was fifteen, when he worked for an English-language paper, the *Beijing and Tianjin Times*. He covered China's war with Japan for the United Press. Subsequently Epstein was appointed assistant editor of the *Hong Kong Daily Press*. Soong arranged for Epstein to visit the Shanxi-Suiyuan Anti-Japanese Base areas where he interviewed Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other senior Chinese Communist Party leaders. In 1938, Soong invited him to join the league. Having a good command of English and other foreign languages, Epstein was the ideal choice for the post of editor of the league's newsletter.

Despite their political differences, Soong Ching-ling invited her brother, T. V. Soong, the finance minister of the central government in Chongqing, to fill the nominal post of president of the league. He accepted the role but resigned in 1941, when Soong Ching-ling openly attacked Chiang Kai-shek after he unleashed his soldiers on the Communist New Fourth Army. It was through Bertram's introduction that Soong met and got Hilda Selwyn-Clarke to join the league. Hilda was the wife of Dr. Selwyn-Clarke, director of Medical and Health Services in Hong Kong. In the days of pre-war colonial Hong Kong, both of them had prestige and influence. But despite her high-society connections, she had Fabian Society background and

a burning concern for the poor and the underprivileged. Hence by her British friends in the colony she was quickly nicknamed “Red Hilda”. She was appointed joint-secretary or English secretary with Epstein. Of all the non-Chinese office-bearers of the league, she probably did more useful work than the sum total of all the other members. Even by the Chinese it was acknowledged that “she actually ran the entire operation of the league”.

Another foreigner who was involved was Norman France. He worked as co-treasurer with Deng Wenzhao. France was a professor of history at the University of Hong Kong. He was born in China and in general sympathetic with China’s war effort.

Liao Chengzhi, by relying on his parents’ prestige and contact with senior and influential members of KMT, actually raised money from all sorts of benefactors. It was reported that, by his persistence, even T. V. Soong donated 100,000 yuan to the league. But one major source of local donations from the Chinese people in Hong Kong undoubtedly came from the “One Bowl of Rice” movement organized by both Soong Ching-ling and He Xiangning. The idea was that donors were asked to give up eating one bowl of rice or donate the equivalent amount in money, which was twenty cents in Hong Kong currency. Some of the funds were spent on materials such as clothing fabric. These were supplied to female students to make warm clothing for the soldiers. Within a matter of only three weeks or so, they managed to raise HK\$6,000. Famous Cantonese opera performers were mobilized to stage free performances to raise funds.³

To provide prestige and appeal to a wider section of the community, Soong even managed to attract the then colonial governor, Sir Geoffry Northcote, to serve as the patron of the function, and M. K. Lo and Hilda Selwyn-Clarke as chair and vice-chair.

Northcote’s term in Hong Kong coincided with the period when the KMT army was in a series of defeats and retreats. Japanese soldiers arrived and camped in Shenzhen, just over the border from Hong Kong, as early as 1938. When most of the coastal areas were occupied by the Japanese, Hong Kong became an important supply depot of war and other materials to China. Despite that, the War Cabinet in the UK issued an urgent order on 28 June 1940, for the evacuation of all British women and children from the colony to Australia. Business was good and the mood of the high society was one of complacency. But Northcote was certain that war with Japan was imminent. Probably this was why he lent his support to Soong Ching-ling’s activities. But plagued by indifferent health, he left Hong Kong in August 1941.

M. K. Lo was the prosperous lawyer son-in-law of Sir Robert Ho Tung, the most prominent and probably the wealthiest Eurasian businessman in Hong Kong at that time.

Ho Tung was the son of a Dutch-British father and a Chinese mother. Sent by his mother to an Anglo-Chinese school where he learned English, he made his fortune by working through the ranks in the biggest British firm Jardine Matheson, where he became the comprador when he was still quite young. Despite his Eurasian features, he always considered himself Chinese and identified with the Chinese community.

Through He Xiangning's contacts and connections, Lo donated generously. And through his influence, other Chinese entrepreneurs followed suit. He Xiangning was the daughter of a rich landowning family in Hong Kong. She became a keen supporter of Dr. Sun and Soong Ching-ling because of her husband's connection. She and Soong Ching-ling were close friends, both personally and politically, for the rest of her life.

The appeal attracted such wide support from the grassroots elements of the community that Soong Ching-ling managed to raise HK\$25,000 within eighteen months. One could gauge that the sum was a substantial amount, as the price of one ounce of gold was only HK\$90 then. The league also managed to attract donations in kind, such as blankets, mosquito netting and pharmaceutical items.

The East River Guerrillas and Their Leaders

It was the more than 3,000 young people of diverse background and training who were initially members of such service teams and who eventually took up arms and formed the bulk of the East River Column. By the mid-1930s, it was estimated there were about 650 Communist Party members under the direct control of the Hong Kong Municipal Committee of the Communist Party, and an additional 50 among the members of the Communist-led Hong Kong Seamen's Union and another 50 in Macao.

With specific approval from Yan'an, Liao Chengzhi decided to send 250 party members from this total of 750 to the various service teams made up of young people from Chinese communities in different countries and regions, to provide the organizing structure and leadership. But by early 1939, many of these young people in the East River area were arrested by the local KMT authorities and many teams were disbanded.⁴ The decision to disband the teams came directly from the Communist Party in Yan'an, through Liao Chengzhi. Liao then gave the direction to Zeng Sheng.

Zeng Sheng, like most soldiers of the East River Column, was a Hakka, born in 1910 in Pingshan, a village about twenty miles north of Shenzhen. His father was an overseas Chinese in Australia. Since his youth, he had worked as an apprentice chef on an ocean-going liner that sailed between Hong Kong, the Pacific region and Australia. He jumped ship when he travelled to Sydney and started a small grocery store. After accumulating some money, he managed to move his wife and

son to Hong Kong. Zeng Sheng started his primary education in Hong Kong and in 1923 went to join his father in Sydney. Initially his father sent him to the Fort Street Secondary School in Sydney, for some intensive training in English.

During his stay, he felt humiliated by the racial taunts of his white classmates. So when his father decided to return home to Pingshan for retirement in 1928 and took along Zeng Sheng, he gladly went. By then he was ready for his university entrance examination.

It was during this period that he came under the influence of his teacher Pan Zishan, who was anti-KMT. Eventually he managed to be admitted to the Faculty of Education at Sun Yat-sen University in July 1933.

Left-leaning intellectuals like Lu Xun, Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo were faculty members of the university at the time. By then there were cells of Communist Party members among the students of up to 300. It was through the influence of some of these students that Zeng became a party member in the winter of 1934. He then joined, and in some instances actually organized, many student rallies in opposing the university authority and the central government. The target of many demonstrations held inside the campus was Zou Lu, president of the university. Zou was concurrently a government official who tried to suppress all student activities. The main thrust of the students' activities was to demand the KMT regime cease the intermittent conflict between the KMT and the Communist Party and to defend the country against Japanese aggression.

It was his participation and leadership during the mass demonstration held on 9 December 1935 that caught the attention of the KMT government. On that day he led a mass rally of 20,000 students and industrial workers who marched through the streets of Guangzhou. Subsequently, an order for his arrest was issued. It was through the help of other students, who provided him with protection and cover, that he managed to escape to Hong Kong in mid-January 1936.

His status as a student was suspended. When he arrived in Hong Kong, he found a job as a waiter on an ocean-going liner, S.S. *Empress of Japan*. He worked for a few months until September 1936. Then he returned to Guangzhou as the warlord Chen Jitang, who issued the order for his arrest, had been toppled by Chiang Kai-shek's central government in Nanjing. He continued his final year of study and completed a bachelor's degree in Chinese. That made him one of the very few Chinese Communists with a university degree during that era. In October 1936, he formally joined the Communist Party in Hong Kong.

After his graduation in July 1937, he moved to Hong Kong. When the incumbent secretary general of the Hong Kong Seamen's Union was called to Yan'an, Zeng took over as the head of the organization section of the union, and performed the duties of the secretary general. The union made use of a recreation body for seamen, the Yu Xian Le She, as the façade to recruit young people to join the Anti-Japan and Save the Nation movement.

The influence and the organizational ability of the Seamen's Union were impressive. As one of the first trade unions founded in Hong Kong, the union organized one of the most successful strikes by Chinese workers in the twentieth century in January 1922. The cause of the strike initially was entirely industrial, as Chinese seamen were dissatisfied with the wide disparity in wages paid to white seamen and to Chinese seamen. Later on some of the Communist labour organizers like Su Zhaozheng, Deng Zhongxia and Deng Fa stepped in to provide leadership. Undoubtedly the union was one of the best organized and most radical trade unions in Hong Kong. With Zeng Sheng's leadership and the union's involvement, it was quite a success in attracting able-bodied young men to the Anti-Japan and Save the Nation movement.

After China and Japan went into a full-fledged war following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937, Zeng returned to Pingshan to launch the Huiyang Bao'an People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas in November 1938.⁵ The bulk of the soldiers were Hong Kong-based seamen, junior staff from foreign firms, students, junior civil servants and peasants.

A less well-known man who was a co-founder of the Huiyang Bao'an People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas was Zhou Boming. Zhou and Zeng had similar backgrounds, as both of them started out as students. Zhou attracted the warlord Chen Jitang's attention in Guangdong because of his participation in the anti-Japanese demonstration in December 1935. As he was about to be arrested, he escaped to Beijing and joined the Communist Party there in 1936.

As he was a relatively well-educated student, the party sent him to Xi'an to join Marshal Zhang Xueliang's Northeast Army. He quickly rose through the ranks and was appointed a lieutenant to command a company of soldiers, a little over a year after he joined. After the 12 December Xi'an Incident, when Chiang Kai-shek was held captive by Zhang and Yang Hucheng's soldiers, Zhou was directed by the party to go for military training in Yan'an. When war broke out between Japan and China on 7 July 1937, the party ordered him to make his way to his hometown in Huizhou. He was then sent by Liao Chengzhi to Hong Kong and appointed to head the propaganda section of the municipal committee of the Communist Party in Hong Kong.

In October 1938, Liao directed Zeng, Zhou and another member, Xie Heming, to lead a nucleus unit of about sixty people, that included cadres and seamen from Hong Kong, to move to the Huizhou, Huiyang and Pingshan areas to launch the Huiyang Bao'an People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas. It was during the period of the United Front between the KMT and the Communist Party that Zeng's unit was given a formal designation and recognition under the central government authority. Zhou and Zeng formed the Chinese Communist Party Huiyang and Bao'an District Works Committee. Zeng was the commander of the guerrillas unit and Zhou was the political commissar.

At the same time, Wang Zuorao formed a team in nearby Dongguan. Initially, Wang's team had a nucleus of no more than thirty soldiers or so. But it quickly attracted young peasants and seamen, and within a year or so it had grown to a team of 600 strong.

Wang was the son of a minor county official under a KMT warlord. He was born in March 1913 in Dongguan. When he was due to begin his primary schooling, his father was unemployed. He entered a village primary school when he turned seven. But due to ill health, his schooling was a series of fits and starts, so that he could not finish his primary education until he reached 13. In 1926, his father took him to Guangzhou, with the hope of finding better job opportunities in the provincial capital. It was in Guangzhou that Wang Zuorao's father came under the influence of such Communist Party members as Zhou Enlai, who joined the KMT in their personal capacities. Finally, Wang senior managed to find a job as an apprentice draftsman. But after a year or so, he became unemployed, as the firm where he worked went bankrupt.

In 1931, when the warlord Chen Jitang was ruling Guangdong, Wang Zuorao joined a junior secondary school in Yan Tang, a suburb of Guangzhou. He graduated in 1934 and was appointed a sergeant in a KMT army under another warlord, Li Yangjing.

As a sergeant, his workload was not particularly onerous, so he could go home every weekend and meet people outside his barracks. Later on he met some Communist Party members, among them his own sister. Gradually he became disenchanted with his life as a KMT soldier. As a result of the warlord Chen Jitang's suppression of the student Anti-Japanese movement, he decided to leave the army. But before he could do so, his superiors noticed his pro-Communist sympathy. When he was absent from his barracks in February 1936, they thoroughly searched his room. He knew that his arrest by the KMT government was imminent and escaped in disguise to Guangzhou. In September 1936, he joined the Communist Party. In January 1938, the local party cell sent him to his hometown in Dongguan. The directive given to him by the party was to organize the local people into anti-Japanese guerrilla units. On 14 October, the Dongguan Model Able-bodied Young Men Guerrilla Team was formed.⁶

Right at the outset, leaders of both teams realized the importance of mobilizing the peasants, who made up the bulk of the population in the area. Most of the peasants were illiterate. But they were keen to support the guerrillas' anti-Japanese activities. With Zeng Sheng, Wang Zuorao and a nucleus of some of the relatively better educated cadres provided the leadership and the organizing abilities in mobilizing the peasants. One important aspect of the peasants' support was that they hid the foodstuffs and medical supplies obtained from Hong Kong and elsewhere, with the tacit understanding that they would be held in storage for the guerrillas for their use in the future when the need arose. In early 1939, the two

teams, the Huiyang Bao'an People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas and the Dongguan Model Able-bodied Young Men Guerrilla Team, were amalgamated. But it was not until 3 December 1943 that this team was formally named the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Team, East River Column. Zeng Sheng was appointed commanding general and Wang Zuorao was appointed chief of staff.

One senior leader of the column who was responsible for political activities more than combat and command duties throughout the war was Fang Fang. He was born into a family of a failed entrepreneur in Puning, Guangdong, in May 1904. As a young man, he was attracted to the May Fourth anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism activities in 1919. In 1924, he left school and joined the Peasant Training School in Guangzhou, founded by the KMT but where Mao Zedong taught for a while. In 1926, he joined the Communist Party and launched peasant liberation activities in his hometown in the Chaozhou district. By 1929, he was appointed to the important post of party secretary in the district, when he was barely 25 years old. Subsequently, he was given the task of working in the border areas of Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangxi. In the early 1930s, he mobilized the peasants in the East River area of Guangdong to join Wang Zuorao's embryonic guerrilla unit. By early 1940, he was appointed to the important post of secretary of the Southern Work Committee, answerable directly to Zhou Enlai in the Central Committee of the party. In the hierarchy of the party, he was senior to Zeng Sheng, despite the fact that Zeng held the rank of general.

It was ironic that these 600 soldiers were initially armed, given military rank and some financial aid by local KMT warlords like Xiang Hanping and Luo Fengxiang, as at least some of the KMT generals superficially observed the policy of the United Front. One single factor which helped the guerrillas in mobilizing so much support from the local populace and in acquiring arms and ammunitions at the early stage of their formation was the failure and desertion of the KMT soldiers. When the Japanese tried to attack Huizhou by landing in Daya Bay on 12 October 1938, over 2,000 KMT soldiers who defended the area deserted the city and surrounding area, without firing a single shot. Some of them actually deserted well before the enemy arrived. The end result was that the entire Huiyang district west of the Kowloon-Canton Railway was left completely undefended. So, without any effort, the Japanese marched on and occupied the provincial capital, Guangzhou, within seven days. Many people who eventually joined the guerrillas were apolitical able-bodied young peasants who just felt the need to take up arms to defend their own hometowns. One example was the young people in Humen, who just picked up the arms and ammunitions abandoned by the KMT army. They dumped into the East River the heavy artillery and the cannons that they could not carry.

Soon thereafter, however, the guerrillas alienated some of the local populace by imposing harsh land reform measures waged on the landlords in the Dongguan

and Huizhou areas. What made their position worse was that they were involved in intermittent small-scale armed conflicts with the local KMT forces, because the guerrillas were expanding too fast for the comfort of the local authorities. Therefore, they were fighting a multilateral war with the KMT forces, the Japanese, local bandits and some local quisling soldiers who were under the command of the Wang Jingwei regime in Nanjing. In fact in many instances, it was difficult to differentiate between the bandits and the KMT soldiers, as many bandits were given military rank and recognition by local KMT generals. This combined group of KMT soldiers and bandits was given the disparaging nickname of *he he ji* (呵呵鷄), i.e. chickens afflicted with parasites, by the people and the Communist-led guerrillas. Initially, in late 1939, General Xiang Hanping had meant to control the guerrillas by appointing a few KMT officers into the guerrilla unit commanded by Zhou Boming and Wang Zuorao, under the pretext of assisting Wang in his “political” work.

The KMT forces gradually tried to exercise control over the guerrillas. In early 1940, General Xiang Hanping actually directed these guerrillas to move to Huizhou to be “integrated” formally into the KMT army establishment. By March 1940, as Wang was playing for time by using delaying tactics, Xiang unleashed over one division of his soldiers, who surrounded and attacked the guerrillas in the Pingshan area. Poorly armed and inexperienced in warfare, the guerrillas were soundly beaten. The pervasive mood among the soldiers was defeatism, so much so that they decided to “move east”, i.e. to retreat to the Chaozhou and Hailufeng areas without the approval of the provincial military command. The excuse was that this was the area where the Communist Party forces, led by Zhou Enlai and He Long, moved after their uprising in Nanchang on 1 August 1927. This is where they believed they still had “a strong base of support from the masses”.⁷ The nearly 1,000 soldiers and civilians led by inexperienced commanders were once again routed, and some deserted, leaving only 108 soldiers who were relatively fit and willing to carry on. The talk among the survivors, with a touch of dry humour, was that they were like the 108 heroes in *Water Margin*.⁸

After over a month on the run, they finally arrived in Shishan, where they took some rest. With a nucleus of about 100 soldiers, they regrouped into three small separate contingents of one rifle team (*dui*), one pistol team of about 70 initially and one team of about 30 who were tasked to handle “political” and propaganda work. The first team was led by Wang Zuorao with Zhou Boming as the political commissar. The latter team was led by Zeng Sheng and underpinned by the legendary Cai Guoliang, who subsequently featured very prominently in the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade.

Cai, one of the few non-Hakka leaders of the East River Column, was born in Xiamen in 1912. In 1928, he joined the Amoy Canning Factory in Xiamen, and there he became active in labour union activities. In 1932, his employer transferred

him to the Hong Kong and Kowloon Amoy Canning Factory in Hong Kong. It was the time when Chinese all over the world were involved in the Anti-Japan and Save the Nation activities. Cai quickly became active in some of such bodies such as the *Qiao Tou* (Bridgehead) Society and the Women's Education Service Team. In May 1938, he joined the CCP.

When China and Japan formally came to war in July 1937, Cai led seventeen of his co-workers in the factory and walked all the way to Huizhou to join the Huizhou and Bao'an People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas. By March 1940, he had risen to the rank of deputy political commissar.

For non-Chinese or English-speaking people who came into contact with the column, Huang Zuomei (Raymond Wong to some of his friends) was probably the best-known member of the column, next to Cai Guoliang. Huang's ancestors were from Fujian. But his grandfather moved to Guangdong and then to Hong Kong, where he worked as a teacher at a government primary school.

Huang Zuomei was born in 1916 into a family of nine siblings. After attending a private primary school, he successfully enrolled in 1932 in Queen's College, which was one of the two elite secondary schools in Hong Kong. Later he could have enrolled at the University of Hong Kong, but as his father was struggling to raise a big family, he gave up the opportunity for a university education and sat for the Hong Kong government civil service recruitment examination. Passing successfully, he began to work as a clerk in the Government Stores Department and later in the Royal Navy Dockyard.

In the 1930s, Huang was swept into the various forms of Anti-Japan and Save the Nation activities in Hong Kong. Initially, he joined a choral group which sang patriotic songs to mobilize students and workers to join the various service teams. Chen Daming, a communist cadre in Hong Kong, noticed Huang's activities and recruited him into the party in 1941.

Fluent in spoken and written English, he worked in the International Liaison Unit of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade. Nearly every prisoner of war and non-Chinese civilian who escaped from Hong Kong through the New Territories met Huang and was received by his unit.

Next to Huang Zuomei, the person who met and looked after most English-speaking prisoners and escapees was Lin Zhan. She also was a fluent speaker of English. Lin was born in Hong Kong in 1920 and went to Belilios Public School, the only government-run Anglo-Chinese girls' school. After completing secondary school, she worked as a physical education teacher at the Catholic Sacred Heart School. In spring 1939, she came under the influence of a friend who worked in one of the many service teams in Huiyang. She then became involved in some of the Anti-Japan and Save the Nation activities organized by students in Hong Kong, one of which was the Rainbow Choral Group. Through such activities, she became a member of the Communist Party in July 1941. Because of her membership in the

choral group, she was assigned by the party to liaise and recruit young people into various *minyun* bodies.

After the Japanese started their occupation in December 1941, the party directed her to go underground and attempt to infiltrate any Japanese military unit. She successfully found a job as a laundry worker/domestic maid in a Japanese military quarter in urban Kowloon. On one occasion, a Japanese officer tried to sexually harass her. She put up stiff resistance. Out of revenge, the officer falsely charged her with theft and put her through two days of physical torture. Eventually she was released, as the Japanese could not prove her guilt. During her eight months of recuperation, she learned to speak Japanese, which was useful for her work in the column. Chen Daming, the political commissar, met her and assigned her to work alongside Huang Zuomei in the International Liaison Unit of the column.

It was Lin Zhan who met Dr. Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke through one of his junior colleagues, Dr. Lai Baozhu. The task given by Lin's superiors was to mobilize Dr. Selwyn-Clarke to escape from Hong Kong. However, he felt it more useful to stay and look after the civilians and prisoners of war. He turned down Lin's offer of help.

Directive from Yan'an

A directive dated 8 May 1940 from the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Yan'an was relayed to Zeng via Liao Chengzhi in Hong Kong. Zeng's "move east policy" was severely criticized. During that difficult period, the directive was probably sent by human courier, as it did not reach Zeng Sheng until early June. The message came from Zhou Enlai himself who said:

The present overall situation throughout the country is a situation of stalling and stalemate on the part of the KMT Government. They still maintain the façade of engaging in anti-Japanese activities. But concurrently, they are more active in pursuing anti-communist activities. The possibility of KMT units surrendering to Japanese units in isolated locations cannot be ruled out. We must maintain our anti-Japanese guerrilla campaign bravely and should not be afraid of armed conflict. Only through such a move can we survive and develop further. Units commanded by Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuorao should return to the Dongguan, Bao'an and Huizhou areas. With such favourable political conditions and the support from the local populace, you should find a way to operate in the areas between the Japanese occupied territory and that controlled by the KMT. But do not stay in an area for too long. If you resort to total avoidance of armed conflict with the enemies and hide in the hinterland, it is not only a wrong political move, but it is also doomed to fail militarily. In such an event, the KMT forces will eliminate you under the pretext that you are but local bandits. If you move to the Chaozhou and Meixian areas, you are leaving your base of support.

The second part of the directive was that they should discard the rank and the designations given to them by the KMT forces. From then on, they renamed themselves “the Guangdong People’s Anti-Japanese Guerrillas East River Column”. Part three of the directive stated:

When you move back to the East River area, you should go through some appropriate rectification among your soldiers. Strengthen unity and mobilize anti-Japanese sentiments politically. On your way to your destination, reduce loss as much as possible so that you can have an intact unit when you arrive in the Huizhou, Dongguang and Bao’an areas. When you arrive, strengthen your United Front work.

The directive was of course very much in keeping with Mao’s teaching that “the guerrilla soldiers are like fish and the people are the water”. Returning to the East River area, they could travel and obtain supplies from Hong Kong with less difficulty. So Zeng Sheng temporarily handed over the command to Wang Zuorao and Zhou Boming and made his way to Hong Kong in July 1940. During his short stay in Hong Kong, he managed to raise funds and supplies for his soldiers.

With some seventy soldiers, the embryonic guerrilla unit re-established a base just a few miles south of Dongguan and west of the Kowloon-Canton Railway. Before long, he managed to recruit up to 500 soldiers and started rebuilding his guerrilla army. Then he launched two local newspapers to promote anti-Japanese propaganda and mobilize the people.

The person who virtually launched and operated the two newspapers was Yang Qi. He was born in Zhongshan County in 1923. His father used to own a small fabric shop in Guangzhou. The Great Depression of the 1930s wiped out all his capital and savings. Equipped only with primary education, he had to fend for himself. Virtually penniless, he made his way to Hong Kong and found a job as an apprentice in an herbalist shop in 1938. Through hard work and self-education, he was admitted as a part-time student in the Institute of Journalism, where Qiao Guanhua, the German- and Japanese-educated journalist, taught. In the meantime, Yang switched jobs and became a proofreader of a left-wing magazine, *Literary Youth*. Before long, he was promoted to editor of the magazine and was involved in the editorial work of *Hua Shang Bao* (Chinese Merchants’ Daily).

By then his brother, Yang Zijiang, had joined the East River Column. Yang Qi came under the influence of his brother and joined the party in early 1941. When the magazine’s anti-Japanese slant caught the government’s attention, it was raided by the Special Branch of the police. Finally the magazine ceased operation. Other party members alerted him that he might be arrested by the government. He was then directed to report to the East River Column’s headquarters in Bao’an. His talent as a journalist was noticed, so he was given the job of publishing *Qianjin Bao* (Forward Newspaper) throughout the war.

The Hong Kong Government and the Guerrillas

It was somewhat strange that the British government's overall policy in Southeast Asia in dealing with Liao Chengzhi and his comrades was not consistent. Liao was eyed with a great deal of suspicion by the colonial authority in Malaya, as his recruitment of young overseas Chinese attracted the local Special Branch's attention. He was criticized for "using Hong Kong as a base to organize communist disturbances against the Government of Malaya". The Hong Kong government, however, held a different view from that of the Malaya government. It stated that the latter government's policy was a "misconception of the overseas Chinese organizations' patriotic activities" and that "suppression of these patriotic movements as being inimical to the Imperialist policy of Malaya encouraged their growth and gave rise to so much internal trouble".¹⁰

In the meantime, Liao Chengzhi's activities in Hong Kong went through a rather hot and cold period of treatment from the Hong Kong authorities. As the UK government still maintained diplomatic relations with Japan, an overly active recruitment centre for anti-Japanese guerrillas was definitely not a welcome move. As a result, the Yue Hwa Company was raided on 11 March 1939. Five of the staff, including Lian Guan, who was probably the most senior communist cadre in Hong Kong then, next to Liao, were arrested by the Special Branch of the Hong Kong Police. The firm was forcibly closed until Zhou Enlai protested to the UK ambassador in Chongqing.¹¹ Then all the staff were released and all documents seized were returned. However, under strong pressure from the Japanese, the Hong Kong government forcibly closed the Yue Hwa Company later in 1939. Liao and his colleagues continued with their fund-raising and recruitment activities even without the façade of the shop. But their real activities were an open secret to their Chinese compatriots and to the Hong Kong Police.

However, the relations between Liao and Hong Kong government took an unexpected turn in mid-1941. As the Pacific War loomed on the horizon, the British intelligence knew that the Japanese army was conducting military exercises in Hainan Island, then under Japanese occupation. Indications were that the Japanese army was attempting to acclimatize their soldiers, before their attack on Malaya and Singapore. On 24 October 1941, the head of the Special Branch of the Hong Kong Police approached Liao with a rather unexpected request: to enlist the East River Column and the Qiongya Guerrillas (commanded by Feng Baiju on Hainan Island since 1927) to sabotage the military airport and other military facilities built by the Japanese. The British side made it quite clear that what they wanted was co-operation in the military area only. Any such negotiations did not imply any overtone of politics or recognition of Liao's political status. For quite some time since the late 1930s, Premier Tojo of Japan had been planning and directing a detailed study of what would be required for the capture and occupation of Malaya

and Singapore. Therefore, the Taiwan Army Research Centre was founded in Taiwan. It was run and directed by Colonel Masanobu Tsuji. Initially, Tsuji was given a year for the planning of the invasion of Malaya and Singapore. By the beginning of 1941, because of the American embargo on all petroleum products, he was told that his period of planning was reduced to six months. The main emphasis of his planning and study was to collate “all conceivable data connected with tropical warfare” for Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia and Burma. Coming from a temperate climate, the Japanese army had never fought in the tropics. So with the beaches in Malaya in mind, amphibious exercises were staged initially in Kyushu, the most southerly island in Japan. Subsequently, such exercises were held on Hainan Island, which was as tropical as they could get.¹² Occasionally, Japanese aircraft also flew over Malaya from French-occupied Saigon and from Hainan Island.¹³

The secret negotiations went on back and forth for a few weeks. Initially Liao cabled Mao in Yan’an for instructions. Mao gave his agreement for Liao to proceed with detailed negotiations, in a cable on 26 October. Representing the British side was the head of the Special Branch of the Hong Kong Police, Superintendent F. W. Shaftain. While the British were anxious to enlist the help from the East River Column, they were highly concerned that if the news of the secret negotiations was leaked out, that would no doubt cause a serious diplomatic disaster. Not only would it offend the Japanese but also the sensibilities of the British authorities in Malaya and the Dutch, who maintained a strong anti-communist policy in the Dutch East Indies. So the negotiations went back and forth right up to a few days before the outbreak of the Pacific War. As late as 14 November, Mao cabled Zhou Boming and Liao to tell them not to be “too greedy in their demands”. Finally an agreement on the following four points was arrived at:

- (1) The Communists agreed to sabotage the military airfield built by the Japanese on Hainan Island. But they hoped that the agreement would not be a one-off operation. They hoped that there would be a long-term co-operation between the two sides. The British, while remaining non-committal, agreed to assist the Qiongya Guerrillas as much as possible.
- (2) The Communists agreed to undertake the operation provided that the British would supply all the necessary arms, ammunition, technology and training to Feng’s soldiers in undertaking the sabotage work. The dynamite required was to be shipped to Zhanjiang, then known as Guangzhouwan, in Guangxi, at that time a French Colony. It would be picked up by Feng’s soldiers. The British agreed to supply 1,000 pistols and 250 sub-machine guns to Feng.
- (3) The Communists requested that Feng be allowed to set up a liaison office and a radio station in Hong Kong, somewhat like the Yue Hwa Company operated by Liao. The British rejected this request but agreed that Feng be allowed to

operate a “commercial firm” in Hong Kong, named “Guang Nam Company” under the management of the Comintern representative in Hong Kong. The Communists considered the possibility that the “company” be formed by a left-leaning New Zealand journalist, James Bertram. There was evidence that Bertram was the intermediary who brought both sides together.¹⁴ The British agreed not to interfere with the firm’s activities but expressed the hope that the “company” would not organize a “mass movement” among the people in Hong Kong. The request to set up a radio station was turned down.

- (4) The Communists requested the British to supply the East River Column and the New Fourth Army with arms and medical supplies. The British agreed to supply them with 500 pistols and 50 sub-machine guns initially. The Chinese side would provide the transport to send the weapons to the areas of operation.

Throughout the negotiations, Liao kept Yan’an informed by telegram, the last one sent to Yan’an on 7 December 1941, one day before Pearl Harbour and the invasion of Hong Kong. It was obvious that the Communists were anxious to obtain the weapons and ammunitions, because they sent Zhou Boming, a deputy of Zeng Sheng, to Hong Kong to take delivery of the weapons. But the British were somewhat hesitant and tardy for fear of offending the KMT government and that of the Japanese. Ultimately, the deal was never implemented because of the outbreak of the war on 8 December. Many guerrilla leaders involved were still bitter at the British side’s failure in fulfilling their conditions of the deal, when they recalled the negotiations many years afterwards.¹⁵

Notes

Chapter 2

1. The term Hakka, which literally means “guest people”, was probably coined by local residents who had settled in the south before the Hakka arrived. The term was derived from the fact that these people came in waves from north and central China to southern provinces like Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian. The first wave came around the Eastern Jin Dynasty, A.D. 317–419. The last wave came around the end of the Taiping Rebellion in 1864. Hakka are found in at least seventeen provinces and over 230 towns and cities. In Guangdong alone, they are found in over seventy-one cities and market towns. It was estimated by a well-known Hakka academic, Professor Lo Hsianglin, that there are at least 80 million of them within China and some 20 million outside China, the majority in South and Southeast Asia. For at least the last three centuries, they have produced well-known revolutionary leaders like Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing, both Taiping Rebellion leaders. Of the later anti-Qing rebel leaders, most of the seventy-two martyrs of the Huanghuagang Uprising in Guangzhou were Hakka. Other notable Hakka were Sun Yat-sen, Soong Ching-ling, Zhu De, Ye Jianying, Liao Chengzhi, Aw Boon Haw, Han Suyin and Guo Moruo. The famous KMT soldiers Zhang Fakui, Xue Yue and Chen Jitang were Hakka. (For details, see William Skinner, *Regional Systems in Late Imperial China*, paper presented at the 2nd Annual General Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1977; and Luo Xianglin, *Kejia Yanjiu Daolun*, Xingning, Guangdong: Shi-shan Library, 1933.)
2. Israel Epstein, *Woman in World History: Life and Times of Soong Ching Ling* (Beijing: New World Press, 1993), p. 323. In order to garner widespread support, Soong managed to rally not only political leaders from the KMT and the CCP but also some international personages to join the league, e.g. T. V. Soong, Foreign Minister of China; Sun Ke, Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s son, who was president of the Legislative Yuan in the KMT government; General Feng Yuxiang, the famous “Christian General” who did not agree with Chiang Kai-shek’s policy of appeasement of the Japanese aggressors; J. Nehru; Paul Robeson, the famous African American singer; Pearl Buck; Clare Boothe Luce; Thomas Mann; and Bishop Ronald Hall, Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong members who were office bearers were: Norman France, a professor of history at the University of Hong Kong; Israel Epstein, an assistant editor of *South China Morning Post*; and Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, the wife of Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke, Director of Medical and Health Services in the Hong Kong government.

- Chan Kwanpo was the Chinese secretary of the league. Chan was a lecturer in Chinese at the University of Hong Kong. He was well known for his patriotism and was well connected with many literary figures, such as Lu Xun and Xu Dishan in China. Liao Mengxing was Liao Chengzhi's younger sister. She married Li Shaoshi, who was an aide to Zhou Enlai when Zhou was staying in Chongqing during the Second World War. Deng Wenzhao (or Tang Manchui to his friends in Hong Kong) was the deputy Chinese manager of the Belgian Bank in Hong Kong. He returned to China after Liberation in 1949. He married Liao's second cousin and hence came under his influence. In the 1930s he studied in Cambridge. He admitted he had acquired his socialist outlook because he came under Harold Laski's influence. For a while he was the deputy director of the Commerce Department in Guangzhou and vice provincial governor of Guangdong just before the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.
3. Chen Daming, *Xianggang Kangri Youjidui* (Hong Kong: Huanqiu Chubanshe Youxian Gongsì, 2000), pp. 15–7.
 4. Wang Zuorao, *Dong Zong Yi Ye* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), p. 87.
 5. Zeng Sheng, Jiangjun Zhuan, unpublished article by the editor of *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 1986.
 6. Wang Man, *Jiangjun de Fengcai* (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 1–20.
 7. Zeng Sheng, *Zeng Sheng Huiyilu* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 141–66.
 8. Interview with Zeng Sheng, 20 October 1984.
 9. Interview with Zeng Sheng, 20 October 1984.
 10. War Office Papers 208/254.
 11. *Xianzhe Bu Xiu: Lian Guan Tongzhi Jinian Wenji* (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 163–5.
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11. David Faure, p. 49; and my interview with Zhang Xing on 19 December 1984.
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21. Edwin Ride, *BAAG, Hong Kong Resistance, 1942–1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 217–8.
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12. *Dongjiang Zongdui Shi*, a magazine published on the East River Column's 40th Anniversary in December 1983 (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1984).
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14. *Gangjiu Dadui Ge Zhongdui Shi* (Shenzhen: Zhonggong Shenzhen Shiwei Dangshi Bangongshi, December 1985), p. 90.
15. War Office Papers 235/1112.
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Chapter 5

1. Interview with Zeng Fa, 17 March 2001, in Shenzhen. Zeng did not join the repatriation on 30 June 1946. He stayed behind and worked for a while in the Fish Marketing Organization, Tai Po, Hong Kong. He fought as a guerrilla soldier during the civil war and held the rank of captain when Shenzhen was liberated in October 1949. He retired from the post of mayor of Jiangmen, Guangdong, in 1985.
2. *Gangjiu Duli Dadui Shi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chunbanshe, February 1989), pp. 18–26; Zeng Sheng, *Zeng Sheng Huiyilu* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 426–9.
3. War Office Papers 208/750.
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5. Tse Wing-kwong, *Zhanshi Rijun zai Xianggang baoxing* (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Publishing House, 1991), pp. 218–20. In the war crimes trials staged by the British military authorities in 1946, Kishi, Matsumoto and Uchida were sentenced to death by hanging. Sergeant Kamiyo was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Sergeant Yoshimura was given a jail sentence of eight years, and Kodama was jailed for five years.
6. Interview with Kwong Pingyau, chairman of Cheung Chau Rural Committee, on 13 April 1986.
7. Eddie Gosano, *Hong Kong Farewell* (London: Greg England, 1997), pp. 36–7.
8. Stephen Harper, *Miracle of Deliverance* (London: Guild Publishing, 1968); Colonial Office Papers 129/591/16.
9. Tse Wing-kwong (ed.), *The Chan Kwan Po Diary* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Commercial Press, 1999), p. 834.
10. Colonial Office Papers 129/594/6.
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13. Colonial Office Papers 537/60/67.
14. Foreign Office Papers 371/537/41.
15. Foreign Office Papers 371/537/41.
16. *Gangjiu Duli Dadui Shi*, pp. 184–5.
17. Chen Daming, p. 164.
18. Foreign Office Papers 327/538.
19. The Third Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 27 June 1947, carried the following citation on the award of the decoration of M.B.E. "Raymond Wong, student, Kowloon. In recognition of his contribution to the British military activities in South East Asia

before 2 September 1945.” Huang Zuomei used his English name Raymond Wong in his dealings with English-speaking friends. The reason his occupation was described as “student” is unknown. Note: Previously referred to as Raymond Huang.

20. *Kung Sheung Daily*, Hong Kong, 16 February 1947.
21. Arthur Clegg, *Aid China 1937–1949: A Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign* (Beijing: New World Press, 1989), p. 167.

Chapter 6

1. Zhou Yi, *Xianggang Zuopai Douzheng Shi* (Hong Kong: Liwen Chubanshe, 2002), p. 16.
2. *Sannian Jiefang Zhazheng* (Shenzhen: Zhonggong Shenzhen Shiwei Dangshi Bangongshi, 1986), pp. 40–5.
3. Colonial Office Papers 129/592/6.
4. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 18 January 1946.
5. Interview with Lin Zhan, 1 August 2000. Lin was one of Fang Fang’s English interpreters during the negotiations.
6. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 18 January 1946.
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9. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 31 January 1946.
10. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 15 February 1946.
11. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 19 February 1946.
12. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 25 February 1946.
13. Public Records Office Papers 371/537/41.
14. *Dongjiang Zongdui Shi* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 2003), p. 470.
15. Zhonggong Nanjing Shi Weiyuanhui, *Zhou Enlai 1946 nian Tanpan Wenxuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996), p. 175.
16. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 23 March 1946.
17. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 8 March 8 1946.
18. *History of Field Team No. 8. Second Quarter Report*. Washington, DC: Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence. US Army Publication, June 1946.
19. *History of Field Team No. 8. Second Quarter Report*, p. 35.
20. *History of Field Team No. 8. Second Quarter Report*, p. 36.
21. Foreign Office Papers 371/53760.
22. *History of Field Team No. 8. Second Quarter Report*, pp. 1–30.
23. Letter from the British Consul General in Guangzhou to the Commander-in-Chief, Hong Kong, 17 April 1946.
24. *Hua Shang Bao*, Hong Kong, 21 April 1946.
25. *Dongjiang Zongdui Shi*, p. 472.
26. Foreign Office Papers 371/53760.
27. *History of Field Team No. 8. Second Quarter Report*, pp. 1–30.
28. L. S. Houchief, *The East River Column Evacuation, June–July 1946, American Naval Involvement in the Chinese Civil War*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1971.
29. L.S. Houchief.
30. *Dongjiang Zongdui Shi*, p. 480.

31. Zeng Sheng, *Zeng Sheng Huiyilu* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 450–76.
32. Zeng Sheng, p. 472.
33. Zeng Sheng, p. 478.
34. *Dongjiang Zongdui Shi*, p. 479.
35. Arthur Clegg, *Aid China 1937–1949: A Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign* (Beijing: New World Press, 1989), p. 171. Qiao Guanhua succeeded Huang Zuomei as director of the Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong when Huang was posted to London to set up the branch office of Xinhua. In London he had the help of Jack Chen and some of his British friends, including Mary Sheridan Jones. The agency was initially based in Fleet Street but moved to Gray's Inn Road in 1948. Huang also tried to run the agency's work in Prague from his base in London.
36. *Liang Guang Zongdui Shi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 9–10.
37. Zeng Sheng, p. 511.
38. Duan Haiyan, *Xianzhe Bu Xiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1995), p. 200.
39. Lu Weiluan, Dade Shuyuan De Lishi, paper presented at the Hong Kong and Guangzhou Literary Activities Seminar, November 1985.
40. Zhou Yi, p. 16.
41. Duan Haiyan, p. 181.
42. Lu Weiluan.
43. *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 22 January 2002.
44. *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 22 May 1991.
45. Nanfang Ribao Baoye Jituan, *Huashang Jiaziqing*.
46. Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948–60* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1975), p. 44. The fact that the Malaya Communist Party was a branch of the party in China was admitted by Chin Peng, secretary-general of the Malaya Communist Party, in an interview conducted in June 1998 with *Yazhou Zhoukan* (Asia Weekly). See *Yazhou Zhoukan*, Hong Kong, 15 June 1998.

Chapter 7

1. There were at least ten recognizable guerrilla groups that operated in Guangdong Province (including Hainan Island) during the Second World War: the East River Column, the Qiongya Guerrilla Column, the Zhongshan Zhongdui, the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Liberation Army, the Guangdong Nanlu People's Anti-Japanese Liberation Army, the Gaolei People's Anti-Japanese Force, the Xingmei Hanjiang Column, the Chaoshan Hanjiang Column, the Hanjiang Renmin Youjidui and the Guangdong Northwest People's Anti-Japanese United Army.
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3. Yang Li, *Gu Dacun Chenyuanlu* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Publications Co., 1999), pp. 77–84.
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5. Zhao Wei, *Zhao Ziyang Zhuan* (Hong Kong: Xianggang Wenhua Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1988), p. 62.
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7. Zhang Leichu, p. 16; and interview with Yang Qi, 12 October 1985.
8. Zhonggong Guangdong Sheng Dangshi Yanjiu Weiyuanhui, *Huiyi Rao Zhangfeng* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (HK), 1989), p. 82.
9. Ezra Vogel, p. 95.
10. “No Feudal Exploitation in South China?” *Xuexi* (Study), Vol. 3, Guangzhou, November 1950.
11. Conversation with Yang Qi, 14 December 1987.
12. Ezra Vogel, p. 111.
13. Zheng Xiaofeng, *Tao Zhu Zhuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 219–26.
14. Ezra Vogel, pp. 112–3.
15. *Nanfang Ribao*, 28 May 1951.
16. Zheng Xiaofeng, p. 226.
17. Fan Shuo, *Ye Jianying Zhuan* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chunbanshe, 1995), p. 493.
18. Zhonggong Guangdong Sheng Dangshi Yanjiu Weiyuanhui, p. 144.
19. Zhao Wei, *Zhao Ziyang Zhuan* (Hong Kong: Wenhua Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1988), p. 64.
20. Li Chunxiao, *Ji Yuegang Yidai Baoren Yang Qi* (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 1–45.
21. Deng Guangyin, *Wo De Fuqin Deng Wenzhao* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi Chubanshe, 1996), p. 91.
22. Yang Li, p. 134.
23. Zhang Leichu, p. 61.
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26. Zhang Jiangming, *Dangdai Guangdong* (Guangzhou, 1995).
27. Wu Zhi, *Feng Baiju Zhuan* (Guangzhou: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1992), p. 763.
28. Interview with Fang Zhanhua, 14 December 1983.
29. Ezra Vogel, p. 122.
30. Wang Man and Yang Yong, *Tie Gu Ling Shuang: Yin Linping Zhuan* (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1992), p. 290.
31. Zeng Sheng, *Zeng Sheng Huiyilu* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1992), p. 652.
32. Zeng Sheng, p. 745.
33. Yang Li, p. 361.
34. Zhang Jiangming, *Dangdai Guangdong* (Guangzhou, 1995).

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