Class, Culture and Structural Domination
in a Colonial Situation: Changing Community
Leadership on Cheung Chau Island, Hong Kong

Yao Soucheu, B.Sc.
Department of Anthropology
The University of Adelaide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page
Table of Contents i
Brief Summary ii
Disclaimer v
Acknowledgements vi

Chapter One  The Argument: Class, Cultural Reproduction and the Formation of Hegemony in a Colonial Situation 1

Chapter Two  Hong Kong: Class, Power Structure and the Development of Industrial Capitalism 42

Chapter Three  The New Territories and the Metropolitan Economy 93

Chapter Four  Cheung Chau Island: Class, Ethnicity and Cultural Reproduction 133

Chapter Five  The Wong Tai Sin Tong: Community Leadership and Traditional Land Tenure Under Colonial Rule 201

Chapter Six  Capitalism and the Post-War Development of Cheung Chau: From the Residents’ Association to the Rural Committee (1945-1960) 245

Chapter Seven  Culture, Bureaucracy and the Constitution of Power: The Politics of Land Administration in the New Territories 293

Chapter Eight  The Emergence of ‘Patriotic Front’ Associations: Peking, Left-wing Ideology and Political Control in Hong Kong 332

Chapter Nine  Conclusion and Future Prospects 385

Character List 423

Bibliography 425
BRIEF SUMMARY

This study is an examination of changing community leadership on Cheung Chau Island from the time of the British takeover until the late 1970's. The relationship between the community leaders and the island population is conceptualized in terms of class and the concomitant structural domination. Of particular importance is the way such domination is reproduced and articulated in the social, economic and ideological spheres of community life. In addition, the analysis gives emphasis to the wider structural changes taking place in the colonial society as a whole. The realignment of power and class relations in Cheung Chau is examined as a response to these changes.

The central argument and the main theoretical issues relating to class and ideological production are treated in Chapter 1. Class is conceptualized as a group of people structurally located in a set of social, economic and ideological relationships vis-à-vis other groups. The reproduction of class structure implies the process of class structuration: the way the structure of relationships based on class permeates all aspects of social life and institutions. Class structuration during the past decades is summarized. Chapter 2 outlines the development of the colonial economy and the structure of the ruling power in Hong Kong. Two aspects are given special attention: the development of industrial capitalism in the post-war years; and the normalization of the relationship with China in the 1970's. The overall process is to produce, on the one hand, close collaboration between European and Chinese capitalists and bourgeoisie in the maintenance of the
colonial order; and on the other, the effective political control of the working class with the tacit approval of the People's Republic of China. Chapter 3 and 4 describe the social organization of the New Territories and Cheung Chau against the background of the metropolitan economy. The system of government administration which incorporates the powerful merchant class is examined. On Cheung Chau class domination involves mobilization of ethnicity as well as the temples and festivals. It is through the temples and religious festivals that the cultural ideology relating to the family is reproduced. I begin in Chapter 5 the analysis of the leadership on Cheung Chau by looking at the Wong Wai Tsan Tong. The historical positions of the Tong in relation to both traditional land tenure and the imperial bureaucracy is discussed. Some of the traditional influence especially vis-à-vis the administration of land is continued under the colonial administration. This resulted in a significant contradiction in the structure of local leadership as the government began to integrate the emerging merchant class interests in the local administration.

The post-war years saw the culmination of the change in local economy from fishing to the development of a residential town for the provision of immigrant workers and tourists. This process, together with the related theoretical issues form the focus of discussion in Chapter 6. The demise of the Tong influence, and the emergence of the merchant class constituting the Chamber of Commerce and the Rural Committee stems from the dramatic changes following the war. While the Rural Committee enjoys a close relationship with the government, it is also placed under effective
political control by the administration. Chapter 7 looks at the nature of this relationship articulated in the complex issue of land administration. The Rural Committee leaders are actively involved in dealing and speculation in land and real estate. Such practices are made possible by their access to the offices of the government bureaucracy. I argue that the goodwill and obligations created by the government are critical in the constitution of power and political control by the District Office.

Chapter 8 examines the emergence of the working-class based left-wing associations in the 1970's as part of the continuous transformation of the structure of class relations. The deradicalization of the left-wing ideology as well as the contradiction in the organizations themselves is vitally related to the development of China after the Cultural Revolution. On Cheung Chau this has produced a movement towards close cooperation between the left-wing leadership and those of the Rural Committee/Chamber of Commerce.

The colonial administrations play a critical role in the restructuring of local leadership. Contradiction is located in the attempt to apply the broader principles of Indirect Rule. The concluding chapter discusses the formation of the District Advisory Board. The DAB represents part of the continuous attempt to restructure the local leadership in order to accommodate the emerging class interests. The marxist conceptions of fetishism and mystification are re-considered. The incultication of ideological forms in social perception and consciousness necessarily incorporates the role of culture. It is operation through culture which characterizes the process of ideological production and the function of cultural ideology in the reproduction of social life.