

Headquarters for the Canton Uprising

The plan for the 1911 Revolution against China's Manchu rulers germinated in the island of Penang, reports Yong Check Yoon

The late Dr Sun Yat-sen's attempt to overthrow the Manchu government in China, known as the Canton Uprising or the 1911 Revolution, saw the first significant role played by the overseas Chinese in the revolutions of modern China.

Among these "foreign" participants were those from the small, predominantly-Chinese state of Penang.

"From 1910, Penang was the guiding spirit of the Chinese revolution, which actually started in the 19th century but was only successful in 1911," said Malaysian Chinese History and Relic Survey director Ong Seng Huat, in his talk on the roles played by Sun and the Kuomintang in the Canton Uprising.

As proof of the pivotal role Penang played, the talk was conducted at the site of Sun's party headquarters for Southeast Asia at 120, Lebuh Armenian, where from 1910 till 1911, Sun plotted and planned the uprising.

The site was also the birthplace of the state's and world's oldest Chinese newspaper, the Kwong Wah Jit Poh.

Today, the place is home to the Penang Heritage Trust honorary secretary Khoo Salma Nasution.

Sun's close friend, Yu Lieh, came to Penang in 1901 to set up two organisations - the Chung Ho Tang (Revolution Organisation) and Chiang Tu, which was not related to the revolution.

Sun's second wife was from Penang.

"In July 1905, Dr Sun, on his way from Europe to Japan, stopped at Penang where he stayed at Market Street.

We know of his presence in Penang in 1905 from the letters he sent to a friend and also from the minutes of a meeting in Tung Meng Hui (Sun's party, meaning "The United League"). He made his stopover in Penang while on his way from Europe to Japan," said Ong.

In July 1905, Sun gave his first speech in Penang at the Hsiao Lan Ting (Penang Merchant's Club), which is the current Philomathic Union in Macalister Road.

It was an unsympathetic audience as overseas Chinese at that time were divided in their opinion on how China could be "saved". The reformists believed that establishing a parliamentary system and a constitutional monarchy was the panacea for the ills, while the revolutionaries subscribed to the idea that toppling the Manchu government and setting up a republic was the only solution.

The Tung Men Hui headquarters was founded in Japan in 1905 and on April 6 1906, a Tung Men Hui branch was set up in Singapore, which was the mansion of Teo Eng-hock.

Hu Han-mm, the coordinator of the Nanyang Tung Men Hui (South-East Asian Tung Men Hui), drafted the arty constitution there.

Tung Men Hui (Penang branch) was formed in 1906 with 22 members, with Goh Say-eng as the chairman and Ng Kim-kheng as the deputy chairman.

In 1907, Sun gave a talk at the Penang Chinese Town Hall, urging the people to overthrow the Manchu dynasty "as the prerequisite for saving China".

Later in August, the Penang Philomatic Society (The Penang Reading Club) was founded at a meeting at Goh Say-eng's home in Green Lane, which has since been demolished. Goh Say-eng was appointed founding chairman and Wang Chingwei drafted the constitution.

On Dec 17, 1907, the Penang Philomatic Society's first meeting was convened at the Penang Chinese Town Hall to amend the constitution.

In 1909, on the 5th day of the 4th Moon, the Penang Philomatic Union, Tung Men Hui, and also Teong Hua Company moved from 94 Datuk Keramat Road to 120 Armenian Street.

On Aug 25, 1910, Sun arrived in Penang with his first wife Loo Muk Chen, his second wife Tan Sua Huan, Sun Yin and Sun Wan, and his elder brother Sun Tek Cheang alias Sun Mei.

The family stayed at 400 Datuk Keramat Road while Sun used house number 404 as his office. Their daily expenses were borne by 11 Penang Philomatic Union members: Goh Say-eng, Seong Ee San, Ng Kim-Kheng, Khoo Beng Ser, Tan Sin Cheng, Tan Soo Cher, Cheah Ee Yea, Loo Boon Hooi, Quah Chin Por, Ooi Kai Swee and Phuah Ee Guan.

The two houses have since been demolished.

During that time, many of Sun's comrades had to flee to Penang to avoid political persecution by the Manchu government for their revolutionary activities and the

botched Hokou Uprising of May 1908.

Sun's second wife Tan took care of the housekeeping chores which included washing their clothes and preparing their meals.

In 1910, the Yan Kon Kwong Wah Pao in Rangoon (now Yangon) was suppressed by the British government and this prompted the newspaper's chairman Ch'ng Yeen Aun to move to Penang, together with his printing equipment.

Sun, Goh and other members of the Phiomathic Society revived the paper by founding the Penang Kwong Wah Pao (later becoming Kwong Wah Jit Poh).

Kwong Wah Pao was published from 120 Armenian Street and Hu Han Min supervised the running of the newspaper until Lua Ter Yar was recruited from Japan as the editor.

The first issue of the newspaper rolled off the press on Jan 3, 1911 and it became Tung Men Hui's main revolutionary organ in Malaya until the 1950s, after which it became an independent Chinese daily to become the world's oldest Chinese newspaper today.

Then in November, Sun chaired the first meeting at his office at 404 Jalan Datuk Keramat to plan for the Canton Uprising. Among those who attended were Sun Mei and the representatives of Tung Meng Hui from the Penang, Ipoh, Seremban and Pontianak (Borneo) branches.

"The forum authorised the Penang comrades for the Canton Uprising as well as the overseas fund-raising campaign," said Ong.

An extraordinary meeting was held on Nov 13 with Sun chairing the Tung Meng Hui meeting at 120 Lebuh Armenian. The Canton Uprising campaign was officially launched.

The meeting has become known in all history textbooks as the P1 Neng Hut Yi or "The Penang Conference." It was also at this meeting that the time and place of the uprising was decided upon.

Sun appealed for donations, saying "overseas comrades need only to donate money, whereas comrades in China are sacrificing their lives for the country"

Sun promised that if the uprising should fail, he would never trouble his supporters again. Those who attended the conference immediately pledged a collective 8,000 straits dollar - a handsome sum in those days.

While the fund-raising campaign was in process, Sun was ordered by the British

Resident Councilor to leave Penang on Jan 6, 1911.

It was the result of his speech at the Ching Fang Ko Club in which he urged the audience to support the revolution against the Ching government (with whom the British government had diplomatic ties) and indirectly attacked the British colonial rule in Malaya.

The task of fund-raising in Malaya was handed over to his trusted comrades and money continued to flow in from Chinese communities in Canada, the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, Thailand and the US.

Eventually \$187,000 was raised, about which a quarter of the sum came from the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore.

The Canton Uprising took place on the 29th day of the 3rd Moon, or April 27, 1911. Huang Hsing, a staunch supporter of Sun took part together with about 170 others in the revolution.

72 were killed, among them "gifted poets, distinguished writers, popular journalists, skilled workers and farmers".

"After the Canton Uprising, Sun's Malayan supporters gathered at the Penang base to mourn the death of the martyrs," said Ong, adding that the anniversary of the uprising is commemorated as "Youth Day" in Taiwan today

One of the reasons the Canton Uprising failed was because the Manchu government was alerted by the assassination of a Manchu general by a revolutionary assassin Wen Theng-tsai in Canton in 1911.

"With a tightened security the authorities were able to intercept the revolutionaries' messages and delivery of arms," said Ong.

The uprising might not have been successful but it turned the tide against the Manchu government and gained widespread sympathy for the revolutionary cause.

The Ching Dynasty was toppled within six months in the Wuchang Uprising on Oct 10. It has since been dubbed the "Double Tenth Revolution".

On Feb 1, 1912, after the success of the Chinese revolution, Sun's ship stopped in Penang while on the way to China. He met his comrades and supporters one last time but because of close surveillance by the British, Sun was unable to alight from the vessel.

In mid-February after establishing the new Chinese republican government, Sun telegraphed his family in Penang to join him in Nanking.

Penang, thus, played a vital role in Chinese history when Sun shifted his Tung Men Hui headquarters from Singapore to Penang and planned the tenth revolution - The Canton Uprising.

Though the uprising was a failure, it was significant in leading to the Wuchang Uprising, which resulted in the end of the dynastic rule and the formation of a Chinese republic. (SunIsland:26/04/2001)