

2 The Global World of Chinese Networks in the 1920s

The Chinese Revolution and the Liberation of the Oppressed *Minzu*

“So we want to know where internationalism [*shijiezhuyi*] comes from? It comes from nationalism.”¹

From Global Trade to Global Emancipation: The Chinese Revolution in Moscow, Tokyo, Berlin, San Francisco, and Singapore

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese migration had become a globalizing force of its own. The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade had created a demand for Chinese labor, and the opening of Chinese ports after the Opium Wars facilitated coolie trade to the Americas. Population crises and new opportunities across the globe, including the gold rush and the demand for indentured labor on plantations, pushed the Chinese from South China, who had a tradition of searching for opportunities overseas, to leave China for the British, Dutch, and Spanish colonies in the Americas and Southeast Asia, including sovereign Siam. Although the number of migrants is difficult to estimate because of inconclusive data, the 14.7 million departures from Xiamen, Shantou, and Hong Kong in 1869–1939 give an idea of the scale of the migration.²

¹ Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yatsen], “Sanminzhuyi [Three People’s Principles,” in *Minzuzhuyi* [*Nationalism*], lecture 4, February 17, 1924, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* [*Collected Works of Sun Yatsen*], 11 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), vol. 9, pp. 220–231, esp. p. 226. In the English translation, *shijiezhuyi* is translated as “cosmopolitanism”: “We must understand that cosmopolitanism grows out of nationalism.” *The Three Principles of the People, San Min Chu I. By Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. With Two Supplementary Chapters by Chiang Kai-shek. Translated into English by Frank W. Price. Abridged and edited by the Commission for the Compilation of the History of the Kuomintang* (Taipei: China Publishing Company, 1960), pp. 21–27, esp. p. 25.

² Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 114, 150; Kaoru Sugihara, “Patterns of Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia, 1869–1939,” in Kaoru Sugihara, ed., *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 1850–1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 244–274.

Although localized centuries-old communities of Chinese were politically second class to the Europeans, they were involved in administration and helped govern the colonies. They “borrowed” the Dutch and British empires in Southeast Asia and were essential middlemen for the functioning of those empires.³ Chinese merchants had been rising to the position of rulers in the indigenous polities of today’s mainland Southeast Asia since the early second millennium. In Dutch and then British colonies, the Chinese had functioned as tax collectors, and they thrived on revenue farms until the late nineteenth century, particularly through the opium trade.⁴ Yet European discriminatory policies toward the alien migrant Chinese and toward the circulation of nationalist ideas made acquisition of a local identity desirable for the Chinese. In the second half of the nineteenth century in the Philippines, in addition to helping to form the basis of the Manila-centered Hispanicized culture, which led people to identify as “Philippine” versus “non-Philippine” after the American takeover, Chinese mestizos were seen as potential challengers to Spanish rule because of their strong economic status as landholders. Indeed, Chinese mestizos played an important role in the Philippine Revolution of 1896–1898, even if they did not identify as Chinese.⁵

In the meantime, emerging Chinese nationalism inside China resonated with and was amplified by the discriminatory policies of the colonial governments in overseas communities in Southeast Asia and in North American settler colonies. Despite the resentment of the Chinese overseas toward the Qing government for its inability to defend its subjects from the discriminatory policies of European colonial governments, they embraced Qing re-Sinicization efforts. From the establishment of Qing diplomatic representation and modern Chinese schools with Mandarin as the medium of instruction to the granting of patrilineal Chinese nationality beginning in 1909, the Chinese overseas sought to assert their Chinese and indigenous identities at the same time.

The Chinese nationalism of the early twentieth century is inseparable from the history of world anticolonial movements. The anticolonial struggles of Cuba and the Philippines, the Boer Wars, and the Asian migrant campaigns for rights in southern Africa, where the Chinese entered into an alliance with Indian migrants led by none other than

³ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, p. 58.

⁴ Craig A. Lockard, “Chinese Migration and Settlement in Southeast Asia before 1850: Making Fields from the Sea,” *History Compass* 11(9) (2013), pp. 765–781; Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, pp. 75, 184.

⁵ Edgar Wickberg, “The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5(1) (1964), pp. 62–100.

Gandhi⁶ not only provided a stimulus for the development of Chinese nationalism but also set an organizational precedent for anti-imperialist leagues, which would become the mode of twentieth-century international anticolonial organizations and have been referred to as the precursors of the 1955 Bandung Conference.⁷ The earliest one, the American Anti-Imperialist League (1898–1920), was established in the United States to protest the annexation of the Philippines and Cuba, whereas the beginnings of anti-imperialist leagues in East Asia were found in pan-Asian societies in the early 1900s in Japan and Shanghai. The goals of Chinese nationalism at the turn of the century included both the solution of China's problems and the making of a world of independent nations. Liu Shiwei, a member of the Indo-Chinese Asian Solidarity Society (Yazhou heqinghui) in Tokyo (1907), pointed out the importance of the solidarity of the “weak peoples” (*ruozhong*) of Asia in the confrontation between China and Asia and the imperialism of Japan and the West.⁸

In these new networks of the transnational Save the Emperor Society (Baohuanghui) in the early 1900s and of the GMD and the CCP in the 1920s, preexisting ideas and aspirations for an interconnected just world were linked to new ideas of national identity and of a world communist revolution. These ideas were transported to diasporic networks, where long-held Chinese migrant ideas about the need for assimilation into local societies and policies of re-Sinicization were at work. Given the history of Chinese ideas about global interconnections, expressed in ancient concepts such as *Tianxia*, “All under Heaven,” and *Datong*, “Great Unity,” the pan-Asian ethos of the Chinese Revolution, and Sun Yatsen's own discussions of internationalism (*shijiezhuyi*) stemming from nationalism, and the convergence of nationalism and internationalism in the May Fourth Movement, is not surprising.⁹

⁶ Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion, and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), pp. 138–168.

⁷ Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Fredrik Petersson, “‘We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers’: Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933” (PhD dissertation, Åbo Akademi University, 2013), pp. 1–2.

⁸ Fred H. Harrington, “The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1898–1900,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 22(2) (1935), pp. 211–230; Karl, *Staging the World*, pp. 113–114, 169–173.

⁹ Sun, “Minzuzhuyi [Nationalism],” p. 226; Xu Jilin, “Wusi: Shijiezhuyi de aiguo yundong [May 4th: Cosmopolitan Patriotic Movement],” *Zhishi fenzi luncong [Compendia of Intellectual Debates]* 9 (2010); Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 347.

The first Comintern agent in Asia was Dutchman Henricus Sneevliet, who founded the first communist party in Asia, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), in 1920 and modeled cooperation between the CCP and the GMD after cooperation between Indonesian communists and Islamic nationalists. He critically reflected that many GMD members linked Chinese traditional philosophy with socialist ideas.¹⁰ For instance, the Datong party originated from the New Asia Alliance (Xin Ya tongmengdang) established by Chinese and Koreans in 1915 in Japan. The Comintern affirmed that the vision of “human equality and international harmony” and the anti-imperialist aspirations of Korean and Chinese members of the Datong party who sought Comintern support in founding the Korean and Chinese communist parties in 1920–1921 were socialist and were on the way to “becoming communist.”¹¹ However, members of the Datong party were unsuccessful in founding a Comintern-supported Chinese communist party because they lacked the reputation and organizational skills of Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao. Also, as was often the case in the world of slow and unreliable 1920s transportation, they were late for the Third Comintern congress in June 1921 and could not join the group of official representatives of China who would establish the CCP the following month in the presence of Sneevliet.¹² The Datong party did not become the communist party of China, but these ideas permeated the world of Chinese communism, especially as the global expansion of Chinese organizations facilitated their further development.

In 1924, Sun Yatsen postulated in his lectures on nationalism that only if China returned to its historical policy of “helping the weak” (*ji ruo fu qing*) and opposing the strong and allied itself with the polities in the former Chinese sphere of influence, which had been lost to European colonial encroachment, would China be able to rise to power again.¹³ New ideas of Asian unity in juxtaposition to the West and traditional ideas of China’s role as a benevolent patron in the region, which Sun Yatsen called the kingly way (*wangdao*) as opposed to the hegemonic

¹⁰ Henk Sneevliet, “The Revolutionary-Nationalist Movement in South China,” in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, September 13, 1922, in Tony Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (Alias Maring)* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 748–757, esp. p. 751.

¹¹ Wu Jianjie, “Cong da Yazhouzhuyi zouxiang shijie datongzhuyi: Lilun Sun Zhongshan de guojizhuyi sixiang [From Pan-Asianism to World Great Harmony: Sun Yatsen’s Internationalism],” *Jindai shi yanjiu [Studies in Modern History]* 3 (1997), pp. 183–198; Ishikawa Yoshihiro, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, tr. Joshua Fogel (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 131–132, ch. 2.

¹² Ishikawa, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, pp. 141–142.

¹³ Sun, “Minzuzhuyi [Nationalism],” p. 253.

ways of Western powers (*badao*),¹⁴ were channeled into new anticolonial liberation ideologies and institutionalized in communist networks. Sun's ideas evolved from China's geopolitics and were shaped by anti-colonial wars in the Philippines, Africa, and Cuba and by Lenin's 1918 discourse on the oppressed peoples and Bolshevik foreign policy as well as by the failure of the Versailles Treaty to solve the colonial question.

Sun Yatsen imagined the way to China's revival as a world power was through an alliance with Japan or with the oppressed nations of Asia. Together with Mongolia, India, Afghanistan, Persia, Burma, and Annam, China would form a federation, a Great State of the East (*Dongfang daguo*). In 1924, Sun Yatsen defined pan-Asianism as "the question of what suffering Asian nations should do in order to resist the powerful nations of Europe – in other words, the great question focused on the elimination of injustices towards oppressed peoples."¹⁵ Sun's "oppressed nations" were not only former Chinese vassals, friendly neighbors, and decolonized countries in the Americas but also Soviet Russia and post-Versailles Germany. The second anti-imperialist league, the League Against Imperialism (LAI), established with Comintern funding, began as the Hands-Off China Society created by Workers International Relief, based in Berlin.

Germany had a special place in Sun's vision. In 1923, Sun harbored the idea of a three-country alliance wherein the Soviet Union would provide ideology and Germany would provide military technology and advisors to China. Sun planned that once China had restored its position as a powerful nation, it would help Germany restore its position, which had been undermined by the Versailles Treaty.¹⁶ The German branch of the CCP (*Lü De zhibu*), established in 1922, became the Chinese-language faction of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) (*Degong Zhongguo yuanzu*) in 1927, one of the leaders of

¹⁴ Sun, "Dui Shenhu shanghui yisuo deng tuanti de yanshuo [Address to the Chamber of Commerce and Other Organizations in Kobe]," November 28, 1924, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* [Collected Works of Sun Yat-sen], vol. 11, pp. 401–409.

¹⁵ Duan Yunzhang, *Zhongshan xiansheng de shijieguan* [The Worldview of Mr. Sun Yatsen] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji, 2009), p. 168; Sun, "Minzuzhuyi [Nationalism]," pp. 193, 200, 253, 304, 409.

¹⁶ Fei Lu (Roland Felber), "Jiezhuzhixinde dang'an ziliao chongxin tantao Sun Zhongshan zai ershi niandai chu (1922–1923) yu Su E guanxi yiji dui De taidu de wenti [Regarding Sun Yatsen's Views on Relations with the Soviet Union (1922–1923) and His Attitudes toward Germany Based on New Archival Materials]," in *Sun Wen yu huaqiao: jinian Sun Zhongshan danchen 130 zhounian guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* [Sun Yatsen and Chinese Overseas: The Proceedings of the Academic International Conference Commemorating the 130th Anniversary of the Birth of Sun Yatsen] (Kobe: Caituan faren Sun Zhongshan jianhui, 1997), pp. 57–69.

which was Liao Chengzhi, a celebrated leader of the international Chinese seamen organization and the son of assassinated GMD leader Liao Zhongkai.¹⁷

Germany did not have a large Chinese labor community, but German communists treated Chinese students as China's national voice. In response to the German branch of the CCP's protest letter regarding Reuters's report that the May Thirtieth Movement in China was yet another expression of Chinese xenophobia and another Boxer Uprising, newspapers published a retraction the following day and arrested Chinese students, participating in KPD-organized rallies against British imperialism and in support of China, received police apologies and were let go. Among them were Liao Huanxing, the future secretary of the LAI's international secretariat and a Comintern cadre in Berlin who had been dispatched originally by the British GMD to establish a branch there, and the future leader of the People's Liberation Army, Zhu De.¹⁸

In 1927, at the Brussels inaugural congress of the LAI, a world congress of nationalist organizations, one-fifth of all representatives came from the GMD.¹⁹ Initially, the GMD Central Committee decided to appoint Hu Hanmin, who had just returned from his Moscow trip during which he had advocated for GMD membership in the Comintern independently of the CCP, as the GMD's representative to the first LAI congress. Liao, as Hu's assistant, was to go in his place if Hu could not make it. In the meantime, in 1923 Liao started to work as a referent for the Varga Bureau in Berlin, the information office of the Comintern for Western Europe. He acted as a self-appointed representative of all worker parties of China

¹⁷ Liao Huanxing, "Zhongguo gongchandang lü Ou zongzhibu, 1953 [The European Branch of the Chinese Communist Party, 1953]," in Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xiandai shi yanjiushi, Zhongguo geming bowuguan dangshi yanjiushi, eds., *Zhongguo xiandai geming shi ziliao congkan. "Yi Da" qianhou. Zhongguo gongchandang di yi ci daibiao dahui qianhou ziliao xuanbian* [Series of Materials on Chinese Modern Revolutionary History. Around the Time of the First Congress: A Selection of Materials, vol. 2] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. 502–510.

¹⁸ Liu Lüsén, "Zhongcheng jianyi de gongchandang ren: Geming xianqu Liao Huanxing tongzhi zhuanlüe [Loyal and Persistent CCP Member: A Biography of the Revolutionary Avant-Garde Comrade Liao Huanxing]," in Zhonggong Hengnan xianwei dangshi lianluo zhidaozu Zhonggong Hengnan xianwei dangshi bangongshi, ed., *Yidai yingjie xin minzhuzhuyi geming shiqi Zhonggong Hengnan dangshi renwu* [An Era of Heroes: Party Members during Hengnan's Revolutionary Period of New Democracy] (1996), pp. 3–11; Liu Lüsén, "Zhongcheng jianyi de gongchandang ren Liao Huanxing [Loyal and Persistent CCP Member Liao Huanxing]," *Human dangshi yuekan* [Human Party History Monthly] 11 (1988), pp. 20–22.

¹⁹ Hans Piazza, "Anti-Imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution," in Mechthild Leutner, Roland Felber, Mikhail L. Titarenko, and Alexander M. Grigoriev, eds., *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 166–176.

at the Brussels congress,²⁰ at which he quoted Sun Yatsen's plea that the GMD unite with the oppressed classes of the West and with the oppressed nations of the world to oppose oppressors and imperialists.²¹ The LAI congress in 1927 devoted special attention to China. It is not difficult to see how the Chinese discourse on an alliance of oppressed peoples would be attractive among some circles in Germany, given Sun Yatsen's support of the German cause. The KPD election campaign in competition with the Nazis against the peace at Versailles in the early 1930s, which was allegedly initiated by Stalin,²² reflected the mood of postwar Germany. A GMD cadre reported the following in 1929 about the situation in Germany to the GMD Central Committee:

After the Great War, Germany was repressed by the Versailles Treaty and dared not offend other nations. Thus, their foreign policy is very prudent. Furthermore, the Sino-German unequal treaties were abolished long ago. Recently, attempting to gain our country's markets in order to compete with other countries, they have mostly expressed sympathy with our nationalist movements (the Germans call themselves an oppressed nation, so they want very much to ally with weak and small nations in order to rise again). [Their sympathy] does not really come from the heart, but temporarily they do not constitute a big obstacle to our country either . . . The KPD previously had positive feelings toward us and were enthusiastic in aiding us.²³

Although the GMD cadre had reservations about the colonialist impulses lying behind Kaiser Wilhelm's ambitions in Asia as a motivation for the KPD to aid the Chinese Revolution, it is clear from the letter that the GMD's own motivation in its alliance with the KPD was strategic. Despite antipathy to foreigners among working-class

²⁰ Li Yuzhen, "Fighting for the Leadership of the Chinese Revolution: KMT Delegates' Three Visits to Moscow," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 7(2) (2013), pp. 218–239; Liao's response to the criticism of the KPD Chinese language group, February 4, 1929, "An die I.K.K." RGASPI 495/225/1043, pp. 31–37, esp. pp. 32, 34.

²¹ Liao Huanxing, "Zhongguo renmin zhengqu ziyou de douzheng: Guomindang zhongyang changwu weiyuanhui daibiao de jiangyan [The Righteous Struggle of the Chinese People: Speech by the Representative of the Standing Committee of the GMD]," in Zhonggong Hengnan xianwei dangshi ziliao zhengji bangongshi, ed., *Zhonggong Hengnan difang shi: Xin minzhuzhuyi geming shiqi [The History of the CCP in Hengnan County: The Revolutionary Period of New Democracy]* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995), pp. 142–145.

²² Gregor Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 32, 35–36.

²³ The report of the Chinese Nationalist Party [Guomindang], French General Branch Report on European Party Affairs to the Third National Congress (March 1929), in Marilyn Levine, *The Found Generation: Chinese Communists in Europe during the Twenties* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1993) pp. 122–153, esp. pp. 149–150. Original Source: Service de liaison des originaires des territoires français d'outre-mer (SLOTFOM) VIII, 6.

supporters of the KPD and the KPD's own use of China in its domestic political struggle,²⁴ KPD leaders extended a warm welcome to arriving Chinese communists and students.²⁵ In the soul searching of post-Versailles Germany, there was an intellectual fascination with China as a model of a nation that had changed dramatically and rapidly through revolution.²⁶

In the meantime, in Canton in 1925 Liao Zhongkai and Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh established an anti-imperialist league (AIL)²⁷ consisting of Vietnamese ("Annamites"), Koreans, Indians, and Javanese. This organization became the breeding ground for the key Vietnamese Marxist organization, the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth (Thanh Niên).²⁸ In 1927, the Union of the Oppressed Peoples of the East (Dongfang bei yapo minzu lianhehui) began to operate in Hankou and Shanghai, drawing membership from migrants of the same countries.²⁹ Vietnamese sources suggest that the GMD established the Shanghai AIL to wrest the leadership of the Asian communists from the Comintern.³⁰ Whether or not this is true, GMD attempts to join the Comintern in 1923–1927, promoted by Hu Hanmin among others, were pragmatic, aiming to realize the party's vision of a world revolution.³¹ Hu hoped to convert the Comintern into a global organization as an "International of Nationalities" (*minzu guoji*), alluding in the name to the "Third [Communist] International" (Disan guoji [gongchandang]), the Comintern, and with the GMD playing the leading role. Hu put this as follows:

²⁴ Joachim Krüger, "Die KPD und China," in Mechthild Leutner, ed., *Rethinking China in the 1950s (1921–1927)* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000), pp. 107–116.

²⁵ Liao left the LAI and his Berlin post for Moscow after the conflict with Münzenberg in 1928. Joachim Krüger, "A Regular China Voice from Berlin to Moscow: The China-Information of Liao Huanxin, 1924–1927," in Leutner, Felber, Titarenko, and Grigoriev, eds., *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s*, pp. 177–186; Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers," p. 199.

²⁶ Li Weijia, "Otherness in Solidarity: Collaboration between Chinese and German Left-Wing Activists in the Weimar Republic," in Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock, eds., *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 73–93.

²⁷ To distinguish the numerous anti-imperialist leagues founded across Asia autonomously from the League Against Imperialism in Brussels, the acronyms AIL will be used for the former and LAI will be used for the latter throughout the text.

²⁸ Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919–1941* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 83–84.

²⁹ "Dongfang bei yapo minzu lianhehui shang zhongzhijie cheng [A letter from the Union of the Oppressed Peoples of the East to the Central Committee of the GMD]," July 23, 1927, File 7625.1, *Hankou dang'an*, reel 64, Hoover Archives.

³⁰ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 167.

³¹ Li, "Fighting for the Leadership."

In the days when Zong Li [Sun Yatsen] was alive, I contend that he proposed to organize a *minzu guoji* [International of Nationalities]³² so that we, the Guomindang, could lead the international national revolutionary movement [*lingdao guoji de minzu geming yundong*] ourselves; when I went to Russia [in 1926] and suggested that the Guomindang become a Comintern member directly, I wanted the Guomindang to independently join the Comintern, acquire [independent] status, and not be subjected to communist control and secret dealings. So the idea to organize a *minzu guoji* and the idea to join the Comintern were consistent with each other and were in the same spirit ... Frankly, my proposal to join the Comintern was because I hoped to organize a *minzu guoji*.³³

In the geopolitical imagination of China's two anti-imperialist parties, the CCP and the GMD, both organizationally structured after a Bolshevik party and striving for a one-party dictatorship, the restoration of China's power in its former imperial borders held an important place. Just as the Bolsheviks drew on tsarist imperial borderland policies, the CCP inherited the imperial borderland policies of the Qing dynasty as well as GMD internationalism, aspiring to liberate together the Chinese and indigenous peoples, in addition to appropriating Comintern internationalism.³⁴ In 1928, a CCP program prepared by Hungarian Eugen Varga, a renowned Soviet economist and the head of the Information-Statistical Institution of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in Berlin, included the restitution of the territories "seized by imperialists," such as "Formosa, Indochina, Manchuria, etc.," along with the abolition of the unequal treaties and the return of the concessions.³⁵ Varga's information on China was provided by Liao Huanxing.³⁶

³² David P. Barrett translates this as "Nationalist International" in "Marxism, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Union: Three Critiques by Hu Hanmin," *Chinese Studies in History* 14(2) (1980–1981), pp. 47–73.

³³ Hu Hanmin, "Minzu guoji yu disan guoji [International of Nationalities and the Third (Communist) International]," in Cuncui xueshe, ed., *Hu Hanmin shiji ziliao huiji, di si ce* [*Hu Hanmin's Works*, vol. 4] (Xianggang: Dadong tushu gongsi, 1980), pp. 1395–1401, esp. pp. 1400–1401.

³⁴ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 134–167; Joseph Esherick, "How the Qing Became China," in Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric van Young, eds., *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), pp. 229–259.

³⁵ "Draft Program of the CCP, April 1928," in Titarenko, Mikhail L. and Mechthild Leutner, eds., *VKP(b), Komintern i Kitai. Dokumenty. T.III. VKP(b), Komintern i sovetskoe dvizhenie v Kitae, 1927–1931* [*CPSU (Bolshevik), the Comintern, and China. Documents. Volume 3. CPSU (Bolshevik), the Comintern, and the Soviet Movement in China, 1927–1931*] (Moscow: AO Buklet, 1999), pp. 364–371.

³⁶ Krüger, "A Regular China Voice from Berlin to Moscow."

At the same time, the GMD was developing its overseas organizations and was promoting the anti-British cause among overseas Chinese. As a result of the Comintern policy of cooperation between the two parties, many CCP members had dual CCP and GMD membership. At the second national convention of the GMD in Canton in 1926, delegates from Malaya, Java, Burma, Siam, and Indochina planned the establishment of the Overseas Chinese Communist Division. Their goal was unity of the Chinese in the Nanyang and propaganda of emancipation among the “small weak races” (i.e., the indigenous peoples).³⁷ In 1926–1927, the GMD organized classes for overseas Chinese (*huaqiao xuexiban*) propaganda cadres who were to lead the overseas Chinese movement (*huaqiao yundong*) in Malaya.³⁸

During the interwar period, various international organizations, such as those of Protestant missionaries and Buddhists, which offered different visions of modernity, had structural similarities. They embraced internationalism and indigenization (involving locals in the organizations to put down roots in local chapters) as their *modi operandi*.³⁹ By the 1930s, these well-established trends could also be seen in the promotion of the Chinese Revolution by the Comintern and by the GMD and the CCP. These two parties’ overseas branches were hybrids of Chinese overseas organizations and political parties and had the need to localize so as to fit in better with local society.⁴⁰ As the Comintern sought to expand its organization, promoting global solidarity of the working class and world revolution, it also adopted indigenization strategies.

The Comintern, Nationalism, and Southeast Asia

The internationalism of the Comintern in the 1920s was one of many expressions of internationalism by transnational organizations in the interwar world, and it channeled the regional and national aspirations of

³⁷ British Colonial Office Records (CO), “Monthly Bulletin of Political Intelligence” (MBPI), January 1926, p. 1, CO 273/534, in *Records of the Colonial Office, Commonwealth and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, Empire Marketing Board, and Related Bodies Relating to the Administration of Britain’s Colonies* (Kew, Surrey: National Archives, 2009).

³⁸ Li Yinghui, *Huaqiao zhengce yu haiwai minzuzhuyi (1912–1949)* [*Overseas Chinese Policy and Overseas Chinese Nationalism (1912–1949)*] (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 1997), p. 491.

³⁹ Robert, “First Globalization?”; Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*.

⁴⁰ Kuhn, “Why China Historians Should Study the Chinese Diaspora”; Li Minghuan, *Dangdai haiwai huaren shetuan yanjiu* [*Contemporary Associations of Overseas Chinese*] ([Xiamen]: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1995), and John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2007) approach the GMD as a Chinese association.

anticolonial movements. Following the Bolsheviks' international isolation of 1919, the Second Comintern Congress promoted nationalities and the colonial question in 1920. At the same time, various groups of Asian immigrants in Soviet Russia made efforts to advance the communist movement in Asia. Prior to the establishment of the Comintern office in China, the union of Chinese laborers in Russia established its own bureau of Chinese communists within the Russian communist party, the Bolsheviks, in 1920 and petitioned the Soviet government to send representatives to China. Chinese and Korean communists also approached the Comintern with suggestions to organize Comintern-supported parties. Contingency and luck were often decisive factors through which organizations became national communist parties. Thus, the initiatives of the members of the bureau of Chinese communists within the Russian communist party, who referred to themselves as the Chinese Communist Party, to organize their branches in Shanghai and Tianjin would have been approved by the Comintern in December 1920, if not for the death of the head of the party, Liu Qian.⁴¹

Ideas of national liberation were intertwined with pan-regional concepts. In 1923, Indonesian communist leader Tan Malaka envisioned a federation of Eastern communists.⁴² In 1924, members of the French Communist Party's Union Intercoloniale Africain, Lamine Senghor, and Ho Chi Minh established the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre. In 1927, they attended the inaugural congress of the LAI in Brussels. In the 1920s, the Comintern's support of the African cause by proposing to create a belt of black states within the United States, South Africa, Brazil, and Cuba in the manner of the invention of new nations in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as soviet republics channeled African diasporic intellectuals' pan-Africanism.⁴³ The idea of an indigenous nation-state, like Wilson's self-determination slogans of a few years earlier, held great appeal in the colonized world.⁴⁴

Tan Malaka, a proponent of a pan-Asian communist network, and Sneevliet, defining his mission as to bring Marxist prophecies to China

⁴¹ Ishikawa, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, pp. 83–84, 137–139.

⁴² "Guiding Principles in the Colonial Question, by Tan Malaka," 1923, RGASPI 495/154/700/23–5.

⁴³ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 29; Piazza, "Anti-Imperialist League"; Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 68; Marc Becker, "Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America," *Science & Society* 70(4) (October 2006), pp. 450–479; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

⁴⁴ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

and to connect the Chinese movement with the international network, shaped the Comintern's approach in the region. The Comintern sent Sneevliet to Shanghai in March 1921 to study the "movement in different countries in the Far East" so as to establish an office there. Sneevliet was impressed by the labor movement in South China and proposed connecting the movements in the Philippines, Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies with British India because of their similarities.⁴⁵ The Eastern Department of the ECCI was responsible for deciding the "guiding line" in the Malay Archipelago. This line was based on Sneevliet's proposal to ECCI representative Tan Malaka, who had the task of building connections between the anti-imperialist movement in Indonesia and "all countries of the East," especially with the "national liberation movement in China," by building their organizations in the Malay Archipelago, Indochina, Siam, and Singapore.⁴⁶ Singapore was intended to be the platform to bring together the communist movements of China and Indonesia, including the movements of the overseas Chinese.⁴⁷ In 1923, with the rise of radicalism in Java, the most populous Indonesian island of the Dutch East Indies, Moscow started to strategize with regard to the Dutch East Indies. For the Comintern, the Malay Archipelago was an important strategic position between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, "near the most populated countries of the globe – China and India."⁴⁸

Sun Yatsen's alliance with the Soviet Union in 1923 and his ideas of anti-British pan-Asian unity matched Soviet plans for an alliance in the Far East.⁴⁹ Sneevliet's and Malaka's visions fit the international needs of the Soviet state. In 1923, in order to subvert the influence of British imperialism in China and Singapore, the Comintern planned to establish

⁴⁵ "Report of Comrade H. Maring to the Executive," July 11, 1922, in Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China*, pp. 305–323, esp. p. 307; Saich, "Introduction," *The Origins of the First United Front in China*, pp. 3, 91.

⁴⁶ Maring, "Instruksia upolnomochennomu vostochnogo otdela ispolkoma Kominternu po rabote v Indonesii [Instructions for the Representative of the Eastern Department of the ECCI on Work in Indonesia]," undated, but judging from the referenced fourth Comintern congress, it must be 1922–1923. RGASPI 495/154/700/18–20. This is a Russian translation of "Instruktion an den Bevollmächtigten des Ost-Ressorts (Abteilung) der Exekutive der Komintern für die Arbeit in Indonesien [Instructions to the Representative of the East Department (Division) of the Executive of the Comintern on Activities in Indonesia]," drafted by Henk Sneevliet. Undated. Henk Sneevliet Papers, inv. no. 349, accessed on August 2, 2012, at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, www.iisg.nl/collections/sneevliet/life-4.php.

⁴⁷ Hassan [Tan Malaka], Letter, July 7, 1924, RGASPI 534/4/106/1–2.

⁴⁸ Popov, "Gollandskaia Indiia [Dutch East Indies]," December 17, 1923, RGASPI 495/214/700/32–36.

⁴⁹ Boris Nicolaevsky, "Russia, Japan, and the Pan-Asiatic Movement to 1925," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 8(3) (1949), pp. 259–295.

the “most important element of the anti-imperial struggle,” an organization of transport workers linking South China, the Malay Archipelago (Java and Sumatra), Indochina, Singapore, and Siam in order to stimulate a national revolutionary movement “in the deep interior of international imperialism on the Pacific coast and islands.” Propaganda in native languages (newspapers) would be launched from some port in the Pacific to develop a “national revolutionary movement.” Tan Malaka, posing as “a journalist from a national bourgeois paper so that he could legalize himself and as a nationalist could do a lecture tour against imperialism,” would be dispatched to establish communist cells in Java, Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Canton, and Shanghai. On the basis of information supplied via this communication channel through Vladivostok to Moscow, the Eastern secretariat would provide a guiding line to printing offices in Singapore and Hong Kong.⁵⁰

In 1924, Tan Malaka reported from his grand Asian tour, sponsored by the Comintern, that in Singapore, a Comrade L. had sufficiently established a school of 100 students and had made connections among plantations and “town workers.” Echoing Sneevliet, Malaka suggested that Singapore offered a chance to work not only in Malaya but also in India because it was “not very far” and because of the large number of Indian migrant workers in Singapore.⁵¹ To promote a united front between the Chinese and Javanese, Tan Malaka had a plan to establish with “Comrade Tan” a Java–China special committee in Canton to study Chinese conditions in Java and to work among the “politically and economically important Chinese population.” Consisting of one member each from Hong Kong, Canton, and Java (including Malaka himself), this committee, which was established in June 1924 but was short lived, would build connections with the Javanese party and design policy for the Sino–Java Committee in Java. A graduate of the Whampoa Military Academy was to leave for Java to work as a teacher.⁵² In Singapore, however, Malaka found that Chinese and Indians were more responsive to communist ideas than were the local Indonesian and Malay

⁵⁰ Grigorii Voitinskii, the Head of the Eastern Secretariat, “Spravka [A Note],” 1923, RGASPI 495/154/700/8, 8ob.

⁵¹ Tan Malaka’s letter from Canton to Heller, signed by his alias, “Hassan,” July 7, 1924, RGASPI 534/4/106/1–2. Original English text. L. N. Heller (1875–?) was the head of the Eastern Department of the Profintern in 1922–1930. Titarenko and Leutner, *Komintern i Kitai [Comintern and China]*, vol. 3, p. 1526.

⁵² Tan Malaka’s letter, July 7, 1924. Tan Malaka only cited *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*. 2nd edn. (Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917–1939), without providing his own account of the events regarding the Canton bureau. Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail*. Translated and introduced by Helen Jarvis (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 103–106, 109–115, 245n18.

communities.⁵³ In response to Malaka's request, experienced organizer Fu Daqing and a Hainanese labor organizer were dispatched to Singapore to organize Hainanese plantation laborers, among whom Cantonese-speaking Comrade L. was useless.⁵⁴ During a visit in 1925, PKI leader Alimin Prawirodirdjo, who did not speak Chinese, was reportedly able to recruit only Chinese and Indian laborers, yet the number of Indonesian communists did increase there when many fled to Singapore following the suppression of the 1926–1927 PKI uprising.⁵⁵

Aside from two Profintern “agents” who published a newspaper in Singapore in 1924,⁵⁶ a number of members of the Nanyang CCP organization studied in Moscow in the 1920s. These included Han Guoxiang; Yang Shanji, head of the Communist Youth League (CYL) in 1926 and the secretary of the Nanyang Provisional Committee (NPC) in 1928 (see Figure 2.1); Chen Yannian, son of Chen Duxiu,⁵⁷ and Xu Tianbing, a member of the older generation of the Revolution of 1911.⁵⁸ Fu Daqing, a member of the Guangdong Provincial Committee and the head of the NPC's propaganda department, studied in Moscow in 1922–1924. He also participated in the Nanchang and Guangzhou uprisings as well as in Lenin's funeral, and he was Borodin's interpreter at the same time that Ho Chi Minh was Borodin's secretary.⁵⁹ The NPC received either CCP or Comintern money occasionally. Once, after the fall of 1929, Fu Daqing's subsidy saved the editorial board of the *Nanyang Worker* from starving for four days.⁶⁰

⁵³ Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Tan Malaka's letter, July 7, 1924; Gene Z. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*. With an introduction by Victor Purcell (New York, NY: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954), p. 9; “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs” (MRCA), December 1931, p. 6, CO 273/572.

⁵⁵ Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 231; Santos [Alimin], “Brief Description of My Activities in the Past,” January 10, 1939; Alimin, untitled, undated, RGASPI 495/214/3/123–124, 161–165.

⁵⁶ Tan Malaka's letter from Canton, September 16, 1924, RGASPI 534/ 4/106/9.

⁵⁷ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 50–51, 68.

⁵⁸ Zhu Yihui, “Xu Tianbing,” *Hainan mingren zhuanlüe (xia)* [Biographical Dictionary of Famous Hainanese. Second Part] (Guangzhou: Guangdong lüyou chubanshe, 1995), pp. 143–146.

⁵⁹ “Proverochniy list studenta, Fedorov (Fu Tagin) [Student's Registration Card (Fu Tagin)],” RGASPI 495/225/793/5. Fang Chuan and Zhang Yi, eds., *Zhongguo xiandai mingren zhenwen yishi* [Stories of Famous People in Modern China] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1989), pp. 393–394; Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzhengbu, ed., *Zhonghua zhuming lieshi di ershisai juan* [Famous Martyrs of China, vol. 23] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2002), pp. 560–562.

⁶⁰ Then sixteen-year-old Xie Fei, a native of Wenchang County in Hainan and the future first wife of Liu Shaoqi, was a Nanyang Provisional Committee CCP member from June 1929 to February 1932. Xie Fei, “Huiyi Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui de gongzuo, 1929–1930 [Remembering the Work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee, 1929–1930],” in *Geming huiyilu: Zengkan 1* [Revolutionary



Figure 2.1 Yang Shanji, 1924.

Born in Hainan, head of the Communist Youth League (CYL) in 1926 and secretary of the Nanyang Provisional Committee in 1928 during his studies at the University of the Toilers of the East in 1924.⁶¹ Published with permission of the RGASPI.

The defeat of the communist uprising in the Dutch East Indies in 1926 shaped the Comintern's approach to Singapore and Malaya. They were to be the basis from which to resurrect the Indonesian party and to build an intra-Asian network. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party also started as a multicentered movement and expanded globally in the late 1920s.⁶²

Reminiscences: Expanded edition 1] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 159–169, esp. p. 166.

⁶¹ Komarov's Personal File (Yang Shanji), RGASPI 495/225/652.

⁶² Hans van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Ishikawa, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*.

The Global World of the Chinese Revolutionaries

Since the turn of the twentieth century, the ideas and organizational modes of Chinese networks had traveled across the world. Workers returning from the United States to China brought with them the modes of unionizing and striking, which they then used in Hong Kong and China in Sun Yatsen's organization.⁶³ In the 1920s, the founding members of the CCP and the first generation of GMD envoys of re-Sinicization were dispatched around the world. Dong Chuping (董锄平), alias Dong Fangcheng (董方诚), visited Cuba in 1925, as well as a Philippine university together with Bao Huiseng, who had previously worked in Malaya in 1922.⁶⁴ The newspaper *Datongbao* was first published by the Chinese workers' union in Soviet Russia in 1918 and commissioned by the Soviet government to propagate the Russian Revolution and Marxism among Chinese workers, but the title was chosen in a way that would attract Chinese readers. After the Chinese laborers who published *Datongbao* in Russia returned to China, they established the Datong society,⁶⁵ the newspaper of which was also published in the Philippines.⁶⁶

The activities of the LAI were closely intertwined with the activities of the Chinese revolutionaries. For example, the first Chinese communist organization in the United States was established after contact with the LAI network. A member of the American communist party, Ji Chaoding, alias C. T. Chi, represented the Students' Society for the Advancement of

⁶³ Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Gao Zinong, "Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League]," June 1–December 7, 1928, RGASPI 495/66/7/137–169; Bai Dao, "Dong Chuping: Wode geming yinluren [Dong Chuping: My Revolutionary Fellow Traveler]," in *Bai Dao wenji di qi ji* [Collected Works of Bai Dao, vol. 7] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2002), pp. 549–569; Peng Zhandong, "Cong aiguo qiaoling Peng Zemin zhandou yisheng kan huaqiao huaren zai Zhongguo geming lichengzhong de tuchu gongxian [The Life of Patriotic Overseas Chinese Peng Zemin as an Example of the Contributions of the Overseas Chinese to the Chinese Revolution]," *Qiaowu huigu* [Overseas Chinese Reminiscences, vol. 2] (Beijing: Guowuyuan qiaowu bangongshi, 2006). Online version accessed on March 17, 2019: <http://qwgzzyj.gqb.gov.cn/qwhg/129/64.shtml>; Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Xue Xiantian, "Guanyu lü E huagong lianhehui jiguanbao Datongbao [On *Datongbao*, the Newspaper of the Union of Chinese Workers in Russia]," *Jindai shi yanjiu* [Studies in Modern History] 3 (1991); Gao Jinshan, "Lü E huagong zai Makeshuzhuyi chuanbozhong de tezhu zuoyong [The Role of Chinese Laborers in Russia in Marxist Propaganda]," *Dangshi bocai* [CCP History] 11 (2004), cited in Zhang Weibo, "Datong lixiang yu Zhonggong chuanguan [The Idea of Datong and the Establishment of the CCP]," in Zhonggong yida huizhi jinianguan, ed., *Zhongguo gongchandang chuanguan shi yanjiu* [Studies on the Founding of the CCP] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2012), pp. 42–54, esp. p. 52.

⁶⁶ Gao Zinong, "Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League]," p. 141.

Sun Yatsenism in America and the American Anti-Imperialist League at the Brussels World Anti-Imperialist Congress as well as at the International Congress of Oppressed Peoples in 1927. Upon returning, he, Shi Huang, and Xu Yongyin⁶⁷ established a Chinese-language faction (Meigongdang zhongyang fushu Zhongguoju)⁶⁸ under the anti-imperialist committee of the American party.⁶⁹ After breaking with the GMD in 1927, the Chinese faction planned to take over the anti-imperialist activities of leftist GMD organizations in the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico through branches of the Alliance for the Support of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolution in America (ASCWPRA) across the United States and in Havana. A revolutionary tradition of Chinese participation in the Cuban national independence struggle dated back to the Cuban war of independence, and local Cuban leaders such as Jose Marti had included the Chinese in internationalist solidarity and in the pan-American vision.⁷⁰ As Chinese communists borrowed the regional imagination of the Monroe Doctrine, their goals were to promote cooperation of Chinese and American workers and pro-China policies, such as the abolition of the unequal treaties as well as the interests of Chinese immigrants.⁷¹

Chinese revolutionary networks helped staff regional Comintern organizations in the Americas through connections between the Chinese faction and party members in Cuba, the Philippines, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru.⁷² The All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL) was reestablished by the Workers Party of America with Comintern authorization in 1925, but in 1927 it existed only on paper.⁷³ The All-American Alliance of Chinese Anti-Imperialists (est. 1928) consisted of Asian immigrants and established the Oriental branch of the American Anti-Imperialist League in 1929.⁷⁴ That same year, the

⁶⁷ Liao Huanxing, "Zhongguo gongchandang lü Ou zongzhibu, 1953 [European Branch of the Chinese Communist Party, 1953]"; Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, p. 65.

⁶⁸ Wang Ming's letter to the Chinese faction of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), undated, RGASPI 515/1/4117/30.

⁶⁹ "Report of the Bureau of the Chinese Fraction, Translation from Chinese," August 5, 1928, RGASPI 515/1/1451/41–48.

⁷⁰ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, pp. 37–47; "Guba huaqiao ying jiaji geming huodong [Cuban Chinese Must Intensify Revolutionary Activities]," *Xianfengbao* [*The Chinese Vanguard*] (107), November 15, 1933.

⁷¹ "Report of the Bureau of the Chinese Fraction. Translation from Chinese," August 5, 1928.

⁷² Letter to the Chinese Faction of the CPUSA, April 4, 1933, RGASPI 515/1/4117/31–38ob.

⁷³ Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers," pp. 70, 175.

⁷⁴ Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919–1933* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 145–147.

ASCWPRA participated in the second anti-imperialist world congress in Frankfurt and joined the LAI.⁷⁵

A Chinese cadre on the Comintern – likely Wang Ming, who was the Moscow liaison for the Chinese section of the CPUSA⁷⁶ – suggested that the Chinese faction should become the center of *huaqiao* work in the Americas by recruiting avant-garde members of the AIL into the party and establishing local CCP cells. The Chinese faction was to help the parties in the Americas in organizing the *huaqiao* but was not to build local parties in Mexico or Canada. The Chinese faction acted as a liaison between the Comintern and the CCP, as this Chinese Comintern cadre asked the Chinese faction to forward to Moscow or Paris the materials from the CCP.⁷⁷ Chinese communists in Europe sent Comintern publications to Chinese communists in the United States, who in turn sent copies of *The Chinese Vanguard (Xianfengbao)* to Europe and to the LAI and to party propaganda to Malaya. Additionally, Chinese students such as Un Hong Siu, sponsor of the MCP, translated party publications into Chinese, as discussed in Chapter 6.⁷⁸

By 1928, Comintern activities aiming to bring workers to power internationally had ended in defeat in Europe and Asia alike. While in 1924 the Comintern had attributed this failure to the stabilization of world capitalism, at its Sixth Congress in 1928 the Comintern announced the beginning of a new Third Period of the “class against class” struggle.⁷⁹ The Comintern no longer encouraged legal methods through parliaments and the press as a strategy for communist parties, and cooperation with moderate labor movements and social democrats was banned. Instead, the Comintern started to establish communist parties in the colonies as

⁷⁵ Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, p. 73.

⁷⁶ Gao Hua, *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong qumai* [*How the Red Sun Rose: The Yan'an Rectification Movement*] (Xianggang: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2011), p. 101.

⁷⁷ “Pismo v kitaiskoe buro KP SShA s predlozheniami po voprosu o rabote sredi kitaiskikh emigrantov [A Letter to the Chinese Faction of the CPUSA: With Suggestions Regarding the Work among Chinese Migrants],” RGASPI 515/1/3181/19–23. It was likely written sometime after July 10, 1933, for the letter mentions the “Extraordinary National Conference” held in New York, July 7–10, 1933. The Communist Party of America (1919–1946). Party History. Accessed August 31, 2015. www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/communistparty.html.

⁷⁸ Zhang Bao, “Er, sanshi niandai zai Meiguo de Zhongguo gongchandang ren [CCP Members in America in the 1920s and the 1930s],” in *Guoji gongyun shi yanjiu ziliao* [*Research Materials on the History of the International Communist Movement*] 4 (1982), pp. 150–161.

⁷⁹ Alexander Vatlin and Stephen A. Smith, “The Comintern,” in Stephen A. Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 187–194.

a way of undermining European imperialism through its “weakest link.”⁸⁰ Such a shift would have come as no surprise given the successful launch of the anti-imperialist league project, for even if its results were modest at best, the scope of its ambitions was captivating.

Old Networks, New Ideas: The Nanyang Organization

Because of the demand for labor after World War I in the colonies and because of easy travel, the Nanyang was a popular destination for “progressive Chinese and revolutionaries” (*Zhongguo de jinbu de renshi he gemingzhe*).⁸¹ In 1921–1925, journalists and teachers, GMD and often CCP members, spread the ideas of the May Fourth Movement and found employment with Chinese schools and newspapers in the Nanyang. Various organizations, including the GMD, the Guangdong CCP and CYL, the All-China General Labor Union, the Shanghai Student Federation, and the Kheng Ngai Revolutionary Alliance (*Qiongya geming tongzhi datongmeng*), sent envoys to promote both the ideas of the Chinese Revolution and anti-British sentiments among the overseas Chinese.⁸² The head of the Overseas Bureau of the GMD in China, older Tongmenghui member Peng Zemin, dispatched cadres to organize local student unions, labor unions, and GMD branches in the Nanyang Chinese Union of Public Societies (*Nanyang huaqiao ge gongtuan lianhehui*) so as to promote the anti-British cause.⁸³ Such propaganda was especially relevant in the aftermath of the so-called May Thirtieth Incident, during which several student participants in the protests against Japanese business owners were killed by the police of the International Settlement in Shanghai, and which led to worldwide growth of CCP membership.

In 1925, All-China General Labor Union cadres in Singapore established worker night schools and unions among seamen and servants in foreigners’ houses – who, in the English version of the document, were given the dramatic title of “foreign affairs workers” (*waiwu*, 外务).⁸⁴ In

⁸⁰ *Shestoi kongress Komintern: Stenograficheskii otchet. Vyp. 4, Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v kolonial'nykh i polukolonial'nykh stranakh* [The Sixth Comintern Congress: Stenographic Report, vol. 4: Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries] (Moscow; Leningrad: 1929), p. 24.

⁸¹ Xie Fei, “Huiyi Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui de gongzuo, 1929–1930 [Remembering the Work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee, 1929–1930].”

⁸² Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 65, 69; “The Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” April 23, 1930, RGASPI 514/1/634/93–158, esp. p. 110.

⁸³ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, p. 51.

⁸⁴ “Report on the Labour Movement,” in “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 110–112; Huang Muhan, “Worker Movement in Federated Malay States,” March 5, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/9/1–4.

1926, more than 300 students and workers in Singapore were involved with the communists.⁸⁵ The Nanyang regional committee of the CCP (Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang qubu weiyuanhui), covering British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, and the CYL of about 300 members were formed in Malaya in 1926, but their organizational relationship with the CCP was ambiguous.⁸⁶ Hainanese trade guilds were the first to display communist sentiments in the 1920s when labor unions took shape, and Hainanese dominated unions of rubber tappers, domestic servants, shoemakers, carpenters, seamen, and mechanics.⁸⁷ The driving forces behind communist organizations in Malaya were Hainanese members of the leftist GMD, who were teachers at night schools (known as the Main School), although they did not have permanent headquarters. They instead organized student unions and spread propaganda and Chinese nationalism among workers' unions. Acting within their Nanyang jurisdiction, they discussed the failed uprising in the Dutch East Indies at their meetings.⁸⁸ In 1927, the founder of the CYL, Pan Yunbo (潘云波), attended the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference in Hankou where he likely learned the ideas of communist organizations around the world, including the model of separate ethnic organizations in the United States.⁸⁹

After the CCP's defeat in China in April 1927 at the hands of the Guomindang, especially after the Canton uprising, many CCP members fled to the Nanyang. The majority of refugee communists settled in Malaya because it was easier to establish party cells and labor unions there, where the Chinese were sympathetic to the Chinese Revolution and more "relatively progressive" (*bijiao jinbu*) than in places where the GMD was strong, similar to Siam. Others went to Indochina and to Palembang in Sumatra.⁹⁰ In 1928, the Nanyang CCP was renamed the Nanyang Provisional Committee of the CCP (Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui), reflecting the fact that the committee's relationship with the CCP was being established because of the CCP's destruction after April 1927.⁹¹

The jurisdiction of the committee was as ambiguous as the boundaries of the Nanyang itself, which included all of mainland and maritime

⁸⁵ Huang Muhan, "Worker Movement in Federated Malay States."

⁸⁶ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, p. 69; Zhou Nanjing, *Shijie huaqiao huaren cidian* [Dictionary of the Overseas Chinese] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993), p. 560.

⁸⁷ Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the Malaysian Chinese Association* (Singapore; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 25.

⁸⁸ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 73–74.

⁸⁹ Pan Yunbo is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

⁹⁰ Xie Fei, "Huiyi Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui de gongzuo, 1929–1930 [Remembering the Work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee, 1929–1930]."

⁹¹ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, p. 72.

Southeast Asia.⁹² The predominantly Hainanese organization consisted of the members of the Nanyang General Labor Union (NGLU), the night schools, and the Nanyang CYL. The committee consisted of thirteen persons, mainly Hainanese, including a five-member standing committee.⁹³ The committee was to direct local committees (*diwei*) in Singapore, Penang, Malacca, Johor, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Ipoh, Sungai Lembing, Riau in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Terengganu, Kelantan, Palembang (Sumatra), and Siam, with subcommittees for labor, propaganda, the armed forces, women, finance, and relief.⁹⁴ In October 1928, the party had 600 members.⁹⁵

In 1929, the NPC included secretaries Zhang Chengxiang (张成祥) and Xu Tianbing (徐天炳), also known as Wu Qing (吴青); Chen Sanhua (陈三华); Fu Daqing (傅达庆), head of the propaganda department; and Wei Zhongzhou (魏忠洲), head of the secretariat. The editorial board of *Nanyang Worker* (*Nanyang gongrenbao*), with the exception of Zhang Chengxiang, lived in the secretariat's office and posed as a *huaqiao* family. The Chinese and English publications of *Nanyang Worker* were in demand; its distribution increased from several hundred copies to 2,000. Although there was one comrade from Siam, as well as A-Fu, a sixteen-year-old who spoke fluent Malay and was indispensable for party operations, the NPC focused on China. At party meetings, which were held once or twice a month or every other month, the NPC held theoretical discussions about Marxism-Leninism and the crisis of capitalism as well as the reasons for the failure of the Chinese Revolution. It also handled routine questions about party fees, the recruitment of new members, the establishment of a revolutionary mass organization, patriotic propaganda, and international education among overseas Chinese, and complained about the low cultural level of workers in night schools.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., p. 92; "Obshchee polozhenie profdvizheniia v Nan'iane [General Conditions of the Labor Movements in the Nanyang]," April 21, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/9/9-14. In Russian, "Nanyang" was translated as "South Islands" and "the Islands in the Pacific Ocean." See "Doklad o polozhenii na ostrovakh Tikhogo okeana [Report about the Conditions in the Islands of the Pacific Ocean]," December 28, 1929, RGASPI 495/66/13/67.

⁹³ "Doklad o polozhenii na ostrovakh Tikhogo okeana [Report about the Conditions in the Islands of the Pacific Ocean]," p. 94. For the backgrounds of the committee members, see Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 90-99, 101.

⁹⁴ Report by the Secretary of Chinese Affairs, "Kuo Min Tang and Other Societies in Malaya, January-March 1928," April 27, 1928, pp. 1-7, esp. p. 3, CO 273/542.

⁹⁵ "Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang," p. 130.

⁹⁶ Xie Fei, "Huiyi Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui de gongzuo, 1929-1930 [Remembering the Work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee, 1929-1930]."

Singaporean leaders paid rare visits to the Malay states and had little influence there.⁹⁷ Front organizations of the NPC were the NGLU, the AIL, the CYL, and the Nanyang General Seamen Union, all of which had overlapping leaderships. The NPC leaders were often arrested and deported by the British authorities, especially after bombings during a shoemakers' strike and assassination attempts on visiting GMD officials in 1928, when one of the bomb throwers was found to be in possession of communist literature. Although the strike was preceded by the formation of a shoemakers' union as an affiliate of the NGLU, and the NPC was assumed to have been behind the strike, the MCP in its later correspondence with the Comintern blamed the bombings on the "masses."⁹⁸ Thus, the NPC's role remained uncertain. The NPC also piggybacked on the anti-Japanese boycott and the campaign organized by the Chinese community to commemorate the GMD's retreat from Ji'nan, known as the Ji'nan Incident.⁹⁹ In 1928, the *Straits Times* reported that the communists had "good organization, clever leaders, and the will to progress."¹⁰⁰

As we have seen, the CCP's local organization in Malaya was shaped by the historical trends of Chinese migration and the political forces in China as well as by the interwar global and Southeast Asian communist connections. The need of Chinese organizations to indigenize so as to fit in better with local society matched the need for the localization of Comintern operations.

World Revolution, Chinese Revolution: Indigenization and Internationalization

Since the emergence of Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth century, Chinese community organizations had been concerned with bringing in and representing not only Chinese. The MCP's impulse to involve non-Chinese in its activities paralleled the impulses not only of newly emerging Chinese organizations like the GMD but also of organizations with longer histories, such as temples. In 1893, the leader of the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur, *Kapitan Cina* (Chinese Captain) Yap Ah Loy, founded a temple dedicated to the previous

⁹⁷ "Societies Opposed to Kuo Min Tang," in "The Report by the Secretary of Chinese Affairs on Kuo Min Tang up till June 30th 1927," p. 147, CO 273/542/52010.

⁹⁸ CC MCP, "From Malaya. To the FEB [Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern]," February 7, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3. For more details on the shoemakers' strike, see Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 113-118.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁰ "Communism in Malaya: Present Positions," *Straits Times*, November 16, 1928, p. 11.

Kapitan, and the processions of the temple included Indians and Japanese along with headmen of Chinese subethnic groups. Yap Ah Loy sought to portray himself as representing not only the Chinese but the wider community as well.¹⁰¹

During the 1920s, the GMD further put into practice its earlier Asianist ideas of the liberation of the oppressed peoples. Since 1927, efforts by Chinese political organizations to embed themselves in their host environments had been evident in the left-wing GMD and in the CCP's Nanyang Provisional Committee, as both had called for local non-Chinese in British Malaya, that is, Malays, Javanese, and Tamils,¹⁰² to be involved in a united movement for liberation from colonial oppression.¹⁰³ During the commemorative demonstration on the anniversary of Sun Yatsen's death on March 12, 1927, which resulted in clashes with the police, known as the Kreta Ayer Incident, the GMD issued pamphlets promoting the common interests of the "weak nationals" of the Nanyang and overseas Chinese in their goal to achieve self-determination and to end the discrimination against Chinese.¹⁰⁴ The leftist GMD, which was strong in Singapore, controlling twenty-one of twenty-nine branches (the Main School),¹⁰⁵ proclaimed that its goal was "the emancipation of the [Chinese] race."¹⁰⁶ The Comintern's plan to infiltrate Southeast Asia through indigenization, using local agents and propaganda in native languages, was likewise central to the CCP's expansion into the Nanyang. In July 1928, the NPC had already decided to start a "national" movement to attract Malays and Indians to the Chinese party organization. It also set a goal of unifying all nationalities and seeking the Comintern's guidance and leadership.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Sharon A. Carstens, "Chinese Culture and Policy in Nineteenth-Century Malaya: The Case of Yap Ah Loy," in David Ownby and Mary Somers Heidhues, eds., *"Secret Societies" Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 120–153, esp. p. 142.

¹⁰² MBPI, May 1927, CO 273/535/ C28030, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 78, 160; "Resolutsiia priniataia posle obsledovaniia raboty vremennogo komiteta v 1929 [Resolution Adopted after Investigation of the Work of the (Nanyang) Provisional Committee in 1929]," RGASPI 495/62/1/23–27, esp. 23.

¹⁰⁴ "Message to the Overseas Chinese in Respect of the Second Anniversary of the Death of Sun Chung San [Sun Yatsen]," CO 273/538.

¹⁰⁵ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ "Purport of the General Registration of Tang Members of China Kuo Min Tang," September 22, 1928, pp. 1–3, CO 273/542/ 52010/28.

¹⁰⁷ Vremennyi komitet malaiskogo arhipelaga [Nanyang Provisional Committee], "V tsentral'nyi komitet. Otchet Malaiskogo Komiteta profsoiuzov [To the Central Committee. The Report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of the Malay Archipelago]," July 19 and August 22, 1928, RGASPI 495/62/1/1–17, esp. 2, 3.

The CCP's aim of involving non-Chinese in its organization is reflected in the writings of Li Lisan, who by 1928 was the head of the Guangdong Provincial Committee and the de facto CCP leader. He had experience working in France among Chinese laborers, and his charismatic leadership and ability to adapt to different local cultural contexts had resulted in the CCP's first successful labor mobilization in 1922 in the Anyuan coal mines.¹⁰⁸ Li Lisan criticized the Nanyang communists in his January 1, 1929, diary entry for "making a Chinese Revolution." This "Chinese Revolution" referred specifically to anti-Japanese propaganda and boycotts, to the campaign for democratic freedoms and improved labor conditions, and to protests against British attempts to control Chinese education in Malaya.¹⁰⁹

Li Lisan promoted the establishment of a CCP organization independent of the GMD. Criticizing the GMD policy of promoting "patriotism" in Chinese communities, Li instead advocated a Nanyang Revolution that would mark the beginning of a "national" movement:

The Party's Nanyang branch has been established for three years; the number of comrades has increased greatly. However, there has been a fundamentally erroneous idea from the beginning, i.e., to "make a Chinese Revolution" in the Nanyang. Although, certainly, to make a "Chinese Revolution" in the Nanyang is a joke, it has deep historical roots. Was not the Nanyang the "cradle" of the Guomindang? This is because the Chinese in the Nanyang were brutally oppressed by imperialism; for this reason they thought, "This is because China is too weak, and cannot protect Chinese immigrants." That is why Chinese in the Nanyang have a very strong patriotic mentality [*aiguo guannian*]. This patriotic mentality is the source of making a Chinese Revolution in the Nanyang. Now our party must completely rectify this mentality; it must promote the following idea among the broad masses: "In order to achieve the liberation of the Chinese people in the Nanyang, the Nanyang Revolution must succeed, and for this reason we must go back to making the Nanyang revolutionary movement." This will put the Nanyang Revolution on the right track and will be the correct starting point for the Nanyang party line.¹¹⁰

The same words were included in a draft resolution of the Central Committee (CC) of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee entitled "the revolutionary movements and policies of our party in the

¹⁰⁸ Ren Guixiang and Zhao Hongying, eds., *Huaqiao huaren yu guogong guanxi* [*Chinese Overseas and CCP-GMD Relations*] (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1999), p. 80; Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 85–86, 148.

¹⁰⁹ Vremennyi komitet malaiskogo arhipelaga [Nanyang Provisional Committee], "V tsentral'nyi komitet. Otchet Malaiskogo Komiteta profsoiuzov [To the Central Committee. The Report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of the Malay Archipelago]."

¹¹⁰ Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi diyi yanjiubu, ed., *Li Lisan bai nian dancheng jinianji* [*Commemoration on the 100th Anniversary of Li Lisan's Birth: Collection of Writings*] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi chubanshe, 1999), "1 January 1929," pp. 68–69.

Nanyang.” The directive set the goals of the Nanyang Revolution as national independence from the British and Dutch governments, an alliance of “Nanyang nationalities,” and a Nanyang republic. The central point of the directive was that a Nanyang communist party consisting exclusively of Chinese promoting a Chinese Revolution indicated a need to adapt the communist strategy to the local context, as policies developed in the labor and anti-imperialist movements in China were applied in the Nanyang without consideration of local conditions. Those conditions included the Nanyang’s colonial status, the “many nationalities” living there, and its more developed industry.¹¹¹ Although the idea that the Nanyang Revolution depended on the success of the revolution in China was also criticized, Li Lisan’s directive still tasked the Chinese with emancipation of the Nanyang and emphasized that Chinese and locals could not achieve colonial liberation separately. Written in English, this letter makes his opinion clear:

We should further impress these slogans and conception deeply upon the minds of the Chinese to remove their wrong ideas as to look down on other nations [i.e., ethnic groups] and then the real unity can be obtained . . . But it is known that Chinese there did oppress Malay people, because the latter are poor and backward in civilisation. So it is the fundamental task of our party to tighten the relationship of all the oppressed nations and to make the Malay people understand that in order to release them from the yoke of the imperialists, the unity of the oppressed is absolutely necessary. If the Chinese want to claim for emancipation, it is possible only when all the oppressed nations are released. It is absolutely impossible to release any single nation separately . . . Thus, the principal task of our party is first of all to make all the oppressed unite and strive for the goal of national emancipation.¹¹²

The directive echoes two central points that were discussed at the Comintern congress in Moscow. Specifically, these were the Chinese Revolution as a frame of reference and the need for each party’s policy to be based on local conditions,¹¹³ that is, the policy of indigenization of the communist movement. These points were also echoed in statements by leaders of other communist parties, such as the Taiwanese Communist Party and the Philippine Communist Party, in 1928–1930.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ CCP CC, “A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee. A Draft Resolution of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Revolutionary Movements and Policies of Our Party in the Nanyang,” January 22, 1929, RGASPI 514/1/532/8–13, pp. 13, 8–9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹³ *Stenograficheskiĭ otchet VI kongressa Kominternā* [*Stenographic Report of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern*] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1929), *vyпуск* 5 [issue 5], p. 143, *vyпуск* 4 [issue 4], p. 414.

¹¹⁴ Konstantin Tertitskii and Anna Belogurova, *Taiwanskoe kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie i Komintern. Issledovanie. Dokumenty (1924–1932)* [*The Taiwanese Communist Movement and the Comintern: A Study. Documents. 1924–1932*] (Moscow: Vostok-Zapad, 2005), p. 95; Gao Zinong, “Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tiebie difang gongzuo

Li Lisan's suggestions reflected what was happening in the Comintern. In 1928, he participated in the Sixth Congress of the CCP (June 18 to July 11) and in the Sixth Congress of the Comintern (July 17 to September 1) in Moscow. The CCP's Sixth Congress elected a new leadership aligned closely with the Comintern, announced the goal of organizing soviets, and supported guerrilla warfare.¹¹⁵ According to two sources, the reorganization of the Nanyang communist organization in 1928 into the NPC took place at the Sixth Congress of the CCP.¹¹⁶ However, the Nanyang communists' views on the Nanyang Revolution were independent of the Comintern's. Moreover, Li Lisan (and others) referred to this letter to the Nanyang communists as a draft for discussion only, as they considered the problems of the Nanyang "complicated." Although they also submitted this draft directive to the Comintern for approval, Li Lisan asserted that even prior to that, the Nanyang communists were to follow the draft resolution.¹¹⁷ In doing so, the CCP was making a gesture toward the Comintern and also redirecting responsibility to the Comintern.

According to available documentary evidence, it was the CCP that first suggested the organization of a Nanyang party under Comintern leadership: "The party in the Nanyang should make preparations to establish an independent party of the Nanyang, directly instructed by the Third International." Moreover, it stated, "suggestions should be submitted to the Third International to call their attention to the work of the Nanyang because it would occupy a very important position during the looming World War, and to ask them to convene a meeting of the parties of various nations to discuss the work of the Nanyang."¹¹⁸ (In the Comintern's analysis, the coming war would resolve contradictions among the imperialist powers that persisted after the First World War.) The CC thus redirected the Nanyang communists to the Comintern and Profintern to obtain the resources necessary to implement these suggestions.¹¹⁹

An ECCI letter written in October 1930, after the MCP had been formally established, confirms the local initiative for the establishment

baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League]."

¹¹⁵ Tony Saich, "The Chinese Communist Party during the Era of the Comintern (1919–1943)," unpublished manuscript.

¹¹⁶ Xie Fei, "Huiyi Zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui de gongzuo, 1929–1930 [Remembering the Work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee, 1929–1930]." p. 161; "Hu Zhiming de shehuizhuyi sixiang [The Socialist Thought of Ho Chi Minh]," in He Baoyi, *Shijie shehuizhuyi sixiang tongjian [World Socialist Thought]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 492.

¹¹⁷ CC CCP, "A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee," 1929.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of the MCP and calls the newly established party “nothing more than a Singapore organization of the CCP that recently decided to separate into an independent communist party of the Malay states.” The ECCI letter continued: “It is a very serious step forward, as it is absolutely clear that it is necessary to establish an independent communist party of the Malay states which will include the proletariat of all nationalities who inhabit them and which will be capable of organizing and leading a united struggle of the toiling masses of Malaya.”¹²⁰ However, in its letter to the British communist party, the MCP emphasized that the Nanyang communists followed the “advice of the ‘Bureau’ in reorganizing themselves into an independent communist party of Malaya,” apparently stressing its international credentials.¹²¹

However, far from expressing an intention to undermine the CCP’s position in Southeast Asia,¹²² in 1928 the Comintern also considered establishing a CCP overseas center “near China (Singapore, Manila, etc.),” where Central Committee members could carry out their work unrecognized, unlike the situation in Shanghai, where they were known to the now hostile GMD.¹²³ After the establishment of the MCP, the Comintern echoed Li Lisan in criticizing the MCP for “mechanistically grafting the methods and slogans of the Chinese movement in Malaya.”¹²⁴ The Comintern’s recommendations and Li Lisan’s directive to stop focusing on the Chinese Revolution both aimed to promote the indigenization of the revolution, that is, a united front with the non-Chinese.¹²⁵

Similar to the migrant structure of the communist movement and of society at large, the MCP’s vision of a multiethnic party organization was likely influenced by the American communist movement. Li Lisan suggested that the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat could help the MCP

¹²⁰ Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), “Malaiskoe pis’mo [Malayan Letter],” Letter to the FEB, October 23, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/2/1,2.

¹²¹ MCP, “To the English Komparty [sic], London,” June 1, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/1–1ob.

¹²² Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*; Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 131–134; Rene H. Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (London: Dorothy Crisp, 1947), p. 109; Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 168. One exception to this view is Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 202–203.

¹²³ “Pis’mo A. E. Albrekhta I. A. Piatnitskomu [The Letter of A. E. Albreht to I. A. Piatnitskii],” May 1, 1928, in Titarenko and Leutner, *Komintern i Kitai [Comintern and China]*, vol. 3, pp. 381–384. A. E. Albrekht was the representative of the Comintern’s International Liaison Department (*Otdel Mezhdunarodnykh Sviazei*) (OMS) in China. Iosif (Osip) A. Piatnitskii was a member of the ECCI presidium. For their biographical information, see Titarenko and Leutner, *Komintern i Kitai [Comintern and China]*, vol. 3, pp. 1514, 1557–1558.

¹²⁴ ECCI Letter to the FEB, October 23, 1930.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

“in building a stable foundation” for the trade union movement in the Nanyang, which should first be organized among separate ethnic groups and then be united into one trade union.¹²⁶ The head of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (est. 1927 in Hankou) was American communist Earl Browder, whose organizational ideas originated in the American multi-ethnic context. Moreover, the Comintern promoted the same policy of indigenization in Malaya as in the United States, where Americanization was a response to pressures by American communists, as immigrant sections in the CPUSA were the largest.¹²⁷ Much as Li Lisan had appealed to the Nanyang communists, the Chinese Comintern cadre from Moscow reminded Chinese communists in the United States that they had to pay attention to local conditions in those countries where they established chapters of the AAAIL, but at the same time they should not forget to conduct revolutionary work among Chinese migrants in the United States.¹²⁸ In the Chinese communist networks enhanced by the Comintern, policies were generally built on locally based approaches and applied elsewhere as well.

This was possible with the globally mobile Chinese communists. The translator of Li Lisan’s letter, lacking knowledge of the South Seas, mistranslated “Zhaowa” (Java) as “Cuba” and “Senmeilan” (Sembilan) as “Ceylon.” One of few translators available since Tan Malaka’s desperate search for one in 1924,¹²⁹ the translator was likely Stanford student Shi Huang, who was dispatched to Cuba and Canada in 1929 by the Chinese faction of the CPUSA to build an Oriental branch of the American Anti-Imperialist League on the Pacific coast among local communists. After visiting Cuba, Shi went to Moscow to study and he returned to China in 1930 to work as a translator for the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, though he perished in a GMD jail in 1934.¹³⁰

By 1930, while the two trends of the interwar global moment, internationalism and indigenization, were manifested in the transnational organization of the Chinese Revolution, the importance of the Chinese Revolution as a harbinger of global changes perceived as the world revolution originally advocated by the Comintern, had become integral to the

¹²⁶ CC CCP, “A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee,” 1929.

¹²⁷ Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), p. 15, ch. 5.

¹²⁸ Letter to the Chinese Faction of CPUSA, April 4, 1933.

¹²⁹ Tan Malaka’s letter, October 1924, RGASPI 534/4/106/19–22, esp. 20.

¹³⁰ Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists*, pp. 145–146; Hu Xianzhang, ed., *Ziqiang buxi houde zaizhu: Qinghua jingshen xunli [Self-Discipline and Social Commitment Are Tsinghua Spirit]* (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2010), pp. 124–127; CC CCP, “A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee,” 1929.

platforms of both the CCP and the GMD. In the words of Hu Hanmin, “Our Chinese nation is truly so large that our national revolution must obtain international assistance and establish international contacts. Of course, the responsibilities that we, the Chinese people, ought to bear will be heavy ones indeed. To the smaller and weaker nations we should offer support in order to strengthen the forces of revolution and secure the foundation for revolution.”¹³¹ Li Lisan considered China to be the site of the most acute conflicts of interest (*protivorechie*) among the imperialist powers, where the prospect of a communist revolution seemed most likely. Li Lisan therefore argued, “[i]ncreasing international propaganda for the Chinese Revolution among the international proletariat and regarding the defense of the Chinese Revolution as the most serious task of the Chinese Communist Party.”¹³² Li Lisan continued Hu Hanmin’s earlier attempts to use the Comintern for the benefit of the Chinese Revolution and to promote Chinese nationalism. On April 17, 1930, one week before the MCP’s founding, he suggested establishing a new, more efficient Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) of the Comintern, which had been reestablished in late 1928 in Shanghai. In communications with the Eastern secretariat of the Comintern in Moscow, he specifically demanded that organizational activities among foreign sailors, while carried out by “foreign comrades from England, France, Japan, India, [and] Indochina,” should remain under CCP leadership.¹³³ Despite Li Lisan’s exile to Moscow for his devastating policy of doomed uprisings, which nearly destroyed the CCP, he was involved in a number of important Comintern projects, working in the mid-1930s in the Xinjiang border region.¹³⁴ Li Lisan also took part in drafting policies for the MCP.

Conclusion

The proximity of British Malaya to the Dutch East Indies, a place of great interest to the Comintern as well as the homeland of one of the visionaries of early communism in Indonesia, Tan Malaka, on the one hand, and a historically large Chinese community in British Malaya, on the other, shaped the birth of communism in the British colony.

¹³¹ Hu Hanmin, “Minzu guoji yu disan guoji [International of Nationalities and the Third (Communist) International].”

¹³² “Pismo Li Lisania Zhou Enlai i Tsiui Tsiubo [Li Lisan’s Letter to Zhou Enlai and Qu Qiubo (Qu Qiubai)],” April 17, 1930, in Titarenko and Leutner, *Komintern i Kitai [Comintern and China]*, vol. 3, pp. 865–868.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Elizaveta Kishkina (Li Sha), *Iz Rossii v Kitai – put’ dlinoiu v sto let [From Russia to China: One Hundred Years’ Journey]* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii proekt, 2014), p. 100.

Globalizing forces brought about a new political imagination and new forms of activism in Asia. Pan-Asianism, anticolonialism, and indigenous nationalist projects shaped the two Chinese political parties overseas, the GMD and the CCP. Traditional Chinese universalist ideas and organizational patterns of Chinese migration, as well as discrimination against Chinese migrants, resonated with the interwar internationalist moment and with Sun Yatsen's idea of allying with the oppressed for the sake of China's revival. As we see in Chapter 6, Sun's ideas permeated school curricula both in China and in overseas communities and thus channeled the Chinese migrant revolutionaries' struggle for equal rights where they intended to settle in their search for employment and livelihood. The Comintern's goal of liberating the colonies offered an internationalist legitimization for those revolutionaries. Chinese communists argued that in the Philippines, in Cuba, and around the world, Chinese communists could help the revolutions of local residents (*juliudi de minzu geming*) along with the revolution in China¹³⁵ and that a world revolution and national liberation of the colonies would be beneficial for China's national interests and for the "soviet" (*suweiai*) revolution.¹³⁶

Chinese communists borrowed existing imperial imaginations and institutions to develop their own networks and to improve the livelihood of their compatriots and revive China as well as to build a better world of justice and equality. The result was hybrid organizations of anti-imperialist leagues based on the American imagination of the Monroe Doctrine and on the global Comintern vision. They took responsibility for the movement in the Americas based on *huaqiao* organizations, as it was in the Nanyang, where its policy matched China's patterns of historical patronage in Southeast Asia, as discussed in Chapter 5. In this global quest for China's revival, Chinese migrants found partners among those whom Sun Yatsen described as the "oppressed nations." Among Germans, discriminated Chinese workers in the United States, native

¹³⁵ Gao Zinong, "Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League]"; Xu Yongying, "Zhongguo Guomindang yu Guba geming [The Chinese GMD and the Cuban Revolution]," *The Chinese Vanguard* (105), October 15, 1933.

¹³⁶ Han Han (possibly Chen Hanxing), "Lun zai huaqiao gongzuo zhong zhixing geming luxian [Regarding the Revolutionary Line in Working among Chinese Overseas]," *The Chinese Vanguard*, March 15, 1934, p. 3. The phrase "China's soviet revolution" (*Zhongguo suweiai geming*) migrated to the CCP texts from the Comintern's discourse, which promoted the "soviet movement" (*sovetskoe dvizhenie*) in China. It referred to the specific mode of government by *soviets*. A *soviet* ("council" in Russian) was a governing organization made up of the "toiling masses" during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Thus, the phrase "China's soviet revolution" describes the aspired revolutionary government led by the communist party.

workers in the American colonies, and native Filipinos and Malays, who were oppressed by their colonizers, the label of being an “oppressed nation” reflected their subjugated status vis-à-vis the winners at Versailles.

In these overlapping networks of Chinese migrants and the Comintern, organizational modes circulated across the globe. The internationalization of the idea of the Chinese Revolution and the indigenization of two Chinese overseas organizations, the CCP and the GMD, manifested a feature of interwar global connectedness in conjunction with a continuous need for Chinese organizations to localize. Worldwide economic nationalism as a reaction to the Great Depression led scholars to proclaim “the end of globalization,”¹³⁷ yet, as we see in what follows, a new localized chapter of a global organization had been established by 1930 in the Nanyang. The era was one of those “global moments” that, in the context of “developing a global consciousness in diverse social contexts,” contributed to the integration and overlap of distinct discursive communities on local, national, and regional levels.¹³⁸

The discourse of the Nanyang Revolution as an indigenized revolution and the concern with the CCP directive being inappropriate for local conditions demonstrated a conjuncture of the Comintern’s indigenization and the indigenization of the Chinese organizations, the GMD and the CCP.¹³⁹ These cast a fresh light on the ways in which both MCP nationalism and the Comintern’s ideas about indigenization were used for mobilization purposes. Moreover, these indigenization trends coincided with the quest for local identity and subculture among *huaqiao* intellectuals in British Malaya.

¹³⁷ Harold James, *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹³⁸ Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Introduction: Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s,” in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–25, esp. p. 15.

¹³⁹ The trope of central missives being inappropriate for local conditions echoes the fears of scholarly officials that bureaucracy could substitute written texts for living “practical” experience. Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*. Edwin O. Reischauer Lecture. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 20–21.