

3 The Nanyang Revolution and the Malayan Nation, 1929–1930

Nations, Migrants, Words

Background

In Southeast Asia, indigenous nationalists adopted the Western concept of nation-states. The nation-states there had also been shaped by the geopolitical limits of colonial and precolonial polities as well as by the colonial concepts of boundaries and colonial ethnic policies.¹ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exclusion and xenophobia generated by increasing Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and the Pacific region fostered the nationalism of the host countries and helped strengthen the idea of territorial borders.² British Malaya was not an exception. While the idea of a Malayan nation was first promoted by the British government, immigrants did not have political rights in that nation.

British Malaya came under colonial control between 1874 and 1919. A mass migration of Chinese laborers to the Malay Peninsula began after Britain imposed its rule in the western Malay states in 1874 to pacify feuds among Chinese tin mine owners.³ These owners benefited from the British takeover,⁴ but violence by Chinese secret societies led to a British ban on such organizations beginning in 1890, including on the GMD in Malaya (1925) and in Singapore (1930). Noncompliant Straits Settlement Chinese community leaders were deported, Chinese were denied their Chinese political rights as “aliens,” and re-Sinicization through Chinese-language education and the press of the Chinese

¹ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); David Henley, “Ethnogeographic Integration and Exclusion in Anticolonial Nationalism: Indonesia and Indochina,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37(2) (1995), pp. 286–324; Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2012).

² Sebastian Conrad and Klaus Mühlhahn, “Global Mobility and Nationalism: Chinese Migration and the Re-territorialization of Belonging, 1880–1910,” in Conrad and Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order*, pp. 181–212.

³ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, pp. 160–161.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

government was restricted.⁵ In contrast, the British recruited Malays into lower administrative ranks, protected Malay land rights, and preserved Malay peasant customs.⁶

The Chinese in Malaya viewed such actions as oppressive, and leaders of commercial, clan, and regional associations therefore promoted Chinese political rights. The Chinese dominated the cities of the Malay Peninsula and comprised the majority of the population in most of the states. According to the 1921 census, nearly half of the Malayan population, around 3,358,000 people, was Indian (14.2 percent) or Chinese (35 percent), and in 1931, the shares increased to 16 percent and 39 percent, respectively.⁷ At this time, 65 percent of Chinese in Malaya worked in tin mines, small rubber holdings, and farms, while 75 percent of Indians worked on European rubber estates.⁸

Malays felt “left behind” in their world during the colonial period, invaded by foreign capital, goods, and labor, and they were alarmed by the rise in Chinese immigration.⁹ Toynbee famously wrote in 1931 that Malaya was destined to become “a Chinese province by peaceful penetration.”¹⁰ In these circumstances, debates took place regarding the creation of a Malay nation based on race, descent, and land rights (*bangsa Melayu*). Newspapers promoted the spirit of Malay unification and the erosion of boundaries dividing the Malay community, and Malay intellectuals talked about the crisis of Malay Muslim society and promoted “the values of rationalism and egalitarianism.”¹¹ In the 1930s, Malay newspapers were filled with articles discussing service to the *bangsa* (nation). *Warta Bangsa*, the first issue of which was published in 1930, declared that its goal was to “raise up” the Malay race. The *bangsa* excluded non-Malays, though it was not based on Islam. To counter the rise of pan-Islamic sentiments, the British government supported the cultivation of a Malay identity on which the creation of a *bangsa*

⁵ Ching Fatt Yong and R. B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912–1949* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), pp. 47, 137, 141; Wang Gungwu, “The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism, 1912–1937,” in Charles D. Cowan and Oliver W. Wolters, eds., *Southeast Asian History and Historiography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 405–423.

⁶ William Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 118, 122.

⁷ Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), p. 3; Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 208.

⁸ Yeo Kim Wah, *The Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya, 1920–1929* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 33–35.

⁹ Anthony Milner, *The Malays* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 110–111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹¹ Milner, *Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, pp. 270, 290.

community was contingent.¹² Originally, the Malay sense of identity evolved around *kerajaan*, a community oriented toward a royal ruler, the *raja*. After World War I, the issue of descent came to the forefront, as Malays refused to recognize the right of the Peranakan Chinese, Indians, and Arabs to serve as representatives on the Legislative Councils of the Malay States and of the Straits Settlements in light of the economic gap between Malays and non-Malays. At the same time, Malays were reluctant to participate in politics because of the disapproval of the Malay elite and the British authorities. In 1931, a comment by Penang Chinese leader Lim Cheng Yan that the Chinese community had become inseparable from Malaya sparked a debate in the Malay press, which created a sense of solidarity in the Malay community. The Malay press discussed *bangsa Melayu* and argued against the historical legitimacy of the term *Malaya*.¹³ For many Malays, the term *Malayan* invoked the threat of immigrant domination.¹⁴

As a consequence of the Great Depression in Malaya, the world's foremost producer of tin and rubber, both the new wave of poor Chinese migrants who had no citizenship rights in the colony and the more affluent locally born Chinese were hit hard. Not only did the economic depression and British protectionist policies undermine Chinese economic power in Malaya but the British government also introduced legislation limiting Chinese migration. For immigrants, it became crucial to become a part of the "Malayan nation" promoted by the British government and to have the legal status of locals in order to gain political and landowning rights as well as to decrease the risk of deportation.

The Founding of the MCP

An independent Nanyang party was formed in 1930 through the initiative of the Nanyang Provisional Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Singapore, which became the core of the newly established MCP.¹⁵ The Comintern policy of creating national parties and fostering a world revolution based on local conditions¹⁶ was related to several

¹² Ibid., pp. 272–273.

¹³ Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, pp. 1, 14–19.

¹⁴ Yamamoto Hiroyuki, Anthony Milner, Midori Kawashima, and Kazuhiko Arai, eds., *Bangsa and Umma: Development of People-Grouping Concepts in Islamized Southeast Asia* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2011); Anthony Reid, "Melayu as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities," in Timothy Barnard, ed., *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), pp. 1–24.

¹⁵ Letter of the ECCI to the FEB, October 23, 1930; Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁶ FEB, "To the Malayan Comrades," December 17, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/12/1–2ob.

factors: the indigenization trend in the CCP, a growing tendency for Malayan Chinese to see advantages in identifying with Malaya, and a sense among Chinese intellectuals of an identity independent of China.

Chinese communists in Singapore and Malaya hoped that the establishment of the MCP would help expand their organizational network, saying, “[t]he CP of [the] Malaya Peninsula can help the organization in those districts where the communist party has not been formed.”¹⁷ Since the work of Nanyang Chinese organizations was insufficiently active for the organization of a new party, in consultation with the CC CCP in Guangdong, Chinese communists decided to first reestablish party organizations and then to revive party work. Because of this decision and because of arrests, their conference was delayed for more than a year. However, twenty individuals eventually attended the third conference of the Nanyang party, the MCP founding conference, from April 22 to 23, 1930. Eleven of these individuals were arrested on April 29, including the secretary of the party, the secretary of the labor union, and a member of the Central Committee.¹⁸

Two Comintern envoys, Fu Daqing and Ho Chi Minh, the head of the Comintern’s office in Hong Kong in 1930 – who was also possibly the head of the Southern Bureau of the CCP with jurisdiction over the Nanyang – presided over the conference.¹⁹ Among other founders were Li Guangyuan (黎光远), Wu Qing (吴清), Secretary Wei Zongzhou (魏宗周),²⁰ Lin Qingchong (林庆充), Wang Yuebo (王月波), Chen Shaochang (陈绍昌), Pang Qinchang, and Lee Chay-heng. The standing committee of MCP members included Wu Qing, Fu Daqing, and Li Guangyuan. All were predominantly Hainanese and in their twenties.²¹ Also in attendance was a CYL representative from Siam.²² Famous writer Ai Wu,

¹⁷ “Resolutions Adopted at the Third Congress of the Malaya Party,” 1930, RGASPI 495/62/3/1–10.

¹⁸ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” p. 109; “Protokol der.3. Delegierten Konferenz von Nanyang (Malayische) [Protocol of the Third Representative Conference of the Nanyang Party (Malayan)],” undated, but likely 1930, RGASPI 514/1/634/86–92; MCP, “To the English Komparty.” The existing MCP historiography has conflicting dates for the MCP’s establishment. See Hack and Chin, eds., *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 61–62. There are also conflicting accounts of the place. According to Fujio Hara and Yong, the MCP was established either in Sembilan, Kuala Pilah, or in Johor, Buloh Kesap. Fujio Hara, “Di’erci shijie dazhan qiande Malaiya gongchandang [The MCP before the Second World War],” *Nanyang ziliao yicong* [Compendia of Nanyang Materials] 160(4) (2005), pp. 56–70, esp. p. 57; Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 128–129. Nowhere in the MCP documents collected by the Comintern was the place of the MCP’s establishment mentioned.

¹⁹ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 162.

²⁰ Likely, the same individual as Wei Zhongzhou. See Chapter 2.

²¹ Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism*, pp. 72, 98, 130, 134–141.

²² “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 137–140.

who had joined a communist cell in Burma in 1928, missed the meeting because the ship on which he was traveling was placed under quarantine.²³

The establishment of the MCP was under double supervision, that of both “the central committee and K,” likely “Kvok” (Nguyen Ai Quoc, or Ho Chi Minh) or the Comintern, who decided the political line in the Nanyang. The representative of the Far Eastern Bureau (FEB), that is, Ho Chi Minh, chaired the conference.²⁴ Ho was concerned about the CCP’s domination in mainland Southeast Asia over Vietnamese communist networks and sought to balance this out with the Comintern’s authority. He had decided to establish his Indochinese party under Comintern jurisdiction a month earlier so as to exclude the influence of the CCP’s Singapore branch, which by 1930 was attempting to lead communist organizations in Annam (central Vietnam), Indochina, and Siam on behalf of the Comintern. Then, possibly to counter the influence of the Vietnamese, the NPC decided to hold a reorganization meeting as soon as possible, without waiting for NPC inspector “Comrade Li”²⁵ to return from Siam and Indochina, citing that it was running out of money, apparently hoping for Comintern subsidies. Once the MCP had been established, Ho proposed a joint three- to five-member committee of the CCP, the Annamese party, and the Comintern’s FEB in order to foster cooperation between the Yunnan and Tonkin sections, Hong Kong and Annam, and the Annamese working in China. Despite Ho formally proposing cooperation among the Vietnamese, the CCP, and the Comintern, his suggestions ran contrary to Li Lisan’s proposal to keep Indochinese seamen in China under the guidance of the CCP (see Chapter 2). Ho was worried that the Chinese communists in “the secretariat of Nanyang” considered the Philippines, Indochina, Siam, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies to be under their leadership. Ho, however, did not hesitate to instruct the MCP to build independent parties in Siam, Borneo, and Sumatra at the MCP’s founding meeting. Six weeks prior to this meeting, as the FEB was planning “the conference of [the] communist organization of Malaya,” Ho approached the FEB in Shanghai with some suggestions regarding future strategies. As a result, the Comintern decided to dispatch Ho to Singapore together with Moscow-trained

²³ Fan Quan, “Ji Ai Wu yige kule yibeizi, xiele yibeizi de zuojia [Remembering Ai Wu: A Bitter Life, a Writer of the Lifetime],” in Fan Quan, *Wenhai xiaoyan [The Smoke of the Sea of Literature]* (Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 68–91.

²⁴ “Protokol der.3. Delegierten Konferenz von Nanyang (Malayische) [Protocol of the Third Representative Conference of the Nanyang Party (Malayan)],” p. 86.

²⁵ There are two possible candidates for this “Comrade Li” in the Nanyang party: Li Qingxin (李启新) or Li Guangyuan (黎光远).

Chinese representative Fu Daqing, who had been involved in communist organizations in Malaya since the mid-1920s.²⁶

Ideas about Vietnamese and Chinese responsibility for the emancipation of the peoples of Southeast Asia can be traced to regional imaginations, not unlike the inter-polity relations of the tributary system of dynastic times. With the influence of social Darwinist ideas, these nostalgic visions were enhanced with new force. Further reinforcement for these ideas came in the form of Comintern-promoted internationalism. Ho Chi Minh, who was familiar with the problem of embedding a predominantly Hainanese communist organization in Siam in the 1920s,²⁷ reprimanded the Chinese communists for not learning Malay. Like the Chinese, Vietnamese communists also sought to indigenize their revolution, and Ho presented himself as a role model, as he had learned French and English while working as a migrant laborer in London.²⁸

The MCP's Malayan Nation (Post-1930)

Like the CCP, the newborn MCP emerged as a text-focused party that spent much time producing, interpreting, and disseminating written material and that was aptly described by the British as a “paper movement.” From October to November 1931, for example, police in Singapore seized a total of 4,716 copies of various documents.²⁹ The MCP's efforts to become “international” were based on Comintern texts as a means of communication and of bonding with non-Chinese. In this multilingual community, there were clear slippages in meaning between different languages. The mechanism for these slippages was twofold, conceptual and social. As speakers of different languages interpreted authoritative texts and key words using the conceptual training available to them, a key word's pragmatic definition (the change in the meaning of

²⁶ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 156–157; Ho Chi Minh, “Malay,” November 18, 1930, RGASPI 534/3 /549/25–27. Ho's authorship is established based on the content of the report; Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 76–113; “Protokol der.3. Delegierten Konferenz von Nanyang (Malayische) [Protocol of the Third Representative Conference of the Nanyang Party (Malayan)],” p. 87; “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 134, 144–146; “The FEB Letter to the ECCI,” March 3, 1930, in Titarenko and Leutner, *Komintern i Kitai [Comintern and China]*, vol. 3, pp. 821–823.

²⁷ Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, p. 89.

²⁸ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” p. 145.

²⁹ Hans J. van de Ven, “The Emergence of the Text-Centered Party,” in Tony Saich and Hans J. van de Ven, eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 5–32; Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya*, p. 9; MRCA, December 1931, pp. 31–32, 55; MRCA, October 1931, pp. 44–45, CO 273/572.

a key word reflected in its actual use) joined with the changed social experience of the text's writers and readers to produce different meanings for the same words. I take inspiration from Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* to connect conceptual history and social history.³⁰

Shifts in the meaning of one particular key word, *minzu*, came in conjunction with the changed social experience of Chinese migrant identification with Malaya and created the basis for the MCP's formulation of its idea of a form of Malayan nationalism inclusive of immigrants. The genealogy of the word *minzu*, used to connote the Comintern concept of "national," can be traced to Sun Yatsen's use of both *minzu* and *guojia* (country) as translations of the English word *nation* when referring to China. Both the GMD and the CCP used *minzu* in this dual meaning as "nation" and "nationality." Multiple meanings of *minzu* as "ethnic," "people," "nation," and "nationality" are reflected in a CCP statement from 1929: "The national problem of the Nanyang – the nations [*minzu*] in the Nanyang are very complex."³¹ In MCP discourse, a Chinese term meaning "nation," "nationality," "race," "ethnic group," and "national," *minzu*, came to mean "Malayan nation."³² These multiple meanings resulted in a semantic slippage when the Comintern embarked on establishing a Malayan national party in a country that only existed in relation to the British colonial concept of Malaya, meaning the Malay Peninsula. Point seventeen of the twenty-one requirements for official acceptance as a Comintern section stated that an applicant party should be named a "party of a country" (*partiiia etoi strany*).³³ By adding the attribute "Malayan" to "nation" (i.e., *minzu*), the Comintern reinforced the concept of a Malayan country that was territorially based on British Malaya.

³⁰ Koselleck, "*Begriffsgeschichte* and Social History," pp. 73–91.

³¹ Tan Liok Ee, "The Rhetoric of Bangsa and Minzu: Community and Nation in Tension, the Malay Peninsula, 1900–1955," Working Paper (Clayton, Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1988), pp. 27–28; CC CCP, "A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee," p. 10.

³² In the English-language discourse of the day, *minzu* pointed to race. However, because the English-language MCP documents do not use the word *race*, nor is the relevant Chinese word, *zhongzu*, used to any significant extent, I do not analyze this meaning of *minzu*. One of the few uses of the word *race* in MCP texts is as follows: "We are not animals and we want to preserve our races." "An Open Letter from the C. C. of the C. P. of Malay to the Working Class of Malay," November 7, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/1a–4. For the ambiguity and negotiation of the meaning of *minzu* in other contexts in the twentieth-century Chinese world, see James Leibold, "Searching for Han: Early Twentieth-Century Narratives of Chinese Origins and Development," in Thomas Mullaney, ed., *Critical Han Studies: The History Representation and Identity of China's Majority* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 210–233.

³³ *21 uslovie priema v Komintern [Twenty-One Conditions for Acceptance into the Comintern]*. 2nd edn. Introduction by O. Piatnitskii, (Izdatel'stvo TsK VKP(b), 1934).

The Chinese communists in the Nanyang, however, imagined another national Malay party, a federation of communist parties organized along ethnic lines. There were several reasons for that. For one, as discussed in the previous chapter, this was likely based on the model that originated in the multiethnic context of the United States. The CCP understood the word *minzu* to mean “people,” probably also because the communist cells in mainland Southeast Asia were organized according to ethnicity, differentiating, for instance, Chinese from Vietnamese.³⁴ Since 1927, the predominately Chinese party’s base had presented a problem for the “relationship between the revolutionary parties of the other peoples” and was hard to solve without organizing parties of “various peoples” separately.³⁵ Another possible factor was the reality of ethnic division within industries, which impacted the makeup of trade unions.³⁶

Since 1929, the CCP had intended to unify Chinese ethnic cells across the Nanyang into one party.³⁷ In 1930, to solve the problem of the party’s focus on Chinese communities, the MCP members-to-be suggested “[establishing] a nucleus among each people [i.e., ethnic community], in order to establish an independent party of each people.”³⁸ In other words, the Nanyang communists interpreted the Comintern’s principle of national parties as being based on ethnic groups. The MCP’s political resolution in English stated the following:

In view of the mistake that the system of [the] Malay party belongs to [the] Chinese party, some members insist to organise an unity party embracing all people in Malaya. This organisational line is also contradictory to the organisational principle of [an] international party, for the unit of organisation is people. Each native people should organise a national party . . . To organise a unity party consisting of various peoples is incorrect.³⁹

This statement was incompatible with the Comintern’s policy of having one communist party per country. Over this paragraph, a Comintern cadre wrote *Sovershenno neverno* (“Absolutely wrong”). Elsewhere, the FEB noted that “[t]he idea of creating several Communist parties based on the [different] nationalities in Malaya must be energetically

³⁴ Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, pp. 76–113.

³⁵ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 116–118.

³⁶ N. A. K. [Nguyen Ai Quoc, alias Ho Chi Minh], “Economic Conditions in Malay, Letter from Singapore,” June 10, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/8/4–6.

³⁷ CC CCP, “A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee,” p. 12.

³⁸ “Resolutions Adopted at the Third Congress of the Malay Party,” p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

combated”; in the Malayan state, there was to be only one party, which would include “workers of all nationalities.”⁴⁰

In CCP documents from 1928–1929, the term *Malaya* was not used, and there was thus no correlation with “national.”⁴¹ However, starting with the MCP’s founding conference minutes, the terms *Malaya party* and *Nanyang party* were used interchangeably and had the meaning of “national party.” The goal of the MCP’s revolution was to achieve “a united front of the oppressed peoples” and to organize “the Democratic Republic by free union among the various people of [the] Nanyang,” a concept that, in the same paragraph, was termed the “Democratic Republics of the Malay States.”⁴² The idea of a soviet federation made sense in Malaya – and in the Nanyang – with its multiple *minzu*, which, for the Comintern, translated into the Russian *natsionalnost’* (nationality).⁴³ Following the Comintern’s directives, the MCP now conceived of the Malayan nation as encompassing all Malayan ethnic groups in the fashion of the multiethnic Soviet federation. Thus, the Comintern gave Chinese communists in the Nanyang the discursive tools to imagine Malaya, consisting at the time of several sultanates under British dominion, as a nation-state.

As a result of different understandings of the word *minzu* by the CCP and the Comintern, a communist organization that was built according to people became the basis of a countrywide communist party of a nonexistent nation. With the equating of the ethnic Chinese party with the national Malayan party, the Chinese communists were to lead Malaya’s oppressed peoples to colonial liberation and nationhood on behalf of the Malayan nation and the Malayan Revolution. It was this slippage that made Malaya a territorialized nation and a country in MCP discourse, since, like the Comintern, the MCP used *national* to refer to the jurisdictional space of the party, so “national” meant “Malayan.” Before the establishment of the MCP, the Chinese communists imagined the place where they were, the Nanyang and the Malay Peninsula, as a place inhabited by different ethnic groups (*minzu*). By promoting a national (i.e., Malayan) party and a Malayan Revolution, the Comintern conformed to the nascent idea of a national Malayan identity among Chinese immigrant communists and their jurisdiction over both the Nanyang and Malaya.

⁴⁰ FEB, “To the Malayan Comrades,” December 17, 1930.

⁴¹ Vremennyi komitet malaiskogo arhipelaga [Nanyang Provisional Committee], “V tseñtral’nyi komitet. Otchet Malaiskogo Komiteta profsoiuzov [To the Central Committee. The Report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of the Malay Archipelago].”

⁴² “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 118–119.

⁴³ “Resoliutsia priniataia posle obsledovania raboty vremennogo komiteta v 1929 [Resolution Adopted after Investigation of the Work of the (Nanyang) Provisional Committee in 1929].”

The boundaries between the Malayan party and the Nanyang party remained ambiguous. From 1928, the twentieth plenum of the CCP Central Executive Committee in Guangdong, in accordance with the Comintern line, decided to transform the special committees of Siam, Annam, Burma, and the Indian islands into the Siam Committee, the Annam Committee, and the Communist Party of the Nanyang Peoples.⁴⁴ In 1928, the NPC plenum decided that the communists had to start a “national movement” in the Nanyang so as to attract Malays and Indians to the Chinese party organization and to accept the Comintern’s leadership.⁴⁵ The party of the Nanyang was to become independent when the parties of various nations in the Nanyang were united into a general organization.⁴⁶ Since 1929, the CCP had planned that the “Communist Party of the Nanyang Nationalities” (Kommunisticheskaia partiia nan’ianskikh narodnostei) would include the larger territory of the Indian islands, meaning the Malay Archipelago, Burma, and the Annam and Siam committees.⁴⁷

At the MCP’s founding conference, the Nanyang party was to be renamed the Nanyang Various Peoples Communists’ Joint Secretariat as a transitional organization for “the communist party in the various oppressed peoples of [the] Nanyang” and would include a Malay communist party or a “Communist Committee of [the] Malay Peninsula.”⁴⁸ Comintern documents before 1930 also demonstrate that the Nanyang was termed alternatively as the Malay Archipelago, the Malay states, or Indonesia.⁴⁹ As early as 1918, *Nanyang* had been translated into English as “Malaysia” by the first “area studies” institution in China, at Ji’nan University, and Comintern translators also translated *Nanyang* as “Malaya.”⁵⁰ The Comintern confirmed this conception of the Nanyang

⁴⁴ “Otchet o polozhenii v Nan’iane [Report about the Situation in Nanyang],” January 1930, RGASPI 514/1/632/7–28, esp. 16.

⁴⁵ Vremennyi komitet malaikogo arkhipelaga [Nanyang Provisional Committee], “V tseñtral’nyi komitet. Otchet Malaikogo Komiteta profsoiuzov [To the Central Committee. The Report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of the Malay Archipelago],” pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁶ CC CCP, “A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee,” p. 12.

⁴⁷ “Otchet o polozhenii v Nan’iane [Report about the Situation in Nanyang],” p. 16.

⁴⁸ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” p. 120.

⁴⁹ Vremennyi komitet malaikogo arkhipelaga [Nanyang Provisional Committee], “V tseñtral’nyi komitet. Otchet Malaikogo Komiteta profsoiuzov [To the Central Committee. The Report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of the Malay Archipelago]”; FEB, “To the Malayan Comrades,” December 17, 1930.

⁵⁰ “Zhongguo yu Nanyang. China and Malaysia” [Bulletin of Ji’nan University] 1 (1918) in Meng Liqun, ed., *Nanyang shiliao xubian* [Continuation of the Compilation of Nanyang Historical Materials], vol. 1 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2010), p. 1; “List of Circulars Issued by the C. C. of the C. P. of Malaysia,” 1933–1934, RGASPI 495/62/24/46–47.

as a Malay region by assigning responsibility for movements in Indonesia, Siam, and Burma to the MCP in 1934.⁵¹

In these uncertain boundaries of the Nanyang, populated by various peoples, we recognize the pattern of Sun Yatsen's idea of a Chinese nation comprising multiple peoples. In 1912, in his inaugural address as provisional president of the Republic of China, Sun Yatsen spoke of the future republic as uniting all territories of the former Qing empire and all five ethnicities (*zu*) – Manchu, Han, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan – in one nation (*yiren*), which would be the “unity of the nation.”⁵² The similarity of the multiethnic conditions in Malaya and in the Chinese empire, now a republic, in both of which the Chinese were the dominant *minzu*, rendered the application of the Comintern's principle of internationalism logical.

In 1930, the MCP, which primarily consisted of CCP members, subsequently changed its idea of a national party in accordance with the Comintern idea of an ethnically inclusive party in order to acquire Comintern recognition and funding. However, because of the MCP's inability to involve non-Chinese in the organization, the de facto ethnic mode of organization of workers and nationalist movements continued throughout the 1930s. The founding conference, as in 1929, thus criticized the party for its continuing failure to indigenize, accusing it of not understanding “the revolutionary task in Nanyang”⁵³ and of not adapting “to the practical life of Malaya.”⁵⁴ The Nanyang comrades recognized that Malay natives should participate in the revolution in the Nanyang, but because of a lack of money and cadres, this recognition did not go further than discussions about the tactics of the party, educational classes, and the establishment of party publications.⁵⁵ The party did not adapt to Malay conditions because it consisted of Chinese immigrants and because of the “patriotism of Chinese toiling masses in Malaya,” as well as a lack of investigation into the conditions in Malaya and a lack of special instructions from the CC CCP to the “Malay party.” The way to fix this, the MCP imagined, was by establishing organizations consisting of members of different nationalities.⁵⁶ The

⁵¹ FEB, “Pismo Ts.K.Malaiskoi K.P. o VII kongresse i.t.d [Letter to the CC MCP about the 7th Congress of the Comintern, etc.],” June 1, 1934, RGASPI 495/62/22/13–13ob.

⁵² Sun Zhongshan, “Linshi da zongtong xunyan shu [The Proclamation of the Provisional President],” in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* [Collected Works of Sun Yatsen], vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), cited in 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, esp. p. 245.

⁵³ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 130–131.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 136–137.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.

⁵⁶ “Resolutions Adopted at the Third Congress of the Malaya Party,” pp. 3, 8.

indigenization of the MCP, which had been previously promoted by the GMD and the CCP in 1929, was now also promoted by the Comintern.

The MCP's indigenization ran through the rhetoric of internationalism and world revolution. The MCP thus promoted the liberation of Malaya through a Malayan Revolution, which would contribute to the world revolution: "Comrades! The III congress [the founding meeting] has entrusted us with the full responsibility for the revolutionary movement of the Malay Peninsula. We must organize the Malayan proletariat and poor peasantry into a new army of the world revolution for the emancipation of all oppressed peoples of [the] Malay [P]eninsula."⁵⁷

Indigenizing the Chinese Revolution through the Malayan Nation, Advancing Malay Civilization through the Chinese Revolution

In 1930 the Comintern promoted the mobilization of Malaya's three major ethnic communities through the MCP, calling for support for the Chinese and Indian Revolutions and "the liberation of Malaya."⁵⁸ Malaya was a unique place to promote slogans of support for the Chinese and Indian Revolutions that would also benefit the Malayan and world revolutions, since in 1931 Indians and Chinese comprised such a sizable proportion of Malaya's population. In the MCP texts, this translated into the "emancipation of the oppressed Malay nationalities" (*Malai bei yapo de minzu jiefang*) or the "the people of Malaya" (*Malai de renmin*), who consisted of "complex nationalities" (*fuza de minzu*).⁵⁹ The MCP argued that it had to organize Malay and Indian workers to address the low political awareness of the Chinese masses (*qunzhong de zhengzhi shuiping jiaodi*), which manifested itself in an immigrant mentality (*yimin de xinli*). In the Darwinian world of revolution, the establishment of a workers and peasants' state (*gongnong de guojia*) would bring liberation to the Malayan nation (*Malai minzu dili*) or "the people of Malaya" (*Malai de minzhong*), rendered in English translation as "Malaya." It would also help overcome economic backwardness and

⁵⁷ CC MCP, "Notice Issued by the C. C. of the Communist Party of the Malay States Relating to the Conclusion of the III Delegate Congress of the Nanyang Communist Party," May 1, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/3/11–25, esp. 25.

⁵⁸ FEB, "To the Malayan Comrades," December 17, 1930.

⁵⁹ "Zhongyang tonggao di si hao. Guanyu Yingguo muqian de zhengzhi qingxing yu women de gongzuo [Central Committee Circular no. 4. On Contemporary British Politics and Our Work]," August 10, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/31–32; "Gongren ying zuo shenmo shiqing [What Workers Should Do]," November 15, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/23/84–93.

would bring the Malay “civilization”⁶⁰ to a higher stage of development (*xiang zhao geng gao de wenming fazhan*).⁶¹

For the MCP, colonial emancipation meant “civilizational progress”: “The British often say in Malaya that peoples of the East are of the second sort [*xiadeng de dongxi*], regardless of whether they are educated elites or not, and they do so because otherwise the peoples of the East will stand up, work on their own country [*jiajin ziji guojia de gongzuo*], and overcome imperialist domination, and their civilization will advance [*wenming jinbu*].”⁶² Propaganda rhetorically defending the Soviet Union, which had been “economically and culturally backward” but in ten years had surpassed any “so-called civilized country,” made sense because it offered a model of civilizational breakthrough.⁶³

Internationalism was intrinsic to indigenization through these discourses of aid to the Chinese and Indian Revolutions for the sake of the Malayan Revolution and ultimately the world revolution. Because Malaya’s production depended on a labor influx from these two countries, revolutions in China and India became the first conditions for the emancipation of the Malay nation (*Malai minzu jiefang*), the MCP argued. To help the Indian and Chinese Revolutions and to expand the movement in Malaya, the MCP needed to organize Chinese and Indian workers. The revolution in India was important because it would help to spread revolution in other British colonies and to bring down British imperialism.⁶⁴ The Comintern

⁶⁰ “Civilization” (*wenming*) here is used interchangeably with “culture,” as the comment on the Soviet Union in the next paragraph demonstrates, and it does not refer to a particular Malay civilization as an entity. For a similar interchangeable usage of *wenming* and *wenhua* in discussions on the relative benevolence of the Chinese civilization over the European colonial one, attracting other peoples for assimilation and thus bearing the responsibility to emancipate the oppressed, see “Zhongguo duiyu shijie de shiming [China’s Responsibility to the World],” in Lü Simian, *Gaoji zhongxueyong benguoshi. Er ce* [*The History of Our Country for Middle School. Second Part*] (1935), pp. 254–258, Wang Gung Wu Library, Chinese Heritage Centre, Nanyang Technological University.

⁶¹ “Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao. Yuanzhu Zhongguo Yindu geming yu muqian gongzuo de zhuanbian [Central Committee Circular no. 7. Aid to Chinese and Indian Revolutions and the Changes in Our Current Work],” September 15, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/36–38; “What Workers Should Do,” 1930, p. 86; “What Workers Should Stand For,” November 11, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/5/9–20, esp. 10.

⁶² Singapore City Committee of the MCP, “Shijie wuchan jieji geming lingxiu Liening tongzhi qushi di qi zhounian jinian [Commemorating the Seventh Anniversary of the Death of the Leader of the World Proletarian Revolution Comrade Lenin],” January 21, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/5/26.

⁶³ “The Present Situation in Malaya and the Task of the CPM (Draft Letter),” July 10, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/17/27–53, esp. 32; the C. C. of the C. P. of Malay, “Central Circular no. 9. The Commemoration of the October Revolution and the Preparation for the Solidarity Strike,” October 3, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/40–44.

⁶⁴ “Zhongyang tonggao di si hao. Guanyu Yingguo muqian de zhengzhi qingxing yu women de gongzuo [Central Committee Circular no. 4. On Contemporary British Politics and Our Work]”; “Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao. Yuanzhu Zhongguo Yindu geming yu

thus provided a new international justification for the internationalism of the Chinese Revolution of Sun Yatsen by merging Chinese nationalism and Asianism together in the MCP's Malayan nationalism.

The Comintern responded to MCP initiatives⁶⁵ with a directive to promote these two revolutions. In the earliest such document, dated December 1930, the Comintern recommended that the MCP promote support for the Chinese and Indian Revolutions among their respective ethnic communities and use different slogans in each. The rationale was that the emancipation of Malaya would help the emancipation of China and India, which would be beneficial for the Malayan Revolution. This attitude also provided a rhetorical tool to attract members of the Chinese community and, most important, on behalf of and to the benefit of the national liberation of Malaya. For instance, the Comintern suggested that among the Chinese population, the slogan that the emancipation of Malaya would help the emancipation of China had to be used, as the same imperialists who oppressed China also oppressed Malaya. The same was promoted among Hindu workers regarding Indian emancipation: "You must tell the native workers that the emancipation of Malaya can be put into practice only through the united front of all toiling masses of the Malay state regardless of nationalities."⁶⁶ The FEB suggested that the MCP explain to the native Malay workers that they should fight not for the lowering of wages among Chinese and Indian workers to their level but for the opposite.⁶⁷

As had Li Lisan in the past, the Comintern criticized the MCP, saying it was a group of Chinese immigrants who were living "by the interests of the Chinese movement" and who were "separated from the life of the indigenous strata of toiling Malays" and Malaya-born "indigenous Chinese" because of their "attempt to mechanistically graft the methods and some slogans of the Chinese movement in Malaya."⁶⁸ The Comintern felt that the MCP was still "more of a CCP organization . . . working among the Chinese workers who fled from China, rather than an independent party of Malaya States."⁶⁹ The ECCI considered the MCP to be "the Singapore group" and recommended that the FEB connect with it and "establish leadership over its activity, and try to convert it and use it for the establishment of the communist party of the Malay

muqian gongzuo de zhuanbian [Central Committee Circular no. 7. Aid to Chinese and Indian Revolutions and the Changes in Our Current Work]."

⁶⁵ The C. C. of the C. P. of Malay, "Central Circular no. 2. Preparation for the Mass Demonstration on 'Aug. 1st' the International Red Day," June 18, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/18–22a.

⁶⁶ FEB, "To the Malayan Comrades," December 17, 1930.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ ECCI Letter to the FEB, October 23, 1930.

⁶⁹ FEB, "To the Malayan Comrades," December 17, 1930.

archipelago, including Malay, Indian, and Chinese (including indigenous) workers,” who would be able to lead the revolutionary movement of Malaya. The FEB was to help the MCP prepare Chinese, Malay, and Indian cadres, who would be able to organize an independent MCP and who “would help the communist movement in Indonesia to form.”⁷⁰

Moreover, the Comintern pointed out, “[t]he proletarian movement in Singapore can play a huge role in the agitation and organization of the countries that surround it.” The FEB continued, “[i]t is necessary to create an organizational network through the whole country of Malaya states. You already have an organizational basis in the Chinese communist group. Now it is necessary without delay to make every effort that these Chinese communists no longer exist like a group of Chinese emigrants, living with their minds and hearts solely upon events in China and mechanically reproducing all such [phenomena] in the Malaya states.” The Comintern refused to recognize the established MCP as the Malayan communist party and suggested that the “communist party in the Malaya States” should be established on the basis of the preliminary committee that the Nanyang communists had established in April 1930.⁷¹

The Comintern’s vision echoed the same method of indigenization of immigrant communist networks that Ho Chi Minh had promoted in Indochina and that the GMD had advocated in Malaya. This indigenization was rooted in the civilizing aspirations of immigrant communists in Southeast Asia. The revolution offered a way of localizing the Chinese communist organization in Malayan society, as the MCP was eager to build a cross-ethnic alliance. When the party distributed its pamphlets during the celebration of a communist festival in “Hindus” and “Malayan” languages, it reported that “the native masses seemed very pleased” to have revolutionaries among themselves as well, while the Chinese were also pleased that Malays and Indians “[were] with them now.”⁷² However, despite aloof slogans and an emphasis on non-Chinese membership numbers, it was obvious that non-Chinese membership was negligible.

Malays in the MCP

Although membership at the founding conference was reported as 1,500 as well as 5,000 labor union members, the party had only 1,130

⁷⁰ ECCI Letter to the FEB, October 23, 1930.

⁷¹ Ironically, the authors of this Comintern letter, apparently unaware of Li Lisan’s promotion of a Nanyang Revolution, labeled the proponents of the China-leaning policy in the MCP as leftist and influenced by Li Lisan and Chen Duxiu. *Ibid.*

⁷² “Report from Malay,” 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27–29.

party members (including five Malays) and more than 4,250 members of communist-influenced red trade unions in October 1930. The conference itself included only one Malay and one representative from the Netherlands East Indies.⁷³ However, the term *Malay* may be deceptive, for by April 1, 1930, of six Malays arrested because of their association with the Chinese communists, five (Ahmed Baiki bin Suile, Ali Majid, Jamal Ud Din, Emat, alias Abdul Hamid, and Haji Mohamed bin Hashim) came from Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Java, and it is likely that the sixth, Salleh Bin Sapi, did as well.⁷⁴ Despite its alleged goals, the MCP was still said to be exclusively Chinese (apart from one Indian) and appeared to have “no plan to involve non-Chinese other than vulgar conversation and politeness,” because of difficulties with their different “language and custom.”⁷⁵ The discrepancy in the documents sent to the Comintern, which report an MCP membership of 10 percent “Malaysians and Indians,” may have been because the CC in Singapore relied on reports from local cells, which were often intercepted and therefore irregular. Some MCP envoys claimed that they themselves did not have sufficient knowledge of party membership to make accurate reports.⁷⁶ Furthermore, when the CC and other local organizations sent envoys to Shanghai in 1930 as MCP representatives in hopes of gaining Comintern funding and recognition of autonomy,⁷⁷ there was a clear benefit to show growing recruitment of non-Chinese, which had been a condition stipulated by the Comintern. It is evident, however, that these estimates were exaggerated, since other sources (see Table 3.1) show no improvement.

Obviously, those few Malays were not very visible in the MCP, since in 1931 Comintern envoy Ducroux discovered that in the MCP,

⁷³ “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 130, 136–137; “Protokol der.3. Delegierten Konferenz von Nanyang (Malayische) [Protocol of the Third Representative Conference of the Nanyang Party (Malayan)]” “Resolutions Adopted at the Third Congress of the Malaya Party,” p. 4; “Informatsiia o Malaiskikh Shtatakh [Information about the Malay States],” October 3, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/7/2–4.

⁷⁴ “A Report Showing the Connection between Chinese and Non-Chinese Concerned in Communist Activities in Malaya,” April 1, 1930, CO273/561/72074, cited in Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, pp. 53–56.

⁷⁵ Ho Chi Minh, “Malay”; “Report from Malay”; “To the C. C. of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” sometime in 1930, RGASPI 495/62/11/1–4; “Informatsiia o Malaiskikh Shtatakh [Information about the Malay States].”

⁷⁶ “To the C. C. of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” p. 3; Wang Yung Hai, “To the Far Eastern Bureau,” December 28, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/17–21.

⁷⁷ The FEB’s Letter to Ducroux, May 20, 1931, RGASPI 495/62/2/6–7.

Table 3.1 *Non-Chinese members in communist organizations in Malaya*

	MCP	Red labor unions
1930	5 Indians Malays: 2 members and 1 candidate, possibly including a former PKI member, Subajio; 1 CC member and 5 CC candidates	300 Indians and Malays (at least 30 Malays and 220 Indians)
March 1931	Total: 1,220	Indians: 350 Malays: 30, as well as 72 Javanese Total: 5,830
September 1931		1,220 Indians and Malays Total: 8,175
December 1931	Indians: 28 Malays: 17, as well as 1 Javanese	Indians: 180 Malays: at least 700 In Singapore, 10 percent Malays, Tamils, and Javanese, 9 Javanese and 57 Indians “under influence” ⁷⁸

there was “no single Malay or Indian, but Indians were in the Malaya trade unions.”⁷⁹ Overall, there were more non-Chinese in the AIL.⁸⁰ However, the MCP had no language skills and asked the Comintern for the help of the Javanese and Indian parties, who could send Chinese, Indians, or Javanese from the *Kommunistischesii universitet trudiashchikhsia Vostoka* (KUTV), and of Comintern cadres

⁷⁸ Because of secrecy considerations, MCP communications rarely mention names. Undated report, probably 1931, RGASPI 495/62/7/9–8; “Declaration of Subajio,” June 21, 1930, RGASPI 495/154/752/37–38; MCP’s Letter to Ho Chi Minh and Ho Chi Minh’s Letter to the Comintern, November–December 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/5–7; “Report from Malay”; Huang Muhan, “Worker Movement in Federated Malay States”; “A Report from 12 September 1931 from Malaya about the Labour Union to CC MCP,” MRCA, December 1931, pp. 41, 44, CO 273/572.

⁷⁹ Letter from the FEB to the “Center” regarding Malaya, Indonesia, and India, June 10, 1931, Shanghai Municipal Police Files (SMP), 1929–1945 (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1989) D2510/49–50.

⁸⁰ Khoo Kay Kim, “The Beginnings of Political Extremism in Malaya, 1915–1935” (PhD dissertation: University of Malaysia, 1973), pp. 127–128, 312–318, 356; McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia*, pp. 131–136; Yong in Hack and Chin, eds., *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 72, 238.

who knew different languages to help recruit Indians and Malays into communist organizations.⁸¹

The MCP's difficulties in engaging Malays were not surprising, given the typically condescending attitudes that perpetuated European nineteenth-century stereotypes.⁸² An MCP report stated that: "All aborigines are lazy. Though they have fertile land, they do not persevere to till it but spend their fatal time in sexual abuses, idleness and superstition."⁸³ Ho Chi Minh, in his report, described the MCP's arrogance eloquently:

Chauvinism and provincialism: They thought that being Chinese, they must work only for China, and only with the Chinese. They looked upon the natives as inferior and unnecessary people. There were no contacts, no relations between the Chinese members and the native masses. The consequences of that exclusiveness are that when they need the cooperation of the natives they find no one or find only mediocre elements.⁸⁴

For example, the MCP decided that the Malay and Hindu comrades had an "infantile education" and therefore could not be trusted with the press to publish Malay- and "Hindu"-language propaganda.⁸⁵ Some party members in Selangor, Singapore, and Malacca "[sabotaged] the work on the grounds that Indian and Malayan workers were too backward and [were] not receptive to revolutionary ideas."⁸⁶ However, the CC MCP in 1930 was critical of such attitudes toward Malays and insisted that though Malays were not revolutionary because of the current British policy of harmonization, they still needed to be dragged out of their present economic condition and their civilizational level had to be raised: "A Malay workers and peasants' state can only be established by Malayan workers and peasants."⁸⁷ Malay intellectuals, in the view of the MCP, lacked nationalism and collaborated with the British government, which destroyed their "conception of independence and emancipation."⁸⁸

Member of the MCP, artist and musician Zhang Xia (张霞) also described Malays as lazy and as having low cultural levels (*landuo, wenhua shuiping you di*) in contrast to the industrious, intelligent, and patient

⁸¹ The MCP's Letter to Ho Chi Minh, December 18, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/5–7; "Informatsiia o Malaiskikh Shtatakh [Information about the Malay States]."

⁸² Milner, *Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, ch. 3, esp. p. 64.

⁸³ "To the C. C. of the Chinese Party and the Comintern," p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ho Chi Minh, "Malay," p. 25.

⁸⁵ "Report from Malay."

⁸⁶ "Resolution on the Labour Movement Passed by the C. C. of the C. P. of Malaysia on March 24, 1934 (Abridged Translation)," RGASPI 495/62/23/46–49.

⁸⁷ "Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao. Yuanzhu Zhongguo Yindu geming yu muqian gongzuo de zhuanbian [Central Committee Circular no. 7. Aid to Chinese and Indian Revolutions and the Changes in Our Current Work]," p. 38.

⁸⁸ "Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang," p. 114.

(*qinlao, naiku, congying*) Chinese.⁸⁹ The *Weekly Herald (Xingqi daobao)*, in a 1935 article about the British colonization of Malaya, reported that the British and the Malays had different cultural levels (*wenhua chengdu buyi*) and that the Malayan national movement (*minzu yundong*) comprised Chinese. The article included a cartoon of “drunken and stupefied” colonial people sleeping in the middle of the day, which illustrates the Nanjing GMD government’s outlook on the “oppressed” peoples of the Nanyang, an outlook the MCP shared.⁹⁰

Indonesian communists continued to attempt to organize Malays in the Malayan Peninsula in 1928–1930, mostly unsuccessfully, but Alimin and Musso allegedly organized a Malay section of the AIL and built connections with Indonesians and Malays studying in Cairo. In Lenggeng in Negeri Sembilan, there was a Sumatran Islamic reformist movement, Kaum Muda, which was connected with the communists in Indonesia.⁹¹ Indonesian Comintern agents were also unsuccessful in recruiting Malays into the MCP. Similarly, a group of Chinese sent by the Nanyang party to Indonesia in 1930 failed to generate links to the PKI. Fearing arrest in Singapore, PKI leader Alimin went to Shanghai in 1931, where he worked among Malay and Javanese seamen until arrests decimated the local Comintern bureau in June 1931. It was hoped that Tan Malaka, whom the Comintern discovered in Shanghai, where he had been in hiding since 1927, would be an effective organizer, but he was arrested en route in Hong Kong.⁹² In Malaya itself, the MCP had no connection with the short-lived *Belia Malaya* (Young Malaya) (1930–1931), established by Malay student teachers at Sultan Idris Training College, including Ibrahim Yaacob, inspired by the idea of unity with Indonesia in a greater *Malaysia Raya* (but since 1926 they had contacts with Alimin and Sutan Djenain, a member of the CC MCP and of the

⁸⁹ Zhang Xia, “Xianyou xian lü Ma huaqiao yu geming huodong [Immigrants from Xianyou County in Malaya and Revolutionary Activities],” in *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng Xianyou xian weiyuanhui*, ed., *Xianyou wenshi ziliao di er ji* [Literary and Historical Materials of Xianyou County, vol. 2] (1984), pp. 34–39.

⁹⁰ “Guoji lunping duxuan: Yingguo tongzhi Malaiya zhi zhengce ji qi minzu yundong (jielu Nanyang yanjiu) [Selected International Review Readings: The Policy of British Colonization of Malaya and Its National Movement (Excerpts from Nanyang Studies)],” *Weekly Herald (Xingqi daobao)*, no. 7 (1935), p. 5.

⁹¹ Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, pp. 9–11.

⁹² “Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” pp. 144–146; Alimin, *Letters*, April 23, September 29, 1930, RGASPI 495/214/752/40–41, 86; Santos [Alimin], “Brief Description,” 1939; Santos [Alimin], Untitled, undated; Santos, “Svedeniia o Malake [Information about Malaka],” June 7, 1939, RGASPI 495/214/3/35–37; Musso, “Situatsiia v Indonesii posle vosstaniia [The Situation in Indonesia after the Uprising],” September 22, 1930, RGASPI 495/214/752/53–76.

Malayan Racial Emancipation League, respectively).⁹³ This apparent gap in communication is significant, given that in 1937 Yaacob and his Young Malay Union (Kesatuan Melayu Muda) (KMM) were credited with creating the discourse of an inclusive multiethnic Malayan nation.⁹⁴

In 1934, when the Comintern requested that the MCP send Malays to Moscow for training, the MCP responded that it was difficult to persuade the five Malay comrades (*Ma ji*) they had found in Melaka and Selangor to leave their families even for one week. One comrade in Singapore was sufficiently qualified to conduct propaganda among Malays (*Malai minzu gongzuo de zhongxin*): “The long-term education of Malay comrades [*Malaiya ji tongzhi*] is very needed. However, they do not want to come to us; we can only go to the locality and teach there and after, perhaps, can gather a training group of Malay comrades.” A lack of help from local organizations was also blamed for the lack of Malay involvement (in Sembilan), and many MCP members considered efforts in this direction to be futile.⁹⁵

However, with overall MCP membership in decline by 1934 due to arrests, one letter mentions only seven Malays (although it does not state whether this refers to all Malays in the party, which had a total membership of 588).⁹⁶ The total union membership of 6,035 included 518 Malays and 52 Indians.⁹⁷ Malay membership in the Singapore CYL increased from 3 in 1932 to 20 in 1934 (with 411 Chinese). During 1932, the number of Indians in the Singapore labor union fell from 120 to 20 and the number of Malays from 50 to 20 (total membership of 3,000).⁹⁸ Since 1931, the MCP had printed propaganda material in Malay, and in 1934, Indonesian communists provided language help, although they were concerned with the independence of Indonesia rather than Malaya.⁹⁹ Amir

⁹³ Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 224–225, 255; Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Tan Liok Ee, “The Rhetoric of Bangsa and Minzu.”

⁹⁵ Guo Guang, “Magong laixin san hao [A Letter from the MCP no. 3],” March 24, 1934, RGASPI 495/62/22/1–7, esp. 5.

⁹⁶ “Magong laijian. Malaiya de qingshi yu dang de renwu [A Document Received from the MCP. The Situation in Malaya and the Tasks of the Party],” August 25, 1934, RGASPI 495/62/27/1–5; Guo Guang, “Magong laixin san hao [A Letter from the MCP no. 3].”

⁹⁷ “Report of Labour Federation of Malaya no. 1 to the Profintern,” March 25, 1934, RGASPI 495/62/24/13–16ob.

⁹⁸ MRCA, October 1932, p. 37, CO 273/580; “Magong zhongyang laijian. Zhengge tuan de zuzhi gaikuang [A Document Received from the CC MCP. The Organizational Situation in the CYL],” August 25, 1934, RGASPI 495/62/27/7.

⁹⁹ MRCA, December 1931, pp. 31–48, CO 273/572; Straits Settlement Police Special Branch, “Review of Communism in Malaya during 1934,” December 31, 1934, *Political Intelligence Journal*, pp. 2, 3, CO 273/616. For an example of Malay-language propaganda by the MCP, see CC MCP, “Surat yang terbuka kepada saudara-saudara kita Melayu

Hamzah Siregar left Singapore for Java in 1934 and was arrested there; an MCP inspector, a Christian Batak named Djoeliman Siregar, was arrested during his tour of Negeri Sembilan and Malacca. A Salim sent a report on Selangor to the CC MCP in 1937.¹⁰⁰ Despite having founded the Malayan Racial Emancipation League in 1936, headed by a committee with two Tamils and two Malays, the MCP remained almost entirely Chinese, also likely because of Malay anti-immigrant stances.¹⁰¹

“The Future of the Nanyang Revolution”

The history of the Chinese words for “assimilation into local society” (*tonghua*) and “allegiance to China” (*guihua*) provides insight into the MCP’s understanding of how non-Chinese peoples could be involved in the party. As China expanded territorially before the twentieth century, these terms had come to denote the assimilation of non-Han peoples in the borderlands (*tonghua*) and foreigners into Chinese culture (*guihua*); however, there was no word for the reverse process. Although Chinese communities in the Nanyang had been characterized by social adaptation (and a certain loss of their Chineseness), increased migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had encouraged a process of re-Sinicization by the Chinese state that only encountered barriers when Chinese migration was restricted after 1929.¹⁰² The Nanjing GMD state’s vocabulary of assimilation reflected its acknowledgment of the foreignness of overseas Chinese, who were being re-Sinicized (*guihua*) to prevent their assimilation into the local culture (*tonghua*).¹⁰³

Closer links with China, however, also led to tensions between descendants of earlier Chinese migrants who had married local women and had developed more connections with local society. In the face of increased Malay activism, some locally born Chinese leaders, like English-educated Tan Cheng Lock (1883–1960), even began to speak of the “*Malayan*

dan Indian [An Open Letter to Our Malay and Indian Brothers],” 1934, RGASPI 495/62/22/14–17.

¹⁰⁰ Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰¹ “Supplement no. 1 of 1937 to the Straits Settlements Police Special Branch, *Political Intelligence Journal*, Review of Communist Activities in Malaya, 1936,” pp. 3, 4; “Straits Settlements Police Special Branch Report for the Year 1936,” p. 7, CO 273/630.

¹⁰² Zhao Gang, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), pp. 4–5, 188–190; Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, pp. 250–282.

¹⁰³ Wang Gungwu, “*Tonghua*, *Guihua*, and History of the Overseas Chinese,” in Ng Lun Ngai-ha and Chang Chak Yan, eds., *Liangci shijie dazhan qijian zai Yazhou zhi haiwai huaren* [*Overseas Chinese in Asia between the Two World Wars*] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1989), pp. 11–23.

spirit and consciousness” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁴ Tan was a prominent Malaya-born Chinese businessman and politician, the head of the Straits Chinese British Association in Malacca from 1928 to 1935. There are parallels between his and the MCP’s activity and discourse. He promoted Malaya’s self-government in 1926 as well as Chinese participation in the Legislative Councils of the Federated Malay States and of the Straits Settlements.¹⁰⁵

However, for other Chinese the restrictions on Chinese immigration as a result of the depression and the dramatic increase of Malaya’s locally born Chinese population, from 20.9 percent in 1921 to 29.9 percent in 1931, increased anxiety about the Chineseness of locally born Chinese.¹⁰⁶ Many teachers from Chinese-language schools and writers for Chinese-language newspapers, as well as intellectuals prominent in the MCP, were also GMD members.¹⁰⁷ One example was Xu Jie, the author of the durian story. He was appointed by the CC GMD as an editor of *Yiqunbao* in Kuala Lumpur in 1928–1929. Xu Jie maintained connections with local communists who shared news with him. In addition to founding *New Rise Literature* (*Xinxing wenyi*, 新兴文艺), which was a disguised form of the proletarian revolutionary literature movement, he was involved in local literary movements and with local writers, and he also promoted the concept of “more purely indigenous literature,” Malayan Chinese literature (*Ma hua wenxue*), and the idea of a Nanyang “local color” (*Nanyang secai*). This was a response to the condescending attitude toward a local “imitation” of Chinese culture expressed by the first generation of educated migrant Chinese. These local Chinese writers were creating a Nanyang *huaqiao* culture while also asserting their difference from China. The reorientation toward a Nanyang (local) color was an attempt to redefine the place of Chinese emigrants in Chinese culture, not, as Kenley puts it, “to become indigenous.”¹⁰⁸ Along with the

¹⁰⁴ Tan Cheng Lock, “Extract from Mr. Tan Cheng Lock’s Speech at the Meeting of the Legislative Council Held on 1st November 1926,” in C. Q. Lee, ed., *Malayan Problems from the Chinese Point of View* (Singapore: Tannisco, 1947), pp. 88–93, esp. p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ Kennedy Gordon Tregonning, “Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10(1) (1979), pp. 25–76; Heng, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Kanagaratnam Jeya Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965), p. 9; Wang, “The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism.”

¹⁰⁷ Yōji Akashi, “The Nanyang Chinese Anti-Japanese Boycott Movement, 1908–1928: A Study of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism” (Kuala Lumpur: Department of History, University of Malaya, 1968), pp. 69–96, esp. p. 77; Ching Fatt Yong, “An Overview of the Malayan Communist Movement to 1942,” in Hack and Chin, eds., *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 247–251.

¹⁰⁸ Ke Pingping as related by Xu Jie, *Kanke daolu shang de zuji* [Road Full of Misfortunes] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), pp. 149–151, 171–217;

dissatisfaction of the local Chinese with the *huaqiao* education program that came from the central government in Nanjing and did not take their needs into account, this literary trend can also be viewed as a manifestation of the adaptation efforts by the immigrant Chinese in Malaya. There were complaints that Mandarin teachers who came from China did not want to learn about Malaya. It was hoped that with time locally born teachers would come to teach Mandarin in the schools.¹⁰⁹

According to Kenley, the rise of aspirations for local Chineseness among Chinese intellectuals and their desire to liberate Malaya's "native" peoples from the British government were the consequences of the increased influence of communist political immigrants from China after 1928.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Chinese intellectuals' aspirations for a Nanyang *huaqiao* culture resonated with the CCP's impulse, expressed in Li Lisan's letter, to make a Nanyang – not a Chinese – revolution in the Nanyang and with the establishment of a local communist party. This was also encouraged by the Comintern, which ultimately offered an opportunity to put these aspirations into practice. This is illustrated in a story by Xu Jie, a follower of a "nativist" group (*xiangtupai*), who relied on true stories (which he also mentions in his memoir) as the basis for fiction.¹¹¹

Xu Jie published a story at the same time in January 1929¹¹² when the Chinese communists in Malaya received Li Lisan's letter. This story contains a discussion of the Nanyang Revolution, echoing Li Lisan's directive and the reports of the Nanyang communists to the CCP and the Comintern. Xu's discussion of a Nanyang Revolution likely reflected discussions among Kuala Lumpur communists with whom he was in contact. Xu Jie viewed the revolution in the Nanyang as different from the revolution in China. Whereas in China the revolution was confined to a limited territory because of undeveloped infrastructure, in the Nanyang it would not be easy to stir up a revolution (presumably due to relatively good living conditions), but developed transport and infrastructure would make it easier to coordinate a revolution once it arose. Thus, infrastructure would help not only to crush the revolution but also to

David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore (1919–1932)* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 157–176, 180–181, n. 50.

¹⁰⁹ Li Yinghui, *Huaqiao zhengce yu haiwai minzuzhuyi (1912–1949)* [*The Origin of Overseas Chinese Nationalism (1912–1949)*], p. 476; Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change* (New York, NY: Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), p. 277.

¹¹⁰ Kenley, *New Culture in a New World*, p. 153.

¹¹¹ Ke Pingping as related by Xue Jie, *Kanke daolu shang de zuji* [*Road Full of Misfortunes*], pp. 171, 173, 208.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 170–177.

conduct it more effectively. Moreover, capitalism in the Nanyang, while fulfilling its own tasks, at the same time contributed to the success of the world revolution. As Xu Jie's analysis of the Nanyang conditions suggests, the Nanyang's prosperity struck the Chinese because of its contrast with China.¹¹³ The CC CCP letter written by Li Lisan mentioned the same issues and presented the Nanyang as a place of highly developed industries and hence as the center of the labor movement in the Pacific and the center of communication. The Nanyang CYL also debated with the CCP about the nature of the Nanyang Revolution.¹¹⁴

Xu's idea that young locally born Chinese would become leaders of the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang if they knew the Chinese language was an expression of the GMD's global vision as well as the goal of cultivating an identification with China among overseas Chinese. In another short story, Xu wrote:

At the bookstore I saw that youngster, Ai Lian . . . He had a touch of melancholy. I thought, this is that specific expression that the oppressed peoples of the colonies have. In a flash, I also recalled the eyes of that [Indian] man, and the yellow scraggy eyes of that Malay, and also recalled those two flashing bayonets. Ai Lian furtively read Chinese books; he especially liked to read books on social sciences . . . At that time, our eyes met. Again, like last time on the road, he smiled slightly at me. I also nodded but did not say a word. "You, promising youth, when you train yourself, strengthen yourself, you will become the center of the Nanyang Revolution!"¹¹⁵

Xu's point – that the hope of the Nanyang Revolution, who would liberate their oppressed fellow countrymen, including Malays and Indians, would be young locally born Chinese who maintained a Chinese identity – provides a rare insight into the intersection of the

¹¹³ Xu Jie, "Yelin de bieshu [Mansion in the Coconut Grove]," and "Liang ge qingnian [Two Youths]," in Xu Jie, *Yezi yu liulian: Zhongguo xiandai xiaopin jingdian [Coconut and Durian: Little Souvenirs of Contemporary China]*, pp. 18–33, 34–48.

¹¹⁴ CC CCP, "A Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Nanyang Provisional Committee," p. 13. Ke Pingping as related by Xue Jie, *Kanke daolu shang de zuji [Road Full of Misfortunes]*, p. 171. The CYL disagreed with the CC CCP's definition of the formulation of the essence of the revolution in the Nanyang, where an anticapitalist national revolution (*fan zibenzhuyi de minzu geming*) was required. The Nanyang CYL decided that *xing* (性) in *fan zibenzhuyi xing de minzu geming*, which was decided by the CCP to be the nature of the Nanyang Revolution, was to be erased, as otherwise it did not convey the spirit of the anticapitalist struggle strongly enough. The essences of the Chinese and Siamese Revolutions were similar because of similar conditions in both countries, which were both semi-colonies. "Dui dang jueyi Nanyang geming xingzhi de yijian [Suggestions Regarding the Party Decision on the Nature of the Nanyang Revolution]," in the CC of the Nanyang CYL, "Nanyang gongzuo baogao [Nanyang Work Report]," 1928, RGASPI 533/10/1818/4–16, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Xu Jie, "Liang ge qingnian [Two Youths]," p. 48.

discourses of the Comintern, Malayan Chinese immigrant intellectuals, the GMD, the CCP, and the English-language public sphere in British Malaya. It also demonstrates the changes in conceptual and social aspects of the discursive community of Chinese revolutionaries.

Xu Jie wanted to include the locally born Chinese in the Nanyang Revolution so that they could fulfill the mission of emancipating “weak nations” through their Chinese identity and Chinese language, which ensured that they were not “slaves” who spoke Malay and English, the language of the colonial regime. The CYL had similar concerns.¹¹⁶ In fact, the two locally born Chinese in Kuala Lumpur, students of a Methodist English school, who figured in Xu’s short story were recruited by the local CYL after they published pieces in *Yiqunbao*.¹¹⁷ Thus the Nanyang communist organizations started to recruit locally born Chinese who would soon become active in the liberation of Malaya and its oppressed peoples and who would also be in demand by the Comintern, as we see in Chapter 5.

The Chinese identity of the locally born thus translated into their participation in the indigenous revolutionary and nationalist project. The Chinese in another revolutionary project in the Nanyang, the Philippine party, despite its similarities with the Malayan party, did not embrace indigenous nationalism. Here, the Chinese identity of the locally born Chinese also played an important role.

Chineseness: The Philippines

As in Malaya, the first communist organization established in the Philippines was a CCP chapter. There, as among other Chinese overseas communities, the popularity of communist parties grew after the March Eighteenth Massacre (1926), when a demonstration protesting Japanese pressure in the Dagu port was suppressed by the North China (Beiyang) government, and after the May Thirtieth Movement.¹¹⁸ The CCP sent Lin Xingqiu (林星秋) to establish a CCP cell in the Philippines in 1926.¹¹⁹ The Special Philippine Branch (Feilübin tebie zhibu) in Manila (est. 1927) consisted of five communist cells of three people. One student cell was at the University of the Philippines, which intended

¹¹⁶ Nanyang gongzuo baogao [Nanyang Work Report], p. 5; Xu Jie, “Liang ge qingnian [Two Youths].”

¹¹⁷ Ke Pingping as related by Xue Jie, *Kanke daolu shang de zuji* [Road Full of Misfortunes], pp. 173–175.

¹¹⁸ 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].”

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

to recruit Filipinos; one was at the Philippine Chinese middle school (*Feiqiao zhongxue*); one was at a night school; and two were in the GMD, consisting of workers and shop employees. Shop employees were the majority of party members (twenty-three) as well as primary school students and women outside of Manila.

Altogether, there were thirty “pure” party members (*danchun dangyuan*). There was also a cell of three people in Suzugun (Japan) and two in Cebu.¹²⁰ In 1927, 300 shop employees established the Association of Chinese Migrant Workers (*Fei huaqiao laodong xiehui*).¹²¹ In 1928, drawing on the report of Gao Zinong (高子农), alias Meditsinskii (Medical), a Fujianese member of the Chinese CYL sent by the CCP to study in Moscow,¹²² the Comintern planned to establish a communist party in the Philippines.¹²³ Like the Chinese communists in Malaya, Gao promoted political rights for Chinese immigrants in the Philippines and viewed the Nanyang as a location of strategic commercial and military ports, and as a market.¹²⁴

The Philippine party was a chapter of the Chinese transnational communist network. Shared characteristics with the Malaya organization included the popularity of anarchist ideas,¹²⁵ study societies and night schools as hotbeds of Marxist ideas, student and shop employee membership, a connection gap between student leaders and workers, and a workers’ preference for traditional ways of self-organizing (“yellow” unions, as the communists called them) over radical red unions.¹²⁶ As in Malaya, Chinese laborers were reluctant to become involved in local politics or with non-Chinese (*yizu*), and even with Chinese outside their native place or surname associations (*tongxinghui*). They were beyond the reach of revolutionary propaganda, as they were illiterate, participated in brotherhoods and friendship associations (*xiongdihui* and *youyishe*), and were afraid to protest against their Chinese bosses (see Chapter 4). The GMD had more appeal among “capitalists,” students, and women’s organizations. Chinese

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. p. 166.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Gao Zinong’s letter to Xiang Zhongfa, June 1, 1928, RGASPI 495/66/7/134–135; Gao Zinong, “Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tiebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League].”

¹²³ V. Demar, “Vopros o sozdaniu sektsii kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala na filippinskikh ostrovakh [Regarding the Establishment of the Comintern Section in the Philippine Islands],” April 17, 1928, RGASPI 495/66/5/1–4.

¹²⁴ Gao Zinong, “Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tiebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League],” pp. 145 *ob.*, 156.

¹²⁵ Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, p. 53.

¹²⁶ Gao Zinong, “Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tiebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League],” p. 141.

communists were also on a mission to liberate the masses of low political and cultural levels (*zhengzhi sixiang [wenhua] di*), affected by a colonial education, and were happy to report progress among students at Philippine University, formerly “the most backward in the East.”¹²⁷

The Comintern approach to Philippine national emancipation was, similar to its approach in Malaya, by a united front of the Philippine population, under the leadership of the communist party, to bring together “the proletariat, the peasantry, the urban poor, and the revolutionary students – the Moros, mountain tribes, and Chinese toilers, as well as the Christian Filipinos.”¹²⁸ The Comintern also promoted unity between Chinese immigrants and Filipino labor movements and campaigned against the deportation of Chinese workers in the Philippines and internationalist support for the Chinese Revolution.¹²⁹ As it had done in Malaya, the Comintern promoted solidarity with the Chinese and Indian Revolutions and contacts with the revolutionary movements in China, Indonesia, Malaya, and the United States.¹³⁰

Why did the Chinese communists in the Philippines not come up with the discourse of a multiethnic Philippine nation despite similarities with the party in Malaya, the long-term presence of a large number of ethnic Chinese, and rule by colonial authorities to overthrow? For one, unlike in Malaya, the Comintern promoted the “equality of all minorities, regardless of race or creed, and their absolute right to self-determination – including complete separation.”¹³¹ Also, the Comintern policy of naming one communist party per host country shaped the organizational forms of Chinese communist organizations in different settings. Where there was already a Comintern-endorsed communist party, Chinese communists joined as a Chinese-language faction, similar to that in Germany and the United States.¹³² In the historical area of Chinese emigration in the Nanyang, where Chinese communists were the earliest communists, and in Malaya

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 141, 157–159.

¹²⁸ Eastern Secretariat of ECCI, “Letter regarding tasks of the CPPI,” December 14, 1931, RGASPI 495/66/16/1–5, esp. 3.

¹²⁹ ECCI, “Draft Letter Regarding the Situation in the Philippines and Tasks of the CPPI,” October 10, 1931, RGASPI 495/66/16/187–208; “Draft Resolution on the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement in the Philippines,” August 16, 1931, RGASPI 495/66/23/59–67, esp. 67.

¹³⁰ Tim Ryan, “The Present Situation in the Philippines and the Immediate Tasks of the Communist Party,” February 17, 1931, RGASPI 496/66/23/1–24, esp. 22–23.

¹³¹ Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI, “Draft Letter to C. P. of the Philippines,” July 22, 1931, RGASPI 495/66/16/65–91, esp. 81.

¹³² In the United States the Chinese communists in 1927 wanted to call themselves the Chinese communist party, but the executive secretary of the CPUSA, Ruthenberg, did not permit them to do so, suggesting they should be called the Chinese faction of the American party. Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists*, p. 125.

and the Philippines, they established national parties. The Philippine party consisting of Chinese migrants had no CCP organizational identity. In contrast to the Nanyang Communist Party, which was responsible for the regional revolution in the Nanyang, the chapter of the Chinese Communist Party in the Philippines was already known as the Philippine Communist Party (Feilübin gongchandang) in 1928 and was organizationally autonomous from the CCP.¹³³ The Comintern established the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands (CPPI) on November 7, 1930, and one year later the Comintern was still pushing the party to connect with the CCP.¹³⁴

In the Philippines, communists were not the only ones promoting independence, unlike in Malaya. Moreover, Chinese mestizos were already considered a part of the Philippine nation and there was an insufficient number of new Chinese immigrants whose rights the party would promote. There was no sense of an intergenerational Chinese identity to bridge the two groups in the late 1920s and early 1930s, despite the continuity of Chinese mestizos' participation in the Philippine liberation movement, from Jose Rizal to the anti-Japanese resistance during World War II.¹³⁵ As a matter of fact, in 1928 Gao Zinong did not even see Rizal as Chinese. On the contrary, because he was celebrated by the American government as an anti-Spanish Philippine hero, Rizal was considered to be an ally of the "American imperialists."¹³⁶ There was a lack of shared Chinese identity between Chinese immigrants like Gao and locally born Chinese mestizos, who instead shared a Christian identity with the locals.¹³⁷

As a consequence of Spanish policies regarding the "Filipinization" of Chinese mestizos, by the end of the nineteenth century mestizo culture had become part and parcel of Filipino culture and, after the American takeover, of the discourse of the Philippine "nation" that the American government took up in an effort to coopt nationalist demands. Because of the leadership of Chinese mestizos in the Philippine Revolution, it has been argued that Chinese mestizos laid a foundation for the independent Philippine nation.¹³⁸

¹³³ 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]."

¹³⁴ Profintern, "Direktiviy po rabote na Fillippinakh [Directive for Work in the Philippines]." The document is undated, but since the previous document in the file is dated 1931, this document is possibly from 1931 as well. RGASPI 534/6/148/162–163.

¹³⁵ Shubert S. C. Liao, ed., *Chinese Participation in Philippine Culture and Economy* (Manila: Bookman, 1964).

¹³⁶ 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]."

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Wickberg, "The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History," pp. 95–96. The Philippine National Assembly was established in 1907, and in 1916, the date of eventual

American policies also favored Chinese mestizos' self-identification as Filipino. Not only culturally, Chinese mestizos had already formed a part of the Filipino identity in the late nineteenth century.¹³⁹ Unlike Malaya, the Philippines already existed as a nation-state, albeit not an independent one, and former Chinese mestizos, now called Filipinos, were part of the Philippine people.¹⁴⁰ Gao said the Americans had curtailed the national movement (*minzu yundong*) through assimilation and manipulation of the nonhomogeneous attitudes of various Philippine nationalities toward independence (*Fei ge minzu dui duli yundong de yijian bu yizhi*), promoting the idea of the Philippines as part of the confederation of the United States (*Meiguo lianbang*).¹⁴¹

American exclusion laws had barred the immigration of Chinese laborers to the Philippines, so the communist party lacked the potential constituency of immigrant Chinese who had to become local so as to improve their lot. Unlike their counterparts in British Malaya, by the second half of the nineteenth century Chinese mestizos in the Philippines already owned large landholdings. Moreover, they were able to improve their economic position after the American takeover. In contrast, during the same period in British Malaya, the economic position of locally born Chinese deteriorated.¹⁴² In absolute numbers in 1903–1939, the Chinese population in the Philippines grew from 41,035 to 117,487, which was negligible to the 2 million Chinese immigrants in Malaya. Moreover, unlike in Malaya, beginning in 1935, a Chinese person born in China could – albeit with many conditions that included property ownership – naturalize as Filipino.¹⁴³

Finally, in 1930, there were only twenty-five Chinese Communist Party members and sixty-two Filipinos, including one Chinese member of the Politburo. At the party's founding conference, there was one

decolonization was set for 1946. Richard T. Chu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity and Culture, 1860s–1930s* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 321–325, 277–278.

¹³⁹ The reasons included American simplification of the earlier Spanish designation of Philippine residents as either Filipino or non-Filipino, economic competition with Chinese immigrants, the weakness of China, and a caution not to identify with Chinese mestizo leadership in the Philippine Revolution, which was feared by the American government. Wickberg, "The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History."

¹⁴⁰ Gao Zinong, "Zhongguo gongchan qingnian tuan Feiliebin tiebie difang gongzuo baogao [Work Report of the Philippine Special Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League]."

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁴² Wickberg, "The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History."

¹⁴³ However, as a consequence of the rise of Chinese nationalism, many Chinese born in the Philippines chose Chinese citizenship rather than naturalization as Filipinos. In the 1920s, anti-Chinese sentiments increased due to the economic problems of the time, as did Chinese nationalism, which was propagated in Chinese schools by the GMD. Chu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila*, pp. 288–298, 316, 327–329.

Chinese delegate, although Chinese trade unions were the most active in the Philippines.¹⁴⁴

To summarize, by the early 1930s the absence of a discourse of a multiethnic nation among the Chinese communists in the Philippines could be explained by a lack of Chinese members in the communist party, a comparatively low number of Chinese laborers in the Philippines, the relative economic affluence of the local Chinese mestizos, and, possibly, conflicting Comintern ideas about national unity and the self-determination of minorities. In addition, the local Chinese had already become “Filipino” and had become a part of the indigenous nation of the Philippines.

Conclusion

The Comintern exported from Europe not only revolution but also the idea of the nation-state. In British Malaya, this export was facilitated by the Chinese immigrant community that needed to gain political rights that no other existing discourse of national belonging could provide. By 1930, Comintern insistence on the founding of national parties based on separate countries, as well as the British fostering of a Malayan nation, led the MCP to become an early adopter of the multiethnic Malayan state.

The case of *minzu* is an example of how different understandings of a single word had far-reaching consequences. The term *national* communicated different meanings to partners in revolution who did not fully understand one another. The shift in the meaning of *minzu* was produced by the interaction of three realms: the Malayan, the Chinese, and the international, including the Comintern in Moscow and communist organizations in the United States. The crossing of languages, groups, intellectual worlds, and how they perceived and reasoned with shared authoritative texts to address their problems shaped conceptual categories and discourses. The altered meaning of the word *minzu* reconciled the “Malayan nation” with Chinese nationalism for the members of the MCP.

To involve non-Chinese in a Chinese revolutionary organization, promoted by both the CCP and the GMD, was the MCP’s survival strategy, which we can call indigenization, though the organization was to remain rooted in China by advocating for the rights of the Chinese and by promoting a Chinese identity among locally born Chinese. What Kuhn calls the “embeddedness” of the Chinese community in local society was

¹⁴⁴ “Report on the Philippines,” January 1, 1931, RGASPI 495/ 66/ 2/48–62, esp. pp. 48–49, 53.

to be achieved through Chinese leadership in the joint liberation of oppressed local peoples and resident Chinese. The Comintern's emphasis on the importance of colonial revolutions in the fall of empires in the form of local, that is, Malayan, nationalism offered a perfect solution for the need to be connected to both ends of migration among the Chinese living in colonies overseas. This was through dual nationalism, Chinese and indigenous.¹⁴⁵ As in other transnational identities that provided the basis for the "pan" movements – Slavic, Islamic, and African – that had emerged during the nineteenth century, interwar internationalism also became significant as a vehicle for national identities because it provided an international legitimization for national sovereignty.¹⁴⁶

By encouraging a Malayan Revolution, the Comintern stimulated the nationalization of the revolution in Malaya as opposed to a revolution led by international or expatriate forces. However, though the Chinese communists sought to create a non-Chinese revolution, they continued to perceive the Nanyang in terms of China's regional imagination, where China was the leader.

In this context, the newly formed MCP understood the Comintern's communist internationalism and support for the Chinese Revolution as referring to the defense of Chinese interests and the liberation of oppressed nations along the lines of Sun Yatsen's ideas about China's political alliance. For Chinese communists located in Singapore and Malaya, the evolving discourse matched the indigenizing need of Chinese organizations, which was also promoted by the Nanjing GMD. Chinese nationalism grafted onto Comintern internationalism became Malayan nation-based nationalism, locally relevant and internationally progressive. This allowed the MCP to secure an unoccupied niche necessary for localization – the niche of the liberators of Malaya.

In another place in Southeast Asia with a long history of Chinese patronage, settlement, and localization, the Philippines, the spread of the Western idea of the nation-state and the patterns of Chinese migration and localization also shaped the formation of an indigenous nation by the end of the nineteenth century with a strong role of the local Chinese.¹⁴⁷ Yet, as the discourse of a soon-to-be-independent Philippine nation had been embraced by the American government,

¹⁴⁵ See Kuhn, "Why China Historians Should Study the Chinese Diaspora."

¹⁴⁶ Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 4, 201–203.

¹⁴⁷ Wickberg, "The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History." Political leadership is still a common approach of Chinese indigenization in the Philippines. See Teresita Ang See, "Integration, Indigenization, Hybridization and Localization of the Ethnic Chinese Minority in the Philippines," in Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Migration, Indigenization and*

Chinese communists could not claim a niche as liberators of the Philippines from colonialism, for that niche was already occupied.¹⁴⁸ As such, the Comintern's brand of internationalism was redundant for Chinese localization in the Philippines. In this story of international forces and regional imaginations, the Chinese identity of migrant Chinese was an important factor determining whether they would engage in indigenous nationalism.

Comparable concerns about political rights in Western colonies in Southeast Asia shaped Chinese political participation in indigenous nationalist projects and their identities vis-à-vis the local population. Different colonial policies shaped the configuration of ideas of ethnic, civic, and national belonging in the Malay realm. Writing in the late 1940s, Tan Malaka, who, together with Alimin,¹⁴⁹ in 1925 prepared the first manifesto of a communist party in the Philippines, attributed the participation of mestizos in the Philippine Revolution to the common religion, Christianity, but called them “indigenous Indonesians” and stressed the continuity between the Philippine Revolution and the Indonesian communist movement.¹⁵⁰ Tan Malaka embraced the idea of *Indonesia Raya*, Greater Indonesia, which in precolonial times included the Philippines, Malaya, and Indonesia;¹⁵¹ Ibrahim Yaacob was also a proponent of Greater Malay Unity (*Melayu Raya*), which he based on *bangsa* (common descent), thus excluding non-Malays.¹⁵²

Despite differences resulting from the position of Malays as the dominant group in Malaya and Malay concepts of national belonging in East Sumatra and Malaya, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies saw parallels in the development of the concepts of national belonging, the place of communists in that development, and Chinese participation in its gestation during the same time period. In Malaya and East Sumatra, with similar political cultures centered on the institution of a sultanate (*kerajaan*) and analogous colonial policies undermining the authority of sultans, and a high proportion (more than 50 percent) of immigrant Chinese, which spurred similar resentment among the Malays, Malays saw the idea of Indonesia as undermining their rights to land. In Malaya in

Interaction: Chinese Overseas and Globalization (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, World Scientific Publishing, 2011), pp. 231–252.

¹⁴⁸ According to Kuhn, the Chinese migrant community had to find an unoccupied niche in the economy in order to survive. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁹ “Santos” [Alimin], “Tovarishcham Kuusinenu i Manuil’skomu [To Kuusinen and Manuil’sky],” January 6, 1936, RGASPI 495/16/8/22–27.

¹⁵⁰ Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, pp. 162, 117–120.

¹⁵¹ Ramon Guillermo, “Andres Bonifacio: Proletarian Hero of the Philippines and Indonesia,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 18(3) (2017), pp. 338–346.

¹⁵² Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, p. 11.

the 1920s, sultans called for restoration of their power and even in 1940, at the Malay congress, participants were unwilling to link the descent-based *bangsa* to *kebangsaan* (nationalist and independence) goals in defining the Malay identity.¹⁵³

In the Dutch East Indies, where by the early 1920s the term *Indonesia* was accepted and used among nationalist organizations,¹⁵⁴ the communist PKI was the first to adopt “Indonesia” in its name, as the Comintern promoted the concept of “one party, one country.” In 1927, the Perserikatan Tionghwa Indonesia (Union of Chinese of Indonesia) was founded by the *Peranakan* Chinese, and in 1928, a conference of social groups in Batavia adopted the goal of one nation, one homeland, one language. The Dutch also promoted Malay, or Bahasa Indonesia, as a unifying language, and in the following year, Sukarno organized the Partai Nasional Indonesia, the Nationalist Party of Indonesia.¹⁵⁵

Comparable discussions of concepts of national belonging among the MCP and among the Chinese in Indonesia stemmed from the Chinese community movement for political and landownership rights. The relationship with local nationalism among Chinese communities in the Malay realm was shaped by a reaction to colonial policies in Southeast Asia and the Comintern’s promotion of national parties and Chinese participation in those parties. All these also shaped the parties’ organizational hybridity.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 5, 9, 11, 20–21, 24–25.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Edward Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, pp. 298–299.