

**A DURIAN FOR SUN YATSEN:
INTERWAR COMMUNISM IN BRITISH MALAYA (1926-1942)**

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ABSTRACT

The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) is known because of its insurgency against the British government in the 1950s, the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960). This dissertation is about early history of the MCP, in the 1920s and the 1930s. It examines the unintended consequences and contingencies of the revolutionary connections between China, Southeast Asia, and the third Communist International (Comintern) in the shaping of the MCP. This dissertation is based on little-studied MCP sources deposited in the Comintern archive in Moscow. It examines the MCP as a hybrid of communist party and a Chinese association and in the context of interwar ideological globalization that had distinct indigenization and internationalisation trends. By 1930, the unintended consequence of this indigenisation and internationalisation, as shaped by Comintern participation, was the emergence of the discourse of the Malayan nation that the Communists sought to lead to liberation. The ambiguity of the meaning of the Chinese word *minzu*, at once nation, nationality, and ethnic group, provided the discursive foundation of this MCP nation as the Comintern promoted the establishment of “national” communist parties. This “nation,” i.e. the MCP support base, was taken away from the MCP by its radical language by 1940. The rise of the MCP was conditioned on the anti-Japanese propaganda of the Chinese Nationalist Party (the Guomindang, GMD) in Southeast Asia and Japanese war atrocities against Chinese population of Malaya.

This dissertation offers fresh light on the internationalist aspects of the Chinese revolution, the role of the Comintern in the Southeast Asian nationalism, the early Chinese communist party’s relation with Chinese overseas, and the political participation of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) in their host countries. The story of the MCP is a showcase that the history of

China is inseparable from the history of the Chinese communities overseas -- and that of the world.

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A NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

All Chinese proper names are spelled using *pinyin* Romanization. Names of individuals are spelled in *pinyin* if the characters are known. When it was impossible to identify a persons' name in Chinese characters, I used their names in the English Romanization that was found in the original text. For the place names in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies that were Romanized from Mandarin or a Chinese dialect pronunciation that I was unable to identify, I used the Romanization that I found in the original English language text and italicized it.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

AEBUS	Anti-Enemy Backing-Up Society
AIL	Anti-Imperialist League
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CO	Colonial Office Records
CPPI	Communist Party of the Philippine Islands
ECCI Comintern)	Executive Committee of the Communist International (the
FEB	Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern
FO	Foreign Office Records
GMD	Chinese Nationalist Party, Guomindang
KIM	<i>Kommunisticheskii Internatsional Molodezhi, Communist Youth International</i>
KUTV	<i>Kommunisticheskiy Universitet Trudyaschihsya Vostoka, Communist University of the Toilers of the East</i>
LHM	Literary and Historical Materials
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MGLU	Malayan General Labour Union
<i>Minzu</i> 民族	Nation/Nationality/People/Race/Ethnic Group
<i>Minzu Guoji</i> 民族国际	“International of Nationalities”
MLF	Federation of Labour of Malaya
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army
Nanyang 南洋	The areas of Chinese migration that roughly correspond to contemporary English language definition of Southeast Asia
NPC	Nanyang Provisional Committee of the CCP
NEI, DEI	Netherlands (Dutch) East Indies
NIANKP	<i>Nauchno-issledovatel'skaya assotsiatsiya po izucheniyu natsionalno-kolonial'nyh problem, Research Association for the study of National-Colonial Questions</i>
PPTUS	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, <i>Tihookeanskiy sekretariat, TOS.</i>

RGASPI	<i>Roskiyskiy gosudarstvenniy arhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoy istorii,</i> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History
RLU	Red Labour Union
SMP	Shanghai Municipal Police
<i>Wenhua</i> 文化	Culture
<i>Zhengzhi</i> 政治	Politics/Political/To govern

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The durian, a Southeast Asian fruit with a strong smell, was for one Chinese writer in Malaya in the late 1920s, a symbol of the region. Southeast Asia, or Nanyang to the Chinese, was a difficult place for Chinese nationalists to operate. Ruled by a variety of imperial powers, the smelly durian was a symbol of the stinky capitalist world of the Nanyang, which, as in the story of Zheng He's discovery of the durian tree, grew from a latrine. In Chinese, "durian" (榴蓮, *liulian*) is a homophone of "to linger." Whether or not a Chinese person who came to the Nanyang was destined to stay there for a long time depended on whether or not the person liked durian. This vignette comes from an essay published in 1930 by Chinese writer Xu Jie, who was employed in the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD) newspaper in Kuala Lumpur through his connections in the central committee of the GMD. At that time, the GMD actively promoted identification of the overseas Chinese with China. When Xu came to the Nanyang in 1929, he maintained connections to China and even with communists. Xu Jie could not stand the smell of durian; he left Malaya after two years.¹

Durian symbolism connects two generations of the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang, the region of Southeast Asia from Vietnam and the Philippines down to Indonesia and across the Malayan peninsula to Siam. Both of these generations returned to China. In this dissertation, durian is a symbol of the indigenisation of Chinese migration and the Chinese revolution in Southeast Asia. Almost none of the Chinese communists were able to stay in Malaya for longer

¹ Xu Jie, "Liu lian," [Durian] in Xu Jie, *Yezi yu liulian* [Coconut and Durian] *Zhongguo xiandai xiaopin jingdian* [Little soveniers of contemporary China] (Shijia zhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), pp. 39-46.

than a few years. Sun Yatsen did not like durian either, according to Zhang Yongfu, the vice president of Sun's Revolutionary Alliance, the Tongmenghui, in Singapore.² Zhang himself was a product of the GMD policy of promoting the identification of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) with China. Zhang's recollection of Sun's aversion to durian, published around the same time as Xu Jie's story and the time of Zhang's own return to China, reflects the troubled nature of the connection between the Chinese revolution, as seen in these three revolutionaries, and Chinese sojourning communities in the Nanyang, represented by the durian that they could not, in the end, accept.

Xu Jie is illustrative of Malayan communism in several ways. Most of the Chinese communists in Malaya stayed not much longer than he did, and most were deported back to China by the British government but ended up elsewhere in the Nanyang founding communist cells, bringing their compatriots for employment to their new homes. These networks would be empowered by the Comintern and used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and GMD during the second United Front period in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these Chinese, like Xu Jie, maintained connections with both the GMD and the communists in the Nanyang, as both parties were continuing to make a Chinese revolution there, a revolution that started at the time of Sun Yatsen. These Chinese intellectuals set themselves the task of civilising both the local Chinese, by making them more "Chinese" in terms of language and culture, and the locals, by liberating them from British imperialism together with the Chinese, whose economic rights were not guaranteed by the British. Xu is also an example of the idiosyncratic—from the point of view of the orthodox communist doctrine—relationship between the Malayan Communist

² Zhang's book was published in 1934. Zhang was born in Singapore, and he went to China in 1932. He held high positions in the GMD until he died in 1957 in Hong Kong. Chen Xuefeng, "Zhang Yongfu he 'Nanyang yu chuang zao minguo'" [Zhang Yongfu and 'The Nanyang and the Creation of the Republic'], in *Yangcheng Wangbao difangban*, [Guangzhou edition of Wang Bao] 9 January 2011, C3.

Party (MCP) and the bourgeoisie: Xu attempted to convert them to communism as the Party was fundraising among them. The confusion in the Party over the question of the bourgeoisie is illustrated by inconsistencies in the MCP opinions on the bourgeoisie, which would become especially pronounced in 1939–1940.

Yet, throughout this confusion, between China and the Nanyang and between proletariat and bourgeoisie, something happened: Chinese in Malaya, as well as in other colonial areas across Southeast Asia, organized themselves in ways both familiar—as Chinese associations among sojourners had for centuries—and novel, as Bolshevik revolutionary parties. They were a novel product of interwar globalisation, a mix of old and new, shaped by misunderstandings and missed communications, and yet the MCP and the Chinese revolutionary organisations across Southeast Asia were not only part of the history of this period but played a key role in the formation of the nationalism that would dominate the Nanyang from the mid-century onwards. The durian for Sun Yatsen did not produce a successful communist regime in Malaya, but it did help shape modern Southeast Asia.

A key legacy of these revolutionary connections between China and the Nanyang was what I call “internationalist nationalism.” This internationalist nationalism was the function of Chinese migration and the need for Chinese associations to indigenise while justifying their cause through the versions of internationalism available to them at the time. This did not start with the communist chapter of the Chinese revolution but with the international triggers of Chinese nationalism during Sun Yatsen’s time, such as the Philippine and Cuban revolutions and the Boer Wars. The world of Chinese communism in the interwar period was quite global, building on these earlier revolutions and contributing, ultimately, to the nationalist revolutions of Southeast Asia after World War II.

By 1930, the unintended consequence of this indigenisation and internationalisation, as shaped by Comintern participation, was the emergence of the discourse of the Malayan nation led to liberation by the Communists. The ambiguity of the meaning of the Chinese word *minzu*, at once nation, nationality, and ethnic group, provided the discursive foundation of this MCP nation as the Comintern promoted the establishment of “national” communist parties. In the ranges of different meanings employed by different actors in the Nanyang revolution, this notion of “nation” was literally sojourning between Malaya and China, particularly in MCP discourse during these years.

I think of the MCP as a “sojourning nation.” I do this as a way to point to the movement of the concept of *minzu* between different meanings for different audiences at different times and even different meaning for the same audience at different times. This process of slippage in the meaning is not the same as a misunderstanding—I will show that the variant meanings attributed to *minzu* were consistent and coherent within specific discursive domains. *Minzu*, and indeed any keyword, could be read differently from the perspective of different discursive worlds. This process could be called “floating,” as in “floating signifier,” but the story I will tell does not conform fully to the general use of that term in literary criticism. *Minzu* is not an empty shell into which the meaning was poured. It is a concept and, as such, has both enduring meanings and flexibility.³ The nature of that which endured and that which was flexible can only be found in the details, and those details are a key part of my story.

“Sojourning” better describes this process. However, it can have a negative connotation: That which sojourns is not really in a new place, is always an outsider in some fashion.

³ Koselleck, Reinhart, “Begriffsgeschichte and social history,” in *Future’s Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 73-91. I discuss the historical study of language later in this introduction.

Scholarship on the overseas Chinese has shown that “sojourning Chinese” contradict this perception in their historical experience. “Sojourning Chinese” were emphatically part of their host societies. In the same fashion, the sojourning concept for *minzu* was both changed by and rooted in the discursive worlds it entered, and at the same time, it played a role that changed history.

This is a story of the meaning of communism in British Malaya in the interwar period. The MCP reveals a lively adaptation of Chinese associational behaviour in new Comintern networks. However, these Comintern networks were merely a new layer added on top of a global network of Chinese sojourning communities in which Soviet ideology and, above all, nationalist Chinese communism, were secondary to the survival behaviour of a *huaqiao* community. We shall see, as well, how this community operated over long distances. This community was larger than families and smaller than the state, although it was trying to become the state in and of itself. Thus, this story includes the words and ideologies of our various revolutionaries and gives some insight into their organisational and justificatory structures. This story opens the door to the relationships between Southeast Asia, China, and this revolution, which involved Sun Yatsen, GMD revolutionaries, and Chinese communists in Southeast Asia. It shows that in order to explain what happened in Southeast Asia in the 1930s, we need to consider three sides: the “overseas Chinese” (*huaqiao*), the Comintern (the Third Communist International, run out of Moscow with a regional office, the Far Eastern Bureau, in Shanghai), and China itself. It suggests three questions. First, what was this Chinese revolution in Southern Fujian and Malaya, and what was the role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (Nationalist Party, GMD) in it? Second, what was this revolutionary party, the

Malayan Communist Party (MCP) that emerged by 1930, in its aspirations and in its actual operations? Third, in all of this, what was the actual role and impact of Comintern activities?

Pursuing these questions allows us to add to four significant issues of general interest and significance for an understanding of Chinese and Southeast Asian history. It is my hope that the empirical and methodological contributions of this dissertation will make this story legible and of use to scholars interested in migration, interwar globalisation, Asian nationalisms, and the role of language and discourse in all of these and across cultures.

The MCP story sheds light on the Chinese migration and maritime networks by demonstrating the involvement of Chinese communities in local politics and in coordination with similar communities across the Southeast Asian archipelago and across the Pacific. The MCP illuminates the nature of interwar globalisation. It is an illustration of the ideological globalisation of international communism in the period between the wars, which strengthened these Chinese networks. Chinese globalisation predates and postdates this interwar globalisation. However, in the interwar period, Chinese globalisation had the features of ideological globalisation, which, in many ways, parallels the globalisation of protestant missionaries, Buddhists, and other diasporic nationalist efforts, such as those of the pan-Africanists. It was characterised by the twin forces of internationalisation and the indigenisation of ideas and organisations as they established national chapters. Another characteristic of this globalisation was a similar language of internationalism and anti-imperialism, a language that the Bolsheviks successfully co-opted. The MCP is a part of both interwar ideological globalisation and the globalisation of Chinese associations. This occurred as a Chinese association, the MCP, co-opted the indigenising impulses of the Comintern for its own indigenisation in the name of revolutionary internationalism.

The MCP sheds light on Asian nationalisms, as can be seen in the case of the emergence of the Malayan nationalism led by a Chinese organization and for the Chinese community, and demonstrates the actual mechanics and ways in which the Malayan nation was imagined by the Chinese communists.⁴ The MCP shows one of the ways in which a nation was imagined, as described by Benedict Anderson, in the process of imagining a Malayan nation and in other conceptions of their collectivity. The Malayan nation was multicultural, and various actors experimented with ways to imagine a nation for those who lived in the Malayan peninsula in sultanates under British domination. These actors were Malay-speaking Muslims, Indians who spoke South Asian languages or English, and those speaking the dialects of South China. How do you imagine a community if you speak three or more languages? Thus, it should not surprise us that the residents of British Malaya sought other ways of imagining an inclusive community besides the single-language print capitalism described by Anderson. These heterogeneous origins of the Malayan conception of its national self helps us understand why it is still under debate today—in fact, “Malaya” was the concept used by immigrants and was resented by indigenous Malays.

Globalisation is also structured by language, and it defines what nationalism is. In the MCP, it shaped a misunderstanding or a variation in the “reading” of key terms, which created the discursive foundation for the MCP Malayan nation. At the same time, language was the main reason for the failure to involve non-Chinese in the MCP. Language is the key issue in migrant communities and is central to the MCP story. Using the same words but having

⁴ This is a hypothesis that needs further research. This future study will include situating this Chinese communists’ way of imagining the Malayan nation within other linguistic and discursive communities and political movements. This would include the discourse of British official nationalism, pan-Malay and Islamic nationalism, the views of Malay elites, and those of pro-British Chinese communities and parties, as well as of the GMD. This is my plan for postdoctoral project.

different meanings for them created a slippage that helped bring about the idea of a nation and impeded that actual nationalisation of the MCP. This highlights the role of language in transnational networks and communication.

Thus, the role of the Comintern was ironic: It failed to provide the groundwork for a communist revolution but helped to promote a nationalist revolution. It is my hope that through this dissertation we can see the profound role of contingency and unintended consequences and how the same components—the Chinese communists and the Comintern—created different outcomes in different contexts. This helps us understand the origins of nationalism in Southeast Asia and China.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This study works at the intersection of four historiographies: modern Chinese history, Comintern history, Southeast Asian modern history, and world history. The MCP story demonstrates Philip Kuhn's point that "the modern history of Chinese emigration and the modern history of China are really aspects of the same social-historical process."⁵ Likewise, one can't fully understand the Chinese revolution and nationalism either in China or in the Nanyang, the "South Seas" region of Southeast Asia that was so important in Chinese emigration, except in conjunction with one another.

The MCP and its history remain a sensitive issue Malaysia and Singapore, as well as in China. The reason for this is the devastating Malayan Emergency (1948–1960), an insurgency

5 Philip A. Kuhn, "Why China Historians Should Study the Chinese Diaspora, and Vice-versa," the Liu Kuang-ching Lecture, 2004, Delivered at the University of California, Davis, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 2.2 (2006) pp. 163-172. See also Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, (Publisher: Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

by the Malayan Communist Party against the British government. The Emergency was a vivid expression of the tensions in Malayan society between the Chinese and the non-Chinese. As well, identification with China has been viewed in the post-war period as siding with the Communists,⁶ and China's involvement in the Emergency continues to be controversial. Because these tensions are not gone, the theme of Chinese communism remains sensitive for all of Southeast Asia. Additionally, there is a lack of available primary source materials on the MCP, except for MCP materials confiscated by the British, which are regarded by some as a "state perspective" and not as genuine MCP sources.⁷ This lack, as well as the sensitivity of the topic, has precluded in-depth studies, with the exception of a few discussed below, both in Chinese and English. There is an enormous body of scholarship on the MCP during wartime, postwar, and the Emergency.⁸ Many of the MCP Chinese-language studies continue to carry out the mandate of the MCP to show how harmoniously the Chinese community blended with the

⁶ Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas. From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 86.

⁷ My conclusion is based on personal communication with Mr. C. C. Chin (Chen Jian) in Singapore in December of 2010. Chen Jian is one of the editors of C.C. Chin and Karl Hack, eds., *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (National University of Singapore press, 2004). A similar view of police sources on the MCP is taken by Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party. Selected Documents and Discussion compiled and edited with Introductions.* (SoutheastAsia Program, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992), pp. 5-6.

⁸ Some of the recent publications are a collection of radio propaganda documents: Wang Gungwu and Ong Weichong eds., *Voice of Malayan Revolution: The CPM Radio War against Singapore and Malaysia, 1969-1981* (Select Books Pte Ltd, 2009); Hack, Karl, "The origins of the Asian Cold War: Malaya 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (JSEAS)*, Vol. 40, Special Issue 03 (2009) "Asian Cold War Symposium," pp. 471-496; *Dialogues with Chin Peng*. In a distinct category of writings about the Emergency are British memoirs and journalistic sources, like that by Harry Miller, *The Communist menace in Malaya* (New York Praeger, 1954). Among the most famous studies of the wartime MCP is Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star Over Malaya: resistance and social conflict during and after the Japanese occupation of Malaya, 1941-1946*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore, 1983). Among most acclaimed journalistic accounts is F. Spencer Chapman's *The Jungle is neutral* (New York, W. W. Norton 1949).

“others” of the host country including, and most importantly in leftist and colonial liberation movements.⁹

Early MCP engagement with the Comintern has usually been solely presented as the result of a Comintern pursuit of Soviet geopolitical interests, which were often in conflict with CCP ambitions in the same regions. Studies do not portray this in a too negative light, because it was seen as promoting the involvement of non-Chinese in the Party. Two major studies of the MCP in the English language represent this view: C. F. Yong, *The Origins of the Malayan Communism* (1991) and Cheah Boon Kheng *The Apprenticeship of the MCP: from PKI to Comintern* (1997), as well as McLane’s *Soviet Strategy in Southeast Asia* (1966) and Sophie Quinn-Judge in *Ho Chi Minh: Forgotten Decade* (2008).¹⁰ C. F. Yong deals exclusively with the Chinese side of the communist movement in Malaya, while Cheah Boon Kheng’s study focuses also on the PKI side of the communist movement in Malaya. The main concern of Chinese authors, both in Chinese- and English-language historiography, is to show that the MCP was alien to the Chinese community in Malaya. Yet, at the same time, they also attempt to show that the MCP was patriotic and loyal to China, but not to the communists or the GMD,

⁹ See, for example, He Qicai’s comparison of the Malay Youth Association (*Kesatuan Melayu Muda*, est. 1938) with the MCP. This article is illustrative of the same kind of attempts to show that Chinese and Malay radical organisations, although taking different paths that did not cross, still had a joint influence on the postwar period. He Qicai, “Zhanqian malaiya zuoyi yundong de xingqi yu fazhan: malaiya gongchandang he malai qingnian xiehui de guanxi tanjiu” [The rise and development of the prewar leftist movement in Malaya: to the relation between the MCP and Malay youth Association] in *Zhan qian di xia dou zheng shi ji, Ma gong wen ji cong shu xi lie, Di 2 ji* [Prewar period of underground struggle. MCP documents] Vol.2, *Fan Faxisi, yuan hua kang ri jieduan* [Anti-Fascist and Aid China Anti-Japanese Stage] (Kuala Lumpur: 21 shi ji chu ban she, 2010), pp. 305-320. My thanks to He Qicai for brining his article to my attention. Also see Ye Zhongling (Yeap Chong Leng), “Chen Jiageng dui magongtaidu de zhuan yi: cong ’ruoji ruoli’ dao gongkai chongtu,” (The change in Chen Jiageng’s attitude to the MCP: from ambiguous to open conflict) in *Yazhou Wenhua*, No.28, June 2004.

¹⁰ C.F. Yong, *The Origins of the Malayan communism*, (Singapore, South Sea Society, 1991); Cheah, *The Apprenticeship*, as well as Charles B McLane’s *Soviet strategies in South East Asia: an exploration of Eastern policy under Lenin and Stalin*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and tangentially, Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: Ho Chi Minh: the missing years, 1919-1941*, (University of California Press, 2003), pp. 147-149, 154.

and at least attempted to blend with the rest of the Malayan population. The MCP's failure to involve non-Chinese in the Party in the 1930s has been presented as unfortunate, as was its connection to the Comintern and the CCP.

Chinese-language studies from the People's Republic of China (PRC) focus mostly on *huaqiao* patriotism during the Resistance War and speak the usual rhetoric of Communist Party-led emancipation of the oppressed, praising the noble intentions of the MCP in anti-colonial liberation. MCP activities of the early 1930s are usually not mentioned.¹¹ Lai Teck, the MCP's infamous triple informer and a fake Comintern agent, attracted the attention of such scholars as Yoji Akashi and Leon Comber.¹² The scholarship of Hara Fujio also sets out to show that the MCP was independent of the CCP but was dependent on Comintern rhetoric in order to argue against the idea that the MCP used the anti-Japanese sentiments of the Chinese population in Malaya.¹³ All these studies are sympathetic to the MCP and aim to show that the MCP was a coherent political party with some influence in the interwar period and that it at least attempted to involve the non-Chinese. MCP organisation and its party qualities are usually not questioned: Anthony Milner wrote that the MCP was the only party in the 1930s that had a

¹¹ For example, see Nie Wanhui, "Kangri zhanzheng shi qi de aiguo qiaobao," [Overseas compatriots during anti-Japanese war] *Dangshi conglan*, Vol.8 (2005), pp. 29-35.

¹² Yoji Akashi, "Lai Teck, Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party, 1939-1947," *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Vol. 49 (1994), pp. 37-103; Leon Comber, "Traitor of all Traitors'—Secret Agent *Extraordinaire*: Lai Teck, Secretary-General, Communist Party of Malaya (1939-1947)," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.83-2, (Sept. 2010) No. 299, pp. 1-25.

¹³ Fujio Hara, "Malaiya Gongchan dang yu Zhongguo," [The MCP and China], *Nanyang ziliao congshu*, 2001, Vol. 4, pp. 26-39; Fujio Hara, "Ribei zhanling xia de malaiya gongchandang," [The MCP during the Japanese occupation], *Nanyang ziliao congshu*, Vol.1 (2006), pp. 26-47; Fujio Hara, "Di er ci shijie da zhan qian de malaiya gongchandang," [The MCP before the Second World War] *Nanyang ziliao congshu*, Vol. 4 (2005), pp. 56-70.

unified program, a clear plan of action, and organization.¹⁴ Yet the minimal degree to which Tai Yuan touches upon MCP participation in the labour movement in Malaya corresponds to my findings in regard to the MCP's limited involvement in the labour movement and in regard to the Party's overall strength in the 1930s.¹⁵ Also, in the most recent comprehensive history of the MCP and a unique project, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, Yong points out that the MCP was weakest in the early 1930s.¹⁶ In recent years, the contemporary MCP has been making efforts to produce a Party history. With regard to both CCP and Comintern involvement, it follows the CCP historiographical tropes and, to a certain degree, reflects the major concerns and sensitivities that I outlined above.¹⁷

Related to the problem of involvement with the Comintern is the question of whether the MCP was nationalist or internationalist. Since this is connected to the sensitivity of the relationship between the Chinese and non-Chinese, in the context of these MCP studies, to be nationalist for China was patriotic, and to be nationalist for Malaya was noble, but to be internationalist was alien and not commended.¹⁸ The central concern of the MCP of how to

¹⁴ Anthony Milner, *The Invention of politics in colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of Public Sphere* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 78.

¹⁵ Tai Yuen, *Labour unrest in Malaya, 1934-1941: The rise of the workers movement* (Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, University of Malaya, 2000).

¹⁶ C.F. Yong, in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p.237.

¹⁷ Song Ping, Yong Zhong, Ah Chuan, Fang Shan eds., *Zhanqian dixia douzheng shiqi. Jiandang chuqi jieduan, Magong wenji, cong hu xilie* [Prewar period of underground struggle. The foundation of the Party. Documents of the MCP] (Kuala Lumpur: Ershi shi yi shi ji chuban she, 2010).

¹⁸ A characteristic example of such attitudes is Chin Peng's memoir. However, Chin Peng is not negative towards international communism. Chin Peng, *My side of History as told to Ian Ward and Norma Mirafior: [recollections of the guerilla leader who waged a 12-year anti-colonial war against British and Commonwealth forces in the jungles of Malaya]* (Singapore, Media Masters, 2003). For the examples of negative attitudes towards the internationalism of the MCP, see Ng Sin Yue, "The Malayan Communist Party and Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya, 1937-1941" (M.A. Dissertation: University of Hull, 1981); Stephen Mun Yoon Leong "Sources, Agencies and Manifestations of Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya, 1937-1941" (PhD dissertation: UCLA, 1976); Liren Zheng,

bring the non-Chinese into the movement is usually presented as something promoted by the Comintern. The exception is C. F. Yong, who stressed non-Chinese participation in the Anti-Imperialist League prior to the establishment of the MCP, as do Khoo Kai Kym and McLane.¹⁹ Wang Gungwu's three-level analysis of the early MCP and his analysis of education as a mark of division between groups of immigrants, representative of their allegiance to China, is helpful for the understanding of the complexity of MCP social fabric and the practicalities of mobilisation in the multilingual Malayan community in which the MCP operated. Wang Gungwu posits it as the contradiction between "the "international nature of the movement and the hard job to lay the foundations of national unity."²⁰

To be sure, neither nationalism nor internationalism, are seen as desirable in these studies of the MCP. If the internationalism of the MCP is linked to Moscow, the nationalism of the MCP is linked to communist China. In a longer historical perspective, the nationalism of the Chinese communities in the Nanyang was much the same nationalism as that which had been taught by Chinese intellectuals since the late Qing. It is an uneasy issue related to the loyalty of the Chinese towards their adopted nation-states in Southeast Asia, nation-states they fought for in the Second World War, as well as their previous loyalty to colonial governments and

"Overseas Chinese Nationalism in British Malaya 1894-1941" (Ph.D. Dissertation: Cornell University, 1997).

¹⁹ Khoo Kai Kym "The beginnings of political extremism in Malaya, 1915-1935" (PhD dissertation: University of Malaysia, 1973), p. 356; Charles McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia* (Princeton University Press, 1966), p.131-136; Yong in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p.72, 238.

²⁰ Wang Gungwu, "The Limits of Nanyang Chinese nationalism, 1912-1937," in C.D.Cowan and O.W.Wolters eds., *Southeast Asian History and Historiography* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976); Wang Gungwu, "Chinese politics in Malaya," *The China Quarterly*, Vol.43 (1970), pp. 1-30; and Wang Gungwu in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp.226-232, esp. p.229.

relations with other ethnic groups of those nations.²¹ This question has been addressed by Wang Gungwu and Prasenjit Duara.²²

Overseas Chinese nationalism in Malaya was further compromised by the links between the CCP and the Malayan Emergency.²³ For the Communists themselves, Chinese nationalism was also an embarrassment as it was seen as the cause of the failure to involve large numbers of non-Chinese in the Party. It is little surprise, then, that the Chinese orientation of the MCP, and the fact that it was the first party to advocate for Malayan independence on behalf of the Malayan nation, inclusive of all *minzu*, is presented by Stephen Leong, for example, as not being representative of the Chinese community but as being “internationally inspired.”²⁴ Zheng Liren and Ng Sin Yue represent this view in its extreme and state that the MCP “exploited” Chinese nationalism.²⁵ Wang Gungwu states that the Chinese of the group that joined the MCP “failed to appreciate the deep emotional appeals of Malay nationalism.”²⁶ However, according to Yong, the movement shifted focus from China to Malaya after 1930.²⁷ The fact that even the GMD is likewise presented as having taken advantage of Chinese nationalist feelings and mass mobilisation, also seen as a failure by Ku Hung-ting, is telling because it links the GMD and the

²¹ Wang Gungwu, “The limits,” Wang Gungwu, “Haiwai huaren yu *minzuzhuyi*,” [Overseas Chinese and nationalism] in *Sun Wen yu Huaqiao. Jinian Sun Zhongshan danzhen 130 zhounian, Guoji xueshu taolun hui. Lunwenji*. [Sun Yatsen and Overseas Chinese. Commemorating 130 anniversary of Sun Yatsen’s birthday] (Kobe: Caituan faren sun zhongshan jinianhui, 1996), pp. 5-19; Prasenjit Duara, “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 1030-1051.

²² Duara “Transnationalism;” Wang Gungwu, “The limits.”

²³ See Brimmell, Jack Henry, *Communism in Southeast Asia [prepared for the] Thirteenth Conference, Institute of Pacific Relations*, (Lahore, Pakistan, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1958).

²⁴ Leong, “Sources, agencies,” p. 819.

²⁵ Zheng, “Overseas Chinese Nationalism;” Ng, “The Malayan Communist Party,” pp. 55-56.

²⁶ Wang Gungwu, “Chinese politics,” pp.18, 29.

²⁷ Yong in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p. 238.

MCP under the same umbrella of organizations that equally and inappropriately espoused Chinese nationalism.²⁸ There is no need to say that in this narrative, Chinese nationalism and “communist ideology” are mutually exclusive.²⁹ MCP studies do not usually situate the MCP in relation to Nanking’s expansionist policy of the early 1930s in the Nanyang. Equally, the apparently colonial overtones of Nanking’s policy (directed at the *huaqiao*) are seen to undermine the respectability of the Chinese nationalism of any organisation, not to mention that of the MCP, and so are not usually mentioned.³⁰ On the other end of the this spectrum of opinion regarding MCP nationalism and its intention to involve the non-Chinese is Cheah Boon Kheng’s study, which bridges Malay and Chinese branches of communism in Malaya in the same ideological and organisational line.³¹

The close connection between nationalism and internationalism in the Chinese revolution that this dissertation explores has not been addressed in previous studies of the Comintern and the communist movement in Malaya. My findings are close to Yong’s conclusion that the MCP was, in essence, a Chinese movement, but that it was an internationalist party in its form. My findings also support Wang Gungwu’s view that the MCP failed on the Malaya national level.³² Ultimately, the goal of scholarship on the MCP is to

²⁸ Ku Hung-ting, “Kuomintang’s mass movement and the Kreta Ayer incident (1927) in Malaya,” Occasional paper series (Nanyang University. Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences), no. 13. Singapore]: (Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Graduate Studies, Nanyang University, 1976), p. 10.

²⁹ Khoo, “The beginnings,” p.346.

³⁰ For this, see Li Yinghui, *Huaqiao zhengce yu haiwai minzuzhuyi (1912-1949)* [The Origin of Overseas Chinese Nationalism], (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 1997); Kawashima Shin, “China’s reinterpretation of the Chinese ‘world order’, 1900-1940s, in Reid, Zheng Yangwen, *Negotiating Asymmetry. China’s pace in Asia*, (National University of Singapore Press, 2009).

³¹ Cheah, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*.

³² Wang Gungwu in “Closing comments: Chin Peng and Malayan Nationalist Cause” in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp.225-232, esp. 228.

understand why the MCP failed—because it did so because of its inability to involve the non-Chinese, the goal is also to understand this aspect of the MCP’s failure. My findings seem to be along the same lines as Wang Gungwu’s explanation that the “democratic impulses of the communist movement went against the interests of the nationalist elites, whereas the capitalists’ offerings to the nationalist elites appealed to them much more readily.”³³ This dissertation will suggest that the MCP failed to attract support because of their radical language.

This dissertation will show that the nationalism of the MCP fits neither into the established view of Chinese overseas nationalism, as opposite to internationalism, nor into Comintern-CCP relations in Southeast Asia, which, as the case of the MCP shows, were actually of mutual benefit and not contradictory even before the Second World War. This shows that Chen Jian’s argument that there was no contradiction between the CCP and the Soviet Union in the postwar period also proves true for prewar times.³⁴ Benton juxtaposes nationalism and internationalism of overseas Chinese communists³⁵ but links them by arguing

³³ Wang Gungwu in *Dialogues with Ching Peng*, p. 231.

³⁴ Chen Jian, ‘Bridging revolution and decolonisation: the “Bandung Discourse” in China’s Early Cold War Experience’, in Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann, *Connecting Histories: Decolonisation and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 137-171, esp. 144-145.

³⁵ Gregor Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2007). The CCP regional connection in Southeast Asia has been dealt with in a pioneering study of the MCP postwar connections by Fujio Hara. Hara Fujio, *Mikan ni owatta kokusai kyōryoku: Maraya kyōsantō to kyōdaitō* [Unaccomplished international co-operation: the Malayan Communist Party and its fraternal parties [in Japanese]. *Mikan ni owatta kokusai kyōryoku : Maraya kyōsantō to kyōdaitō*, (Tōkyō: Fūkyōsha, 2009] My thanks go to Maria Petrucci for her help in looking at this book in Japanese. The East Asian connections of the early CCP are explored in Ishikawa Yoshihiro, *Chūgoku Kyōsantō seiritsu shi* (*History of the Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2001). Chinese translation by Yuan Guangquan, *Zhongguo Gongchandang chengli shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006). Sophie Quinn-Judge explored the relationship between the Vietnamese and Chinese diasporic communist movement in Indochina and dealt tangentially with the MCP. See Quinn-Judge *Ho Chi Minh*. All these studies provide valuable scholarship on the topic. However, with the exception of Goscha’s study of Vietnamese networks, the transnational communist networks were not approached for their synthetic ideology and organisation but rather were treated as “model” communist parties with

that the Chinese revolution and internationalism were linked through Chinese transnationalism.³⁶ I have come to similar conclusions.

In appreciating the internationalism of the MCP, I build on John Fitzgerald's ideas about Chinese nationalism, its stages, and the proletarian essence of the Chinese nation.³⁷ Fitzgerald posits that the GMD and the CCP represented two successive stages of Chinese nationalism and that membership in the CCP was intended to provide an awakening as a member of the Chinese—and proletarian—nation-state. I see GMD and MCP nationalism in a similar two-stage model. I also see a confirmation of Fitzgerald's ideas about the proletarian nation in the case of the MCP.

Overwhelmingly, scholarship has approached the MCP as a political party. This dissertation approaches the MCP as a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party. Chinese communist organisations overseas have been studied³⁸ but have not been approached as Chinese associations overseas, unlike the GMD, which has been approached as a Chinese association.³⁹ Within the field of Chinese history, this study of the MCP thus offers a

little variation of the orthodox components in ideology and behavior. Benton, *Chinese Migrants*; Fowler, Josephine, *Japanese and Chinese immigrant activists organizing in American and international Communist movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007) On post-war Chinese ambitions to lead the world revolution, see Alex Cook "Third world Maoism," in Cheek, Timothy, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 288-312.

³⁶ Gregor Benton, "The Comintern and Chinese overseas," in Tan Chee-Beng ,ed., *Chinese Transnational Networks*, (Routledge, 2007), p. 122- 150, esp. p.144.

³⁷ John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 88,175.

³⁸ Benton, *Chinese migrants*.

³⁹ Li Minghuan, *Dang dai hai wai Hua ren she tuan yan jiu* [Contemporary associations of Chinese overseas] (Xiamen da xue chu ban she : Fujian sheng xin hua shu dian fa xing, 1995). John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (University of New South Wales Press, 2007)

contribution to the study of the Chinese revolution and of Chinese communities in Malaya.⁴⁰ For the field of the Chinese revolution, this study contributes by supporting Patricia Stranahan's conclusion about the Shanghai underground party in the same time period, that whenever the party promoted cross-class alliances, it lived, and when it followed the rhetoric of class warfare, it failed.⁴¹ In the study of the overseas Chinese in Malaysia, I borrow Kuhn's concept of Chinese associations, which needed to be doubly rooted in China and in the local environment. Kuhn's approach allows for an explanation as to why there was no contradiction in the MCP's double nationalism. The MCP's indigenising impulse as a Chinese association thus partly explains the MCP's liberational discourse and the reason for the appeal of this double vision of the MCP for Chinese intellectuals in Malaya both now and then—that of a Chinese association that attempts to indigenise by using a communist party language of anti-colonial liberation. Kuhn's model, explained below, also illuminates my findings regarding social aspects of GMD-CCP relations after the 1927 breakdown of the United Front in South China and Malaya. Unlike grand narratives of the Chinese revolution by both the GMD and the CCP, my research shows that in Fujian as well as in Malaya, individuals maintained links with both parties after 1927, despite the bloody competition between top leaders. This is another example of Kuhn's point that Southeast Asian Chinese communities were frontier enclaves of Chinese migration that included South China. As both the GMD and the CCP were Chinese associations, the fact that

⁴⁰ For the history of Chinese communities there, see Yen Ching-Hwang, *A Social history of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Routledge, NY& London: Oxford University Press, 1986). For the *huaqiao* literary scene, see David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World. The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese diaspora in Singapore (1919-1932)*(Routledge, NY:2003), and studies in Chinese on the literature of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore (*Xinma wenxue*), for example, Yang Songnian and Wang Kangding, *Dongnanya huaren wenxue yu Wenhua* [Culture and literature of the Chinese in Southeast Asia], (Xinjiapo: yazhou yanjiuhui congshu, 1995).

⁴¹ Patricia Stranahan, *Underground: the Shanghai Communist Party and the politics of survival, 1927-1937*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

individuals maintained connections with both parties rather freely is not surprising. Thus, the MCP case also contributes to our knowledge of society in South China.⁴²

Kuhn's Sojourning Networks

Kuhn's theory of Chinese migration provides an excellent overall framework by which to explain the MCP story. The MCP establishment in 1930 was on the watershed of eras of what Kuhn terms as the modern history of Chinese emigration: the age of mass migration (mid-19th century to around 1930) and the age of the Asian revolution (late 19th to late 20th century). The MCP was a migrant community, a "bilateral organism" connected by a corridor, a cultural space that connected two societies, the sending society (places in China) and the receiving society (places in Southeast Asia).⁴³

Like other immigrants, the MCP was "carving out" an "economic niche and finding ways to protect them." MCP members were "gaining social capital" "by remitting funds (MCP was sending money back home and receiving money from the Comintern) "or extending his patronage to kinsmen seeking to migrate." (MCP members were bringing party members over from China for employment) According to Kuhn, "this continuing attachment did not preclude cooperating with non-kin or non-compatriots in a host city, or even developing dual loyalties." This was the social world that made use of the GMD overseas discourse on the *huaqiao* leadership in the emancipation of the oppressed nations. The MCP remained overwhelmingly

⁴² This approach, linking South China and Southeast Asia, is taken by Ownby and Heidhues in their study of modern Chinese associations in both. David Ownby, Mary Somers Heidhues, *"Secret Societies" Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia* (ME Sharpe, 1993).

⁴³ Kuhn, "Why China Historians," p. 163.

Chinese because in order to survive -- “to maintain a compatriot niche” -- it needed “to keep open a cultural, social and economic corridor to the hometown.” The Comintern, by encouraging these network connections, provided an additional “channel of money, social transactions and culture” which were “extensions of the hometown that embraced men far away, realms of interests and affections that could extend over great distances; they were both connective links and living cultural spaces.”⁴⁴

This is not to say that the MCP was nationalistic for China only and that the internationalist element was entirely alien to it. I suggest, rather, that this demonstrates Kuhn’s point that migration and immigration are the same process, which takes place in the space that includes different areas across the vast regions of China proper but also includes frontier enclaves outside China—all connected by exchanges of money, social transactions, and culture. There is no simple distinction between “China” and “overseas”; rather, there is the network that forms the social and economic world more or less seamlessly for its Chinese inhabitants across some of these spaces. We shall see the liveliness of the Chinese maritime network in our story. One of the enclaves in this network was the MCP in Singapore.

Kuhn’s imagery is about trade, but it can also be applied to politics and the study of a CCP overseas organisation. Comintern sponsorship and material support thus provided one of the “resources” that helped MCP members to “carve out” their “niche” in this extended network of familial and community survival. Such enclaves are places in which special rules allow Chinese and foreign business to develop unhindered by the bureaucracies and the ideologies of the Qing empire and its successor Chinese nation states.”⁴⁵ Thus, Singapore was an enclave

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

where Chinese communists could organize safe from the depredations of Chinese warlord armies and especially Chiang Kaishek's GMD back in China proper. Nonetheless, the MCP's nation (*minzu*) could not but remain China because their migration took place within the extended Chinese "nation" – the sojourning networks of overseas Chinese. And at the same time, "the European colonies," Kuhn suggests, "the treaty ports and the S[pecial] E[conomic] Z[ones]" have been "a single evolving system linking the Chinese economy to world markets (which of course include markets of ideas and technology)." ⁴⁶

Like one of those frontier enclaves that "shared a common function: to enable Chinese commerce to become integrated with global markets," the MCP's function was to integrate Chinese communist associations into the global Comintern network and its civic world of international communism. Like Chinese merchants, who, in Kuhn's words, "borrowed European empires," the MCP "borrowed" the Comintern's empire in order to carve its niche. The role of the Comintern was to provide the idea of a Malayan nation for the MCP and thus embed them in the local environment. The Comintern provided an unoccupied niche: the niche of a political organisation that argued for Malayan independence.

Since, according to Kuhn, "the 'nature' of Chinese communities is business oriented," when the MCP followed the communist ideology and excluded the bourgeoisie, it failed. The MCP was an institution that, like "the sojourners' guilds, the branch temples, the mutual-aid brotherhoods," was created by migrants to handle the "life of commerce and mobility." As Kuhn noted, migration and commercialisation had the effect of preserving migrants' native place ties, which the MCP case also proves. Comintern subsidies, the monetisation of internationalism, did not create a Bolshevik party but strengthened the MCP's migrant

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

associational characteristics. We see this as the MCP focused back on the *huaqiao* business community in 1939.

Language—in Kuhn’s terms, culture—flowing in the corridors of *huaqiao* networks linked to hometowns in Southeast Asia—connected cultural niches created by the Comintern in different places of Southeast Asia to link to each other and back to China. The Comintern created the *Minzu Guoji*, the International of Nationalities. It both created the discursive foundation of nations, in the fashion of Soviet republics, and fostered the connections of the networks of Chinese *Minzu Guoji* across Southeast Asia. The CCP transnational organisation, that is, the CCP chapters in Southeast Asia, that took shape by the late 1930s, of which the MCP was a chapter, is reminiscent of the *Minzu Guoji*, Nationalist International, imagined by Hu Hanmin but never put into practice: a world organisation led by the Chinese to bring about world colonial emancipation. The CCP promoted the organisation of communist parties based on common ethnicity in Malaya and Southeast Asia at large, rather than the establishment of a “national” party that was promoted by the Comintern. The Comintern provided an additional channel, in Kuhn’s terms, through which money, ideas, and people circulated between China, Malaya, and the international communist network and its centre, the Comintern. Since the late 1920s and in the 1930s, the MCP had been closely connected with the CCP. In fact, organisationally, the MCP was a chapter of the CCP in Malaya during this period. This Comintern-boosted network was an example of a Chinese association responding to the opportunity offered by the Comintern to carve its niche within the market system of China and the world.

The MCP case illustrates Kuhn’s point about bilateral connections of an individual Chinese community overseas. This necessary embeddedness in the local society can be called

“indigenisation.” It was part and parcel of Chinese migration. It started with the GMD discourse of *huaqiao* leadership in the emancipation of the oppressed peoples of the world. Indigenisation of the international and Chinese communist organisation was based upon the MCP discourse of bringing in the non-Chinese into the Party, which was rooted in the GMD discourse and was explicitly called Malayafication (*malaihua*) in the early 1930s. The local quest for identity and subculture by the *huaqiao* intellectuals coincided with the indigenisational drive of international communism and that of the Chinese Communist Party. Kuhn’s model sheds light on long-term Chinese visions of the region, referred to then as the “Nanyang,” the Nationalist International (or International of Nationalities) aspirations, and, finally, on the emergence of the CCP’s pronounced ambitions as the leader of the world anti-colonial movement after the Second World War.

Contributions to Historiography

In using the above perspective, this dissertation contributes to the scholarship on Chinese migration and the political participation of Chinese communities in host countries. This dissertation addresses the question of the connection between the political participation of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and British Malaya specifically, and the Chinese state.⁴⁷ Previous scholarship has addressed the PRC and the earlier history of the CCP’s relationship with the Southeast Asian Chinese.⁴⁸ This dissertation sheds light into the early

⁴⁷ Wang Gungwu, “Chinese politics,” Amy L. Freedman, *Political participation and ethnic minorities: Chinese overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States* (Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁸ Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese. A Study of Peking’s changing policy 1949-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1972); Glen Peterson, *Overseas Chinese in the People’s Republic of China* (Routledge, 2011).

stages of the CCP's relationship with overseas branches in the Nanyang and on the early stages of CCP *huaqiao* policies, which Peterson discusses in his study of the returned overseas Chinese in the 1950s. Also, this dissertation may suggest some background for the PRC's call for the overseas Chinese to adopt local citizenship after 1956, with simultaneous efforts by the PRC to co-opt them as economic resources into the PRC economy, as well as to pursue a policy of peaceful coexistence with Southeast Asian countries, in order to counter American and GMD efforts to isolate China in Southeast Asia.⁴⁹ Essentially, Peterson's question of how entrepreneurial *huaqiao* fitted into the narrative of revolution after 1949 is one of my central questions regarding the MCP of the 1930s.⁵⁰ I seek to understand the MCP's relationship with the Chinese "bourgeoisie" in Malaya and how that influenced the MCP's fate. The second way in which this dissertation contributes to the study of Chinese migration is by adding a dimension of indigenisation to the analysis of the Chinese associations. However, the indigenisation that this dissertation seeks to address is more reminiscent of the reverse assimilation of the indigenous population into the migrant communities. This indigenisation thus sheds light on the origins of the "colonial implications"⁵¹ of the CCP's overseas Chinese policy. Last, but not least, this discussion of the MCP as a hybrid of Chinese association and communist party is a contribution to the literature on the Chinese associations that previously did not include communist organisations.⁵²

On the intersection of the fields of migration and Southeast Asian nationalisms, this dissertation offers a way of explaining the specific mechanism of how the presence of Chinese

⁴⁹ Peterson, *Overseas Chinese*, p. 124

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁵¹ Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, p. 9

⁵² An example of such studies is Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Evelyn Hu -Dehart eds., *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora* (Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

communities affected the emergence and character of Southeast Asian nationalisms, which has been pointed out in broad strokes by scholars before.⁵³ This dissertation offers a study of a concrete case of how it happened and what role outside factors, such as the Comintern, had in shaping the ways of imagining the nation as described by Benedict Andersen.⁵⁴ Scholars have addressed other ways of imagining a nation for collective living in the Malayan peninsula, as *bangsa*, which excluded non-Malays, as an Islamic community (*umat*), which excluded non-Muslims, and as a monarchical vision (*kerajaan*),⁵⁵ but none have addressed the national idea that came to British Malaya along with communist ideas.

This study adds to our understanding of nationalism in Asia and Africa in the interwar period by showing the role of the Soviet Union and Soviet nationalities' policy in creating new nations not only inside the Soviet Union⁵⁶ but also outside. This is similar to the Soviet intention to create a belt of independent Black states within the United States.⁵⁷ This dissertation also offers a contribution to the literature on the interwar internationalist moment⁵⁸

⁵³ Norman G. Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp.254-255.

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991)

⁵⁵ Milner, *The Invention of politics*, p. 282-83. For a comparison of the discourses of *bangsa* and *minzu*, see Tan Liok-Ee "The rhetoric of Bangsa and *Minzu*: community and nation in tension, the Malay Peninsula, 1900-1955" Working papers (Monash University. Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988). For Malay nationalism, see William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967; Anthony Milner "Historians Writing Nations: Malaysian Contests," in Wang Gungwu ed., *Nation-building. Five Southeast Asian Histories* (ISEAS, Singapore, 2005) pp.117-161.

⁵⁶ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Culture and Society after Socialism)* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁵⁷ Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵⁸ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tomoko Akami, *Internationalising the Pacific: US, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations* (Routledge, 2010)

and the interwar schemes to create global nationalist networks among the African diaspora⁵⁹ and the Vietnamese,⁶⁰ as well as a global anti-imperialist league that the GMD attempted to co-opt for the Chinese cause.⁶¹ It contributes, as well, to the literature on Chinese pan-Asianism and the internationalist aspect of Chinese nationalism.⁶² Scholarship has shown that the Chinese communist party also started as multi-centered movement and expanded globally in the late 1920s.⁶³ This dissertation offers a case study of one node of this network.

The MCP case contributes to our understanding of the interwar global world through the study of Chinese migration and communist organisations. In conceptualising the Comintern's local policies, I draw on Robert's analysis of interwar internationalisation and its other side, indigenisation, in the case of the Christian missionary movement.⁶⁴ In this vein, this dissertation can offer a contribution to the conversation on the relationship between globalisation and Chinese migration and its relationship to the indigenisation of Chinese social organisations.

⁵⁹ Edwards, Brent, H., *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Harvard University Press, 2003)

⁶⁰ Christopher E. Goscha *Thailand and the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese revolution, 1885-1954* (Curzon Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Hans Piazza, "Anti-imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution," in Mechthild Leutner et. al, eds., *The Chinese revolution in the 1920s : between triumph and disaster* (Routledge, 2002).

⁶² Karl makes that case that the very origins of Chinese nationalism had an internationalist component and were a response to anti-colonial wars in the Philippines, the Boer War, and Cuban Independence War. Rebecca Karl, *Staging the world: Chinese Nationalism at the turn of the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶³ Hans Van de Ven, "War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority: Mao from 1937 to 1956" in Cheek, Timothy, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, p. 88; Hans Van De Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920-1927*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991); Yoshihiro, *History of the Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*, 2006.

⁶⁴ Dana L. Robert "The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars." in Ogbu Kalu, ed., *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Eerdmans/Curzon, 2008), pp.93-130.

Indigenisation of the overseas Chinese has been addressed as a feature of globalisation.⁶⁵ However, this indigenisation (or localisation) refers, as a rule, to the indigenisation of overseas Chinese as individuals, not as an organisation. Localisation usually means assimilation of the Chinese into the local environment, rather than an attempt by their leadership to assimilate the locals into the Chinese organisation and “civilisation,” as was the case in the MCP.⁶⁶ Indigenisation as the local response to globalisation has been explored recently in literature on the indigenisation of education and of Southeast Asian and China’s politics and culture.⁶⁷

This dissertation, by presenting the MCP as a case of interwar globalisation, suggests some alternative methods and perspectives for approaching and understanding the world of interwar globalisation. It does so by suggesting parallels between the ideology-based globalisation, embodied in the transpacific movement of Chinese communists, and the globalisation of other social movements that experienced internationalisation and indigenisation

⁶⁵ Lim Tai Wei, "Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenry of Chinese Americans in Selected Regions of the United States" and Teresita Ang See, "Integration, Indigenization, Hybridization and Localization of the Ethnic Chinese minority in the Philippines," in Leo Suryadinata eds., *Migration, Indigenization and Interaction. Chinese Overseas and Globalization*. (Chinese Heritage Centre, Singapore, World Scientific Publishing, 2011), pp. 123-148, 231-252.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Pearce and Hu-Dehart, "Introduction: The Chinese Diaspora and Voluntary Associations" in *Voluntary associations*, pp. 1-28.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Rui Yang, "Internationalisation, indigenisation and educational research in China. Faculty of Education. Monash University. Paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education. International Educational Research Conference, 28th Nov-2nd Dec, 2004, Melbourne; *International Communication Gazette August*, vol. 58 no. 1 (1996), pp. 45-60. Joseph Man Chan, Eric K.W. Ma, "Asian television: Global trends and local processes," *International Communication Gazette August vol. 58 no. 1 (1996)*, pp. 45-60; T.Ruanni F.Tupas, "The politics of Philippine English: neocolonialism, global politics, the problem of postcolonialism. *World Englishes*, Vol. 23, No.1 (2004), pp. 47-58; Kerry Brydon, "A changing face for social work: globalization, internationalisation, and the Monash B[achelor]S[ocial]W[ork] in Singapore 2004 - 2006," (PhD. dissertation, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University, 2009); Amrith, Sunil S., "Asian internationalism: Bandung's echo in a colonial metropolis," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6 (4),(2005), pp. 557-569.

both in ideology and organisation in these years, such as those of the Buddhists⁶⁸ and Christians. All these movements offered conflicting visions of modernity but had structural similarities. One of these similarities was the internationalisation of ideas and indigenisation of organisations. This dissertation is a contribution to the study of nationalism as it relates to internationalism, which is usually a relationship heretofore often perceived as contradictory.

This dissertation also contributes to the literature on the role of language and how ideas and organisations adapt across cultures and contexts. This scholarship includes Kuhn's theory on the role of language in cross-cultural exchange in the example of the Taiping ideology.⁶⁹ Kuhn argues that novel concepts and language are adopted in a new environment when the existing conceptual apparatus of a locality fails to accommodate and, more to the point, effectively represent the change in the social experience of a local population. At the same time, Kuhn stresses, the imported concepts and language (which, by the twentieth century, often came in the form of an integrated ideology) are not simply adapted to the new locality but bring their own internal logic to the new environment. Thus, the novelty of imported ideology (if it finds social efficacy) is twofold: It offers new ways to perceive and address a changed social reality, and it injects some new intentions and reasoning to the locality. This dissertation offers a concrete case study of the workings of such a case of ideological borrowing. Marshall Sahlins's concept of the structure of conjuncture takes a similar approach.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pittman, Don, A., *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism. Taixu's Reforms*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001)

⁶⁹ Kuhn, Philip A., "Origins of the Taiping Vision: Cross-Cultural Dimensions of a Chinese Rebellion" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Jul., 1977), pp. 350-366.

⁷⁰ Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981)

This dissertation also offers a contribution to the historical study of language. It shows how historical change happens, in part, through linguistic slippage in the texts produced by a coherent organisation, with a continued shared engagement with that text across linguistic domains (in this case, Comintern- and CCP-inspired communications and propaganda produced across Russian, English, and Chinese languages). This dissertation also adds to the literature on the justificatory use of language, such as Kotkin’s study of the strategic use of Bolshevik language in the 1920–1930s Soviet Union, and provides an example of the justificatory imperative of individuals in a conflict situation.⁷¹ In this, the dissertation adds to the discussion of the complex ways in which Comintern policy was created and implemented.⁷² It approaches the MCP as a text-centred party, as Van de Ven describes the CCP of the late 1920s. Both parties spent lot of time producing, studying, interpreting, and disseminating texts. The International—based on Comintern texts—provided the means of communication and bonding.⁷³ In this regard, I also contribute to the literature of the history of the Chinese Communist Party and how it was related to the Comintern and to its internal dynamics.⁷⁴

Thus, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the emergence of Malayan nationalism through the history of words and concepts. In mapping the social history of these meanings in the language, I have built on Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte* (History of

⁷¹ Boltanski, L. & Thévenot, L., “The Sociology of Critical Capacity,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2(3) (1999), pp. 359-377.

⁷² Worley, Matthew ed., *In Search of Revolution. International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, (I.B.Tauris & Co.Ltd., London, 2004); McDermott, Kevin & Agnew, Jeremy, *The Comintern: a History of International Communism*, (Macmillan, Houndmills, 1996); Rees, Tim & Thorpe, Andrew, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-1943*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998).

⁷³ Hans J. van de Ven, “The emergence of the text-centered party,” in Saich and Van de Ven, *New perspectives on the Chinese communist revolution*, (Armonk, N.Y. M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

⁷⁴ Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade*.

Concepts)⁷⁵ and the connection between conceptual history and social history.⁷⁶ I use this to support my method of comparing the words and their meanings in different languages and how they created misunderstanding or useful ambiguities and simultaneous variant meanings, which provided the discursive foundation for the MCP's Malayan nation. The mechanism for this International was twofold, conceptual and social. When speakers of different languages interpreted the authoritative texts or generated their own texts using the conceptual training available to them, a keyword's pragmatic definition (the change in the meaning of a keyword reflected in its actual use)⁷⁷ conjoined with changed social experience of text-writers and text-readers to produce different meanings for the same word. The Chinese in Shanghai and Singapore used Russian pronouncements in English based on their experience in late 1920s; perched in their different environments, they assigned significantly different meanings to these borrowed words and concepts. This International also worked as an international public sphere: It generated policies based on locally based approaches and applied them elsewhere as well. Thus, in this public sphere, these key terms and ideas were communicated and made sense, though the "local" reading of shared terms was lost or embedded, allowing different meanings to be expressed in shared terms. I use justification theory to explain why, in a conflict situation (between the Chinese immigrant communists and the British state, in this case), individuals need a frame of reference that is external to themselves, i.e. the Comintern.⁷⁸ In analysing the

⁷⁵ Koselleck, Reinhart, "Begriffsgeschichte and social history."

⁷⁶ Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and social history". I also drawn on the methodology from Cheek, Timothy, "The Names of Rectification: Notes on the Conceptual Domains of CCP Ideology in the Yan'an Rectification Movement" *Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series on Language and Politics in Modern China*, no. 7, East Asian Studies Center, Indiana University, January 1996.

⁷⁷ Koselleck, Reinhart, "Begriffsgeschichte and social history."

⁷⁸ Boltanski & Thévenot, "The Sociology". I applied this concept to the analysis of the Comintern's relations with the Taiwanese communist party. See "The Civic World of International Communism: The

discourse of the MCP using the keywords of “culture” (*wenhua*) and “nation” (*minzu*), I build on the studies of Duara, Lydia Liu, and Levenson,⁷⁹ and on the Soviet *kulturnost* discourse.⁸⁰ However, Duara, Liu, and Levenson’s studies illuminate a different aspect of the meanings of *minzu* and *wenhua*—that of Chineseness. I thereby hope to contribute to the discussion of the discourse of *wenhua* and *minzu* in Chinese history.

SOURCES

It is with these perspectives that I approach my sources. This dissertation is based on MCP materials collected by the Comintern and archived now in Moscow at the *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenniy Arhiv Sotsio-Politicheskoi Istorii* (Russian State Archive of Sociopolitical History). I will use the acronym “RGASPI” for this archive. The materials cover 1928–1935 and 1939–1941. These materials, at the time when I did my archival research in December of 2008, had not been used by scholars before with the exception of Professor Sophie Quinn-Judge, who used them to follow Ho Chi Minh’s story and to account for the MCP in relation to the Vietnamese movement.⁸¹ However, materials similar to those collected by the Comintern show up materials intercepted and confiscated by the British police and have been used through the British records by scholars. This study is also based on MCP members’ memoirs from local

Taiwanese Communists and the Comintern (1921-1931),” *Modern Asian Studies*, 46:6 (2012, forthcoming).

⁷⁹ Duara, Prasenjit, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, (University Of Chicago Press; 1997); Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China, 1900-1937*, (Stanford University Press, 1995); Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (University of California Press, 1967).

⁸⁰ For instance, see Volkov, Vadim, “The concept of kulturnost: notes on the Stalinist civilizing process,” in Fitzpatrick, Sheila ed., *Stalinism: new approaches* (Routledge, 2001).

⁸¹ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*.

literary and historical materials (*wenshi ziliao*), English-language newspapers such as *The Straits Times*, and British Colonial and Foreign Offices records that contain analytical reports and translations of MCP documents, as well as translations of press clippings from China. I also use the materials of the Shanghai Municipal Police.

Each of these sources has its limitations. The Comintern sources, when they are the MCP's own reports, sometimes have the tendency to exaggerate the successes, membership numbers, and scope of activity of the Party. However, the discrepancies are quite easily identifiable when several reports are compared. Another related problem is that, for security considerations, membership numbers and names of key people are sometimes crossed out and are illegible. Problems related to names are due to the Romanisation of different dialects, as well as the large number of aliases that Communists used. In many cases, the Chinese characters for the names of people that are romanised in Comintern sources have been impossible to establish. Reports are mostly signed by the "Central Committee of the MCP," and only few letters are signed by individuals, so it is impossible to attribute ideas and policies to certain individuals, with rare exception. This shortcoming thus migrated to this dissertation, when I have to refer to the CC MCP, or even worse, the MCP or the CYL, as monolithic actors. As for the police sources, their limitations have been outlined for the MCP study by Cheah Boon Kheng.⁸² In brief, those limitations are an exaggeration of the scope of Communist activities—and thus the impossibility of knowing whether those who ended up in police hands as "Communists" were indeed such—and the manner in which the data was extracted (interrogation) and presented (to conform with the image that was convenient for the state to

present to the public).⁸³ As the British government was aware of the danger of Chinese nationalism for the British colonial rule, British Colonial and Foreign Offices sources contain useful analyses and selections of the intercepted documents. “Literary and Historical materials,” *wenshi ziliao*, are the most questionable sources of all, which have been used for this study. These are personal recollections (*huiyi lu*) produced many years after the events. However, even such facts as a person’s relationship with both the GMD and the CCP in the 1930s are sometimes omitted from official biographies and can be found in the oral histories published in the 1990s, as in the case of Xu Jie.⁸⁴

THE STORY

The first three chapters of this dissertation throw light on three questions: globalisation, migration, and nationalism up to the mid-1930s. The final two chapters explore the fate of all three in the late 1930s and 1940. Chapter 2 discusses what this Chinese revolution was about, as well as the relation between the CCP, the GMD, the Comintern, and the local situation in Malaya. Chapter 3 explores the MCP in practice. Chapter 4 is about the relationship between the Comintern and the MCP. Chapter 5 is about generations of Chinese revolution in Malaya and Southern Fujian. Chapter 6 is about the role of language and ideology and the fate of nationalism. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are about the role of unintended consequences and contingencies in the fate of the MCP: the role of GMD official nationalism that was promoted

⁸³ Cheah, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*, pp. 5-6

⁸⁴ [Remembering literary activity of Xu Jie in Kuala- Lumpur] in *Tian Tai wenshi ziliao di 3 ji. Xu Jie zuan ji* [Literary and historical materials of Tiantai. Vol. 3. Xu Jie.], (Tiantai xian hengzhixie wenshi ziliao yan jiu weiyuanhui, 1987); He Pingping. *Xu Jie koushu* [Oral history of Xu Jie] (Shanghai : Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997),.

in Chinese schools and of the Japanese atrocities, as well as the double-edged consequences of Bolshevisation, which led to the loss of the MCP's support base but also empowered it, in its ambitions and discursive resources, to become the state. Chapter 6 is about the role of language in the MCP's story.

Chapter 2, "Making Revolution in the Nanyang: The Founding of the Malayan Communist Party (1926–1931)," examines the establishment of the MCP as Sahlin's structure of conjuncture. The conjuncture of the introduction of the idea of the "national" party in Malaya, where the nation-state did not exist, by the Comintern, changed the structure of the political practice of involvement with host environment by the Chinese revolutionaries, which was driven by the need for Chinese associations to indigenise. This chapter demonstrates that nationalism and internationalism, in the case of the MCP, were not mutually exclusive and served one cause—that of justifying Chinese leadership in the revolution in Southeast Asia. This chapter poses the question of whether the Hu Hanmin's aspired *Minzu Guoji*, or Nationalist International,⁸⁵ can be applied as a metaphor to the MCP's use of the internationalist and international Comintern's support of the Chinese revolution as a justification for their Chinese nationalism and the building of a network of Chinese communists in the Nanyang. This chapter examines how three ways of starting the world revolution by the Comintern, the CCP and GDM, and the local communists in Malaya led to the establishment of the MCP. The MCP is an example of how the Comintern helped create new nations through its policy of "one country, one party," similar to the Soviet policy of nationalities. Localisation of the Comintern national revolution model ended up creating a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist

⁸⁵ Hu Hanmin "Minzuguoji yu disan guoji" (Nationalist International and Communist International), in *Hu Hanmin shiji ziliao huji (Hu Hanmin Materials)*, di si ce, (vol.4), Cuncui xueshe ed., (Xianggang: Dadong tushu gongsi, 1980), pp. 175-181, esp.180-181.

party. The Comintern provided justification for Chinese overseas nationalism by providing a rhetoric for the defence of the Chinese revolution, which it borrowed from the GMD and CCP. The Comintern laid the discursive foundation of the Malayan nation for the MCP by promoting a discourse of the Malayan revolution as led by the MCP. The establishment of the MCP was the consequence of the Comintern policy to create a party in each country in pursuit of world revolution, but it also happened to match CCP and GMD indigenisation drives and the aspirations for local Chineseness among the locally born Chinese intellectuals. This chapter will also discuss how the MCP establishment fits into the trends of interwar globalisation.

Chapter 3, “The Malayan Communist Party as a Chinese Overseas Association, 1930–1934,” examines the MCP as a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party by tracing MCP discourse and activities. This chapter shows how the MCP hybrid nature worked in practice. This chapter also shows that the MCP’s double rootedness in Malaya and China as a Chinese association was achieved through the discursive practices of the internationalisation of both the Chinese revolution and the Malayan revolution, as well as through the attempt to indigenise its organisation, which I suggest makes the MCP a case of interwar globalisation.

Chapter 4, “The MCP, Chinese Networks in Southeast Asia, and the Comintern, 1930–1939,” is about the unintended consequence of the Comintern having fostered connections between Chinese communists across Southeast Asia. This effort strengthened the Chinese communist maritime network by pushing the MCP to establish connections with other communists in the region while fomenting world revolution. The Comintern was the source of international legitimacy and finances. The Comintern wanted the MCP, which was then based in Singapore, to become the connecting hub of the Comintern network in Southeast Asia that would also pursue the goal of reviving the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis*

Indonesia, PKI) and connect it with India—thus encompassing all of Asia. The chapter traces the history of this idea to the Comintern’s early envoys in Asia, Hendricus Sneevliet and Tan Malaka. In the process of pushing the MCP to establish connections across the region, the Comintern fostered the intraregional links of the Chinese communists. By the time of the anti-Japanese united front between the GMD and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1937, the CCP had the Comintern’s network of connections, however loose and incomplete, at its disposal to cooperate with the communist parties in Southeast Asia. In Kuhn’s terms, the MCP “borrowed” the Comintern’s empire to pursue its goals as a Chinese association.

Chapter 5, “Becoming Communist: Chinese Students and Their Teachers in Malaya (1928–1940),” shows that the GMD’s nationalist policy of countering Japanese southward expansion, expressed in educational policies towards the *huaqiao*, created the groundwork for the Communists in Malaya. The rise of the Communists in Malaya was an unintended consequence of this GMD educational policy. The GMD policy was a continuation of the trend, started in the late Qing, of Chinese politicians teaching the overseas Chinese how to be more Chinese. The younger generation of Malaya-born Chinese rebelled against GMD indoctrination, which, however, successfully instilled in them the ideas of “nation,” *minzu*, and identification with China. The agents of Guomindang propaganda were teachers coming from China. The generation they taught in Malayan schools joined the MCP after the start of the Japanese invasion, when the Chinese were massacred in large numbers by the Japanese and the MCP was the only force available to lead anti-Japanese resistance.

Chapter 6, “Language, Power, and the MCP’s Lost Nation (1939–1940),” is about how the Bolshevik language both empowered and hindered the MCP as a Chinese association and as a communist party. The aspect that empowered the MCP was the changed discourse of

modernity and promotion of the need for armed struggle. By the late 1930s, the MCP discourse on modernity started to be described as a “political level,” not a “cultural level,” as before. This change was the result of the MCP’s incorporation into the world of the international communism and Comintern networks. Other consequences of this incorporation were the MCP’s growing ambitions to become the state, which started with Nanyang Chinese Communists’ calls for anarchist violence in the 1920s. Only by the late 1930s had the MCP acquired justification through Bolshevik discourse to act on its ambitions. This chapter also analyses the discourse on *minzu*, a floating signifier that meant both the MCP’s Malaya, China, and above all the MCP’s proletarian nation. Together they comprised the “greater China’s nation,” to put it into Kuhn’s conceptual language. This chapter shows how the MCP lost its support base despite explicitly focusing on the needs of the Chinese community as a part of the United Front policy and widespread popular protests against British wartime policies. This happened because the MCP used radical anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie language, which pushed the potential constituency away from the MCP. The MCP excluded the bourgeoisie from its proletarian nation and lost the little support it had enjoyed over the 1930s.

To conclude, the MCP’s attempt to imagine a Malayan nation did not fail: As Chin Peng claims, Malaya did get independence, after all.⁸⁶ Singapore did become a nation-state led by the Chinese. The model of local nationalism led by the Chinese did work in places where the Chinese were numerous enough to promote their interests at the expense of the interests of others, as in Singapore.⁸⁷ The MCP failed to engage the non-Chinese in its ranks because MCP

⁸⁶ Chin and Hack, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p. 234-235

⁸⁷ Singapore is officially a four-nationality multicultural nation, but the Chinese dominate.

leaders were Chinese, did not speak languages other than Chinese, and were outsiders—as outsiders they condescended to the locals. Furthermore, in the face of British state repression of revolutionaries, it was dangerous to be a Communist. It is for these same reasons of elitism and danger that I think the MCP was not able to attract the Chinese “masses” in Malaya. In the end, the MCP gained strength because of the war.

In admission of my own commitments, I was born and raised in the Soviet Union. I had to join the young *Oktyabryata* (Octobrist) and young pioneer organisations, but by the time I reached the age I was supposed to join the *Komsomol* (Youth League), it was no longer mandatory. I studied history textbooks where we had to memorise the resolutions of party meetings before the revolution of 1917. In university, I studied history textbooks of “the Ancient East” that had quotes from Marx, Engels, and Lenin. When the Comintern was preparing to give 50,000 gold dollars for work in Malaya, my grandmother lived through famine in the Volga region in 1930–1932 and recollected how, as a kid, she would go to the fields to look for edible plants. When I see requests for money in the letters of the Malayan and Taiwanese Communists to the Comintern, I think of my grandmother and of her father, who was arrested by the NKVD for hiding a Bible. All this, no doubt, translates into the detachment, even cynicism, with which I approach MCP texts. I also believe, however, that my attention to the practical aspect of the relationship between the Comintern and the MCP is not unreasonable: As I show in my dissertation, the MCP was consciously manipulating rhetorical and organisational tools designed for mobilisation, and its members were asking for money. They were practical, even if they dreamed of a Soviet federation of Malayan states where they would be the government. Aspirations to make one’s way to power with weapons, even in the name of

the “masses,” can hardly be called idealism. Nonetheless, my job as an historian is first to understand and to explain how things came to pass; judgement can wait for essays.

CHAPTER 2. MAKING REVOLUTION IN THE NANYANG: THE FOUNDATION OF THE MALAYAN COMMUNIST PARTY (1926-1931)

INTRODUCTION

“[...] at the book store I saw that youngster, Ai Lian. He was much more reticent (silent), however, more reserved. He had a touch of depression; 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 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. One of the shop assistants told me so. At that time, our eyes met, he again, like last time on the road, smiled slightly at me. I also nodded, but did not say a word. “You, promising youth, when you train (*duanlian*) yourself, strengthen yourself, you will become the centre of Nanyang revolution!” -- I thought to myself. “

----Xu Jie, 1930⁸⁸

“In the days when *Zong li* [Sun Yatsen] was alive, I contend that he proposed to organize *Minzu Guoji* [International of Nationalities]⁸⁹ so that we, the Guomindang, could lead the international national revolutionary movement (*lingdao guojide minzu geming yundong*) ourselves; when I went to Russia and suggested that the Guomindang become a Comintern member directly, I wanted the Guomindang to independently join the Comintern and acquire the status, and not be subjected to communist control and secret dealings. So, the idea to organize *Minzu Guoji* and the idea to join the Comintern were consistent with each other and were in the same spirit.[...] Frankly, my proposal to join the Comintern was because I had the hope of organizing *Minzu Guoji*[...]”

----Hu Hanmin, 1930⁹⁰

88 Xu Jie, “Liangge qingnian” [Two Youths] in *Yezi yu liulian: yiming Nanyang manji [Coconut and Durian: Nanyang Travel Notes]* Xu Jie, *Yezi yu liulian [Coconut and Durian]* Zhongguo xiandai xiaopin jingdian, (Shijia zhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), p. 16-27, esp. 27.

⁸⁹ *Minzu Guoji* is also translated as “Nationalist International” in David P. Barrett, “Marxism, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Union: Three Critiques by Hu Hanmin,” *Chinese Studies in History*, Vol. 14-2, (Winter 1980-1981), pp. 47-49, 67-73. Readers today may have an issue with the word *minzu*. This will be discussed in this chapter in the section on the discourse.

⁹⁰ Hu Hanmin “*Minzu guoji yu disan guoji*” (Nationalist International and Communist International), in *Hu Hanmin shiji ziliao huji (Hu Hanmin Materials)*, di si ce, (vol.4), Cuncui xueshe ed., (Xianggang: Dadong tushu gongsi, 1980), pp. 1395-1401, esp. 1400-1401.

“So, we want to know where the internationalism (*shijie zhuyi*) comes from? It comes from the nationalism.”

----Sun Yatsen, 1924⁹¹

These quotes provide a glimpse into an aspired to, but never established, world organization, *Minzu Guoji*, the International of Nationalities, which under the GMD's leadership, would lead a world revolution by co-opting the Comintern. The origins of Hu Hanmin aspirations were Sun Yatsen's own articulation of internationalism, which came from nationalism and the international dimension of the Chinese revolution.⁹² A GMD cadre and secret communist, Xu Jie, promoted Malaya-born young Chinese as liberators of the oppressed people of the Nanyang, an idea that was both a continuation of Hu's aspirations to emancipate the oppressed of the world as well as Xu's own reflections on the CCP's ways of making revolution in the Nanyang. Along with Sun's own experiences with the “Durian” of Nanyang revolutionary activity, these quotes remind us that the Chinese revolution of the 1920s had an international dimension, and that the Nanyang, the CCP, the GMD, the Comintern and the MCP were part of it.

⁹¹ Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yatsen], “Sanminzhuyi” [Three Principles]. *Minzuzhuyi* [Nationalism], lecture 4. 17 February 1924, in *Sun zhongshan quan ji*, in 11 vols., vol.9., (Beijing: Zhong hua shuju, 1986), pp. 220-231, esp. 226. In the English translation, *shijiezhuyi* is translated as “cosmopolitanism.” “We must understand that cosmopolitanism grows out of nationalism.” *The Three Principles of the People. San Min Chu I. By Dr. Sun Yat-sen. with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek. Translated into English by Frank W. Price Abridged and edited by the Commission for the Compilation of the History of Kuomintang.* (China Publishing Co Taipei, 1960), pp. 21-27, esp. 25. Further in this dissertation all translations into English from Chinese and Russian are mine unless a translated source is cited.

⁹² Karl, *Staging the World*; Don Price, *Russia and the roots of the Chinese revolution*, (Harvard University Press, 1974); Piazza, “Anti-imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution;” for international dimension of the CCP foundation see Yoshihiro, *History of the Formation of the Chinese Communist Party*.

This chapter seeks to explain the origins of the MCP. In order to do that, I seek to explain what that revolution was for a variety of actors. For it is out of this complex and contradictory dance between the actors noted above that the MCP was born as the party of revolution in the Nanyang, as well as the party of Malayan nationalism led by the MCP .

Three ways of making world revolution interacted in a way that by 1930 set the stage for the creation of a “national” and unified Malayan Communist Party, with “national” here meaning that it included Malays and immigrant communities such as the Indians. The three ways of making revolution included the Chinese revolutionary activities in the Nanyang, the Comintern’s pursuit of Soviet strategic interests, and pursuit of local Chineseness by Chinese intellectuals in Malaya. The indigenizing impulses of the Comintern and Chinese associations like the revolutionary organizations in the Nanyang, the GMD and CCP (including the CYL⁹³) coincided, and produced Malayan nationalism, led by the Chinese communist organization, the MCP. The making of the Chinese revolution in Malaya showcased interwar ideological globalization, which had two sides -- indigenization and internationalization. These two processes resulted in the establishment of the Malayan national communist party.

Indigenization was the intention to involve non-Chinese in the party; internationalization was the appeal to international support for the Chinese revolution by both the Chinese revolutionaries and the Comintern. In Malaya, the intersection of Comintern and CCP discourses of support for the Chinese revolution created a unique situation in which internationalism and nationalism became one. My goal is to show that the resonance of these

⁹³ The MCP characteristics as a Chinese association will be discussed in chapter 3. The CYL will be discussed in chapter 5.

two impulses among the different ways of making revolution resulted in what Marshall Sahlins described as the structure of conjuncture.

Sahlins' approach offers suggestive parallels for our story circa 1930. The conjuncture of the Comintern's introduction of the idea of a "national" party in Malaya, where a nation-state did not exist, changed the structure of the political practice of the Chinese involvement with its host environment, something that was driven by a Chinese association's need to indigenize. The result of this conjuncture was the change in the practice of the Chinese revolutionaries in the Nanyang embedding themselves in their local environment. Their previous discourse of advocating for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of Malaya together with Chinese was transformed. What emerged was Malayan nationalism led by a Chinese communist organization, the MCP, which then became a political organization that advocated for Malayan independence and was endorsed by the Comintern. Thus, the conjuncture altered structural factors and this combination resulted in a historical change.⁹⁴ Kuhn's insight that individuals adopt new concepts when an old conceptual apparatus fails to explain new realities⁹⁵ complements Sahlins' explanation in that it helps us understand the origins of the MCP's establishment. Kuhn's concept helps to explain why the Chinese revolutionaries in Malaya adopted the Comintern's ideas of establishing a "national" party. This happened because the idea of a "national" Malayan party allowed them to indigenize in a more efficient way by

94 Sahlins, *Historical metaphors and mythical realities*. Drawing parallels with Sahlins' work is not to suggest any parallels between the actors involved in both situations. Perhaps, someone could read into this parallel that the Chinese were less civilized than the Comintern. If anything, the rich complex multinational Chinese merchant maritime network that was a part of the MCP support base, was more prosperous than Soviet Russia in 1930 and not less -- if not more -- international -- than the Comintern itself. The usefulness of Sahlins' structure of conjuncture for Malaya material has been acknowledged in a different context and used differently by Anthony Milner. Milner, *The invention of politics*, p.293-294. My thanks to Prof. James Wilkerson, Ching Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, for pointing out this work for me.

⁹⁵ Kuhn, "Origins of the Taiping Vision."

putting into practice the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang, which had been the goal since the times of Sun Yatsen. The Comintern offered the discourse for the Chinese revolutionaries that justified them becoming the leaders of a yet non-existent polity -- independent Malaya. Thus, the Chinese nationalism of the MCP became Malayan nationalism. The change in indigenization practice was mediated through the linguistic slippage and adoption of a new meaning of the Chinese word *minzu*, which came to mean Malayan “nation” and was justified through the rhetoric of the internationalist support of the Chinese revolution. This perspective suggests that an organizational shift in the Chinese revolutionary organization -- such as the establishment of the MCP -- was not simply the implementation of the Comintern’s order,⁹⁶ but rather the result of the conjuncture of processes in several different worlds. In this story, discourse and words (and their related, varying concepts) are key variables.

This chapter will show how this conjuncture led to the establishment of the MCP. This chapter will have four sections. Section one will discuss the meaning of the making of revolution for the Chinese revolutionaries in Malaya, including party and intellectual activities. I will also show that the MCP discourse of joint liberation of the Chinese and “oppressed peoples” of the Nanyang was based on the GMD’s discourse, which originated with Sun Yatsen as the discourse of the emancipation by the Chinese of the oppressed nations of the Nanyang. That discourse was justified in a new way by the Comintern’s rhetoric of the internationalization of the Chinese revolution and the establishment of a Malayan national party, which was to be led by Chinese revolutionaries. Section two will discuss the evolution of the Comintern’s ideas regarding Malaya by 1930. For the Comintern, the establishment of the MCP

96 Both older and more recent publications uphold this view. See Cheah, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*; Yong, *The Origins*; McLane, *Soviet Strategies*; Brimmell, *A Short history*; Rene H. Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background* (London: Dorothy Crisp, 1947); Gene Z. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya* (NY: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954).

resulted from the decisions of the 6th Comintern congress marking the Comintern's more active pursuit of revolutionary goals in the colonies. The evolution of the Comintern's policy towards the region of British Malaya and Singapore started with Sneevliet, and was later adjusted by the pan-Asian aspirations of Tan Malaka and by Ho Chi-minh's intention to have an independent from Chinese Vietnamese pan-Southeast Asian organization. It was also impacted by the Comintern's pursuit of Soviet strategic interests in the region, which was seen as a key strategic area in the future world war. All of these actors aspired for world revolution. I will then show how the Comintern laid the foundation for the discourse of the Malayan nation, led by the MCP, through the semantic slippage of the word *minzu*, which in Chinese, English and Russian meant nation/ nationality/ people/ race. This discourse gave the MCP the international legitimacy to continue using the GMD's discourse of the Chinese liberation of the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang, while also pursuing their indigenization more effectively. However, despite their intentions, this endeavour proved to be a futile endeavour throughout the course of the 1930s. The final section of this chapter will situate the impulses of the indigenization and internationalization of Chinese revolutionary organizations within the context of interwar globalization.

CHINESE REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE NANYANG

An Overview (1921–1941)

The first wave of GMD members, comprising teachers and journalists, came to Malaya in 1921–1925. This wave included Han Guoxiang, who studied in Moscow. At that time, Chinese communists were often also GMD members. In 1926, the overseas branch of the GMD

was dominated by the left GMD. However, separate regional branches of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Communist Youth League (CYL), and All-China General Labour Union (an amalgamation of Hainanese labour unions) were formed in Malaya by 1926. The MCP grew out of the regional branch of the CCP. The CCP established a Nanyang regional committee of the CCP (*zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang qubu weiyuan hui*, 中国共产党南洋区部委员会) and the Communist Youth League (CYL) in 1926 to guide revolutionary activity in the Nanyang. The Nanyang included Indochina, Malaya, the Malay Archipelago, the Philippines, and Burma.⁹⁷ It was the head of the Overseas Bureau of the GMD in China, Peng Zemin, who dispatched communists to found the Nanyang Union of Public Societies (*Nanyang huaqiao gegong tuan lianhe hui*), which united student unions, labour unions, and GMD local branches to undertake the anti-British cause.⁹⁸ By May 1926, there were three to four hundred members of the CYL in Malaya, headed by Pan Yunbo. From July 1927–January 1928, the revolutionary committee of the GMD of China was also involved in revolutionary activities in Malaya. The British police referred to the first communist organization in Malaya as the “Main School,” and in April 1927, it was renamed the Nanyang CCP committee, jointly established by the CYL and the CCP.⁹⁹

In 1927 and 1928, communists were fleeing from GMD prosecution after the Canton uprising and the split between the GMD and the CCP. After Hainanese Cheung Yuk-kai arrived in late 1927 from the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference in Hankow, the Nanyang committee

⁹⁷Yong, *The Origins*, p. 67-69. The relationship between the CYL and the party will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁹⁸ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 51.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-71.

changed its name in January 1928 to the Nanyang Provisional Committee (NPC) (*zhongguo gongchandang Nanyang linshi weiyuanhui*, 中国共产党南洋临时委员会). The committee consisted of the Nanyang General Labour Union (NGLU), Hainanese night schools, the Nanyang CYL, and the Hainanese-dominated GMD branches. The committee consisted of a fifteen-person reorganization committee, mainly Hainanese, and a general committee of five individuals.¹⁰⁰ In January 1928, the committee was reorganized into the fifteen-member Nanyang Provisional Committee.¹⁰¹ The committee of five members was to direct local committees (*diwei*) in Singapore, Penang, Malacca, Johor, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Ipoh, Sungei Lembing, and Riao (in the Netherlands East Indies, or NEI), with subcommittees for labour, propaganda, the armed forces, women, finance, and relief. They produced pamphlets entitled *Bolshevism*, *Roaring Blaze*, *Candle Light*, and *Blood Light*.¹⁰² According to the British police, Singapore leaders paid only rare visits to the Federated Malay States, and organisation among communists was not strong.¹⁰³ Front organizations of the NPC were the NGLU, the Anti-Imperialist League, the CYL, and the Nanyang General Seamen Union, all of which had overlapping leadership. MGLU membership was one hundred in 1926, and six thousand in 1927; NPC membership was three hundred; and AIL membership was one hundred in Singapore in 1931.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.71-74.

¹⁰¹ For the names of the committee members see Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 90-99, 101.

¹⁰² The report by the Secretary of Chinese Affairs “Kuo Min Tang and other societies in Malaya, January-March 1928,” 27 April 1928, pp.1-7, esp. 3, CO 273-542.

¹⁰³ The report by the Secretary of Chinese Affairs on Kuo Min Tang up till June 30th 1927, “Societies opposed to Kuo MinTang”, p. 147, CO 273-542.

¹⁰⁴ Compiled based on Yong, *The Origins*, 71-74, 102-119, Zhou Nanjing, *Shijie huaqiaoren cidian* [Dictionary of the Overseas Chinese], (Beijing: Beijing da xue, 1993), p. 560.

Table 5.1:
Party Structure of the Nanyang Provisional Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1928

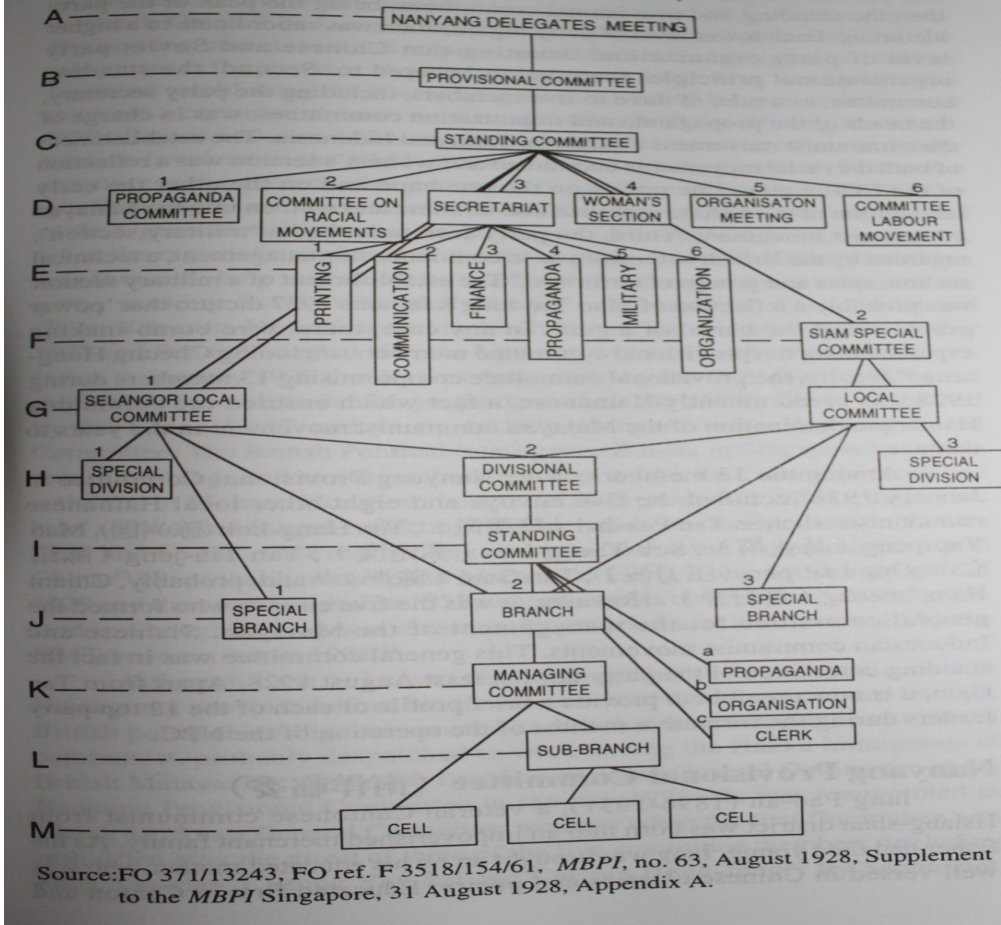
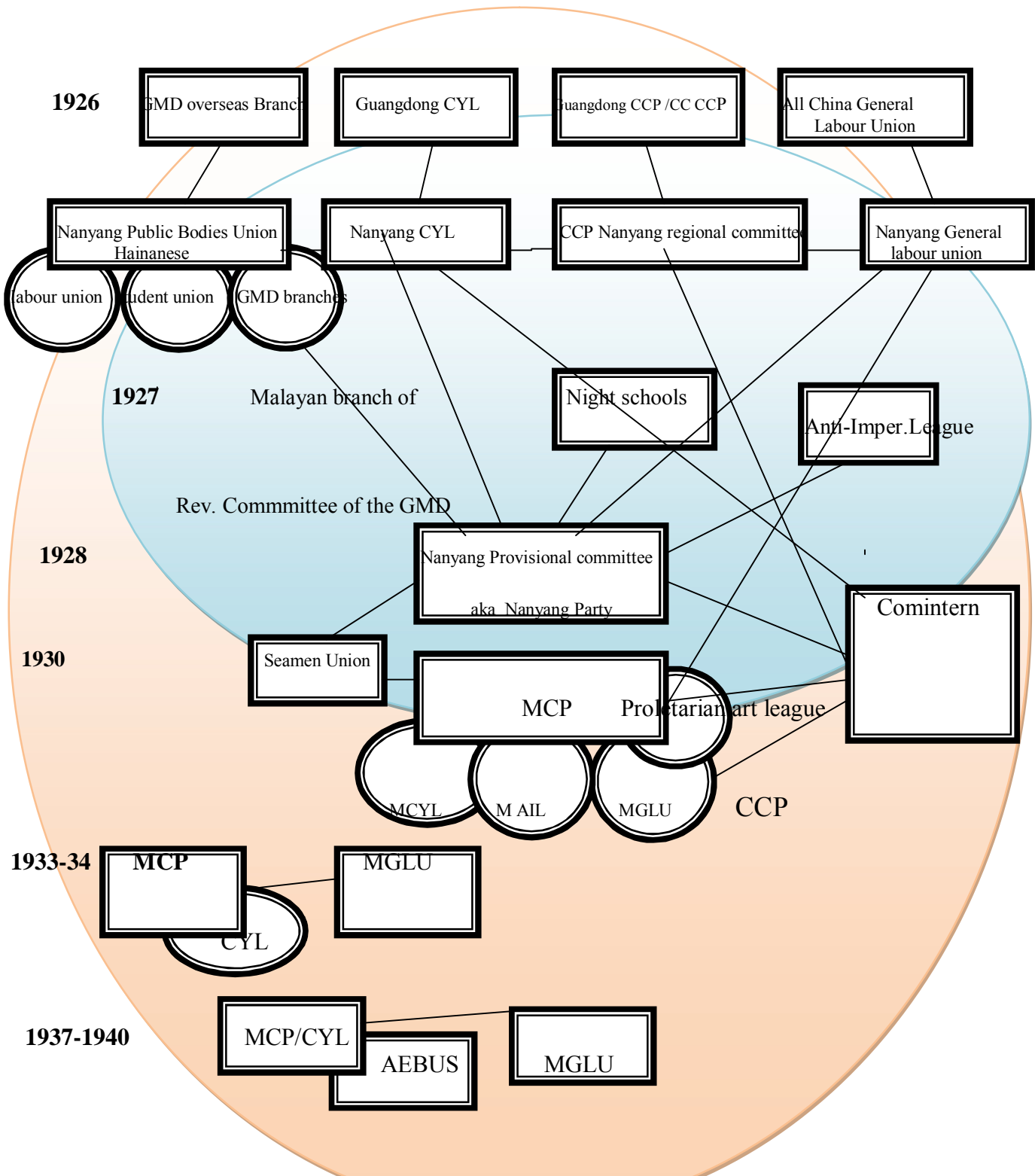


Figure 1. Organizational Structure of the Nanyang Provisional Committee in 1928 ¹⁰⁵

Figure 2. Chinese communist organizations in Malaya. Connections and overlapping organizations, 1926-1939 ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Yong, *The Origins*, p, 93

¹⁰⁶ Compiled from information in Yong, *The Origins*, p. 62-79, 90-113, 128-141, 152-159, 242-258; “Nanyang gongzuo baogao” [Nanyang Working report] signed CC of the Nanyang CYL. RGASPI 533/10/1818/ 4-16;).”Kuo Min Tang and other societies in Malaya, January-March 1928 (continued)” p. 1-7, esp. 2, 23 April 1928, Interim Report on the activities of the Kwok Man Tong in the Federated Malay States during 1927 with Reference to similar or hostile organizations, 1-26, November 1927, CO 273-542; as well as on information about the CYL structure in the early 1930s that is based on the reports from the time, for instance see “Magong lianzi tonggao di 8 hao -- guangyu yanmidang tuan de zuzhi wenti.”[Circular no.8 of the CC MCP and CYL regarding the organization of the secret work of



the party and CYL], by Dangtuan zhongyang [CC of the MCP and CYL] 15 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/29-30.

The MCP founding conference was a reorganization of the NPC, and it was attended by twenty individuals, including Ho Chi Minh, Li Guangyuan (黎光远), Wu Qing, Fu Daqing, Wei Zhongzhou (secretary), Lin Qingchong, Wang Yuebo, Pang Qinchang, Lee Chay-heng, and Chen Shaochang. The standing committee of MCP members included Wu Ching, Fu Daqing, and Li Guangyuan. All leaders were in their twenties and predominantly Hainanese.¹⁰⁷ According to Yong, the MCP was a four-tier organization with cells and branches at the grassroots. The second level was district, state, or municipal organization and the central committee of eleven members. In June 1934, the CC was reorganized because of arrests and became a nine-member joint CC for the CYL and the MCP. According to the British, the strength of the MCP lay in its front organizations.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 134-141

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152- 156

**Numerical Strength of the MCP and Its Subsidiary Organizations -
An Analysis from Party Records for the Years 1931-33**

Organizations	1931	1932	1933
Malayan Communist Party	500	995	722
Malayan Communist Youth	640	502	210
Childrens Corps	460	175	94
Students Federation	200	85	101
Juvenile Workers	1000	—	—
Women's Section	100	85	70
Malayan General Labour Union	<u>7600</u>	<u>7734</u>	<u>5592</u>
Malayan Seamen's General Labour Union	400	432	255
Malayan Racial Emancipation League	—	8	9
Peasant's Union	100	614	268
Red Aid Society	—	220	—
Proletarian Writers Association	—	—	80
Anti-Imperialist League	—	10	1
Malayan Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese National Salvation Association	Non-existent	Non-existent	Non-existent
Total	11,000	10,860	7,402

Sources: WO 106/5701, *Malaya Command Intelligence Summary*, no. 10, October 1937, p. 194.

Figure 3: The MCP and its Front Organizations¹⁰⁹

According to materials from the Comintern collection, MCP membership looks different: In 1930, it was 1400; in 1934, 558; in 1939, 500; and in 1940, 1000.¹¹⁰ The Malayan CYL had children's corps (up to twelve years of age), a student federation (twelve to fifteen years), a women's division (fifteen to twenty-three years), and a young workers department (eighteen to twenty-three years). From September 1930–June 1931, Wu Jiannan (吴健南) was secretary general and Zhu Mingqiu (祝明秋) was head of the organization department .

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.156

¹¹⁰ Ho Chi Minh's letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930 RGASPI 495/62/8/6., "Magong lai jian." [A document received from the MCP] 25 August 1934 RGASPI 495/62/27/6; "Maijin", [Forward] A pamphlet consisting of materials produced between December 1939 and early 1941. RGASPI 495/62/28/53-84, esp. p. 60

There were two attempts to purify the ranks of the MCP and the CYL in 1933 as a reaction to a squabble between the Hakkas and Hainanese in the leadership, and another from 1935–1936, which had the goal of purging “traitors.”¹¹¹ As the result of this squabble, Lai Teck, who was a fake Comintern agent and a real British and Japanese agent, betrayed many party members and came to power. British suppression was also responsible for the discontinuity of party leadership. Between 1930 and 1935, the Straits Settlement Special Branch banished 882 communists and intercepted, from 1929–1935, 5,297 “useful communist letters.”¹¹²

In September 1936, the MCP ended Hainanese domination in the party and elected Hokkien Cai Baiyun (蔡白云) as the party secretary and half-Vietnamese Lai Teck as deputy secretary. In 1936, the MCP formed a united front with the Singapore Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Union (*Xingjiapo huaqiao kangri lianhehui*). The MCP also founded the All-Malaya Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese National Salvation Union (*Quan malaiya huaqiao kangri lianhe hui*). In September 1936, in the Johor branch of the MCP, the CYL and MGLU organizations combined their CCs into one because of a lack of cadres, but this CC was subordinate to that in Singapore.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp.157-159

¹¹² Ibid., pp.168-169

¹¹³ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 179-181.

Table 8.1: MCP's Central Committee Members, September 1936

Name	Key Positions Held
Ts'ai Pai-yun(蔡白云) alias Ts'ai Chang-ching(蔡长青)	Party Secretary from September 1936 to January 1937, Singapore born Hokkien of Quemoy origin.
Lai Teck(莱特)	Deputy Secretary; a British agent from 1934 and a central committee member from May 1935.
Huang Cheng(黄诚), aliases A Wong(亚黄) Huang Shih(黄石)	Chairman, central committee; member, political bureau. Born in Pu-tien, Fukien.
Yang Shao-min(杨少民) alias Hsiao-min (小民)	Hainanese communist from Penang; successor to Ts'ai and member of the party's political bureau.
Ng A-hui (黄亚辉)	Member, political bureau; arrested and banished in May 1937.
Chang Li (张理), alias A Keng (亚硬)	Hainanese, Penang CP chairman; member, organizational bureau and chairman of MCP's Northern Region, Malaya.
Toa Beng (大明)	Member, organizational bureau; chairman of MCP's South Region in Malaya, Jan-May 1937, chairman, MGLU standing committee.

Name	Key Positions Held
Chiu Tong (周唐)	Member, organizational bureau; chairman, Building Workers' Labour Union, Jan-April 1937; vice chairman, Selangor CP State Committee, Jan-April 1937; arrested and banished in 1937. Born in Canton, Kwangtung in 1905.
Heng I-cheng (邢贻精)	Member, organizational bureau; chairman, Negri Sembilan CP State Committee, Jan-March 1937; arrested and banished in 1937; a Hainanese communist leader.
Chan Han (陈汉) alias Ch'en Shih (陈石)	Member, organizational bureau, chairman, Selangor CP State Committee, Jan-April 1937; MGLU standing committee member; arrested and banished in 1937. Born in Hainan. Kwangtung province, in 1911.

Sources: 7F 74 Surété Generale Indonchinoise series, see Supplement No. 1 of 1939 to SS Police Special Branch *Political Intelligence Journal*, under Names Index, p.ii; Ching Lang, *Wei-chuang pi shi po-chi*, Macao, 1987, p. 4, Information on Ch'en Shih has been kindly provided by Ma Lin (马林), a historian on the Malayan communist movement, now living in Canton and Ch'en Ching-shan (陈青山), himself a former Malayan communist activist during the 1930s and now living in Canton.

Figure 4. CC MCP members in 1936.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp.181-182.

In April 1939, at the sixth plenum of the CC, a new fifteen-member CC was elected.¹¹⁵ The last CC of the prewar years was elected in July 1941, but with the exception of Wu Tien and La Teck, all those CC members were captured and killed by the Japanese.¹¹⁶

In 1937, prior to the outbreak of the war, the MCP changed its own name and the names of the CYL and the MGLU by adding the word *geminzu* (all nationalities) to them. Its new name was *Malaiya geminzu gongchandang* (All-nationalities Communist Party of Malaya). However, this emphasis on inclusive organization was finished after the outbreak of the war. The party focused on the Chinese community. A “ten-point programme of struggle” adopted in April 1938 promoted a united front of all nationalities and dropped the anti-British and anti-imperialist line.¹¹⁷ In April 1939, the MCP reversed its pro-British policy and adopted a revised “ten-point programme.” The MCP realized the damage caused by its anti-British policy by early 1940, as Comintern documents show. The British-MCP concord was officially endorsed on 20 December, 1941, when communist detainees were released from British detention en masse.¹¹⁸

The MCP narrative in prewar years is celebratory. According to Yong, party membership was 379 in March 1937, 1000 in April 1939, 1700 in May 1940, and “probably” 5000 in 1941. MCP membership had two levels, secret and open, that participated in the China Salvation movement and labour organizing.¹¹⁹ According to Yong, 1936–1941 was the period of breakthrough in labour organizing and national salvation.¹²⁰ Communist-led labour unions were successful in organizing labour protests from November 1936–March 1937 and attempted the same in the fall

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp.184-186.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.,p.188.

¹¹⁷ Yong,, pp.196-97

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp.198-201.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.202.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

of 1939. MGLU membership was reported as 20,000 in April 1939, 50,000 in 1940, and 100,000 in 1941.¹²¹ In February 1937, among the eleven-member committee of the Singapore Overseas Chinese National Salvation Association (*xinjiapo qiao kangri lianhe hui*), six were MCP members. The MCP continued to use the Anti-Enemy Backing Up Society (AEBUS), which had been organized in December 1937, as its front organization until September 1940. In 1939, AEBUS membership was estimated at 38,848, including other Chinese associations.¹²²

The materials examined in this dissertation provide sufficient grounds to doubt this celebratory narrative. The situation in the MCP in prewar time will be discussed in chapter six. In the next section we will examine how the NPC worked and interacted with the CCP and the Comintern.

Liu Shaoqi's first wife, a Hainanese Xie Fei described the NPC as follows. After the breakdown of the united front between the CCP and the GMD, many Chinese communists fled to the Nanyang, where they continued to make revolution. Chinese communists came to Malaya, established the CYL and party organizations, "introduced overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) to the Chinese revolution,"¹²³ and established communist cells in different places in Malaya. The NPC directed town and district committees of Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Melaka, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pulau Penang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Indonesian Palembang, and Siam. The

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 215-219, 231, 234

¹²² Yong, pp. 243,246, 264, 265

¹²³ Then 15-year-old Xie Fei (谢飞) was a native of Wenchang county in Hainan, future first wife of Liu Shaoqi, and Nanyang Provisional Committee member from June 1929 to February 1932. Xie Fei, "Huiyi Nanyang Linshiweiyuanhui de gongzuo" [Remembering the work of the NPC], in *Geming huiyilu. Zengkan 1* [Revolutionary reminiscences], (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp.159-169.

members of NPC in 1929 were: Xie Fei, Chen Sanhua (陈三华), Secretaries Zhang Chengxiang (张成祥) and Xu Tianbing (徐天炳) (aka Wu Qing 吴青), the Head of the Propaganda Department Fu Daqing (傅达庆), and the Head of the Secretariat Wei Zhongzhou (魏忠洲).

The editorial board of *Nanyang Worker* (*Nanyang gongrenbao* 南洋工人报) - Xie Fei and four men, Chen Sanhua, Fu Daqing, Xu Tianbing, and Wei Zhongzhou - lived in the secretariat's office and posed as a *huaqiao* family. *Nanyang Worker* first published several hundred copies, which later increased to 2,000, both in Chinese and English. They also had one comrade from Thailand and A-Fu, a 16-year-old who spoke fluent Malay and on whom they relied for many things. As described by Xie Fei, the NCP policies and membership focused on China¹²⁴ and targeted the Chinese community. At party meetings, which were held once or twice a month, or once every other month, they discussed theoretical questions such as the reasons for the failure of the Chinese revolution, Marxism –Leninism, the crisis of capitalism, as well as practical questions such as party fees, the recruitment of new members, the low cultural level of workers in night schools, the establishment of a revolutionary mass organization, patriotic propaganda, and international education among overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*).

¹²⁴ Xie explains that after World War I, imperialist countries needed a large labour force in their colonies. Travelling to Nanyang was not difficult, and “progressive Chinese and revolutionaries” (*zhongguode jinbu de renshi he gemingzhe*) went there to promote the May 4th movement and to do revolutionary work. After the 1927 GMD assault on communists, some places where the GMD was strong, like Siam, were difficult to move to, and so a majority of Chinese communists going to Nanyang ended up in Malaya, while a minority went to Indochina and Indonesian Palembang. According to Xie Fei, another reason the Chinese communists went to Malaya was because Malaya Chinese were progressive (*bijiao jingbu* 比较进步) and sympathetic to the Chinese revolution, making it easier for communists to establish party cells and labour unions. Xie Fei, “Huiyilu.”

The membership of all the communist organizations – the Women’s Committee (*funuxiehui*), the Anti-Imperialist League,¹²⁵ the CYL and the red labour union - was predominantly Chinese. Cadres and members of the NPC were from Chinese language schools and were Chinese workers.¹²⁶ According to Xie Fei, the members of the party in Malaya were predominantly workers, since even those who were intellectuals in China often could not find a job in Malaya and became workers. Moreover, some Chinese communists were explicitly dispatched by the CCP to the Nanyang to promote the Chinese revolution. Fan Yunbo (潘云波), the founder of the CYL (which he claims was the first communist organization in Malaya), was sent by the Guangdong Provincial Committee to Singapore in March 1926 in order “to promote patriotism among *huaqiao* and aid Chinese revolution”.¹²⁷ The NPC was established in support of the Chinese revolution.¹²⁸

Communist envoys in the Nanyang continued the job started by the late Qing envoys who had been concerned with the Chineseness of the Chinese communities there and engaged in fundraising for the Chinese revolution.

¹²⁵ According to the British, the League was “a communist society” confined to Hailam agitators. They published the periodical *Bright Dawn* starting in June 1928. The League was a preliminary organization for those who wanted to join the party. “The propaganda of this society is chiefly racial and is directed towards ‘oppressed nationalities’ of the East with the object of attaining emancipation from imperialist rule”. According to the British police, the Anti-Imperialist League in Brussels had no connection to a similar league in China and Southeast Asia. “Kuomintang and other societies in Malaya”, July-September 1928, *Report by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs*, SS, SGD R.Ingham 23October 1928, CO 273-542, pp. 1-10, esp. pp. 9-10.

¹²⁶ Yang Jiancheng, *Malaixiya huaren kunjing (Ximalaixiya huawuzhengzhi guanxi zhi shenlun, 1957-1978)* [The dilemma of the Malaysian Chinese: an investigation into the political relationship between Chinese and Malays, 1957 to 1978] (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1982), p. 353.

¹²⁷ Huang Xinyan, Lin Zhi, Qi Wen, “Pan Yunbo tongzhi geming de yisheng,” [Revolutionary life of comrade Pan Yunbo] Du Hanwen ed., *Hainan wenshi. Di shijiu ji* [The history of Hainan. Vol.19], (Haikou: Hainan chuban gongsi, 2005), pp.57-63, esp. 58-60.

¹²⁸ Zhou, *Shijie huaqiaoren*, p. 560.

In 1928-1929, the CCP was attempting to indigenize their organization. This effort to indigenize was something they shared with both the Comintern and the GMD.¹²⁹ Li Lisan, the secretary of the Guangdong provincial committee in 1928¹³⁰ and a former *huaqiao* communist in France¹³¹ who had revolutionary experience outside China, returned to Shanghai from Moscow in late 1928. He was, apparently, also influenced by two different 6th congresses: that of the CCP, and that of the Comintern, which adopted a more proactive policy toward the colonial countries, and which matched the Chinese communists' impulse to indigenize in the Nanyang. On the first day of 1929, Li Lisan wrote in his diary:

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

¹³⁰ Tan Dunliang, *Li Lisan zhuan* [Biography of Li Lisan], (Harbin, Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 73.

¹³¹ In the early 1920s, Li was the editor of *Chinese Worker Weekly* (*Huagong zhoubao*). Guixiang Ren; Hongying Zhao, Mao Shi eds., *Hua qiao huqren yu guogong guanxi* [Chinese overseas and the CCP-GMD relation] (Wuhan chubanshe, 1999), p. 80.

movement.’ This will put Nanyang revolution on the right track and will be the correct starting point for the Nanyang party line.¹³² “

Li Lisan’s reflections show that for the CCP, making the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang was the Guomindang’s legacy, something the communists now had to leave behind as the CCP intended to make a fundamental break from the ideology related to the GMD, and in particular, the promotion of Chinese revolution in the Nanyang. Within one month, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CC CCP) sent to the Nanyang Provisional Committee a draft resolution on “The revolutionary movements and policies of our party in Nanyang [sic],”¹³³ The “Nanyang directive” was greatly reminiscent of Li Lisan’s diary entry.¹³⁴ This suggests his participation in drafting this directive.¹³⁵

In the CC CCP letter to the Nanyang Provisional Committee, the CC CCP described “The Nanyang Revolution as ‘the beginning of the ‘national movement.’” By describing the Nanyang revolution in this way, the CCP was attempting to encourage the indigenization of the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang, or, in Kuhn’s terms, to foster the CCP organization’s embeddedness in the local environment. The CC CCP criticized the Nanyang communist organization by saying: “The Chinese revolution is being exercised in Nanyang by the party of China, not the

132 Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiu shi di yi yanjiubu bian eds., *Li Lisan bainian dancheng jinianji* [Li Lisan 100 Anniversary. The Collection of Writings], (Beijing: Zhonggongdangshi chubanshe, 1999), p. 68-69.

133 “A letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to Nanyang Provisional Committee,” dated 22 January 1929, is deposited in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, *Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy Arhiv Sotsio-politicheskoi istorii* – hereafter, RGASPI . RGASPI *fond* [collection] 514/*opis* [inventory] 1/*delo* [file] 532/ *list* [page] 8-13, esp. 9. Hereafter, “Li Lisan’s letter.”

135 “Li Lisan’s letter” was also produced in January 1929. RGASPI 514/1/532/8.

Nanyang revolution.”¹³⁶ In other words, the policies in China were applied in Nanyang without considering Nanyang conditions, as the Nanyang party was organized by the Chinese communists who focused on the Chinese revolution and neglected the Nanyang revolution. The CC CCP also pointed out its own lack of consideration for local Nanyang conditions in its instructions to Nanyang.¹³⁷ The directive argued that the policies of the Nanyang revolution should be different from those of China, since Nanyang, unlike China, was “a pure colony” with “many nationalities” and an important industrial area.¹³⁸

The directive placed responsibility for the Nanyang’s emancipation on the Chinese. It insisted that they cooperate with others in Malaya because, “The national problem of Nanyang, i.e. that the nations in Nanyang are very complex,” can only be solved by the cooperation of all of the “complex nations” of the Nanyang in the anti-imperialist struggle, and, in that way, overcome the British policy of creating “mutual hatred.” However,

“It is known that the Chinese there did oppress Malay people, because the latter are poor and backward in civilization. So it is the fundamental task of our Party to tighten the relationship of all the oppressed nations and to make the Malay people understand that in order to release them from the yoke of the imperialists, the unity of the oppressed is absolutely necessary. If the Chinese want to claim emancipation, it is possible only when all the oppressed nations are freed. It is absolutely impossible to free any single nation

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Specifically, the policies of the Chinese party in the labour and anti-imperialist movements were applied in Nanyang. Such were “the purges of opportunism at the emergency meeting of August 7, 1927, the policy of uprisings which resulted in individual terrorism in Nanyang, or the idea that the Nanyang revolution was dependent on the success of the revolution in China.” “Li Lisan’s letter”.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

separately[...]. Thus the principle task of our party is, first of all, to make all the oppressed unite and strive for the goal of national emancipation[sic].”¹³⁹

The directive suggested: “We should further impress these slogans and conception deeply upon the minds of the Chinese to remove their wrong ideas as to look down on other nations and then the real unity can be obtained[sic].”¹⁴⁰ Thus, the goal of the Nanyang revolution was to “emancipate” the Chinese and by way of achieving this goal, the emancipation of all other “nations” of the Nanyang would be necessary.

The “making Chinese revolution”¹⁴¹ by the communists in the Nanyang referred to the anti-Japanese boycott and protests for the rights of Chinese immigrants in Malaya. This was a main goal of a Chinese overseas association. Both communists and the GMD participated in the anti-Japanese campaigns of the Chinese communists in the Nanyang. This was the beginning of the GMD’s policy of countering Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia. It is unclear whether it was a local or central (China) initiative.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid..

¹⁴² “Li Lisan’s letter” was drafted on the basis of the information provided by the Nanyang communists in reports they had sent to the CC CCP. These are the following reports: 1. “Nanyang gongzuo baogao” [Nanyang Working report] signed CC of the Nanyang CYL. There are two versions of this report. One is RGASPI 533/10/1818/55-68 and another version is RGASPI 533/10/1818/ 4-16. The latter contains some information omitted from the former version. These two versions are dated February 1929 and 16 January, respectively. A Comintern translator translated the latter as “A report of Indonesia.” However, judging from the content of the report, it was written prior to the “Li Lisan’s letter.” 2. Three reports compiled in July-August 1928 by the “Provisional Committee of the Malay Archipelago” and “The Soviet of Trade union of Malay archipelago”: a. “*Otchet Nan’yanskogo komiteta*” [A report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC] 19 July, 22 August 1928. This report is addressed to the Central Committee (*V tsentral’niy komitet*). Most likely, it is the CC of the Guangdong provincial committee; “*Otchet Malayskogo Komiteta profsoyuzov*,” [The report of the Soviet of Trade Unions of Malay Archipelago] and “*Resolutsiya priniataya posle obsledovaniya raboty vremennogo Komiteta*,” [Resolutions adopted after investigation of the work of the [Nanyang]Provisional Committee], (RGASPI 495/62/1/1-17;18-22;23-27).

For the Nanyang communists, the Chinese nationalist movement was the anti-imperialist movement which they planned to start apparently after the CC's criticism for not having conducted anti-imperialist activities in the past. The commemoration of the Jinan Incident¹⁴³ as described in these reports leaves no doubt about the Chinese nationalist and anti-Japanese focus of the activities in which both communists and GMD participated.¹⁴⁴ The report dated 19 July 1928 described in detail the plan they had for commemoration activities: a demonstration and boycott of Japanese products under the name of the Chinese Residents' Association, an anti-Japanese society as they "could not guide the movement of the masses openly in the name of the communist party." They planned to distribute leaflets with the slogans: "Boycott Japanese goods," "Away with Japanese imperialism," "Return Shandong," and "Return Manchuria" in Chinese, Malay and English languages, as well as with slogans regarding the rights of the Chinese population in the Nanyang, including, "Away with British imperialism, which entered into agreement with Japanese imperialism," "Away with American imperialism, which took advantage of the moment and intruded into China," and "Away with militarists who compromised with imperialists." The leaflets also included demands for freedom of speech, print, assembly and strike, abolition of unjust taxes and levies, workers' wage increases, an eight-hour work day, government aid to Jinan workers, the abolition of the registration of

¹⁴³ The "August 3rd Movement" was the commemoration of the three-month anniversary of the clash between Japanese and GMD troops that resulted in the GMD retreating from Jinan and in the increased Japanese aggression known as the Jinan Incident.

¹⁴⁴ According to the British police, during the commemoration of the three-month anniversary of the Tsinan incident in Singapore, about 300 Hainanese gathered for a demonstration, but were easily dispersed by the police and several arrests were made, including that of an "important communist." A commemoration of the fifth month of the Tsinan incident was also attempted, but police dispersed that one easily too. As a result, a number of Hainanese night schools were closed. "Kuomintang and other societies. July-Sept. 1928," pp.7,8.

students in school, and that “all oppressed nationalities and classes unite in the struggle against imperialism.”¹⁴⁵

The NPC considered the August 3rd movement to be the most important activity of the communist party of the Malay Archipelago. According to the report on the actual activities of this day (dated 22 August 1928), some Chinese workers partly stopped working, students stopped attending classes, and Chinese enterprises, schools, and organizations lowered flags and campaigned for the boycott of Japanese goods. At the meeting, a resolution was adopted to pressure the national [Chinese] government to conduct an open foreign policy, to carry out a boycott of the Japanese goods, to punish speculators, and to protest against the national government’s adoption of the 5 points of the Japanese conditions. Moreover, the “Fujianese masses [who were reported to have displayed the greatest patriotic attitude] said that the cause of national salvation is the right cause and one should not ask whether it is communists or non-communists who led it.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the Chinese revolution was about national salvation and the protection of the rights of Chinese and China’s national interests, and not about communism.

Need to Indigenize: the Origins of the Discourse of the Emancipation of the Oppressed *Minzu*

“[During the Ming] all small states of the Nanyang returned to China and paid tribute to China. That was because they looked up to Chinese culture, and themselves were willing to come back to be loyal, not because China forced them with weapons to do so. [...] the powerful countries in today’s world can’t achieve such respect and reverence .

¹⁴⁵“A report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC,” RGASPI 495/62/1/1-17.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Although the Chinese communists' activities in Malaya remained China-centred, they realized the need to involve the local population and to participate in local politics, that is, to indigenize. The enlarged NPC plenum in the first half of July 1928 decided that the NPC must start a "national" movement and attract and recommend that Malays and Indians join the Chinese party organization, as well as set the goal of the unification of all nationalities and accept the Comintern's guidance and leadership.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, according to C.F. Yong, the Malayan Chinese communists' turn away from Chinese nationalism and towards locals and Malaya nationalism took place in 1927 after the March 12 commemorative activity of Sun Yatsen's death, which was organized by the GMD. It ended in a clash with the police. According to Yong, this shift resulted in the founding of the Malayan communist party in 1930.¹⁴⁹ I suggest that the GMD was the origin of the discourse of the involvement of non-Chinese in the Chinese communist organization.

This section will argue that a Chinese association's need to be embedded in the local environment formed the origins of the MCP's discourse on the emancipation of oppressed nations/races/peoples.¹⁵⁰ In the origins of the MCP's discourse on liberating oppressed and weak races through the Chinese revolution, and in the model of a Chinese-non-Chinese joint

¹⁴⁷ Sun Zhongshan, [Sun Yatsen], "*Sanmin zhuyi*" [Three Principles of the People] in *Sun zhongshan quan ji* (Collected Works of Sun Yatsen, in 11 vols.), vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 183-426, esp.p.227

¹⁴⁸ "A report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC," RGASPI 495/62/1/1-17, esp. 2,3.

¹⁴⁹ Yong, *The Origins*, p.78.

¹⁵⁰ Kuhn, Philip, "Why China Historians."

organization, where Chinese assumed the leading role, was in left GMD.¹⁵¹ This branch of the GMD was strong in Singapore; it controlled 21 out of 29 branches, referred to as the Main School,¹⁵² and in early 1927, it talked about the need to extend its activities to the Malays, Javanese, and Tamils.¹⁵³ The MCP discourse regarding the protection and unity of the Chinese, as well as the discourse about oppressed races of the South Seas, originated in the same GMD policy targeting *huaqiao* Chineseness and proclaimed that the GMD's goal was "the emancipation of the (Chinese) race."¹⁵⁴ The slogan of uniting overseas Chinese with the "weak nationals" of the Nanyang, and rising up against the harsh treatment of Chinese and in support of the self-determination of the races in the Nanyang, appeared in the address to overseas Chinese that was distributed during the demonstration at Kreta Ayer in 1927.¹⁵⁵ According to Yong, the MCP's policy was the continuation of the multi-racial policy that the Nanyang committee had in place since 1928.¹⁵⁶

This model of indigenizing revolutionary organizations has been around since the Anti-imperialist League, which will be discussed in this section. Ultimately, this model can be

¹⁵¹ The Left GMD, according to the British, controlled the overseas bureau of the GMD and "the communists" in 1927 Malaya. They advocated forming an alliance with Russia and the communists, "believe[d] in communism," and aspired to world revolution. "Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence,(MBPI) July 1927, p. 5. CO 273-535; "Interim report on the activities of Kwok Man Tong in the Federated Malay States during 1928 with reference to similar or hostile organizations." 6 July 1928, CO 273-542, p. 1-42 esp. 21. 27-Yet, the CCP and the GMD were not the only ones who advocated for the support of the independence movement of the oppressed peoples. In 1931, this was also a point of propaganda of the China Youth Party that advocated against the GMD's one party rule, against communists, and promoted federalism. Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs, September 1931, No. 13, October 6 1931. 1-71, esp. 49-52. CO 273-572, pp. .esp. 49-52

¹⁵² Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 134.

¹⁵³ The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence," (hereafter, MBPI) May 1927, CO 273-535, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ "Purport of the general registration of Tang members of China Kuo Min Tang," CO 273-542, pp.1-3.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, "Message to the Overseas Chinese in respect of the Second Anniversary of the death of Sun Chung San [Sun Yatsen]," CO 273-538.

¹⁵⁶ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 160.

explained by the need of a frontier enclave such as the GMD/"Nanyang communist party"/MCP to be embedded in the local society. For these Chinese associations it meant, for example, emancipating the local society and leading it to independence in order to liberate the Chinese from their imperialist oppressors, which in this case was the British colonial government.

In its discourse on the emancipation of the Chinese and other oppressed peoples, and in its model of organization, the "Secretariat" that was established at the MCP's founding conference echoed the Anti-imperialist Leagues (AIL) and the *Minzuguoji*. The AILs, with the active participation of the GMD in Guangdong and Europe, were created first by Workers International Relief and its secretary, Willi Muntzenberg, in August 1925 at the "Hands-off-China" Congress. The AIL inaugural congress was carried out in 1926 in Brussels with funding from the Comintern (which considered the AILs to be a challenge to its authority), and Song Qingling presided over the honorary presidium. Song Qingling was also the initiator of the organization in July 1927 after the communists were proscribed by the GMD head branch of the "Revolutionary committee of the GMD of China" and a branch of this organization was established in Singapore in September. It was meant to be a new Malaya GMD head branch in opposition to Chiang Kaishek. It supported a "Nanyang general labour Union" under communist guidance and had 834 members in Singapore, but was broken up by arrests. In the AIL, worldwide colonial emancipation and Chinese revolution were linked, and GMD members from China and Europe accounted for 30 of the 152 delegates.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ For more information on left GMD see So, Wai-Chor, *The Kuomintang Left in the National Revolution, 1924-1931: The Leftist Alternative in Republican China*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). "Kuo Min Tang and other societies in Malaya, January-March 1928 (continued)" p. 1-7, esp. 2, 23 April 1928, Interim Report on the activities of the Kwok Man Tong in the Federated Malay States during 1927 with Reference to similar or hostile organizations, 1-26, esp. p. 22, 9 November 1927, CO 273-542; Piazza, "The Anti-imperialist League," p. 167-169.

The use of “national” and “international” had been inseparable in the discourse of the emancipation of Chinese and other “oppressed nations” ever since the establishment of the Nanyang committee of the CCP. This organization (the prospective NPC) had the goals of uniting “South seas” (that is, the Nanyang) Chinese, strengthening the overseas organization, and doing propaganda work among the “weak races” in order to emancipate them. The establishment of this communist organization was planned at the second national GMD convention in Canton on 1 January 1926 by the delegates from Malaya, Java, Burma, Siam and Indochina.¹⁵⁸ There was little surprise that in the Comintern’s MCP materials, the AIL in the Nanyang was mentioned in the section of the report as conducting “the investigation of the work of the national commission” (*obsledovaniya raboty natsionalnoi komissii*).¹⁵⁹ Here, *minzu* was translated as “national,” as in “nationalities,” while the authors intended for it to mean “nation(state)”, thus conflating the anti-imperialist league with the “nation.” Hu Hanmin’s aspirations for *Minzuguoji*, (into which he apparently hoped to convert the Comintern through GMD participation), that is, an AIL under China’s leadership -- sheds light on a utilitarian aspect of the cooperation between the GMD and the Comintern. Hu mentioned the inconsequential establishment of an AIL in Canton in 1925, apparently, the one established by Liao Zhongkai and Ho Chi Minh among the Annamites, Koreans, Indians, and Javanese. That League was the beginning of the Vietnamese revolutionary Than Nien’s group. The League’s

¹⁵⁸ CO 273-534, MBPI, January 1926, p.1. There were parallel developments in the GMD and the CCP in regard to Nanyang overseas branches. In 1926, according to Li Yinghui, and in September 1927, according to the British, the GMD organized classes for overseas Chinese (*huaqiao xuexiban*) to prepare cadres for overseas Chinese to conduct activities among them (*huaqiao yundong*), and who would then be dispatched to Malaya. . The Nanyang overseas branch of the GMD under the overseas branch of the GMD was abolished in 1928 and the British Nanyang overseas GMD branch was established under the guidance of the CC GMD Li Yinghui, *The Origins*, p. 491; “Interim Report on the activities of the Kwok Man Tong in the Federated Malay States during 1928 with reference to similar or hostile organizations.” 6 July 1928, pp. 1-42, esp. 14, 24 CO 273-542,. 24.

¹⁵⁹ “Resolutions adopted after investigation of the work of the [Nanyang] Provisional Committee,” RGASPI 495/62/1/ 23-27, esp. 25-26.

goal was to connect with the nationalist and revolutionary organizations of the Philippines and Java and of the capitalist countries.¹⁶⁰ The NPC's establishment could have been its next step, but since the GMD and CCP paths diverged, Hu advocated a *Minzuguoji* without communists. Song Qingling's AIL never recovered from the Chinese revolution's failure in 1927, and it ceased to exist in 1937.¹⁶¹ Various AILs were established in Shanghai, Canton and Malaya (1928) as communist front organizations.¹⁶² The idea of a Pan-Asian *Minzuguoji*, "International of the East," or a "Three Principles' International" headed by China, was advocated by the Left

¹⁶⁰ See Thomas Engelbert, "Chinese Politics in Colonial Saigon (1919–1936): The Case of the Guomindang," *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, Vol. 4 (2010), pp. 93-116. Also see Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁶¹ Piazza, "The Anti-imperialist League," p. 172.

¹⁶² Khoo, "The Beginnings," p. 312. "Kuo Min Tan and other societies in Malaya (continued), July - eptember 1928," A docuby the secretary of Chinese affairs SS SGD R.Ingham, 23 October 1928, CO 273-542, pp. 1-10, esp. 9-10. According to Quinn-Judge, there was rivalry between the Comintern and these AILs in the Asian anti-colonial movement. According to a publication by *Thanh Nien*, the Shanghai AIL was established by Chinese nationalists to separate Asian communists from the Comintern. See Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 167, 135; AOM Slotfom v. 16, "Thanh Nien," no.208, cited in Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, , p. 278 n.99. Taiwanese Communist Party's Comintern liaison Weng Zesheng was one of the founders of the 1929-1930 Anti-Imperialist League in Shanghai under the CCP leadership. The League had participant organizations from Taiwan, Korea, Annam, the Philippines, and India. See Wang Naixin et al. (ed.). *Taiwan shehui yundong shi, 1913-1936* [History of Taiwan's Social Movement], 5 Vols. (Chuangzao chubanshe, Taipei, 1989, Vol.3, *Gongchan yundong* [Communist Movement], pp. 300-320. In Malaya, the Anti-Imperialist League was founded in 1928. It was criticized at the MCP founding conference as a not functioning organization and for not having a mass following. The AIL ranks were "always decreasing and in the end the organization has no members at all." These problems were attributed to the fact that the organizational policy was to create a leading organization before the establishment of lower cells and focusing mainly on "national and petty bourgeoisie as on the main mass of this organization." "*Otchet o polozhenii v Nanyane*," [Report about the situation in Nanyang], 8 August 1930, compiled in January 1930, RGASPI 514/1/632/ 7-28, esp. 24-25. More about the MCP relation with bourgeoisie is discussed in chapter 6. In 1931, the Singapore AIL had 110 members: 50% Hainanese, 40% Hakka, 10% Hokkiens. Among those 70% were labourers and 30% were intellectuals. CO 273-572, p. 565.]"Monthly Review of Chinese Affiars," December 1931, pp. 48.

GMD's Chen Gongbo¹⁶³ and others, and gained wider popularity in the early 1930s as the GMD policy of countering Japan's southward expansion intensified.¹⁶⁴

In Malaya, the unique combination of two things created the conditions for a specific structural model of a revolutionary organization: the first was multiple ethnic groups being "oppressed" by the British, and the second was the Chinese frontier enclave's – that is, the MCP's -- indigenization drive. This was the model of the AIL, of the aspirations for a *Minzu Guoji*, and for a Malaya Federation. These were organizations encompassing members of various ethnic groups that were to be under the communist - and thus Chinese -- leadership. Both the existing model of communist organizations in Siam consisting of two ethnic branches, the Chinese and Vietnamese, and the model of first organizing separate ethnic parties and then uniting them into the MCP (as the MCP members-to-be were planning to do), were consistent with this .

Chinese Intellectuals in Malaya

The organizational model described in the previous section was based on the indigenizing impulse of individual Chinese intellectuals in the Nanyang. This was the other side of their mission as agents of the Chinese state who were also to enhance the local Chinese peoples' identification with China. This dual process was reflected in the complicated, and often contradictory, sense of local Chineseness that included a distinct literary style, the "Nanyang local colour." We will see how this search for local Chineseness was part of the process that resulted in the establishment of the MCP. We will see this through writings of Xu

¹⁶³ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 135.

¹⁶⁴ Li Yinghui, *The Origin*, pp. 506-507. More about the Nanking policy is discussed in chapter 5.

Jie, who was engaged with a literary movement that advocated for local Chinese literary style. Xu himself was involved with the communists. His ideas were part of the zeitgeist of the intellectual circles that had communist ideas. Sometimes the members of these circles belonged to the communist party, and sometimes they belonged to the GMD, like Xu Jie. They were teaching in Chinese schools or worked as writers and editors in Chinese newspapers and aspired to the liberation of the Nanyang. Below, we will see how this played out.

The Chinese intellectuals, teachers and newspaper editors aspired to indigenize and to embed themselves in the local intellectual scene. This section will look at the writings of one of the Nanyang Chinese communists, writer Xu Jie. Xu Jie is illustrative of this Chinese revolution in the Nanyang in several ways. For one thing, he is an example of intellectuals who maintained connections with both the CCP and GMD; for another, in his writing he responded to the Li Lisan letter to the NPC, which suggests that this directive made sense to the Chinese communists in the Nanyang. His response contained his thoughts on the question of the Nanyang revolution in his writings. This amounts to the audience's response to Li Lisan's letter, together with a response from another revolutionary organization in Malaya, the Youth League, in regard to the nature of the Nanyang revolution. The CYL's response to the CC CCP directive was not to adjust their actions, but rather to adjust their language, despite their conflict at the time.¹⁶⁵ Xu Jie, had been dispatched by the GMD to be the editor of the Chinese newspaper,

¹⁶⁵ Produced in January 1929 by the Nanyang Youth League in response to the Li Lisan's letter, "Dui dang jueyi Nanyang geming xingzhi de yijian" "Suggestions regarding the Party decision on the nature of the Nanyang revolution, "did not mention Malaya, but had suggestions about the nature of the Nanyang revolution. The Nanyang CYL did not agree with the CC CCP definition of the Nanyang revolution as anti-capitalist in nature and a national revolution (*fan ziben zhuyi xing de minzu geming*) and suggested getting rid of "in nature" (*xing*, 性) in the definition, as it did not convey powerfully enough the revolution's anti-imperialist goal and defined it as an anti-capitalist national revolution (*fanzibenzhuyide minzugeming* 反资本主义的民族革命). The reason was that with the exception of

Peoples Concern (Yiqun ribao), in Kuala Lumpur in 1928-1929. These writings reflect on and provide insight into the acceptance of the idea of a Nanyang Revolution on the part of Chinese intellectuals in Malaya, intellectuals who were searching for their own Nanyang *huaqiao* literary style and identity. This trend was a part of an indigenizing impulse that paralleled the aspirations of creating a Malayan Chinese communist organization which would be realized in 1930 with the establishment of the MCP.

Xu Jie was a follower of a “nativist” group (*xiangtu pai*) whose reliance on true stories as the basis for fiction arguably makes him no less a historical source than personal reminiscences.¹⁶⁶ Xu Jie (许杰) was one of the CC GMD’s envoys to overseas communities, and he was supposed to boost the *huaqiao*’s identification with China. Not only did Xu Jie have double party affiliations, both communist and GMD, but he also related to the trends of the local literary scene. Xu Jie’s double political affiliation reflects the world of the MCP “petty intelligentsia”¹⁶⁷ and of the syncretism of the MCP ideology: he was a CCP member who could not openly be a communist, yet, communists in Kuala Lumpur shared “news” with him.¹⁶⁸ This was, apparently, how he learned about the Li Lisan’s letter to which he responded in his writings.

Siam, the rest of Nanyang was colonial. According to the Li Lisan’s letter, the Nanyang revolution was a bourgeois-democratic revolution, but the driving forces were the proletariat and that they should advocate national independence, form an alliance of Nanyang nationalities, and found a Nanyang republic, as well as drive out British and Dutch imperialists. “Nanyang Working report,” RGASPI 533/10/1818/16. The conflict between the CYL and the NPC will be discussed in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁶ Moreover, Xu’s memoirs suggest that his writings had a measure of accuracy. He, *Xu Jie*, p.208.

¹⁶⁷ My thanks to Professor Timothy Cheek for suggesting this term.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149-151, 212, 217. According to Xu, he once met the head of the communist organization in Kuala Lumpur whose pseudonym was Ying Hua. *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 173

Xu's stories were written at the same time as the CC CCP directive, the Li Lisan's letter, in January 1929.¹⁶⁹ They echo the Li Lisan's letter, the CYL reports that were sent to the CC CCP, and ended up in the Comintern, and in other Comintern ideas. It is likely that Kuala Lumpur communists also shared with him the CC CCP directive, and thus the story about two youths. His conversation with a Chinese capitalist can be seen as his reflections on the CC CCP letter. Two points that Xu made in his novels echo the Li Lisan's letter. One is that the centre of the Nanyang revolution was locally-born young Chinese who could speak Chinese (the significance of this will be discussed in chapter 5), and the other is that the Nanyang was more industrially developed than China.¹⁷⁰

Xu Jie was a CCP member but claimed to have no strong sense of the party organization. As we will see in the following chapters, that was one of the criticisms of the MCP that was addressed by the MCP itself and by the Comintern. This is also illustrated by the life of another Chinese school teacher, Zhang Xia, in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 171, 173.

¹⁷⁰ Xu Jie, "Yelinde bieshu" [Mansion in the Coconut Grove] and "Liangge qingnian" (Two Youths) in Xu Jie, *Yezi yu liulian* [Coconut and Durian] *Zhongguo xiandai xiaopin jingdian* [Little soveniers of contemporary China] (Shijia zhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), pp.18-33, 34-48; "Li Lisan's letter" RGASPI 514/1/532/13. Xu Jie also talks in this story about how the revolution in Nanyang was different from the revolution in China. In China, the revolution was confined to a limited territory because of undeveloped infrastructure. In Nanyang, it will not be easy to stir a revolution (presumably due to relatively good living conditions), but developed transport and infrastructure will make it easier to coordinate a revolution once it rises. Thus, it will help not only to crush the revolution, but also to conduct revolution more effectively. Moreover, capitalism in 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, Nanyang's prosperity struck Chinese with its contrast with China. Since the CC CCP "Li Lisan's letter" mentioned the same issue and presented the Nanyang as the place of highly developed industries and hence the centre of the labour movement in the Pacific and the centre of communication, I conclude that Xu Jie was responding to Li Lisan's directive. "Li Lisan's letter" RGASPI 514/1/532/13. This shows that Xu Jie was indeed in touch with the communists in Kuala Lumpur, like he mentioned in his oral history. He, *Xu Jie*, p. 171.

According to Xu, as he was sent to the Nanyang by the CC GMD, he could not openly be a communist. However, he says the CCP knew “deep in the bones” that he was a revolutionary, and his writing during that time is indeed proof.¹⁷¹ He spoke quite openly about his communist views in his fiction. Xu Jie not only proselytized Marxist-Leninist theory in his conversations with Chinese emigrants, but he also wrote in his novels about this experience. For example, his story “Mansion in Coconut Grove” is essentially a record of his attempt to persuade a Chinese rubber producer that Nanyang’s prosperity, peacefulness, safety (until a few years earlier it was not necessary to lock one’s doors at night), and supposedly superior labour conditions were illusions. Xu argued that world capitalism was globally connected and would inevitably fall, as had been shown by rising unemployment.¹⁷² It is interesting that Nanyang communists reported that oral propaganda was the only reliable propaganda in the Nanyang, as “comrades” did not like the printed newspaper because it was printed badly and was difficult to read. In addition, being in possession of a newspaper exposed one to the danger of being accused of belonging to the communist party.¹⁷³ Thus, Xu Jie, who had been dispatched by GMD cadre, was propagating communism in Malaya. The GMD and CCP in Malaya had more conditions for an anti-imperialist united front, which even in China was “a unique characteristic” of the Chinese communism.¹⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, the relationship with the KMT was not mentioned very often in the 1930 MCP documents. In one place, it was mentioned in a very confrontational manner. In another, in response to the question of why 900 KMT members in

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.212, 217.

¹⁷² Xu, “Mansion,” pp. 34-48.“ He, *Xu Jie koushu*, p.190.

¹⁷³ “Doklad o polozhenii na ostrovah Tihogo Okeana” [The report about the conditions on the Pacific Islands]. RGASPI 495/66/13/67-78, esp.77.

¹⁷⁴ Lyman P. Van Slyke *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1967], p. 2.

Malacca “didn’t hinder the party work,” the representative of Malacca party answered that they “didn’t pay attention to our work.”¹⁷⁵ Moreover, according to the communists themselves, “merchants and intellectuals have stronger national ideology.”¹⁷⁶

Besides creating *New Rise Literature* (*Xinxing Wenyi* 新兴文艺), which was a disguised form of proletarian revolutionary literature, Xu was a supporter of the local Chinese intellectuals’ search for their local Chineseness. In Kuala Lumpur, Xu was connected with locally born Singaporean writers, who from 1927 to 1932, in response to the Chinese immigrant intellectuals’ contempt for local Chinese culture as a “pale imitation” of home Chinese culture, started to feel resentful and began to search for their own Chineseness. They were looking for their place in the Chinese culture and Chinese nation, and promoted “more purely indigenous literature,” *mahua wenxue*, that would reflect the Nanyang “local colour” (*Nanyang secai* 南洋色彩). Yet, they were creating a Nanyang culture, or a “*huaqiao* culture,” that resisted becoming Malay, while also asserting their difference from China.¹⁷⁷ The rise of the ambition of the local Chineseness among Chinese intellectuals was related to the influx of Chinese communists who fled GMD persecution after 1927.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ See “The Minutes of the Third Representative Conference of Nanyang,” RGASPI 514/1/634/93-158, esp. 139. Further research is needed on the relations between the communists and the GMD at the local level. Apparently, after the 1927 breakup both local organizations were supposed to speak the rhetoric of animosity, while before 1927, the GMD was communist, both in its rhetoric and undoubtedly in British eyes. For example, British saw the GMD branch in Malacca in 1927 as spreading communism. Yet, in the summer of 1928, in Malacca violent protest against GMD were propagated by the communists. CO 273-542, p 202.

¹⁷⁶ “To the CC of the Chinese party and Comintern,” undated, RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4, esp. 2. More about the MCP relations with the bourgeoisie will be discussed in chapter 6.

¹⁷⁷ Kenley, *New Culture*, pp. 157,159,167-169, 176 and pp. 180-181 n50.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

Judging from the literary circles, the reorientation towards “Nanyang [or local] colour” was an attempt to redefine Chinese emigrants’ place in Chinese culture.¹⁷⁹ This literary trend can be viewed as a manifestation of the impulse of the immigrant Chinese to indigenize in Malaya. Another manifestation of this indigenization impulse, which was actually an aspiration to avoid the grip of the Chinese state, was the dissatisfaction of the local Chinese with the *huaqiao* education program that came from the central government in Nanjing. They felt that it did not take into account the needs of the local Chinese.¹⁸⁰ Kenley attributes examples in 1930 of addressing Malaya’s “native” peoples and invoking them to rise up against the British to increase the influence of communist political immigrants from China after 1928.¹⁸¹

Chinese intellectuals’ aspiration for a Nanyang *huaqiao* culture resonates with the CCP impulse expressed in Li Lisan’s letter of making a Nanyang - and not a Chinese - revolution in the Nanyang, and with the establishment of a Malayan (i.e., local) communist party. This was in parallel with the Comintern’s 6th congress indigenization rhetoric.

This trend to reinvent the intellectual *Mahua* identity paralleled the impulse to create a Malayan Chinese communist organization, the MCP, and was encouraged by the Comintern who offered an opportunity to put this into practice. Kuhn’s conceptualization is applicable in this case. I suggest, building on Kuhn, that the MCP was a “frontier enclave,” and one of the Chinese overseas organizations that emerged as the result of the need to cope with migration, and as a response to the opportunity for international legitimization and subsidies offered by Moscow. The “niche” of an organization that advocated for Malaya “national” independence was unoccupied (like an ideal “niche” that Chinese immigrants would look for, according to

179 Ibid., pp. 170-171.

¹⁸⁰ Li Ying-hui, *The Origins*, p. 476.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 144-50.

Kuhn);¹⁸² the MCP was therefore the first party, aside from the pan-Islamic movement, which had been suppressed by the British, and that advocated for Malaya independence.

THE COMINTERN'S POLICY TOWARDS MALAYA

Local trends and the Chinese state's nationalizing aspirations regarding the Nanyang Chinese were joined by the Comintern's pursuit of Soviet geopolitical interests in Southeast Asia. The result was the creation of the MCP. The Comintern's goals were to be achieved through the establishment of "national" communist parties, which, according to point 17 of the Comintern 21 requirements of acceptance of a party as a Comintern section, were each supposed to be called "a party of a country" (*partiya etoi strany*).¹⁸³ The Comintern's goal was to revive the Indonesian party and to connect Southeast Asia into the global communist network.

¹⁸⁴ In this section, I will discuss the evolution of the Comintern's policy regarding Malaya and Singapore in the 1920s.

¹⁸² Kuhn, "Why China Historians."

¹⁸³ "21 usloviye priyema v Komintern" (Twenty-one conditions of acceptance into the Comintern). Second Edition, Introduction by Pyatnitskiy, (Publishing House TsK VKP(b)[CC CPSU], 1934). Similarly, the name of the party of "Annam" was changed to the party of "Indochina." According to the resolution of the CC of the Indochinese party, "the name "Annam" party did not cover Cambodia and Laos and left the proletariat of these countries outside of the party. "Resolyutsiya TsK (Indokitayskoi) partii o politicheskom polozhenii v Indokitaye i zadachah partii" (Resolution of the Central Committee of Indochinese party about political situation in Indochina and the party tasks) 21 March 1931 RGASPI 495/154/630/8. The choice of "Indochina" as the name of the "country" was, likely, based on the Comintern's frame of reference that was based on colonial divisions according to mother country in the region (hence, Malaya, Indochina, Indonesia) as well as on the Vietnamese aspirations for the "Golden Peninsula," that is, Indochina. See Goscha, *Thailand*.

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 4.

The Comintern ideas about Southeast Asia and China came from Dutch communist Hendrik Sneevliet.¹⁸⁵ Another important Comintern policy-maker was Tan Malaka, who in 1922 advocated for the creation of the “Federation of Eastern Communists,” which was not unlike the idea of Hu Hanmin’s *Minzu Guoji*.¹⁸⁶ Malaka’s pan-Asian and Indonesian liberation aspirations, as well as Sneevliet’s experience in Indonesia and China, likely were the reasons that Indonesia was the initial goal of the Comintern policy in Southeast Asia. According to a report to the Comintern by a Profintern cadre, “Popov,” from 17 December 1923:

“It is not possible not to arrive at the conclusion that given the geographical position of the Dutch Indies between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the world struggle, the struggle of the proletariat of the Dutch Indies, should the favourable domestic conditions arrive, will be an extremely important strategic place near the most populated countries of the globe -- China and India.”¹⁸⁷

The instructions for the representative of the Eastern department of ECCI, i.e. Tan Malaka, for work in Indonesia, were to build an anti-imperialist front and closer connections between the movement in Indonesia and “all countries of the East,” building their organizations in the Malay archipelago, Indo-China, Siam, and Singapore, specifically with the GMD, which had been crossed out and “national liberation movement in China” written in its place. The “Instructions” made it clear that it was the Eastern Department of the ECCI which was to

¹⁸⁵ Tony Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (Alias Maring)* 2 Vols. (Brill Academic Publishers; 1991)

¹⁸⁶ Tan Malaka wrote, apparently about the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in November 1922, that the parties of the East were to convene in order to establish that organisation of the Eastern communists. “Guiding Principles in the colonial question,” Undated, but from the content it can be established (“5 years since October revolution”) that it was written in 1922. RGASPI 154/700/23-25.

¹⁸⁷ Java in this document was singled out as the most populated Indonesian island “Gollandskaya India,” [Dutch Indies], by Popov, 17 December 1923, RGASPI 495/214/700/32-36, esp. 36.

decide the “guiding line” in the Malay Archipelago.¹⁸⁸ The author of these instructions was Hendrikus Sneevliet, alias Maring, the godfather of the infamous united front of the CCP and GMD in China, which was modeled after the Indonesian cooperation between communists and Islamic nationalists. Sneevliet was the advocate of the link between the proletarian and national liberation struggle in the Far East. He was sent to Shanghai by the Comintern in March 1921 to study the “movement in different countries in the Far East,” and was to do so with a view to establishing an office there. Sneevliet was impressed by the labour movement in South China¹⁸⁹ and proposed linking the movement in the Philippines, Indochina, and the Dutch Indies with British India because of the similarities in the development of the movement in these countries.¹⁹⁰ Sneevliet was not able to establish connections with the Philippines, Indochina or Malaya. Thus, for him, the two movements in the Far East were China and Indonesia. These two countries remained the Comintern’s priorities in the region throughout the 1920s.

The materials at hand, however do not allow us to establish with certainty whether it was the Comintern or Tan Malaka who first came up with the idea of the network of communists that would connect South China, Southeast Asia and Vladivostok, something that had been outlined in the “Note” from Grigory Voitinsky, Head of the Eastern Secretariat, from 1923. Most likely, Voitinsky’s “Note” depicting the Comintern’s vision of a pan-Asian maritime

¹⁸⁸ Maring, “Instruktsiya upolnomichennomu vostochnogo otdela ispolkoma Komitern po rabote v Indonesii.” [the Instructions for the representative of the Eastern department of the ECCI on work in Indonesia] undated, but judging from referenced Fourth congress of the Comintern, must be 1922-1923. RGASPI 495 /154/700/18-20. This is Russian translation of "Instruktion and den Bevollmächtigten des Ost-Ressorts (Abteilung) der Exekutive der Komintern für die Arbeit in Indonesien" [Instruction to the representative of the East resorts (Department) of the Executive of the Comintern for the activities in Indonesia], drafted by Henk Sneevliet. Undated. (German text) Henk Sneevliet Papers, inv.no. 349, accessed at International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, website: <http://www.iisg.nl/collections/sneevliet/life-4.php> Accessed on 2 August 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁰ Report of Comrade H. Maring to the Executive, Moscow, 11 July 1922, in Saich, *The origins of the First United Front*, pp. 305-323, esp. 307.

network was a combination of the Comintern's ambition to link the Russian Far East with China and Southeast Asia, and was based on the ideas of Sneevliet and Tan Malaka. A 1923 document regarding the region of the Malay Archipelago gives a clear picture of the Comintern's plans for the region.¹⁹¹ Starting from 30 May 1923, the growth of a strike movement in Java gave the Comintern the idea that the Malay Archipelago already had favourable revolutionary potential that should be mobilized and utilized against British imperialism's growing influence in China and Singapore. Voitinsky thought it necessary to set up a foundation for this revolution by establishing what he called the "most important element of anti-imperial struggle": the establishment of the transport workers' unions in South China, the Malayan Archipelago (Java and Sumatra), Indochina and Siam (Bangkok and Singapore). As this struggle was to be based on a "national-revolutionary movement," it was crucial to carry out propaganda in the native language from a port on the Pacific. In order to initiate this "propaganda and organization" of the working masses "in the deep interior of international imperialism on the Pacific coast and islands," the Eastern Secretariat deemed it necessary to proceed as follows: to dispatch a comrade with good knowledge of Malay language to Singapore or Bangkok, with the task of carrying out the conference of labour organizers from Java and to establish cells. These cells were to connect Java, Malacca (Singapore), and Siam (Bangkok), to Hong Kong, through Canton and Shanghai with "the end point of connection in the Far East", i.e. Vladivostok. Newspapers in native languages were to be established in Singapore and Hong Kong, along with an "apparatus for printing addresses and pamphlets." This apparatus was to be adapted to the "fast implementation of campaigns at the directives from Moscow and Vladivostok," as well as to enable people there to inform the Executive

¹⁹¹ Grigory Voitinsky, „Spravka,“ [A Note], 1923, RGASPI 495/154/700/8,8ob.

Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in detail and promptly so that “this information truly served as the material on the basis of which the Eastern secretariat could provide the guiding line.” A comrade was to go “to Singapore or Bangkok as a journalist from a national bourgeois paper so that he could legalise himself and as a nationalist do a lecture tour against imperialism.”¹⁹² The comrade was Tan Malaka.¹⁹³ The language of these proposed lectures was apparently meant to be English.

According to the documents found to date, it was Tan Malaka who first promoted the “united front” between Chinese and “Javanese.”¹⁹⁴ It is known that Tan Malaka found Chinese and Indians to be more responsive to communist ideas in Malaya.¹⁹⁵ After he went on his grand pan-Asian tour sponsored by the Comintern, he reported about the publication of materials in “local languages” in Canton, in accordance with Voitinsky’s plan. Already in 1924 in Singapore, there was “comrade L.” who had “a school” with 100 scholars and who already had relations among “plantation workers and town workers.” “L.” planned to establish a newspaper to be paid for by the workers. Malaka believed there were enough people to lead the work in Singapore. He adopted Sneevliet’s idea of linking the Southeast Asian movement to India further, and suggested that Singapore was the chance to work not only in Malaya, but also

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ The term “Java” was used interchangeably for Java and all of Dutch East Indies and not only one of the islands of Malay Archipelago. In the 1920s, the Malay and Indonesian students were collectively termed the *Jawa* (Javanese) community. Roff, W.R., ‘Indonesian and Malay Students in Cairo in the 1920’s’, *Indonesia*, Vol. 9, (1970), pp. 73–87, esp. 73, cited in Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, *Malay Anti-Colonialism in British Malaya : A Re-appraisal of Independence Fighters of Peninsular Malaysia Journal of Asian and African Studies* 2007 42: 371-398, esp. 379. Ho Chi Minh referred to Java and Siam as “two countries” Ho Chi Minh’s report ,18 November 1931 RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27. The authorship of Ho is established based on how well informed he was on the part devoted to Indo-China and on specific suggestions to the Comintern regarding the Indochinese party. He also referred to “us” as he spoke about the Indochinese party.

¹⁹⁵ Cheah Boon Kheng, *The apprenticeship of the MCP*, p. 9.

in India because it is “not very far,” and because of the large number of migrant workers in Singapore who were from India.¹⁹⁶ In regard to the Chinese-Javanese united front, Tan Malaka had the following plan:

“The idea about the united front between Chinese and Javanese seem to have affected our Chinese comrade very much. Yesterday I conferred with Comrade Tan. We are agreeing to build a special committee in Canton (Java-China) committee for the work in Java among the Chinese population. This Committee will consist of one-Hong-Konger, one Cantonese, and one Javanese (Hassan [Malaka himself]) It will study the Chinese condition in Java, build connection with the Javanese party, give general line in Sino-Java Committee in Java will establish and promote the United front between the Chinese and Javanese population. After 10 days a very good comrade (he had taken part in the Chinese revolution and will after 10 days finished his study at military college) will leave Canton for Java. He will stay there with some men more as teacher. That is the general idea. After 10 day we will confer with comrade Tan and our officer-comrade. We will discuss the political line we have to follow, the general work and the mode of working. I do not need to tell you the importance of this plan. The Chinese population in Java represent a very important element politically and economically, it is not an easy work, therefore it is very good to have such a comrade [sic].”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Tan Malaka’s letter from Canton to Heller, signed by his alias “Hassan” 7July 1924. RGASPI 534-4/106/1-2. Original English text. L.N. Heller (1875-?) in 1922-1930 the head of the Eastern department of the Profintern. M.L.Titareno, M. Leutner, *VKP(b), Komintern I Kitai. Dokumenty T.III. chast 1, 2. VKP(b), Komintern I Sovetskoye dvizheniye s Kitaye. 1927-1931.[CPSU (Bolshevik), the Comintern, and China. Vol.III, part 1 and 2]* (Moscow: AO Buklet, 1999), pp. 1526.

¹⁹⁷ Tan Malaka’s letter, 7 July 1924.

Profintern materials confirm Roff's conclusion that it was Tan Malaka who requested that Canton send a Chinese to work in Singapore.¹⁹⁸ This comrade was a Hainanese who was suitable for working among Hainanese workers in plantations in the Malay states where Cantonese-speaking "comrade L." was useless.¹⁹⁹ It was Fu Daqing who would be the Comintern representative at the founding conference of the MCP.²⁰⁰ Thus, there were two Profintern "agents" in Singapore in 1924 before the Nanyang section of the CCP was established there, and in the summer of 1924 they already had published a newspaper.²⁰¹

There were other connections between the Chinese communists in Malaya and the Comintern. The secretary of the reorganized NPC in 1928 was Xu Tianbing, who was one generation older than the rest, and who took part in the revolution of 1911 and had studied in Moscow in 1926.²⁰² Fu Daqing studied in Moscow in 1922-1924, participated in the Nanchang and Guangzhou uprisings and Lenin's funeral, and was Borodin's interpreter at the same time as his classmate Ho Chi Minh was Borodin's secretary.²⁰³ Yang Shanji (杨善济), the head of

¹⁹⁸ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 223.

¹⁹⁹ Tan Malaka's letter, 7 July 1924.

²⁰⁰ Hanrahan, Gene Z. *The Communist Struggle in Malaya. With an introduction by Victor Purcell*. (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954), p. 6, cited in Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965) p.449 n 142. Fu Daqing, the head of the NPC propaganda department, was dispatched also by the Guangdong Provincial Committee to Nanyang, according to Xie Fei, in the summer of 1928. Xie Fei, "Memoir."

²⁰¹ Tan Malaka's letter from Canton, 16 September 1924. RGASPI 534/ 4/106/9.

²⁰² Zhu Yihui, Hainan Mingren zhuan lue (xia), [Biographical Dictionary of Famous Hainanese] (Guangzhou: guangdong luyou chubanshe, 1995). pp. 143-146.

²⁰³ "Proverochnyi list studenta, Fedorov (Fe Tagin))" [Student's control card (Fu Tagin)] RGASPI. 495/225/793/5. Fang Chuan, Zhang Yi eds., *Zhongguo xiandai mingren zhenwen yi shi*, [The stories of famous people of modern China] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1989), p. 393; *Zhonghua zhuming lieshi die r shi san juan*, [The famous martyrs of China. Vol.23] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2002), p.562.

the CYL in 1926, also studied in Moscow.²⁰⁴ According to Yong, the NPC was under Comintern guidance.²⁰⁵ Perhaps the NPC even received Comintern money occasionally. When, in the fall of 1929, the editorial board of the *Nanyang Worker* did not have anything to eat for four days, it was Fu Daqing who “sent some money.”²⁰⁶ It is plausible that the Comintern was the source of this money.

In 1928, two 6th congresses – one of the Comintern (from 17 July to 1 September), and the other of the CCP (from 18 June to 11 July) – took place in Moscow. The CCP 6th congress elected a new leadership, which was under strong Comintern influence, and proclaimed both the policy of organizing Soviets to replace the old political system and the importance of guerrilla warfare.²⁰⁷ The Comintern’s 6th congress adopted a more proactive policy in the colonial countries and accentuated the importance of learning from the Chinese revolution. The establishment of national, Comintern-endorsed parties in Southeast Asia was the result of decisions taken at this congress. The discourse of the importance of supporting and learning from the Chinese revolution was the key to the emergence of the MCP’s nationalist internationalism and its “nation.”

According to two sources, the very reorganization of the Nanyang communist organization in 1928 into the NPC took place at the 6th congress of the CCP.²⁰⁸ At the Comintern’s 6th congress in Moscow in August 1928, two points were made that parallel the

²⁰⁴ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 68.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.72.

²⁰⁶ Xie, “Memoir”, p. 166.

²⁰⁷ Saich, Tony, ‘The Chinese Communist Party During the Era of the Comintern (1919-1943),’ unpublished manuscript.

²⁰⁸ Xie, “Memoir”, p. 161 and “Hu Zhiming de shehui zhuyi sixiang” [The Socialist Thought of Ho Chi Minh], in He Baoyi, *Shijie Shehui sixiang tongjian [World Socialist Thought]* (Renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 492.

rhetoric of the Li Lisan's letter to the NPC: the importance of the Chinese revolution and of building a communist movement based on local conditions, i.e. indigenization. Bukharin's concluding remarks emphasized that "to learn from this really enormous experience [of the Chinese revolution] was the task of our congress."²⁰⁹ The Chinese revolution and the subtlety of its experiences and errors were the central frame of reference at the congress. Besides, the Comintern's statements regarding a party policy based on local conditions, i.e. the policy of indigenization of the communist movement, had been made since at least the Second congress (July 19 – August 7, 1920)²¹⁰. These are also echoed in the statements of the leaders of other communist parties, such as the Taiwanese communist party in 1928.²¹¹ However, at the 6th congress, this point was one of the central questions.

Li Lisan attended both congresses and likely transmitted the message he received there to the CCP branches, including the one in the Nanyang. Li Lisan's letter invoked basic Comintern ideas, such as developing the revolutionary strategy on the basis of on-the-ground conditions, or general encouragement of self-criticism by the parties in their reports to their superiors, but it still largely expressed its own views on the Nanyang revolution. Nanyang communists' views on the Nanyang revolution were independent of the Comintern's. As we have seen, the Nanyang communists had persisted in focusing on the Chinese in Malaya. Moreover, the CCP sent the directive only "for discussion" and suggested that, "As the problems of Nanyang are complicated, the central Committee can only point out a draft[sic]."

²⁰⁹ *Stenograficheskiy otchet VI kongressa Komintern, Vypusk 5, [Stenographic report of the 6th congress of the Comintern. Volume 5]* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo, 1929), p. 143.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vypusk 4 (Volume 4), p.414.

²¹¹ K.Tertitski, A.Belogurova, *Taiwanskoye kommunisticheskoye dvizheniye i Komintern. Issledovaniye. Dokumenty (1924-1932) (Taiwanese Communist Movement and the Comintern. A Study. Documents. 1924-1932)* (Moscow: Vostok-Zapad, 2005), p. 95.

It was also submitted to the Comintern, yet, “before it has become the formal resolution you may adopt it as the direction of your work.”²¹² By doing so, the CCP was making a gesture towards the Comintern and also redirected responsibility to the Comintern. Yet, the CC CCP suggested that, “The party in Nanyang[sic] should make preparations to establish an independent party of Nanyang, directly instructed by the Third International.” Moreover, the party indicated that “suggestions should be submitted to the Third International to call their attention to the work of Nanyang, because it would occupy a very important position during World War and to ask them to convey a meeting of the party of various nations to discuss the work of Nanyang.”²¹³ The CC redirected the Nanyang communists to the Comintern and Profintern to obtain resources for implementing these suggestions.²¹⁴

The CCP relied on the Comintern to establish a frontier enclave, the Nanyang communist party, under international (i.e. Comintern) jurisdiction, and wanted the Comintern to connect the Chinese networks in the Nanyang, thus incorporating Chinese networks into the Comintern’s international network.²¹⁵ As a result, they were linked into the network of “Nanyang” nations that were to be emancipated by the Chinese.

²¹² “Li Lisan’s letter.”

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ This will be discussed in chapter 4.

The Establishment of the Malayan “National” Communist Party: the Emerging Discourse of the Malayan Nation

In April 1930, the Nanyang Provisional Committee was abolished and in its place three communist parties were organized: the Indochinese, the Siamese, and the Malayan. The Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern in Shanghai, which had been re-established there in late 1928, was to direct the MCP. In early 1930 in Hong Kong, the Southern Bureau of the CCP was established to guide the communist movement in the Nanyang.²¹⁶ The 1930 reorganization of the Nanyang CCP committee was the consequence of the Comintern’s policy of creating a party in each country, fomenting world revolution, supporting the Chinese revolution and pursuing Soviet strategic goals in the region. In 1928, the Comintern was considering establishing an “overseas centre “ of the CCP “near China (Singapore, Manila, etc.)” where among large Chinese overseas communities the members of the CC were not known and could do their work unnoticed, unlike in Shanghai.²¹⁷ It also followed from the indigenization impulse of the Chinese revolutionaries in Malaya. The MCP was an intersection of the Comintern’s and a Chinese association’s indigenisation. The MCP was a frontier enclave where Chinese communists sought to “carve out” their niche independently of the Chinese state, i.e. the GMD. This niche, which was not yet occupied, was the niche of a party that would advocate for

²¹⁶ Wang Jianying, *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi. Dashiji. 1921-1937*, (The history of the CCP organisation) 3 vols., vol.2. “1930” (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2003).

²¹⁷ “Pismo A.E. Albrehta I.A. Pyatnitskomu” [The letter of A.E. Albreht to I.A. Paytnitskiy] 1 May 1928, *Comintern and China*, Vol.3, pp. 381-384, esp. 383. A.E. Albreht was the representative of the Comintern’s International Liaison Department (OMS, *otdel mezhdunarodnyh svyazey*) in China. I.A. Paytnitskiy, was the member of ECCI presidium. For their biographical information see *Comintern and China*, Vol.3 part 2, pp. 1514, 1557-1558.

Malaya's independence. It was also an institution created by communists there to deal with and respond to the opportunity of international legitimacy and cash provided by the Comintern.²¹⁸

The indigenization of the MCP, which had been previously promoted by the GMD and the CCP in 1929, was now also promoted by the Comintern and became the party line. However, despite aloof slogans and the emphasis on non-Chinese membership numbers, it was obvious that non-Chinese membership was negligible. In order to comply with the need to organize a united party of various ethnic groups, the Nanyang communists came up with the idea, based on CCP suggestions, to organize different ethnic groups into separate parties, and then unite them into the MCP. This approach was based on the precedent of organizing the party this way in Siam where Vietnamese cells were united with the Chinese ones, and on a slippage of understanding of the word *minzu*, which for the Malaya communists meant "people" and not "country." By adopting the Comintern's meaning of "national party," Chinese communists in Malaya established the discursive foundation of the Malayan -- and proletarian -- nation.

The third conference was planned and delayed for over a year because of the arrest of the secretary of the NPC (who and when). It was first planned for February 1929, and then delayed until September 1929. The Nanyang party twice sent a representative to the CC CCP (apparently, in Guangdong) for the directives for the conference.²¹⁹ The MCP was to be

²¹⁸ See Kuhn, "Why China Historians."

²¹⁹ "Minutes," p.86.

established at the third representative conference of the Nanyang party²²⁰ on 21-23 April 1930.²²¹

The MCP was to be responsible for the Siamese party, which was to come into existence after the Nanyang party was divided, and only once it was strong enough. There were representatives from Malaya in various places who presented reports about the political situation, economy, labour movement, and party activity. The conference was presided over by two Comintern envoys: the Chinese Fu Daqing and the Vietnamese Ho Chi Minh. Ho established an independent Indochinese party a month earlier by extracting it from the Nanyang party. Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern (FEB) correspondence reveals that both Fu Daqing and Ho Chi Minh brought the message from the Comintern to the Malayan communists.²²² The goal of the 3rd conference of the Nanyang party, which came to be known as the MCP

²²⁰ The British translated *minzu* as “race” and reported about the formation of the MCP that in order to extend the communist party activities to “other races in South seas” they urged the formation of “racial groups.” Also, the British were aware that the communist party of Nanyang changed its name to “the united secretariat of the communist party of the Nanyang races.” “Monthly review of the Chinese Affairs,” December 1930, No.4, p. 52. CO 571.

²²¹ “Minutes”, pp.86,109. The existing historiography on the MCP has conflicting dates for its establishment. See Hack and Chin, *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 Johor, Buloh Kesap. Fujio Hara, “The MCP before the Second World War,” p. 57, Yong, *The Origins*, p. 129. Nowhere in the MCP documents collected by the Comintern was the place of the MCP’s establishment mentioned.

²²² The FEB in Shanghai, in its letter to the ECCI on 3 March 1930, a month and a half before the MCP establishment, wrote: “in mid-April in Singapore the party conference of the communist organizations of Malaya will take place and one of the Chinese comrades with instructions from us will take part [Fu Daqing].” The FEB continued, “several days ago an Annamite comrade, Nguen Ai-kwok, arrived here [Ho Chi Minh].” “We enclose his letter [not found in RGASPI], in which he wrote all that he had conveyed during our conversation. We decided to use him for the work in contact with us and gave him some tasks regarding the organization and continuation of the work on the ground.” M.L.Titarenko, M. Leutner, *VKP(b), Komintern I Kitai. Dokumenty T.III. chast 2. VKP(b), Komintern I Sovetskoye dvizheniye s Kitaye. 1927-1931. Vol.III, part 2* (Moscow: AO Buklet, 1999), pp. 822-823. The MCP establishment was under double supervision: “The central committee and K.” (likely, the Comintern) have decided the political line direction in Nanyang” and the representative of the East office (FEB) and Ho Chi Minh -- “came to lead the work in our conference.” “Minutes,” pp. 86.

establishment conference in accordance with “King-tsehung’s opening speech, was yet another reorganization of the NPC.²²³

Party membership data from the founding conference shows that there were Malay and Indian members, but they numbered only in the dozens, or sometimes only one or two per locality. Overall, party membership grew after the second representative conference in October 1928, when the party had 600 members.²²⁴ At the MCP’s founding conference, the party claimed to have 1,500 members. The constituency was not homogenous. Overall, the majority were gum cutters, teachers, seamen, and servants in foreigners’ homes. For example, in Johor there were 105 members (including 3 Malays), Selangor had 108, and Ipoh district had 26. Twenty percent of these members in Ipoh were industrial workers, and the rest were shop employees and “foreign workers.”²²⁵ . A number of representatives claimed there was an improvement in party work since 1929 – presumably after the CC CCP directive – and especially since early 1930, presumably because it was close enough to the time of the conference that they felt they could safely claim such an improvement. There was a Malay representative (despite the arrests of Malay members not long before that²²⁶) and a CYL

²²³ “Minutes,” p.86.

²²⁴ “Minutes,” pp. 130, 139.

²²⁵ Most likely, “foreign workers” were servants in foreigners’ homes. *Chiayinpa* district had 23 comrades, 70% of them “gum cutters,” 20% *falang* makers (珐琅, Cloisonné, metal work decorated with enamel, My thanks to Liu Tianhan for identifying this), and 10% shop employees. *Pasen* had 6 comrades who were “small dealers and foreign workers.” Penang had 70 members, all Chinese, 30% teachers, 20% gum and small traders, 40% seamen, 10% other. Sembilan had 150 party members, mostly rubber workers. In Ipoh (*Japo*), there were 120, 5% of whom were teachers; *Futsing* had 60 comrades, “Minutes,” p. 104.

²²⁶ For the Malay members, the only name I have from the Comintern materials is an Indonesian communist, Subagio, who joined the communist party of Singapore in 1930, according to his letter dated 21 June 1930. RGASPI 495/154/752/ 38.

representative from Siam.²²⁷ As for the red labour unions, there were 5,000 members of the red trade union, 20 industrial nucleuses, and 60 industrial correspondents. These party membership numbers did not include AIL and CYL members.²²⁸

Throughout 1930, membership fluctuated between 1,100 and 1,500. On 1 June, 1930, the MCP still had 1,500 members. The Red Labour Union had three industrial unions (rubber, mining, and seamen) with 1,333 members, and 11 unions of handicraftsmen with 3,244 members.²²⁹ The membership of the red unions was 4,250. The party had 1,130, and the CYL had 441 as of October 1930, with the largest organizations being in Singapore (1,150; 355; 203), Sembilan (460; 238; 37), and Johor (550; 120; 79).²³⁰

According to Ho Chi Minh's letter dated 10 June 1930, most of the party members were seamen, workers of rubber plantations and tin miners.²³¹ Sometime in 1930, party membership was 1,400. Of this, 70% were labourers, 10% were intellectuals, and 20% were "liberal businessmen." Ninety percent of the party members were Chinese, and the others were "Malaysians" and Indians. Seventy percent of the members in the leading organs of various levels were workers. There were five local committees and four special sub-district committees.

²²⁷ "Minutes," pp. 137-140.

²²⁸ "Minutes," p. 113.

²²⁹ "Letter to the MCP." 1 June 1, 1930. RGASPI 495/62/6/1-1ob..

²³⁰ "Informatsiya o Malayskih shtatah" [Information about Malay states], 3 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/7/2-4. (4180 is the correct total for the number of workers after adding up the numbers for all places) Ho Chi Minh's letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930, presented a more optimistic picture: there were 5000 members of labour union where "Chinese, Indian and Malays are being all fraternally united". Ho Chi Minh's letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930. RGASPI 495/62/8/6.

²³¹ Ho Chi Minh's letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930, RGASPI 495/62/8/6.

Chinese comprised 90% of party members, among which six out of ten Chinese were “Chuennya natives from south Kwangtung” [Hainan].²³²

The conference, as in 1929, criticized the party for carrying out a Chinese revolution in Malaya: “the party did not understand the revolutionary task in Nanyang but only [how] to do the narrow national movement”²³³ The meaning of “national” here was obviously “Chinese.” The party’s shortcoming was its failure to indigenize. It “organized a Chinese party in Malaya so that the Malaya party doesn’t (sic) adapt to Malay conditions and despite the criticism of the CCP this hasn’t been corrected.” The causes of this failure were that “the party foundation was built on Chinese members,” that “the responsible people came from China,” and the “patriotism of Chinese toiling masses in Malaya.”²³⁴ Other reasons included a lack of investigation into the conditions in Malaya, which should have formed the basis of the party’s tactics, and a lack of special instructions from the CC CCP to the Malay party.²³⁵ The way to fix this was to bring workers of other nationalities into the party and the labour unions.²³⁶

²³² In Malaya in general, Hainanese, “Chuennya,” were 20-35%, amongst overall Cantonese (60%). Ho Chi Minh’s letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930RGASPI 495/62/8/6. According to MCP analysis (most likely, about Singapore) among the 470,000 Chinese, 10% were “lackeys of imperialists,” 10% were students, 20% were merchants, and 60% were “toiling masses and liberal businessmen.” “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” Undated report from 1930, RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4.

²³³ “Minutes,” pp.130-131. Yet, “Nanyang comrades” were said to have succeeded in recognizing that “the natives of Malay states [should] participate in the revolution in Nanyang.” Also, discussions were held about the tactics of the party, educational classes, and party publications were set up. But because of the lack of money and cadres, it did not go well. “Minutes,” pp.133-134.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ According to the text of the “Minutes,” “the political line of Malaya should be implemented and [the Party should] not just follow “the CCP line.” p. 135, 132.

²³⁶ “Minutes,” pp. 152,153.

Malayan National Party's Nation and Nanyang Peoples

The English text of Li Lisan's directive to the Nanyang party reveals the slippage in the meaning of the word *minzu*, which, after the establishment of the MCP, caused unintentional disagreement between the MCP and the Comintern, that caused a semantic slippage. As a result, the communist organization that in the Nanyang was built according to "people" (*minzu*) - Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant communist organizations - was to become the basis of the "nation-wide" communist parties of the nation-states that did not yet exist, such as Malaya. The word "*minzu*" meant "nation," "country," "peoples," and "nationalities." The word "national" meant "countrywide." Alternate usage of these words in the Nanyang communists' documents reveals a misunderstanding that created a semantic slippage, which in turn created a Malayan nation for the MCP.

In the text of the CC CCP letter to the Nanyang Provisional committee, "We should further impress these slogans and conception deeply upon the minds of the Chinese to remove their wrong ideas as to look down on other nations and then the real unity can be obtained [sic]."²³⁷ *Minzu* was translated as "nations" and "national," and it referred to the different ethnic groups that lived in the Nanyang. The phrases, "The national problem of Nanyang" and "the nations in Nanyang are very complex" illustrate the nature of the translation slippage: the word "nation(al)" had two different meanings, one as "peoples" and another as "country."

The Nanyang communists imagined a communist party that was organized according to ethnicity, i.e. "people" -- that is "*minzu*". To solve the problem of the party's confinement to Chinese communities, the MCP members-to-be, apparently responding to the Li Lisan's letter,

²³⁷ Ibid.

suggested that “the Party should [...] establish nuclei in various peoples in order to establish the independent party of each people.”²³⁸

The Nanyang communists knew about the Comintern “national” party principle, but interpreted “peoples” as “nation” because in Chinese it is one and the same word: “*minzu*.” The Nanyang communists therefore thought that the Comintern wanted parties organized by ethnicity as “national” parties. According to the MCP’s political resolutions, “In view of the mistake [sic] that the system of Malay party belongs to Chinese party, some members insist to organise an unity Party embracing all people in Malaya. This organizational line is also contradictory to the organisational principle of international party, *for the unit of organisation is people*. Each native people should organise a national Party. [...] To organise an unity Party consisting of various people is incorrect.” A blasphemy in terms of the Comintern’s policy of “one country-one party,” this idea of organizing separate parties based on ethnic characteristics was condemned by a handwritten remark above these lines by a Comintern cadre: “*sovershenno neverno*” (“absolutely wrong”). Elsewhere, the FEB said that the idea of creating multiple parties of all nationalities must be “combated” and that there must be only one party “including workers of all nationalities.”²³⁹ The MCP planned to organize independent parties of various peoples for which a “Nanyang various peoples communists” joint secretariat²⁴⁰ was to be established as a means of transition and in place of the “Nanyang Preliminary [provisional]

²³⁸ “Minutes,” pp.108, 144-146.

²³⁹ Comintern’s letter to the MCP sent between December 1930 and January 1931. RGASPI 495/62/12/4.

²⁴⁰ “Minutes,” p. 118. RGASPI 514/1/634/118.No Chinese text of the minutes is available. We only have the English name of this committee. Resolutions adopted at the Third representative conference, p.

Committee of the Nanyang Communist Party.” Simultaneously, the Malay Communist Party should be established.”²⁴¹

Contrary to appearances, the views of the Comintern and those of the Chinese communists in Malaya regarding the organizational mode of dealing with other “peoples” were not in disagreement. The cause of the problem was the slip in meaning of the word *minzu*. Since both “nation” and “nationality” in Chinese is *minzu*, the communists in Malaya understood the Comintern’s idea of a “national party” based on the assumption that the “national” was “*minzu*” as ethnic group, or people.

Another telling disparity in meaning was that of the word “national.” Since the word “national” meant “countrywide,” the equivalent of a country was both “Nanyang” and “Malaya.” For example, at the NPC’s enlarged plenum in the first half of July 1928, Nanyang communists used “national” to mean “according to ethnic group, i.e. peoples.” The plenum decided that the NPC must start a “national movement” in the Nanyang and attract and recommend that Malays and Indians join the Chinese party organization and accept the Comintern’s leadership.²⁴² This decision points to the fact that the differentiation between the Nanyang and Malaya was not one of crucial importance to them. Thus, the words “nation (*minzu*),” “Malaya,” and “Nanyang” were used interchangeably. In the documents of the Guangdong Central Committee, the word “Malayan” did not appear together with “national”; “national” referred instead to a jurisdictional space of the communist party, but there was no correlation between “national” and “Malaya.” In the second half of 1928, the NCP did not have

²⁴¹ “Minutes,” p. 131 .

²⁴² “A report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC “ RGASPI 495/62/1/1-17, esp. 2,3.

a plan for working with different “nationalities” (*natsionalnosty* in Russian translation).²⁴³ While the Comintern translated the “Nanyang CP” as the “provisional committee of the Malay archipelago” (*vremennyi komitet malayskogo arhipelaga*),²⁴⁴ Chinese communists in Malaya continued to refer to Nanyang. In the minutes of the founding conference, participants also referred both to the “Malaya party” and the “Nanyang party.”²⁴⁵ This illustrates Kuhn’s²⁴⁶ point about frontier enclaves; one of the enclaves was the Chinese communist organization in Malaya, which included parts of the “nation”, yet was struggling to be independent of the Chinese bureaucracy, including the CCP, whose directive they considered to be inadequate for conditions in the Nanyang.

At the time, the Chinese communists imagined that the place where they were was the Malaya Peninsula, not Malaya as a country: “although most of the party members in Malay Peninsula are Chinese, it is necessary to form C.P. of Malaya Peninsula. This is not contrary to the organizational system of international party. The organization of the communist committee of Malaya Peninsula will be annulled as soon as the C.P. of Malay Peninsula has been formed. The CP of Malaya Peninsula can help the organization in those districts where the communist party has not been formed [sic].”²⁴⁷ Possibly, Chinese communists attempted to avoid using the term “Malaya,” which was considered by Malay nationalists as a colonial creation and an endorsement of collaboration with the colonialists, and therefore had no legitimacy. What was

²⁴³ “Resolutions adopted after investigation of the work of the [Nanyang]Provisional Committee,” RGASPI 495/62/1/24.

²⁴⁴ “A report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC,” RGASPI 495/62/1/16.

²⁴⁵ “The Minutes.”

²⁴⁶ Kuhn “Why China Historians.”

²⁴⁷ “Resolutions adopted at the Third Congress of Malaya Party,” RGASPI 495/62/3/1-10 esp.8.

legitimate was “land of the Malays,” *tanah Melayu*, and its legitimate owners, the *bangsa melayu*, from which non-locally born immigrants were excluded as late as 1939.²⁴⁸

In contrast, for the Comintern, which may not have had any idea about this negative connotation of “Malaya,” “national” meant “Malayan” and each time the Comintern used the word “national” it meant “Malayan.” As a result, by promoting the “national” -- i.e., Malayan -- party, the Comintern added internationalist legitimacy to the term Malaya and contributed to the fomenting of national Malay identity for the MCP, which was still based in the Nanyang but was about to become Malayan. The Comintern imagined Malaya as a country, or as a nation-state, but for the Chinese communists, and for the rest of the population in that territory, no such entity existed. “Malaya” was not how the Malayan Chinese communists imagined the place they were in; rather, it was either a Nanyang inhabited by various *minzu*, one of which was Chinese, or the Malaya Peninsula, from which the Chinese were excluded. Chinese communists in Malaya wanted to establish separate parties for each *minzu* and then to unite them in accordance with their vision of the Nanyang and its peoples. This vision also matched the situation in the communist organizations in the part of Southeast Asia that had two ethnic branches, the Chinese and Vietnamese, and provided the basis for their (incorrect) understanding of what the Comintern meant by “national party.” For the Chinese communists, it was a party based on common ethnicity, but for the Comintern, it was a country-based party.

At the NCP meeting that established the MCP, the Chinese communists advocated the goal of revolution in Malaya and achieving “a united front of the oppressed peoples” through

²⁴⁸ Tan, “The rhetoric of Bangsa and *Minzu*,” pp. 7, 9.

the creation of a “democratic republic by free union among the various peoples in Nanyang,”²⁴⁹ also referred to as the “democratic republic of the Malaya states.”²⁵⁰ Apparently, the idea of the Soviet federation made a lot of sense in Malaya with its “complex nations” (*minzu fuza*). To be sure, the communist party they planned to establish was one they imagined in the same “federation” mode. This, combined with the fact that the Comintern introduced the idea of a “national” party based on Malaya as a country, not on “Chinese” or “Malayan” ethnicity, gave the MCP the legitimization to make the Malaya revolution on the behalf of Malayan nation, which did not even exist in 1930. Thus, the Comintern’s policy of “one party, one country” initiated the association by the Chinese communists in Malaya of Malaya as a nation-state. By encouraging a Malayan revolution, rather than a Nanyang revolution, the Comintern stimulated the “nationalization” of the revolution in Malaya, which was becoming a country (and potentially a nation), as opposed to a revolution led by international or expatriate forces.

According to some scholars, in the early 1930s, the Chinese and Indians in Malaya started to develop an identification with Malaya.²⁵¹ Thus, the Comintern’s discourse matched the local context. The very definition of the Malayan communist party and the goal of creating a Soviet Federation of Malaya put the mission on the shoulders of the Malaya communists to unite “British Malaya” into a “nation-state.” British Malaya consisted at the time of several sultanates under British domination. *Minzu* gained the meaning of “Malaya” for the Chinese communists in Malaya after the Comintern enforced the establishment of the Malayan

²⁴⁹ The propaganda of the establishment of the Nanyang Peoples Democratic Republic “(by free union)” was to be communicated through published pamphlets in Siamese, Malay, Indian, Chinese, and English. “Minutes,” pp. 119-120.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Hua Yu Yin, *Class and Communalism in Malaysia* (London: Zed Books LTD, 1983). However, only Ibrahim Yacoob, the founder of the Young Malay Union (Kesatuan Melayu Muda) in 1937, is the first to be credited for coining the inclusive notion of Malaya. Tan Liok-Ee, *The rhetoric of Bangsa*.

Communist Party. The CCP aspired to organize a party of “Nanyang peoples,” which was certainly larger than just Malaya but lacked clarity regarding its geographical boundaries. Meanwhile, the Comintern envisioned the party of Malaya, which at the moment was (incorrectly) an overwhelmingly Chinese party instead of multiethnic party, but with operations (correctly) according to the Comintern plan, i.e. remaining in the vicinity of the CCP. For the MCP, the Malayan nation encompassed all Malayan ethnic groups in the fashion of the multiethnic Soviet federation, an “empire of nations.”²⁵² The foremost problem that Nanyang communists saw was “the problem of the relationship between the revolutionary parties of the other peoples,” which they did not feel they had a way to handle.²⁵³ Most likely, these were to be established parties of the “various peoples” that were discussed above, parties which would then be united. The Malaya communists lamented that in the past three years they “only had the basis of mass organizations among the Chinese labourers.” The situation was to be solved by organizing independent parties of various peoples,²⁵⁴ apparently because this was the way communist organizations existed prior to that in Malaya²⁵⁵ and in Siam. Another factor was the reality of racial divisions within industry,²⁵⁶ and because these divisions were the only way they knew to organize the work. Interestingly, while doing work among soldiers who were mostly Malays, the party was supposed to “stimulate their national consciousness” so that they would participate in the anti-imperialist movement together with workers and peasants. As the

²⁵²Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005)

²⁵³ “Minutes,” pp. 116-117.

²⁵⁴ “Minutes,” p. 118.

²⁵⁵ Cheah, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*.

²⁵⁶ Ho Chi Minh’s letter from Singapore, 10 June 1930, RGASPI 495/62/8/4-7, esp. 6.

categories of nation and ethnicity were conflated in the word *minzu* (I assume this was the word in the Chinese original), after the establishment of the MCP, the “ethnic” movement became a movement on behalf of the nation. According to the minutes of the founding conference, the immediate goal of the revolution in Malaya was the creation of the “democratic republic by free union among the various peoples in Nanyang,” which in the same paragraph is called the “democratic republic of the Malaya states.” Was the slippage accidental? Obviously, the party and the federation were to be organized by a comparable principle that went back to the organizational principle of the Soviet Union, and was reminiscent of the way in which the Chinese communists imagined the unification of different ethnic branches of the communist organization in the Nanyang.

The CCP’s idea of organizing the “Nanyang secretariat” can be traced to early 1928. “Organizational principles and the work line adopted by the CC and the Comintern” were discussed “at the 20th plenum of the Central executive committee [Guangdong] [in March 1928], where it was 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.” The Nanyang communists discussed the organization of multiple revolutionary parties on the basis of ethnicity after the discussions with the CC CCP: “After the return of our representatives from the CC plenum, we immediately started to discuss organizational principles and the work line adopted by the CC and the Comintern.”²⁵⁷

This discourse on unification of the cells of “different peoples” existed prior to the MCP’s establishment: “ In order to make the Party of Nanyang an independent organization,

²⁵⁷ The party organization in Sumatra was also mentioned in this document. “The party publishes 2 legal newspapers but they cannot increase the influence over the masses sufficiently. “Report about the situation in Nanyang.” January 1930, RGASPI 514/1/632/16.

the party of various nations in Nanyang should be united into a general organisation”.²⁵⁸ As early as 1928, the unification of the ethnic party cells was carried out in Siam.²⁵⁹ These, apparently, were the Chinese and Vietnamese, who were the overwhelming majority of the Siamese party.²⁶⁰ Above all, there is evidence in the October 1930 - February 1931 Comintern letters suggesting that it was the initiative of local communists to establish the MCP,²⁶¹ seemingly referring to the CC CCP initiative to move the Nanyang organization away from the GMD influence expressed in the Li Lisan’s directive. Yet, according to the MCP letter to the British communist party, the Nanyang communists followed the “Advice of the ‘Bureau’ in reorganizing themselves into an independent communist party of Malaya.”²⁶²

²⁵⁸ “Li Lisan’s letter” RGASPI 514/1/532/12. The establishment of unified nuclei were suggested also in major industries, such as railway and mines. “Minutes,” p.117.

²⁵⁹ “The report by the Nanyang Provisional committee to the CC,” RGASPI 495/62/1/1-17, esp. 2,3.

²⁶⁰. Goscha, *Thailand* .

²⁶¹ According to the ECCI, the “MCP was nothing more than a Singapore organization of the CCP who decided recently to separate into an independent communist party of the Malay States. It is a very serious step forward, as it is absolutely clear that it is necessary to establish an independent communist party of Malay States that would include the proletariat of all nationalities who inhabit them and which will be capable of organizing and leading united struggle of the toiling masses of Malaya.” The ECCI letter to the FEB, 23 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/2/1,2. Several months later, a draft Comintern letter to the MCP stated that the party in Malaya decided correctly to transform the party of Chinese immigrants into the communist party of Malaya, uniting all nationalities. Draft Comintern letter to the MCP, 20 February 1931 RGASPI 495/62/18/8

²⁶² According to this letter, “Malay komparty[sic] is being organised since May 24th, 1930[likely, a typo, should be “April”]. Formerly, we were a Malay section of the Chinese komparty [sic]. On Apr 21st, a Conference was called. It was attended by 11 delegates, not including members of the C.C. A representative of the Eastern Bureau of the Komintern was present. Following the advice of the Bureau, our section was reorganised as an independent Komparty of Malaya.” Thus, as the Comintern said that “you decided correctly” to reorganize the party into the MCP, and this remark that the MCP was organized on the advice of the FEB reveals that the Comintern did not have leverage to exercise control -- and perhaps did not need to -- or didn’t want to in order not to spoil relations with the Malay communists. “On April 29 at the preparation meeting for May Day, all 11 comrades who attended the meeting were arrested, including the secretary of the party, the secretary of the labour union, and a member of the Party CC.” “Letter to the CP of Britain”, 1 June 1930. RGASPI 495/62/6/1-1ob. on the 1st page it is noted “*kopiya otpravlenya 29.VIII.30* (the copy is sent out on 29 August 1930)”. Judging from another note in different handwriting “make a copy and send to the CC CP of England”, 29 August 1930 is the date when the letter was sent out to the communist party of Britain. As a

Clearly, the initiative for a new organization came from several directions and each used a form of authority to justify its initiative. Ho Chi Minh, who took over from Tan Malaka as the Comintern's representative in Asia, was another architect of the Comintern's policy regarding the MCP. Ho was the head of the Comintern representative office in Hong Kong in 1930; whether he was the head of the southern bureau of the CCP in Hong Kong, which was established in 1930, and which was to lead the communist movement in the Nanyang, is not clear.²⁶³ Ho's role in the reorganization of the Nanyang provisional committee of the CCP into three "national" parties - the MCP, the Indochinese and the Siamese parties - is attributed to his dissatisfaction with the Comintern Far Eastern Bureau's decision to place the Indochinese party under the guidance of the CCP as the CCP was unifying Chinese and Vietnamese cells in Siam.²⁶⁴ In light of the CCP's intention to unify into one party all "national" branches of the communists in Nanyang, and after this was put into practice in some places in Indochina, perhaps to Ho Chi Minh it indeed looked like the CCP intended to take over the communist movement of the Vietnamese and entire Golden Peninsula, Indochina, itself.²⁶⁵ Moreover,

handwritten note on the letter suggested, the letter was sent to the addressee. However, there were doubts whether this would not jeopardise the security of Comintern communication addresses. A letter, 19 February 1931 from Profintern centre to PPTUS in Shanghai, RGASPI 534/4/360/78-79, esp. 7.

²⁶³Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 162.

²⁶⁴ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 164, 141.

²⁶⁵Goscha, *Thailand*; William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: a Life*, (New York:Hyperion,2000). According to the report of the CC ICP, "Before the foundation of the communist party, Indochinese workers had hostility (*nepriyazn*) towards the Chinese workers, but after the party's foundation, they got rid of it. There is hostility toward Chinese traders." "Chinese workers are connected to the party, but it is not clear whether they have separate cells". "Otchet TsK KP Indokitaya" [Report of the CC ICP] 2 September 1930. RGASPI 495/154/618/10-19, esp. 13, 19. According to Quinn-Judge, the Cochinchina-Cambodia committee of the CCP in the 1920s promoted the idea of a unified Indochinese communist movement, Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 252. Likely, it was also promoted as a "national" party under Chinese leadership as the Chinese communist organization in Cochinchina, comprised of refugees from the suppression of the Canton Uprising and was larger than any Vietnamese factions there. The members of this committee were reluctant to join the Indochinese party, Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 164. In Cochinchina, the situation was similar to the communist organization in Malaya and the communist cell was doing anti-Japanese propaganda and fundraising for China and anti-Japanese efforts through the

according to the “Draft Program of the CCP” of April of 1928 by the head of the Information-Statistical Institution of ECCI in Berlin, E. Varga, one of the points was the reinstatement of regions “seized by imperialists,” that is, “Formosa, Indochina, Manchuria, etc.” This point was listed together with the abolition of unequal treaties and the return of concessions.²⁶⁶ Ho Chi Minh’s report shows that he was concerned with the Chinese communist ambitions in Indochina. According to his report, the Chinese communists in Malaya before the founding of the MCP, “thought that the secretariat of Nanyang existed de facto, comprising the Philippines, Indo-China Siam, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies.” They had sent inspectors to Siam and Indochina under the name of “representatives of the Comintern” who was surprised to find an independent party of Indochina.” Ho, instead, was proposing a joint committee between the CCP, the Vietnamese communists, and the Comintern.²⁶⁷ This was the organizational model of Tan Malaka’s organization of Eastern communists and Hu Hanmin’s *Minzuguoji*.

anti-Japanese league. Because of unemployment caused by the depression, the party membership fell from 100 to 80, CYL members were 15, all mostly from Canton and Hainan a few from Swatow and Fuzhou. Earlier, a Chinese comrade who belonged to the CP of Cochinchina was working among Chinese, but then because of the language difficulties, the Chinese formed a separate Bureau. That Bureau had 3 comrades and two commissions, propaganda and labour union. It covered seven cells -- two in Saigon and 5 in *Tian*, near Saigon. Financial difficulties precluded printing of party publication, from 1931 the connection with the party of Cochinchina was lost because the meeting place was exposed. Of three Chinese labour unions, only the union of tea house workers was reported to be under the party control. There were no students and other employees in the party. “Orgrabota sredi kitaitsev Kohinhiny. Vyderzhka iz doklada sdelannogo kitaskim tovarischem is Kohinhiny” [Organizational work among the Chinese in Cochinchina. Excerpts from the report by a Chinese comrade from Cochinchina]. 1932, RGASPI 495/154/661/1-4.

²⁶⁶ Although the author was concerned about the accuracy of the “facts” and recommendations he was presenting, likely, this was based on the information provided by the Chinese communists, since this was obviously not common knowledge for a Comintern cadre without background knowledge on China. *Comintern and China*, vol.3 part 1, pp. 364-371, esp.369. For Varga’s short biography see *Comintern and China*, Vol .3 part 2.p.1522

²⁶⁷ Ho proposed to organize a 5-member inter-party commission with one representative of the FEB, and the others from the Chinese and Annam parties, in order to decide on the question of cooperation between the Yunnan and Tonkin sections, and Hong Kong and Annam, as well as the members not working in their homelands, such as the Annamese working in China. Ho’s Report, 18 November 1930, RGASPI RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27, esp. 25, 26.

The GMD, Ho Chi Minh, and the CCP promoted the idea of their compatriots learning about and subsequently emancipating the colonized peoples of Southeast Asia. Ho Chi Minh famously reprimanded the Chinese communists for not learning Malay. Ho presented himself as a role model, as he had learnt French and English when he was a migrant labourer in France.²⁶⁸ Both the Chinese and Vietnamese communist networks sought to indigenize. The ideas about Vietnamese and Chinese responsibility for the emancipation of the peoples of Southeast Asia can also be traced to their regional imagination, not unlike the inter-polity relations in the tributary system of dynastic times. With the pervasive influence of social Darwinist ideas, these nostalgic visions were enhanced with new force. Further reinforcement to these ideas came in the form of Comintern-promoted internationalism.

Internationalization

“Our Chinese nation is truly so large that our national revolution must obtain international assistance and establish international contacts. Of course, the responsibilities that we, the Chinese people, ought to bear will be heavy ones indeed. To the smaller and weaker nations we should offer support, in order to strengthen the forces of revolution and secure the foundation for revolution.”

-----Hu Hanmin, “*Minzu Guoji he disan Guoji*”, 1930²⁶⁹

The internationalism of the Chinese revolution that was promoted by the Comintern fused the GMD’s policy of “nationalization” of the *huaqiao* together with the idea of the emancipation of oppressed peoples, an idea that had originated with the GMD. The result was the promotion of indigenization. In 1930, shortly after the MCP’s establishment, the MCP

²⁶⁸ “Minutes,” pp.144-146.

²⁶⁹ “The Nationalist International and the Third International” translated by D. Barnett, “Marxism, the Communist Party and the Soviet Union: Three critiques by Hu Hanmin”, *Chinese Studies in History*, Winter 1980-1981, pp. 47-75, esp. 67-68

received the Comintern's recommendations to promote support for the Chinese and Indian revolutions²⁷⁰ among their respective ethnic communities. The rationale was that the emancipation of Malaya would help the emancipation of China and India, and would do so for the benefit of the Malaya revolution. This attitude also provided a rhetorical tool to attract members of the Chinese community, and, most importantly, on behalf of and to the benefit of the "national" liberation of Malaya. In its rhetoric, the Comintern was advising against what the CCP -- namely, Li Lisan -- advised in January 1929: to stop focusing on the Chinese revolution and to start focusing on the Nanyang revolution. However, there was no contradiction in the essence of the two recommendations. Rather, the ambiguities inherent in translation were at work once again: because the Comintern made it a condition of acceptance (into the Comintern) that a party must be called "the party of this country," it imagined Malaya as a country. The Comintern thus promoted Malayan -- i.e., national - - revolution. For the Comintern, the Chinese revolution was a rhetorical tool to mobilize the Chinese community. As for the CCP, it imagined the Nanyang revolution in Nanyang according to their understanding of the region, i.e., as a region that had no nation-state divisions. The goal of both was the indigenization of the "revolution," that is, involving non-Chinese in the movement. According to the Comintern, "this emancipation can be realized only through the united front of all the toiling masses of the Malayan state regardless of nationalities."²⁷¹

While promoting the rhetoric of the Chinese revolution, the Comintern advocated the creation of a multiethnic communist movement in Malaya. The Comintern wanted the MCP to

²⁷⁰ To support pro-Chinese campaign in India was one of the aims of the anti-imperialist league organization in India. "British Malaya Intelligence Bulletin,": August 1927, p 2.,CO 273-535. More about the role of the propaganda of the aid to China and India revolutions by the MCP is discussed in chapter 3.

²⁷¹ The letter from the FEB to the MCP, 17 December 1930 RGASPI 495/62/12/3, 3ob,4.

develop among other ethnic groups. It also criticized the MCP for several things. One was that they were 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.” It also criticized them for their “attempt to mechanistically graft the methods and some slogans of the Chinese movement in Malaya.” And finally, the Comintern felt that the MCP “still is more of a CCP organization that is working among the Chinese workers who fled from China, rather than an independent party of Malaya States.”²⁷² The ECCI recommended that the FEB “connect with the Singapore group, establish leadership over its activity, and try to convert it and use it for the establishment of the communist party of the Malay 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 to prepare Chinese, Malay, and Indian cadres, “who would provide for the organization of the independent MCP,” and who “would help the communist movement in Indonesia to form.” Moreover, the Comintern indicated that, “The proletarian movement in Singapore can play a huge role in the agitation and organization of the countries that surround it, so it is absolutely necessary that the FEB take all measures to connect with the Singapore group, study the situation there and establish leadership over its activity. It is necessary to help to prepare MCP cadres from the Chinese, Malays, and Indians.”²⁷³

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ “It is necessary to create an organizational network through the whole country of Malaya states. You have already 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 phenomenon in the Malaya states.” “All efforts must be made in order to use this group for the organization of the Communist party in the Malaya States.” The letter also makes obvious that the Comintern did not want to acknowledge that the established MCP was appropriate to be called the Malayan Communist party and suggested that the MCP should be established on the basis of the

Yet, once again, the Comintern's suggestions to the MCP drew on the materials and concepts that the CCP in Guangdong and Malaya supplied to the Comintern. It was Li Lisan and the MCP, not the Comintern, who suggested propagating support for the Chinese revolution in Malaya. In the November 1930 CC MCP circular no.7, which predates the FEB December letter advocating the rhetoric of support for the Chinese and Indian revolutions in MCP propaganda, it was suggested that the MCP advocate helping the revolutions in India and China. Emphasis on the importance of the Chinese and Indian revolutions were seen as helping to solve two long standing problems for the MCP: "ethnic complexity and the low political level of the masses (*zhengzhi shiuping di*), such as the immigrant mentality (*yiminde xinli*).[...]" "Involving these two races (*zhongzu*) will raise the political level of workers. In order to do that, we must stress the importance of Chinese and Indian revolution to the workers."²⁷⁴ In a letter to Zhou Enlai and Qu Qiubai, dated 17 April 1930, Li Lisan also suggested establishing a new FEB, and ensuring that the leadership of the work among foreign seamen, while done by "foreign comrades from England, France, Japan, India, Indochina," was led by the Chinese party. It is no wonder that Ho Chi Minh promoted independence from the Chinese Vietnamese communist organization. Li Lisan noted that the question of connecting the Chinese revolution with the world revolution was of foremost importance, as China was the point of the most acute contradiction of the imperialist powers and where the world revolution would break out first: "[...] increasing international propaganda for the Chinese revolution among the international proletariat and increasing propaganda regarding the defense of the Chinese revolution is the

preliminary committee that Nanyang communists thought they established in April 1930. The Comintern was not satisfied with the way MCP was set up. The authors of this Comintern letter, apparently unaware of Li Lisan's promotion of Nanyang revolution, labelled the proponents of the opposite policy in the MCP as leftist and being influenced by Li Lisan and Chen Duxiu. ECCI letter to the FEB, "Malaiskoye pis'mo" [Malayan Letter] 23 October 1930 RGASPI 495/62/2/1,2.

²⁷⁴ A CC circular, September 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/36-37.

most serious task of the Chinese communist party.”²⁷⁵ Through the Comintern’s process of transmitting locally generated approaches back to local parties (as was the case with the Chinese revolution), for the MCP, the international again fused with national and local. The Comintern was promoting the importance of the Chinese revolution to the Chinese revolutionaries in Malaya, where, according to the Comintern’s “national” party rule, they were to lead the Malayan nation to liberation.

The internationalists’ support for the Chinese revolution, support that was promoted by the Comintern, allowed the MCP to use this rhetoric to justify their focus on China through the incorporation of Malays and Indians. The Comintern’s ideology tapped into the internationalist dimension of Chinese nationalism, which had existed since the time of Sun Yatsen. This dimension was, in fact, an outcome of Chinese migration: that is, a frontier enclave of Chinese revolutionaries needed to be embedded in the local society and to occupy a niche not yet occupied. The Comintern’s internationalist Chinese revolution justified for the Chinese communists in Malaya both the defence of Chinese interests and the emancipation of the oppressed nations. These were also promoted by the Nanking policy to cultivate overseas Chineseness in 1930-1931, just like the discourse of cooperation in the fight against imperialism of the Chinese and Indian revolutions.²⁷⁶ The Comintern’s recommendation, which was initiated by the CCP, to defend the Chinese revolution once again landed on fertile soil. This time, the ground had been prepared by the GMD. Yet, ironically, Li Lisan’s “Nanyang directive” sought to distance the Chinese communist organization in Malaya from the GMD’s

²⁷⁵ “Pismo Li Lisanya Zhou Enlayu i Tsu Tsubo,” [Li Lisan’s letter to Zhou Enlai and Qu Qiubai] 17 April 1930, *Comintern and China*, Vol.3-part 2, pp. 865-68, esp. 865-66. The same idea that FEB propaganda among foreign sailors should be under control of the CCP is expressed by Xiang Zhongfa in his letter to Zhou Enlai, 25 June 1930, *Comintern and China*, Vol.3-part 2, pp. 917-927, esp. p. 926.

²⁷⁶ According to 1931 “Monthly review of Chinese affairs,” this text appeared in “a monthly magazine of world politics published in Nanking.” CO 273 - 572, p.538.

organization and ideology, that is, Chinese nationalism, or the “Chinese revolution,” especially as the discourse associated with the GMD had betrayed the CCP.²⁷⁷ That included the discourse regarding the dependence of the Nanyang liberation on the liberation of China, that is, Sun’s internationalism, or *shijie zhuyi*.²⁷⁸ The Comintern’s promotion of the Chinese revolution thus granted the Chinese communist movement in Malaya legitimacy on a different scale: the scale of the Chinese community as a whole, and without the CCP-GMD divide. It reconciled Chinese nationalism and communism and granted the Chinese the discursive foundation to build a united and inclusive Malayan nation.²⁷⁹

The semantic slip and the influence of the term *minzu* is understandable if we consider who the MCP leading members were. At the founding conference, the Nanyang communists lamented that since the party’s establishment in 1927, there had been no protest activity and the most active members had been intellectuals.²⁸⁰ In addition to being school teachers, they were writers for Chinese language newspapers who in indirect language promoted communist

²⁷⁷ “Li Lisan’s letter,” RGASPI 514/1/532/10.

²⁷⁸ “Some comrades of Nanyang thought that the revolution in Nanyang was dependent upon the success of the Chinese revolution breaking the yoke of the imperialism and then it followed that the defeat of the Chinese revolution affected the organization of the party of Nanyang.” “Li Lisan’s letter” RGASPI 514/1/532/11. The report regarding the adoption of the resolutions of the 10th ECCI plenum talks about the error of focusing on the Chinese revolution in Nanyang again. RGASPI 495/62/1/35.

²⁷⁹ The FEB suggested using different slogans while working with different groups of the population. For instance, they suggested that among the Chinese population, the slogan that the emancipation of Malaya would help the emancipation of China had to be utilized as the same imperialists who oppressed China also oppressed Malaya. The same was promoted for the “Hindu workers” and 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”. The FEB suggested that the MCP explain to the “native” workers that they should fight not for the lowering of wages of the Chinese and Indian workers to their level, but for the opposite. Another central point of propaganda was the defence of the Soviet Union. RGASPI 495/62/12/3.

²⁸⁰ “Minutes, pp. 96-97.

ideas.²⁸¹ Many of them were the agents of GMD propaganda. If the Comintern unintentionally cultivated the new meaning of *minzu* for the Chinese communists in Malaya, *minzu* was a slogan in the Nanking government's educational policies that intentionally targeted the second generation of Nanyang Chinese to become more Chinese, and to do so in order to counter Japanese expansion in the Nanyang. This will be discussed in chapter 5.

PAN-ASIANISM AND INTERWAR GLOBALIZATION

“When we say Pan-Asianism, and think about its goals, what are they in the end? They are the question of what should suffering Asian nations do in order to resist the powerful nations of Europe. In other words, it is how to eliminate injustices [打不平] towards the oppressed peoples.”

----Sun Yatsen, the speech at Kobe, 1924²⁸²

The MCP story shows that modern Chinese history cannot be understood without understanding the Chinese experience in Southeast Asia or the *huaqiao*. While European colonialism laid the foundation for postwar Southeast Asian nations, World War II fostered the imagining of the region as a whole.²⁸³ Internationalism was creating nationalisms during the interwar period and became the vehicle for both anti-colonial and colonial aspirations of the nations-to-be. China was not unique among other countries at the time and aspired to win the Darwinian race to be the first in the world: colonial aspirations dressed up in civilisational goals were a part of globalization of the interwar period when colonialism, like socialism, was

²⁸¹ This discrete propaganda in the newspapers is discussed in chapter 3.

²⁸² Sun Zhongshan, [Sun Yatsen], “Dui shenhu shanghuiyisuo deng tuanti de yan shuo ,” [The address to the Chamber of Commerce and other organisations of Kobe] 1924, 28 Nov, in *Sun zhongshan quan ji* (Collected Works of Sun Yatsen, in 11 vols.), vol. 11 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 401-409, esp. 409.

²⁸³ Donald K. Emmerson, "Southeast Asia": What's in a Name? *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Mar., 1984), pp. 1-21

an accepted goal among leading actors. For China, this gained vital importance with the onset of Japanese aggression in the early 1930s, which resulted in the Nanking government's Nanyang policy of *huaqiao* indoctrination. China's colonial aspiration to counter Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia – something that was reminiscent of the United States' Monroe doctrine²⁸⁴ -- prepared the ground for the acceptance of the Comintern's ideas, which fused the global and the local to create the “national.” The Comintern created this “International of Nationalities” in the Chinese world of interwar globalization. The Comintern's role in justifying the Chinese emancipation of Southeast Asia echoes how centuries earlier, Southeast Asian polities consolidated through text-based religions and vernacular language texts that drew from South Asian traditions.²⁸⁵ This time, however, it was dispersion. Likewise, the Buddhists, Baptists and Bolsheviks who had experienced internationalist expansion during the interwar period, had a comparable trajectory in Chinese history as they had a shared commitment to words, concepts, and social experience. It was not just Chinese and communists living out these forces of interwar globalization; similar issues and processes are also apparent in the indigenization efforts of Christian missionaries and Buddhist sects during the same period.

We also see the strategic use of Comintern rhetoric by both the CCP and Nanyang actors to serve local interests - interests that were different in Shanghai and among the *huaqiao* in Singapore. In other words, to understand Sun Yatsen's pan-Asian internationalism (*shijie*

²⁸⁴ The British fixation with the GMD “anti-imperialism” was not groundless. In October 1922 a lecturer Juin Li at Jinan University called on *huaqiao* to unite and stand up against colonial governments instead of asking for help from the Chinese government, which was the cause of China being behind Europe in colonial possessions. He prophesied revolt and independence of the Malaya Peninsula. Juin Li called for the students to “shoulder this big burden.” “Now is the time for you students to build up your political ability, because the future master of the Malaya peninsula are you students of this College”. CO273 -518 cited in Khoo, “The beginnings,” p.174.

²⁸⁵ Lieberman, Victor B., *Southeast Asia in global context, c. 800-1830*, 2Vols., (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003-2009)

zhuyi) with China at the centre, we need to consider the MCP, GMD, and *huaqiao* experiences. As the CCP sought to create a non-Chinese revolution, and to become independent from the GMD Nanyang party, they continued to perceive the Nanyang revolution in the categories that echoed China's long-term regional imagination, in which China and Chineseness were the frame of reference and the leaders.

In a global context, this is the story of how, in the interwar globalized circulation of people and ideas, internationalism emancipated peoples and created nations. For one thing, it was the illustration of the globalization of the Chinese revolutionary movement – both nationalist and communist. This will be discussed in chapter 4, which is devoted to the Comintern's relationship with the MCP. In the broader context of the internationalist origins of the anti-colonial movement,²⁸⁶ MCP nationalist internationalism is comparable to the African diasporic movement's aspiration of the Black International,²⁸⁷ and does not appear to be particularly surprising. Communist and National(ist) Internationals were not the only ones operating in this interwar world. International of the Free Thinkers, "Clerical International," and "Amsterdam International" appear in the pages of the Comintern's official voice, "International Press Correspondence" (especially before 1927). Different Internationals overlapped. In 1924 an African nationalist, Lamine Senghor, together with Ho Chi Minh, was involved in the French communist party's Union Intercoloniale. They established the League de Defense de la Race Negre and attended the inaugural congress of the anti-imperialist league in

²⁸⁶ Manela, *Wilsonian moment*, Tomoko Akami, *Internationalising the Pacific: US, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations*, (Routledge, 2010)

²⁸⁷ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*.

Brussels in 1926, which is central to the MCP story and has been discussed in this chapter.²⁸⁸ Africans sought the support of other oppressed peoples, and the Chinese aspired to lead the struggle of the oppressed peoples.²⁸⁹ The Comintern's indigenizing discourse of the Chinese and world revolutions, which was employed for mobilization purposes, was also a reflection of the worldwide indigenization and globalization trend during the interwar years, which by the 1930s had become pronounced.

The year 1930 was a significant one in the history of Chinese migration and nationalism. That year was the time of the upsurge of the Chinese overseas nationalism, which depended on expatriate intellectuals for reproduction and to be "purposeful."²⁹⁰ The year 1930 was also the end of the era of mass Chinese migration.²⁹¹ Although the establishment of the MCP in 1930 does not appear to be accidental, in fact it was: indeed, it was the convergence of two things - the Comintern's impulse to indigenize, Chinese migration - that was accidental. From 1928-1931, several communist national parties were set up across the globe by the Comintern (for example, in Taiwan, the Philippines, and number of parties in Latin America). By 1930, Comintern and communist internationalism, through the rhetoric of support for the Chinese revolution, became the key to the internationalizing and legitimizing the diasporic Chinese nationalism that was promoted by Nanking. This served to remove the obstacle to the Chinese community fostering Malayan national unity: Chinese nationalism grafted onto Comintern internationalism became Malay nation-based nationalism—it was locally relevant and

²⁸⁸ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 29; for the centrality in this chapter, see section *Need to indigenize*, pp. 54-59, above.

²⁸⁹ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 253.

²⁹⁰ Wang Gungwu, "The limits," pp.417-419, 421.

²⁹¹ Kuhn "Why China Historians," p. 164.

internationally progressive. Comintern internationalism helped justify Chinese aspirations in Southeast Asia and the aspiration for local Chineseness of the Chinese intellectuals.

CONCLUSION

The 1930 abolition of the Nanyang Provisional CCP committee and the establishment of three parties -- the Indochinese, the Malay, and the Siamese -- was not simply the result of the Comintern's design to create a party in each country and to extend Moscow's control. This chapter has shown that it was more complex than that; it was the conjuncture of disparate processes which pertained to the CCP, the Comintern, and the local Chinese in Malaya that resulted in the establishment of the MCP in 1930. . The initiative for contacting the Comintern was at least mutual, but possibly more at the initiative of the Nanyang communists.

Li Lisan's directive to make a Nanyang revolution, rather than a Chinese revolution, was the CCP's attempt to distance itself from the GMD, which had been connected closely with the communist movement in the Nanyang in the 1920s, as well as the impulse of a Chinese communist association overseas to indigenize. The case of Xu Jie also illustrates the social fabric of the MCP and the intricate relationship between the CCP and the GMD in the Nanyang. Xu and other intellectual MCP members, who are discussed in chapter 5, had a relationship with both the GMD and the CCP in the Nanyang and in China because their personal commitments overruled their political ones.

Since the late Qing, Chinese intellectuals who discovered that overseas compatriots did not have a strong Chinese identity boosted overseas Chinese patriotism and "succeeded in cultivating a vague, contextual and ambivalent yearning for a Chineseness that reminds us of

the 'national' in transnational.”²⁹² The most famous result of this campaign was the *huaqiao*'s financial support of the 1911 revolution. In 1929-1931, the result was the national internationalism of the Chinese communists in the Nanyang. As we have seen in this chapter, The CCP and GMD had an identical discourse regarding the involvement in the Chinese revolutionary associations and joint liberation of Chinese and oppressed peoples in the Nanyang. They did this by mobilizing non-Chinese “oppressed races,” institutionalized in the Anti-imperialist League, the unrealized *Minzuguoji*, and the short-lived “Secretariat of the oppressed Nanyang races.” The 1930 abolition of the Nanyang Provisional CCP committee and the establishment of the three parties were along the same lines as the Comintern's policy of creating a party in each country in order to pursue Soviet state interests. However, it also matched the Chinese revolutionary associations' indigenization goals.

The case of the Malayan Communist Party shows that what were presented by official Comintern rhetoric (and by scholars²⁹³) as two opposites - nationalism and internationalism – were combined in particular historical circumstances. The conflation of nationalism and internationalism in the early 20th century, as well as the conflation of Chinese nationalism and Leninism in the 1920s, are well known.²⁹⁴ In 1930, similar forces were at work. Yet, for Chinese communists in Malaya, from Sun's Three Principles to MCP slogans in 1930-31, “*minzu*” gained an additional attribute: “Malayan.” Furthermore, as the Malayan communists adopted the Comintern's operative definition -- “country” -- of this word, the discursive foundation of Malayan nation-state was born. With this, the foundation of a legitimate and an

292 Prasenjit Duara, “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 1030-1051, esp. p. 1043.

293 See for instance Perry Anderson ‘Internationalism: a breviary’, *New Left Review*, 14 (2002) pp. 5–25

294 Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 347

internationalist Malayan nation-based nationalism within the MCP was laid.²⁹⁵ The medium for this inadvertent development was a misunderstanding of the Russian, English, and Chinese words for “people,” “nation,” “nationality,” and “race.” For Sun and Hu, *minzu* was Chinese for “nation” and the oppressed “peoples” of Asia; when the Comintern’s rhetoric was grafted onto the founding of the MCP in 1930, the word *minzu* came to mean Malaya as a country.²⁹⁶ The term “national” communicated different meanings to partners in revolution who did not fully understand each other. This misunderstanding connected the AIL (Anti-Imperialist League) and the *Minzuguoji* to the MCP. The altered meaning of the word “*minzu*” produced Malayan nationalism as the dominant discourse and reconciled it with Chinese nationalism for the members of the MCP. The internationalist aspect of the Chinese revolution was the mechanism for this slippage. The Comintern provided a new justification for the Chinese leadership in the emancipation of oppressed Malaya peoples on behalf of the Malayan nation and for the Malayan revolution. They did this by (re)introducing to the MCP the rhetoric of the internationalist support of the Chinese revolution. The Comintern borrowed, and then had successfully infused, a new meaning into the internationalism of the Chinese revolution that had originated in the early 20th century and developed within the GMD. The shift in the meaning of *minzu* was produced by the interaction of three realms: Malaya, China, and the international. This was a new justification for the discourse of Malayan and Nanyang anti-colonial revolution and aspirations to incorporate Malays and Indians into the Chinese movement. The crossing of languages, groups, intellectual worlds, and how they perceived and reasoned with shared

²⁹⁵ For the Malay nationalism and Malay concepts of community including “nation” see Milner, *The Invention of politics*, Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*; Tan, “The Rhetoric of Bangsa.”

²⁹⁶ However, according to CF Yong, the Chinese communists’ shift from Chinese to Malayan nationalism in Malaya occurred after the Kreta Ayer incident and led to the foundation of the Malayan communist party in 1930. Yong, *The Origins*, p.78.

authoritative texts to address their problems, shaped conceptual categories and discursive practices which further shaped this conjuncture.

The Comintern internationalist rhetoric and the rhetoric of support for the Chinese revolution, as well as the indigenizing strategy, shaped the policy that fit the Nanyang communists' justificatory needs. It provided them with a way to justify Chinese nationalism and regional paternalism in Southeast Asia, as was promoted by the GMD through the rhetoric of the defense of the interests of Chinese. This was thought of as illegitimate by the CCP on the wake of their breakup with the GMD. In 1929, CCP recommendations to make a Nanyang revolution instead of a Chinese revolution had the goal of turning the Chinese communists in Malaya away from activities driven by Chinese nationalism and towards those of native and other emigrant populations. These CCP recommendations and the Comintern's "directive" to promote support for the Chinese revolution had been inseparable in the discourse of the internationalist aspect of the Chinese revolution in the GDM since Sun Yatsen. As the Chinese communists sought to create a non-Chinese revolution, they continued to perceive the Nanyang in terms of China's regional imagination, in which China was the leader. Their vision was a *Minzuguoji*. Another justification for the Chinese communists' leading role in the emancipation movement in Malaya was what Ip calls the Chinese intellectuals' sense of "self-distinction [that] was incorporated into their efforts to build a cultured revolutionary milieu," and their elitism based on Chinese intellectuals' self-perception as the most progressive and modern "elements."²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Hung-Yok Ip, *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China: Heroes, Leaders and Sophisticates* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2009), p. 215.

After the 6th congress in 1928, the Comintern policy became one of creating parties within the colonies and designing policy in each country in accordance with local conditions. This happened to fall on fertile ground in Malaya, as it was consistent with CCP's ideas regarding the indigenization of the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang. These ideas were passed through the channels of "progressive" intellectuals that connected the centre and the periphery of the Chinese world. These progressive ideas included the liberation of Chinese and other oppressed peoples from European colonial rule, along with the promotion of the "Chineseness" of the Chinese. In 1929, this process had two meanings. First, the GMD and CCP both promoted what Kuhn calls the "embeddedness" of the Chinese community in the local society, which was to be achieved through Chinese leadership in the joint liberation of the oppressed local peoples and the resident Chinese. Second, both political parties nonetheless were doing this in the pattern of the Chinese state reaching out to a "frontier enclave" via the Nanyang communist party. Both the GMD and the CCP acted like Chinese associations aspiring to indigenize, yet, also like a Chinese state.

The Comintern's internationalism fit the Chinese ideas of "Asianism" among early revolutionaries, i.e. the idea of China's place in colonial emancipation and its connection to China's and the world's salvation.²⁹⁸ Ironically, the unintended consequences of the

²⁹⁸ The precedent of MCP's nationalist internationalism based on the discourse of the Comintern's support of the Chinese revolution and dependence of the emancipation of oppressed nations on the Chinese emancipation, can also be found in the internationalist aspect of the Chinese nationalism at the turn of the century, represented by Liu Shipei and Sun Yatsen. It was triggered by the Boer War and the Philippine and Cuban Revolutions and then transposed back onto the world with the aim to solve China's problems and make a world of independent nations. The discourse of the importance of the solidarity of the weak peoples" (*ruozhong*) of Asia for China and Asia for escaping imperialism of Japan and the west can be found in texts by Liu Shipei as a member of the *Asian solidarity society*, (*Yazhou heqin hui*) in Tokyo, organized by Indian and Chinese in 1907. Karl, *Staging the World*, pp.113-114,169,173-172. For Sun's internationalism as China's role for the emancipation of Southeast Asia, see *Wu Jianshu*, 'Cong da Yazhou zhuyi zouxiang shijie datong zhuyi: lulun Sun Zhongshan de guoji

Comintern's indigenizing strategy of using internationalist rhetoric -- which was supposed to be against the idea of nations in the nationalities' policy of the USSR²⁹⁹ -- created nations within the boundaries of the polities created by European colonialism. The Comintern exported from Europe not just revolution, but also the idea of the nation-state. The Comintern's policy became the main vehicle for 20th century nationalism in Southeast Asia, with the Chinese as their liberators. The MCP itself was a *Minzuguoji* and China's connection hub for the larger *Minzu Guoji* across the Nanyang. It was the overlap of the ambitions of the Chinese nationalist international and the Communist International that created a synergy between the two, and this will be explored in chapter 4. In a sense, it didn't matter who was dispatched from China, GMD or CCP agents. To use Kuhn's idea, they all were promoting China's jurisdiction over attempted frontier enclaves and their embeddedness in the local society. To involve non-Chinese in a Chinese revolutionary organization was the MCP's -- like any Chinese association's -- survival strategy. The MCP's characteristics as a Chinese association will be discussed in chapter 3.

zhuyi sixiang' [*From Pan-Asianism to World Great Harmony — Sun Yatsen's Internationalism*], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 3 (1997), pp. 183–198; also see Rebecca Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (Oct., 1998), pp. 1096-1118.

²⁹⁹ Hirsch, *The Empire of Nations*,

CHAPTER 3. THE MALAYAN COMMUNIST PARTY AS A CHINESE ASSOCIATION, 1930-1934

This chapter is about the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) activities between 1930 and 1934. It seeks to explain why, despite their efforts and the Comintern's guidance, the MCP did not become a fully-functioning Bolshevik party. It spoke of revolution, and increasingly of the Bolshevik version of revolution, but acted in ways that call to mind Chinese overseas associations. The politics of the MCP was not limited to Marxist world revolution. It included political concerns about China and Malaya.

The chapter suggests that the MCP was a hybrid of a communist party and a Chinese association. In retrospect, the overseas Chinese associational aspects and the Leninist aspects of the MCP might seem like a contradiction and might suggest that one role was "real" and the other "false." In lived experience, it was not so simple. The MCP was more of a *synthesis* of the organizational habits and expectations of the actors involved, combined with the new ideas, opportunities, resources, and constraints of the international communist movement embodied in Comintern support. This chapter shows how the synthesis between the MCP's characteristics as a Chinese association and as a communist party worked in practice in the early 1930s. While some aspects of this synthesis (namely, anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie language) hindered the MCP's development, other aspects helped the MCP to survive (namely, organization and Malayan nation discourse).

There were three components of this synthesis that will form three parts of this chapter. Part one will discuss membership and constituencies ("the masses," in revolutionary parlance) and will show that the party's disconnection from its membership and larger constituencies was due to its characteristics as both a Chinese association and as a communist party. Part two will

discuss the MCP's goals and activities. The MCP promoted a political movement for the rights of the Chinese immigrants and their participation in the British state, as the MCP's main goal was to protect the interests of the Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, as a communist party, the MCP advocated the overthrow of the British. Part three will examine two campaigns carried out by the MCP: the campaign against Alien Registration Ordinance (1933) and the campaign for the aid to soviet revolution in China. MCP activities that were both aiming at promoting Chinese political participation *and* overthrowing of the governments in China and Malaya showed the MCP's nature as a Chinese association through its double rootedness in Malaya and China.³⁰⁰ Also, as both these connections were achieved through internationalization of the rhetoric and attempts to indigenize, I suggest that this shows that the MCP was a case of interwar globalization. In its China-related activities this internationalization was achieved through the rhetoric promoted by the Comintern's regarding the Comintern's internationalist support for the Chinese revolution, and its indigenization was attempted through the rhetoric of aid to the Chinese revolution for the sake of the Malayan revolution. In all, this synthesis or the hybrid nature of the MCP shows us one way that globalization could work in Asia and reflects the astonishing resilience of overseas Chinese organizations.

STRUCTURE AND SPACE: TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION, MEMBERSHIP, AND DISOCNNECTION FROM THE MASSES

How did the MCP work? Or at least, how did its leaders, want it to work? The archival materials, as well as other sources, give us an idea of the membership and constituency of the MCP. To understand what those facts can tell us, I make a comparison of MCP discourse,

³⁰⁰ See Kuhn, "Why China Historians." This is also discussed in my introduction, above.

including its self-declared “failures” from its reports to the Comintern, and problems which scholars have identified as particular to Chinese associations.³⁰¹ I suggest there are parallels between the two.

Membership and Constituency

The first part of this component is the membership and constituency of the MCP. One of the main demands that the Comintern placed on the MCP, and the main criteria of a Bolshevik party, is that the MCP had to become a “mass party.” That meant it had to have a large constituency that represented the majority of the population, i.e. the “masses.” The MCP thus was greatly concerned with the “masses.” The MCP discourse on the “masses” is exclusively about their backwardness and the party’s inability to involve them in party activities. The party was not only unable to lead the masses, but it was also behind the “masses.” The following section will make the point that there were two groups from which the MCP leaders were disconnected. One was the party’s lower level membership, the so-called “lower ranks,” that is, comrades at the level of the party branches. Another kind was the masses that were the party’s target constituency, both Chinese and non-Chinese. In this subsection I will show that the MCP’s disconnection with the larger constituency was due to its deficiencies both as a Chinese association and as a communist party. I will analyze the MCP’s discourse about its disconnection with the lower ranks of the party and from the “masses,” which were the larger target constituency. I will first compare the MCP membership with the membership of the Hong Kong Chaozhou association in the 1980s where the poorer and more numerous members

³⁰¹ I draw on the literature on Chinese associations in the 20th century in the USA, Mexico, and Hong Kong to make my point. GMD branches overseas have been looked at as an organizations of the Chinese overseas in Li Minghuan, *Contemporary Associations*, p. 4; Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*.

of that overseas Chinese association are cut off from the leadership of the organization. I will do so in order to show that there is a parallel issue in *membership* relations within the MCP. In the MCP, that issue corresponded to the class-based division into “cultured” and “not cultured,” in other words, as the distinction between people who were members of the party and those who did not have the appropriate class - - or cultural level -- to join the party. The party also functioned as an upward mobility tool for intellectuals to achieve elite status. In the second part of this section, I will show that the reasons why the MCP failed to engage with the larger social constituency of local people, the Malays, Indians, and Chinese. This “disconnection from constituencies” of two sorts—within the membership of the MCP and with the target population of the society at large- reflects the hybrid nature of the MCP. Like other Chinese associations, the MCP leadership is somewhat divorced from its own membership, and like many other Communist Parties in Asia at the time—including the CCP—the MCP was unconnected with its stated target population: the proletariat of Malaya. The last sub-section of this section will discuss the MCP’s failure to organize a labour movement.

Membership

The MCP was, in organizational terms, in the same family as native place and neighbourhood associations. To begin with, the origins of the CCP were a ‘study society’ (*xuehui*).³⁰² Also, in the past, Chinese in Malaya became involved in an organization because of their native place ties.³⁰³ Secondly, the MCP and other communist organizations such as trade unions, the Anti-imperialist league, and the CYL were built on native place ties and were all

³⁰²See also, Van de Ven, *From Friends to Comrades*.

³⁰³ Ch’ing-huang Yen, *A social history of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 178.

dominated by the Hainanese. The MCP complained in their letters to the Comintern about the lack of cadres who knew English or Malay, something that prevented them from spreading propaganda among anybody except other Chinese.³⁰⁴ And even with other Chinese, the MCP work was still not without language difficulties. The Youth League attributed its deficiencies to language limitation that confined the activities to Hainanese.³⁰⁵ The MCP was built around native place ties and there were conflicts between the Hainanese and Hakka factions of the party leadership in 1932 and 1936. The Hainanese dominated the communist organization and its leadership in Malaya and Singapore starting from the mid-1920s.³⁰⁶ In 1930, there were 60% Cantonese, 20-35% of them from Hainan, (“Chuennya natives”) and 40% Fukienese.³⁰⁷ Ho Chi Minh provided an ample description of this side of the MCP:

“Owing to the difference of dialects, there exist even a pronounced provincialism between the members. The Fokienese likes to work only with his Fokienese comrade, to listen

³⁰⁴ There was little surprise that the party was mainly Chinese. Besides its Chinese origins, there were a lot of grievances among the Chinese in regard to the British attitude toward them, and this sustained party membership, as first-generation immigrants had fewer rights in the British state than did Chinese born in Malaya. “British policy was to lure Chinese with the words like ‘you go develop the commerce in Malaya. We English take care only of administration.’” The author of the report lamented that even after Chinese producers of rubber and tin suffered from the economic crisis, they still hoped that that British would help them out. “In reality, Chinese merchants are like the cook-boy; the English master eats the fowl, giving the fowl’s leg and head to the Chinese cook. The English further say ‘As long as the Chinese got rice to eat, card to play, and opium to smoke, they are satisfied.’” The MCP saw British intentions to give land to Chinese peasants and oust the Malay peasants as a policy to divide and rule. As for “Malayan, they are planning to enlist them in the army and police, in order to make of them the nominal masters of the country and to utilise them against the workers of other nationalities.” “For instance, whenever there is a Chinese workers movement, the English tell the Malayan that the Chinese want to conquer Malay.” “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 28.

³⁰⁵ “Kuomintang and other societies in Malaya,” July-September 1928, CO 273-542, “Kuomintang and other societies in Malaya”, July-September 1928, pp.5, 6.

³⁰⁶ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 165-171. On the factional squabble in 1936, see also letter from CC MCP to the CC CCP, 21 August 1936, SMP D 7085.

³⁰⁷ Another problem was that British employed labourers from different dialect groups in the same industry in order to prevent solidarity. “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” 1930 (established from the context) RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4.

only to Fokienese speakers, to recruit only Fokienese friends etc. In a discussion, the Fokienese generally side with the Fokienese and the Hainanese with their own “countrymen” [sic].³⁰⁸

Thirdly, there is a relationship between the involvement of second-generation Chinese and organizational structure. The MCP’s two-level organizational structure created problems for the MCP and other Chinese associations. This explains the content and language of the MCP’s self-criticism: the MCP’s frame of reference was that of a Chinese association, although one that was being inflected by the Bolshevik language over the course of the 1930s.

In terms of organizational structure and first-generation membership, we can compare the MCP’s organization and composition to that of the contemporary Chaozhou association in Hong Kong, circa 1990: China-born individuals were three times more likely to become association members than were locally-born individuals, whose primary identity was Hongkongnese rather than Chaozhou or Chinese. As in the case of the MCP, the inability of Chaozhou voluntary associations, in particular grassroots ones, to attract the locally-born generation also contributed to their decline.³⁰⁹ In this sense, the Comintern’s demand for locally-born Chinese was tuning into the Nanking policy of “nationalizing” overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) (i.e., to get Chinese in overseas locations to identify more strongly with China), a policy that had originated in the late Qing and was also driven by a Chinese association’s need to reproduce and survive. The MCP’s concerns about raising second-generation Chinese *as*

³⁰⁸ Ho Chi Minh’s report, 18 November 1930, RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27, esp. p. 25

³⁰⁹ Susanne Y.P. Choi, “Association Divided, Association United: The Social Organization of Chaozhou and Fujian Migrants in Hong Kong,” in *Voluntary Organizations*, eds. Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, Hu-Dehart, pp. 130, 135.

Chinese was consistent with the concerns of other Chinese associations. The MCP's relations with second generation Chinese, i.e., "the youth," will be analyzed in chapter 5.

Additionally, in structural terms, clan associations in Malaya were comparable to the communist party and included a secretary, a treasurer, and a standing committee. Clan associations had a three-tier structure: a standing committee, a management committee, and rank-and-file members. The management committee was democratically elected by the rank-and-file.³¹⁰ Party and Communist Youth League organizations had a centrifugal tendency and weak centralization, in addition to a lack of subordination between the two, contrary to organizational hierarchy, but not unlike separate native place associations (see chapter 5).

The MCP was structured as a Chinese overseas association because that was the default way to organize, but also because the MCP also deliberately organized itself that way. This might also have been the reason why the MCP promoted the organization of a secretariat of "various peoples," and the organization as a communist party according to "peoples" (see chapter 2). Also, in Johor, Chinese associations in various districts modelled themselves after *gongsuo*.³¹¹ A Chaozhou association had both a central committee and *yuans* in its organization, hinting at similarities with both the CCP and the GMD, which, when overseas, acquired characteristics of Chinese overseas associations.

As in other Chinese associations, MCP members were mostly first-generation immigrants, as was discussed above. Also, there was a comparable spatial dimension within the organization of the party and native place associations, as well as similar problems arising from that type of organization. There is a parallel with territorial organizations based on

³¹⁰Yen, *A Social History*, p. 79

³¹¹ P.Pui Huen Lim, "Between Tradition and Modernity: The Chinese Association of Johor Bahru Malaysia," in *Voluntary Organizations*, eds. Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, p. 33

neighbourhood. The party was also organized on a territorial basis, rather than according to the industry or organization in which party members worked. The MCP intended to unite local organizations into *rayon* (which means “neighbourhood” in Russian) organizations.³¹² The neighbourhood model of organization was crucial to Chaozhou associations in Hong Kong: most neighbourhood organizations declined in the mid-1980s because those who were becoming wealthier moved out of crowded housing.³¹³

Similarly, spatial reasons were the basis for the MCP’s disconnection with the “masses.” More strikingly, the patterns of migration were crucial to whether or not people from the same native place -- the party (intellectuals) and the masses -- ended up in the same place in the Nanyang. This resulted in the infamous “disconnection” of the party from the “masses.” For instance, the potential party leaders from Xianyou county in Fujian – teachers, journalists and party “masses” – and the labourers from the same Xianyou county ended up in different places of the Malay archipelago and Malay peninsula.³¹⁴ They therefore could not form the basis of a native place bond organization. According to Zhang Xia’s reminiscence, almost none of those who migrated to the Nanyang as labourers became party members; rather, it was teachers and journalists who became party members. According to Zhang Xia, those who joined had a higher cultural level (*wenhua shuiping gao*). His account of the migration of those whom the MCP referred to as “the masses” is sympathetic; yet, Zhang mentions none of them as participating in

³¹² “We plan to unite some localities into one large rayon, and each local committee to send the most able specialist to organize the Rayon press”. “A Report,” 2 January 1931. RGASPI 495/62/11 /28 ob.

³¹³ Susanne Y.P. Choi, “Association Divided, Association United: The Social Organization of Chaozhou and Fujian Migrants in Hong Kong,” in *Voluntary Organizations*, eds. Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, Hu-Dehart, p. 135

³¹⁴ Zhang Xia, “Youxian liu ma *huaqiao* yu geming huodong [Immigrants from Xianyou county in Malaya and revolutionary activities] *Xianyou wenshi ziliao di 2 ji*. [Literary and Historical materials of Xianyou County, Vol.2.] (Zhongguo renmin *zhengzhi* xieshanghui Fujian sheng Xianyou xian weiyuanhui, 1984), pp. 34-39, esp. p. 38

“the revolution.” This is consistent with the MCP’s documents lamenting a disconnection from the masses and the possible role of territorial disconnection of migrants from the same native place, and thus their inability to come together on the basis of a native-place-bond in the communist party.

Disconnection from the “masses” of the party, as well as the disconnection of the lower and upper levels of the party,³¹⁵ can also be explained by the structure of Chinese associations. The Chaozhou huiguan in Hong Kong in the 1970s had an upper- and lower-level structure: 1. A tightly knit network of chambers of commerce, industry/trade based associations, and large native place associations – the upper structure and leadership of the Chaozhou community dominated by medium-to-large entrepreneurs. 2. A loose network of neighbourhood and surname organizations -- the lower structure of the community; the leaders of lower-level associations are typically small business-owners, while members are working class men. This lower level association has a striking similarity to the MCP membership structure. Perhaps, what the MCP referred to as “the upper and lower grades of the party,” which were

³¹⁵ The discourse about the disconnection between upper and lower level (*shangji* and *xiaji*) comrades that had existed since 1929 intensified in 1933. The party was to strengthen the connection between them, as well as between comrades in a branch (*zhibu*). They were also to strengthen the understanding by upper level comrades of the conditions of the party’s lower level comrades, and to lead their work. Judging from the fact that the party branch was also to supervise the work of comrades, possibly upper-level comrades were those who worked in the party branch. There was also a lack of connection between the central and local branches. This disconnection was the reason the party was not able to lead propaganda effectively, as its publications (*faxing*) could not reach either lower grades of the party or the masses (*xia ji zhong huo qunzhong zhong*). “Magong lianzi tonggao di 8 hao -- guangyu yanmidang tuan de zuzhi wenti.”[Circular no.8 of the CC MCP and CYL regarding the organization of the secret work of the party and CYL], by Dangtuan zhongyang [CC of the MCP and CYL] 15 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/29-30.

disconnected, was derived from the way Chinese overseas communities associations -- including the MCP itself -- were organized, or fell apart.³¹⁶

Whether or not the MCP shared the upper/lower structure of the Chinese huiguan, the MCP complained about weak or lacking connections between the upper and lower levels of the party and trade unions.³¹⁷ For instance, the MCP lamented that many local party branches only paid attention to establishing the upper organization (*shangceng jiguan de*), such as the Union to Aid Chinese Soviet Revolution (*yuanzhu Zhongguo suweiai geming datongmeng*). Moreover, it is possible that in some cases, there were no lower-grade comrades and the lack of connection was a euphemism for the absence of a lower grade; that is, the “masses” were absent altogether. Critical resolutions were passed on abandoning the development of the organization at the lower level (*fadong xiajidangbu*) and practical (*shiji*) activity among the “masses,” as they felt that if the organization was not established, the activity could not be carried out. “They don’t understand that the establishment of a strong upper leadership organization should be developed

³¹⁶ Choi, “Association Divided,” pp.128-129. Another structural similarity is that the communists were working in schools that were part of a Chinese community structure, and had a leadership network such as in Chaozhou associations.

³¹⁷ Such problems existed in the relations between the Malacca federation of labour and adjacent organizations. “*Rabochee dvizheniye v malayskih federativnyh shtatah*” [Worker movement in Federated Malay States] by Von Mei-Hon [Huang Muhan] 5 March 1931, RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4; between the upper and lower grades of the party headquarters and a few people who were sent from the upper grade of the party to guide the work of the lower grade. “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” Undated report from 1930, RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4. Trade unions were criticized for not paying attention to the work in the lowest strata. “Intimate relations” were to be established between lower and higher grades of the labour union. “Decisions of the CC of the Malayan party on the intensification of the labour movement,” passed on 20 March 1934. RGASPI 495/62/23/57-59ob. Thus, as early in the party history as October 1930 the party leaders already had to be instructed how to do the “party work.” A circular prescribed party superiors to attend nucleus meetings to explain to the working class the significance of organizing a general solidarity strike on the anniversary of the October revolution. “Central Circular no. 9. The commemoration of October revolution by means of the general solidarity strike,” 3 October 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44.

out of the practical activity in the masses.”³¹⁸ Hence, party creation happened from the top down. In 1934, this problem persisted. Even though there was progress in the leadership, and in the investigation and work among lower grades of the party, the decisions of the Central Committee and the “spirit of the Central Committee” still only reached a part of the local organizations of the party and the youth league.³¹⁹ The growth of auxiliary mass organizations (like brotherhoods (*xiong di hui*) and sports societies (*tiyuhui*)) was unsatisfactory. Comrades in the trade unions³²⁰ were “ignorant of the conditions of living of the masses.” The same was the case for the party and the CYL.³²¹

However, in addition to structural problems, other challenges included communication infrastructure, police interception and slow communications, and should not be discounted as possible other reasons for the disconnection between the upper- and lower-level party organizations. The reason for the lack of connection between the provisional committee and lower-level leadership organs of the CYL in 1928 was the lack of funds to buy postage stamps and to mail circulars, as well as the lack of regular transport connections between those locations. Inspection trips were both ineffective and expensive. For instance, in order to get from Bangkok to Singapore, the tax was 100 dollars and a second class ticket was 100 dollars³²²

³¹⁸ “Magong zhongyang tongzhi. Zenyang qu jingxing yu fazhan yuanzhu Zhongguo suweiai geming yundong de gongzuo jueyi” [CC MCP circular. The resolution on how carry out and develop to aid soviet revolutionary movement in China] 24 December 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/34-37.

³¹⁹ [A letter from the Malayan party no. 3] 24 March 1934 by Guo Guang (国光) English version RGASPI 495/62/22/8-12ob ; Chinese version “Malaiya alai xin di san hao,” RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

³²⁰ “Red union organizations become a second party.” “Resolution on the labour movement passed by the C.C. of the C.P. of Malaya on March 24, 1934 (abridged translation)” RGASPI 495/62/23/46-49.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² This information comes from the letter that had two sides, in visible and in invisible ink. The content of the latter was about requesting a Comintern publication, and the content of the former was about these

which was more than one month of earnings of the central CYL organization in 1930. According to a piece of British analysis, the central committee of the CCP corresponded with the Malaya party through seamen; so did the parties in Perak with Singapore.³²³

Just like other Chinese overseas associations, the MCP lacked organizational coherence and was not well centralized.³²⁴ One of the reasons for this was difficulties in communication. Another reason may have been that the MCP had the nature of a voluntary organization that lacked a formal organizational hierarchy and formal lines of authority. Each association was entirely independent, just like the several independent delegations from Malaya that approached the FEB in 1930-1931,³²⁵ each claiming to represent the MCP. Among the Chaozhou associations in Hong Kong, each association was entirely independent. Yet, the associations are closely-knit through their interlocking ‘officerships,’ especially at the upper level,³²⁶ such as with the leaders of the party and labour unions. While the interlocking membership promotes inter-organizational collaboration in Chinese associations, in the case of the MCP, it promoted connections between the upper levels of various communist organizations. Consequently, the

travel expenses. “A letter from “King” in Bangkok to “Fong” in Singapore, 4 March 1936, SMP D 7376.

³²³ CO 273-571, pp. 810, 811. Slow and irregular communication affected the connection between the Nanyang provisional committee and the Guangdong provincial committee, as well as between the provincial committee and the local party headquarters and the exchange of instructions and reports between them. “Minutes,” p. 135.

³²⁴ There was also a problem in the connection between the chapters of the AIL and its centre in Singapore. “Minutes”, p. 100.

³²⁵ Letter from the FEB to Ducroux, 20 May 1931. RGASPI 495/62/2/6-7. Duiker attributes this letter to Yakov Rudnik, the head of the FEB. Duiker, *Ho chi-minh*, p. 615 n.43.

³²⁶ Choi, “Association Divided,” p. 129.

MCP had to explain the party hierarchy to its members, specifically, that party branches needed to accept the Centre's resolutions and hold meetings for discussion.³²⁷

Hence, I would like to suggest that the centralized Bolshevik party organization, which is what the MCP, was aiming for, strengthened the a loose organizational structure of a Chinese association which is what the MCP was, Hence, I would like to suggest that the MCP strengthened itself by adopting a Bolshevik party organization, which was centralized in nature; as a Chinese association, it would otherwise have a loose organizational structure. The goals of "Bolshevization" included having a coherent, simple and homogenous language, a centralized structure, the existence of armed forces, and the ability to penetrate into all groups of society. Arguably, this transformation began within the MCP by the beginning of the war in 1939-1940. Most significantly, Bolshevik superior organizational capacity brought with it further aspirational goals, and realizing all these aspects of their goals drove the MCP to strive for the role of a state and a bureaucratized government, an effort that, simply put, backfired. This will be discussed in chapter 6. This echoes Kuhn's thesis³²⁸ about the Taiping vision: imported ideas and organizational models "fit" local needs, but also introduce new aspirations that might not work in the long run.

Finally, the leaders of the MCP, like the Chaozhou associations' leaders, assumed leading roles in a number of so-called front organizations. Moreover, the organizations the MCP worked with also suited the Comintern's revolutionary goals. These organizations included the Anti-imperialist league, the Red Aid society, and Chinese associations (*shetuan*), as was discussed in the previous section. I suggest that these are parallels between this mode of

³²⁷ "Magong zhongyang gei mayin ji tong zhi de yi fen gongkai xin [CC MCP open letter to Malay and Indian comrades. 8 August 1933, RGASPI 495/62/20/21-24.

³²⁸Kuhn, "Origins of the Taiping Vision."

operation of a Chinese association with the MCP, as well as with the Taiwanese Communist Party's work in their front organizations. This also parallels the Comintern's policy of communists working within a legal (usually labour) party to convert their members to a communist party, which was illegal. This speaks to the MCP's nature as a hybrid. Like the MCP, Chaozhou associations in Hong Kong were concerned with extending their influence to the entire community and with commanding a broad base of support. The leaders found a means of reaching the lower structure by assuming honorary positions in lower-level associations. This was exactly the Party's model of work in the mass organizations. These positions in Chaozhou associations solidified the lower and upper structure associations. This was also the model of how the Taiwanese party worked; but in the case of the MCP, it was *huiguans*, and in Taiwan, they were the Peasants Union and the Cultural Association.³²⁹ In contrast, the members of the lower organizations who wished to become members of a higher organization first joined as members, and then after their financial position improved, they became directors ("leaders").³³⁰

This division into upper and lower grades of the party parallels the class stratification that took place in the Chaozhou associations of the 1970s. According to Susanne Choi, "The superstitious images of lower-level associations that are preoccupied with the organization of the Hungry Ghost Festival give wealthy Chaozhou individuals another incentive to distance themselves from their less affluent, mainly working-class, co-ethnics. The result is vertical

³²⁹Wang Shilang. (1988). *Taiwan shehui yundongshi. Wenhua yundong (The History of Taiwan's Social Movement. Cultural Movement)*, Daoxiang Chubanshe, Taipei Xian, p. 333, Wang Naixin et al.(ed.). (1989). *Taiwan shehui yundong shi, 1913-1936 (History of Taiwan's Social Movement)*, 5 Vols. Chuangzao chubanshe, Taipei, Vol.3, *Gongchan yundong (Communist Movement)*,p. 215.

³³⁰ Choi, "Association Divided," p. 131.

fragmentation.”³³¹ Class divides Chaozhou associations into upper and lower structures. Uneducated Fujianese emigrants flock into the Christian churches, which function as community support providers.³³² An analogous process can be discerned in the MCP, but the class division within the party was between intellectuals and labourers, and the dividing line was “*wenhua*,” the individual members’ cultural level. This is confirmed by Wang Gungwu’s analysis that education was the line that divided the Chinese community in Malaya into two groups that engaged in politics differently within China: one group situated its interests and identity with China, and the other with Malaya.³³³ This corresponds to what I suggest is the distinction that the MCP was making: there were two classes, those who “*you wenhua*” (had culture), and those who did not. According to the MCP documents, those who had a sound understanding of politics were “cultured,” whereas those who did not want to join the party were “*mei wenhua de*” (lacking culture). Moreover, the party was “cultured,” and the masses were not. The same conclusion can be reached from the way an MCP member, Zhang Xia, classified immigrants in the Nanyang who were from his native *Xian you* county (see chapter 5).

The internal dynamics of huiguans also shed light on why intellectuals joined the party, apart from the appeal of being the avant-garde of modernity by belonging to an avant-garde party. The reason was that membership and leadership of the avant-garde party was the means to achieve elite status within the community. Today’s Minnan and Minzhong associations in Hong Kong are divided horizontally and communicate only through the provincial-level

³³¹ Ibid., p. 132.

³³² Zhou Min and Rebecca Y. Kim, “Paradox of Ethnicization and Assimilation: The Development of Ethnic Organizations in the Chinese Immigrant Community in the United States,” in *Voluntary Organizations*, eds. Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, p.239.

³³³ Wang Gungwu, “Chinese politics,” p.15.

associations. The executive power in smaller associations (alumni and native place associations) is often shared between entrepreneurs and educated migrants who hold manual jobs; Many of the emigrants who arrived in Hong Kong after 1978 had not yet managed to establish their own businesses, and this provided a gap to be filled by educated migrants who were working manual jobs in order to find a sense of self-worth and status.³³⁴ For the “petty intelligentsia” migrants in Malaya, aside from employment (see chapter 4), becoming a party cadre also may have provided a sense of self-worth. Entrepreneurs supplied associations with financial resources, whereas educated working class men supplied the human resources. Unlike in the Chaozhou community, which was under the threat of vertical disintegration into separate associations, the working-class element of the Fujian associations helped them to integrate vertically.³³⁵ The Fujian associations also had a strong interlocking membership. This parallels the dynamics in the MCP. According to Xie Fei, the members of the party in Malaya were predominantly workers, since even those who were intellectuals in China often could not find a job in Malaya and therefore became workers. Thus, it is plausible to suppose that the reason the party cadres were far from the masses was also because embarking upon the party project -- becoming a party cadre (the equivalent of state bureaucrat, a magistrate) -- for them was a means of moving up the social ladder. As a result, they moved even further away from the “masses.”

Comparisons can be extended back into the past. During the Qing dynasty, the bureaucratic machinery of the state did not reach below the *xian* (county) level; in 1819, it was

³³⁴ Choi, “Association Divided,” p. 132.

³³⁵ Choi, “Association Divided,” p. 133

250,000 people per country magistrate.³³⁶ Thus, the MCP's self-criticism of not being able to penetrate the "lower" level was perceived either in terms that were familiar to them (the local bureaucracy in China), or the party indeed was structurally and functionally reminiscent of the Chinese bureaucracy. Martin King Whyte compares the CCP's later *xiaozu* political study groups in the PRC to the *baojia* and *lijia* rural self-responsibility systems which were imposed by the imperial bureaucracy to maintain control over the population. In the MCP's case, we can see an analogy between structures such as *baojia* and *lijia* in Whyte's sense, and the party's front organizations. I do not suggest any kind of filiation except for the function of embracing the population into the realm of elites, but at arm's length. These elites were professionalized by the 1920s writers and teachers, the "petty intelligentsia."

Mis-connections with the Constituency

"All the aborigines are lazy. Though they have fertile land but they did not persevere to till it but spend this fatal time in sexual abuses, idleness and superstition. "

MCP report to the CC CCP and the Comintern³³⁷

"Chauvinism and provincialism: They thought that being Chinese, they must work only for China, and only with the Chinese. They looked upon the native 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 native they find no one or find only mediocre elements".

----Ho Chi Minh's report, 18 November 1930.³³⁸

³³⁶ Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: imperial control in the 10th century*, (University of Washington Press, 1967), p 5 cited in Martin King Whyte, *Small groups and Political Rituals in China*, (University of California Press, 1974), p. 19.

³³⁷ "To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern," RGASPI 495/62/11/2.

³³⁸ Ho Chi Minh's report ,18 November 1930, p. 25.

The MCP members were not unprecedented in holding condescending views of the masses in general; it was a continuation of looking down upon the masses, which began with the 1920s radical intellectuals. The ideas about the backwardness of Malay society were also circulating in the Malay press.³³⁹ Likewise, early Chinese Communists regarded the general public as “uneducated and politically apathetic,” and believed that their “own civilizing mission” would help the masses to escape their backwardness.³⁴⁰ In 1922, the GMD also attributed the failure to awaken the masses to the deficiencies of the masses themselves, and decided that the community organization should be displaced by the party organization better suited to awake the people.³⁴¹

This section seeks to explain why the MCP had exclusively Chinese membership, something that must be explained as something based on more than just the lack of language skills. The reasons include ethnic elitism and the elitism of party members as the agents of modernity and civilization, which applied to both non-Chinese and Chinese masses, that is, their target constituency, as the above quotes show. Disconnection from the larger constituencies was characteristic of communist parties in the 1920-1930s across Asia. Both Malay and Chinese masses were backward, full of vice, and needed to be emancipated. And yet, the Chinese communist organization, the MCP, needed to embed itself in the local environment by connecting with these masses and leading them. The MCP’s condescending tone and its lack of knowledge about the Malay language and culture prevented it from spreading propaganda among non-Chinese, and this was the reason the MCP could not attract the Malay masses.

³³⁹ Mark Emmanuel, “Viewpapers: The Malay press of the 1930s,” JSEAS, 41-1, (2010), pp.1-20.

³⁴⁰ Van de Ven, *From Friends to Comrades*, p. 52. .

³⁴¹ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p.174

In fact, the purpose of the MCP's indigenization was to lure the masses into modernity, which was something the party offered. The masses were to be awoken, acculturated, and civilized. This was part of the "noble vocation" that drew countless intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie into the party. The challenge was to appeal to the targets of this "civilizing project": "the masses." In party language, to overcome backwardness and to be awoken meant being aware of both international and Malaya politics. It also meant being anti-imperialist, and, since about 1933, being theoretically sound or having a "high political level" (something that will be discussed in chapter 6).³⁴² Colonial emancipation was seen as the progress of civilizing the oppressed peoples of the East. "The British often say in Malaya that peoples of the East are of the second sort (*xia deng de dong xi*), 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 gong zuo*), overcome imperialist domination, and their civilization will advance (*wenming jingbu*).³⁴³ The Soviet Union was proof of that: "In the 10 years after the success of the proletariat revolution, the Soviet Union was economically and culturally

³⁴² Every comrade must understand party's political tasks and understand the world's and Malaya's political situations. Every branch must print more educational materials, especially basic theory books, and must strengthen the education and theoretical levels: "no revolutionary theory -- no revolutionary movement." "Dangwu wenti jueyi an" [Resolution on party work] in "Malaiya gongchandang, Diyici kuo da hui jue yi an," [The First Enlarged congress of the MCP] 5 April 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/1-21, esp. 9-13.

³⁴³ "Manifesto in memory of comrade Lenin, the leader of the world proletarian revolution, in his seventh anniversary of death, addressing the oppressed people of Malay," by the Singapore committee of the MCP, 21 January 1931 RGASPI 495/62/5/8. "Shi yue geming chengong di shi san zhou nian jinian xuan yan," [Propaganda leaflet for the commemoration of the Thirteenth anniversary of October revolution] by CC MCP, 7 November 1930. RGASPI495/62/5/23; "Guangzhou baodong san zhou nian jinian," [Commemorating the Third anniversary of Guangzhou commune], 11 December 1930. RGASPI 495/62/5/25.

backward, and has now has been able to surpass the economics and culture of any so-called civilized country.”³⁴⁴

Who were the party’s Chinese “masses”? In 1930, likely, in Singapore, among the Chinese 10% were “lackeys of imperialists”, 10% were students, 20% were merchants, and 60% were toiling masses and liberal businessmen. Thus, the majority of the population, the “masses,” were “middle class” -- toiling masses and liberal businessmen. The fact that toiling masses and liberal businessmen are listed together speaks to their comparable economic class in the eyes of the party. The party’s opinion about Chinese was not very optimistic either: they were seen as mostly busy with “physical games, Christian doctrines and remnants of theories in China. “

To the frustration of the MCP’s leaders, neither the Chinese nor the Malay masses wanted to go the way of the party, something the party blamed on the masses’ backwardness. According to the CC MCP, “Owing to the lack of experience with struggle, and to their backward cultural level, the masses in Malaya may be suspicious of a large struggle. The small daily struggle, the one that focuses on the most immediate demands, can mobilize the broadest, even the most backward, masses to participate.”³⁴⁵

Attitudes toward even Malay intellectuals were condescending. The Chinese communists were critical of the Malay intellectuals who did not promote nationalism. Referring to the British way of dealing with the Malays, a delegate at the MCP’s founding conference said “they train up a few native intellectuals specially employed by the imperialists for the purpose of destroying their conception of independence and emancipation but [are] willing to

³⁴⁴“Central Circular No. 9. The Commemoration of October Revolution and the preparation for the Solidarity Strike,” by “The CC of C.P. of Malay,” 3 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44.

³⁴⁵ “Central circular no.5. The general lesson of the Demonstration on Aug. First,” 17 August 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/33-35.

[be] beasts (cows and horses) of the imperialists from generation to generation.”³⁴⁶ Yet, not all Malay intellectuals fit the MCP’s perception of them as of being obedient servants of the British colonial state. Moreover, the awakening of the Malays was also a key theme in the Malay public sphere and intellectual debates happening in the Malay language.³⁴⁷ There were a number of parallel themes between the MCP and trends on the Malay intellectual scene, as well as Malaya intellectuals’ relations with the “masses.”³⁴⁸ During the Depression, newspaper editors and writers not only suffered less than other strata of the population, they also discovered themes and causes for their writing.³⁴⁹ Like these Malaya editors, Chinese editors also did not suffer from the Great Depression, which was not the case for labourers. They lived a life that was different from that of labourers, the very masses they sought to engage.

Thus, it was not surprising that the Chinese communists would feel that the establishment of a Malayan communist party was a tremendous step forward in setting Malay masses on the journey to modernity. Starting with the MCP’s establishment, however, the party had trouble bringing in Malays and Indians. Since Ho Chi Minh’s times in Siam in the late 1920s, when he encouraged his Vietnamese comrades to learn Siamese (and he was learning it himself), immigrant communists had trouble bringing natives into their organizations, both Vietnamese and Chinese alike.

To be fair, the MCP was self-critical for its condescending attitude toward the masses. In August 1930, the MCP intended to “intensify our efforts to obtain the confidence [and understanding p.29] of the masses by exposing their ’imperialists plots.’” “We should avoid the

³⁴⁶ “Minutes,” p. 114.

³⁴⁷ Milner, *Invention of Politics*, p.265

³⁴⁸ See last part of this chapter.

³⁴⁹ Emmanuel, “Viewpapers.”

allegation that the masses are unconscious and on the contrary, we should study how to approach the masses and explain to them the various facts, we should carry out our work very practically.” The MCP continued: “we should acknowledge not enough diligent work of our own. We must break from the opportunistic thinking and do real work. Among Malay and Indian workers, we must work equally as among Chinese workers.”³⁵⁰

There are few mentions of Malays and Indians within the party, apart from the various complaints about the party’s failure to attract them into the party. There were fewer than a dozen special references to Malays as MCP members in the documents from 1930. For example, in 1930, there were two Indian youths who led anti-imperialist work, and one Malay and one Chinese born in Malaya who could compile Malay and Indian language materials. But that was only preparation, for the actual work of publishing in three languages, it “all depends on the *instruction and support*.”³⁵¹ In October 1930, at the second enlarged meeting, changes in the Central committee included one Malay comrade and five Malay candidates in the CC, two of them students and three of them workers. The MCP reported that despite the arrests of many leaders the previous day, a demonstration of over 1,000 people, including 20 Malays and Indians, was organized. The demonstrators distributed printed leaflets and 40 participants were subsequently arrested. In Johor over 400 people demonstrated, including Malays and Indians.³⁵² The attitude toward the non-Chinese comrades was patronizing: “the CC has bought

³⁵⁰ “Zhongyang tonggao di si hao,” [Central circular no,4] 10 August 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/31-32.

³⁵¹ “Economic conditions in Malay,” by “N.A.K.” [Nguyen Ai Kwok, aka Ho Chi Minh] 10 June 1930. RGASPI 495/62/8/4-6.

³⁵² The MCP asked the Comintern to send it one person for each department, including the central committee, the youth league, the red union and seamen, as well as political slogans and money to do propaganda work. Understandably, they reported an increase in non-Chinese involvement in the party organizations. That included over 200 Indian workers in the union, and one Indian in the party in Johor. Thirty joined the trade union in Melaka, among them 20 Malay and Indian workers. There were 30 local

a tin press and long had taken up the question of propaganda in Malayan and Hindu languages. But after some conversation with the Malay and Hindu comrades, we find out that their education is still too infantile. Therefore, we cannot trust them with the press.”³⁵³ When the party issued pamphlets on an international celebration in Hindu and Malay, “the native masses” were “pleased to have revolutionaries among themselves as well, while the Chinese are also pleased that Malays and Indians are with them now.”³⁵⁴

The MCP was critical of the masses, but it was also critical of its own members. In October 1930, the MCP membership was over 1,100 party members and 500 *Komsomol*. Yet, the quality” of party and CYL members is not higher than that of the revolutionary masses” or perhaps even lower, in terms of practical work. Thus communists could not become the “revolutionary vanguard.”³⁵⁵ Otherwise, the foundation of the party was weak, and the main industries (*zhuyao chanye bumen*) and ethnic masses (*minzu qunzhong*) were largely not part of its organization. Party propaganda among the masses was meant to use a recently published book by Lenin to propagandize his teaching at the party meetings and in the mass organizations (*qunzhong tuanti*) that were under the leadership of the party.³⁵⁶

workers in Negri Sembilan in the red union, and in Selangor, 20 Indian workers were in the red union and anti-imperialist league. In Penang, 200 Indian workers joined the red union and two joined the party. In Singapore, the MCP reported that they started to organize railway workers and already connected with 30 workers, and that there were 30 other Indian and Malay workers connected with the party in other areas. Overall, party membership was 1,220, red union membership was 6,000, the anti-imperialist league had over 100 members, and they started to work on the organization of more than 20 women.”Report from Malay, 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ The party leadership in Singapore was criticized for not being involved enough in the everyday struggles of the masses, for not underestimating the potential of the masses who were afraid of repression, and for not “rising to the struggle.” In 1933, the party planned activities including commemorative demonstrations for revolutionary anniversaries, strikes, demonstrations in schools and

The MCP was self-critical in that it did not spread propaganda regarding world politics and Malaya politics to the masses, did not know about workers' daily lives, and neglected the real-life demands of the masses. "Malay and Indian language materials are lacking; work in the cities is not good," party organizations mainly remain, as in the past, in the "rubber tree gardens." The MCP did not "understand the life of - and doesn't carry out ethnicization of the organization of (*geminzuhua*) - women, young workers, children, peasants, the unemployed, abandoned work among the soldiers, and the party proletariat consciousness is lacking."³⁵⁷ In 1933, the MCP continued to report that the party organization could not penetrate into each ethnic community (*geminzu*).³⁵⁸ By 1934, the frank opinion of the party members regarding the involvement of Malays in the party was that it was impossible. Thus, the reason the Malayan comrades were only in Sembilan was that comrades acknowledged the importance of involving Malaya and India comrades in the party, yet did not pursue it as if they thought it was "part of local party organizations and comrades had no faith in the work among the said natives (*ma yin minzu gongzuo*), thinking that it was impossible to do it" (*meiyou ban fa de*).³⁵⁹

According to the MCP, in 1930 it did have connections with the masses, unlike in the late 1930s, something that will be discussed in chapter 6. "In Malaya we have connections with masses, but we can't manage to attract them into our organization."³⁶⁰ "The party has no influence in the masses because it doesn't work in the basis of factory nucleuses [sic] and doesn't allow us to attract wide toiling masses. Protests often ended in defeat because of the

other public places, as well as performances. "Magong zhongyang gongzuo jue ding" [CC MCP work resolution regarding the Fifteenth anniversary of Liebknecht and Luxembourg's death and Tenth anniversary of Lenin's death] 26 December 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/38-40.

³⁵⁷ "Resolution on party work," RGASPI 495/62/21/ 9-13.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ "A letter from Malaya No.3," RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

³⁶⁰ "Report from Malay," 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/ 28.

weaknesses of our work and because of the objective conditions”. The “party did not have sufficient influence in the factories.” An example of how the party’s “ethnic” policy worked was when the MCP sent a comrade to the East Indies after there was a struggle between Chinese and “Asian” workers over “national differences.” The comrade was sent there to do “education work there [and] to explain to them that the working classes in all countries are one family not divided by nationality.”³⁶¹ Thus, the party used the rhetoric of “proletarian internationalism” to do work in multi-ethnic environments. The party itself alienated the masses through its policies. “Burning up factories and confiscating properties in order to seize the ruling power and establish the Soviets not only rendered mass struggles a heavy blow, but also makes masses apart from the party or even hating the party.”[sic]³⁶² The same effect had “disregard for insurrection and individual terror.” “The Party compelled the striking workers to play the insurrection as if it were a joke. This is an unforgivable mistake.”³⁶³ “The slogan of seizure of power and establishment of soviets is premature because the Malay party is young,” and there was a “lack of broad masses around the party.” To use this slogan would mean “to neglect the forces of enemies, overestimate our own forces, and to abandon the general task of the party, that is, to win over the masses, to organize the masses and finally to prepare for an armed insurrection.” After the MCP’s establishment in September 1930, the CC MCP in its circular wrote: “Because of the present British policy of harmonization, and of the fact that the Malaya bourgeoisie is following the tail of British imperialists, Malaya workers and peasants do not dare to say anything, and it is possible to say the Malays are not revolutionary, that they need to be dragged out of the present economic condition, and that their civilisational level

³⁶¹ “A letter from Malaya No.3,” RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

³⁶² “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” RGASPI 495/62/11/ 4.

³⁶³ Ibid.

should be raised. A Malay workers' and peasants' state can only be established by Malayan workers and peasants."³⁶⁴ Above all, the problem with the masses was "afraidism" (*haipa zhuyi*) i.e. the masses were afraid to join the party.³⁶⁵

Another point of party failure in luring the masses into the party was excessive internationalization and linking the Malaya situation with the situation in the world, like in the August 1 International Red Day campaign in 1929. This commemoration apparently had little significance to the workers in Malaya, as the party had to explain to the masses that the significance of the August 1 demonstration, International Red Day, was a day of protest against the coming Second World War.³⁶⁶ However, the MCP attributed its failure to its preoccupation with the world situation instead of with the situation in Malaya. Furthermore, "the daily sufferings of the masses were supposed to be used as materials for the agitation work and the masses should be called upon to fight the authorities by the means of demonstration. It should be remembered forever that the sufferings of the masses should be disclosed by the strength of the masses themselves. To write essays, groan and persuade the masses to tolerate is not at all the spirit of the Bolshevik party." On several occasions the MCP stated that propaganda (for the celebration of the October revolution and the general strike) "should be simple and clear."³⁶⁷ Apparently, their point of reference was the essays in newspapers' literary supplements

³⁶⁴ "Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao," [Central Circular no. 7] 15 September 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/36-38, esp. 38.

³⁶⁵ "Resolution on party work," RGASPI 495/62/21/9.

³⁶⁶ "Central circular no.2. Preparation for the mass demonstration on 'Aug.1st' the International Red Day," 18 June 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/18-22a. For a generic Comintern English language propaganda of this day see *International Red Day (August 1st 1929) .The workers Fight Against imperialists War.* (London, 1929, Modern Books Limited).

³⁶⁷ "Central circular no. 2," RGASPI 495/62/13/18-22a); Central Circular no. 9 "The commemoration of October revolution by means of the general solidarity strike," 3 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44.

(*fukan*)³⁶⁸ that, for instance, talked about communism without naming it, meaning it was potentially understandable only to an educated audience, such as students, for example.³⁶⁹

An important way for the communist party to connect with its constituency was by organizing a labour movement. But as of the mid-1930s, that did not work for the MCP either.

The MCP and the Labour Movement

According to Trocky, the communist movement in Malaya is difficult to disentangle from the labour movement in the 1930s. However, the MCP documents show that this relationship was tenuous. The MCP was ineffective in labour organizing, something that was a major task of both a communist party and a Chinese association (or secret society). In this sense, the MCP can be seen as the successor of the protectors of labour, along their predecessors' secret societies, which were banned by the British in 1890.³⁷⁰ In most cases, the

³⁶⁸ The examples of this kind of discreet communist propaganda are articles in *fukan* (literary supplement) of *Lat Pao*, Singapore, published under the rubric of *Yezi* (coconut) on April 21-22, 1930. Among the various short phrases was one about revolution: "Revolution is like a nice dress: when you put it on, you look good". *Lat Pao*, April 21, 1930, p. 16. In *Lat Pao's fukan* right during the MCP founding conference there was an article by Yi Hong (衣虹) "Xin xin wenxue de xingshi wenti" [To the question of the form of the new literature] that quoted a Marxist theorist about art that included phrases like "Art form is determined by the social productions forces." *Lat Pao* April 24, 1930, p. 25. More about *fukans* and leftist writers publishing in Singapore Chinese newspapers see Kenley, *New Culture*.

³⁶⁹ "Central Circular no. 2," RGASPI 495/62/13/18-22a.

³⁷⁰ The ban on secret societies by the British in 1890 impeded the Chinese workers' ability to self-organize for defence purposes. Karl Trocky, "Development of Labour Organisation in Singapore, 1800-1960," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* Vol. 47, Issue 1, (March 2001) pp. 115-129, esp. 121. The communists were competing with secret societies in labour organizing. On a number of occasions, the MCP mentioned the "Three Star society" (*sanxingdang*) as an "organization of rascals" in which workers participated. "Decision of the CC of the Malayan C. Party on the intensification of the Labour Movement," passed on 20 March 20 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/57-59ob. In 1936, secret societies (*sihuidang*) were getting in the MCP's way when the MCP tried to organize workers. Chen Zhengchun, "Xinjiapo binggan gongren de douzheng"[the Struggle of the workers at cookies factory in Singapore] in *Guangdong wenshi ziliao di 54 ji* [Literary and Historical materials of Guangdong. Vol.54] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi guangdongsheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), pp. 155-161.

MCP was using the labour organizing to ensure its own organizational survival. This section will show that the MCP tried to lead the strikes that already had been underway, and had a hard time organizing strikes on its own. Materials found in the Comintern archive confirm C.F.Yong's view that by 1934, the MCP occasionally involved in labour protests.³⁷¹ Although the situation improved by the late 1930s, the available evidence from the Comintern's archives shows that the party did not play as important a role in labour organizing even in 1936-38, as is the established view in the historiography.³⁷²

The MCP was self-critical over the fact that the party branch was not independent and did not play the role of a nucleus (*hexin zuoyong*) of the masses; party leadership was weak and the party was the "tail of the masses." The party did not do open propaganda nor did it use legal methods, and it "closed the door" to the masses. Arrests of almost all members of the provisional committee frightened the leaders in 1930 and reduced their activity and influence.³⁷³ The arrests continued throughout the 1930s.

In 1930, six out of nine CC members were workers.³⁷⁴ However, overall, judging from the fact that the party was self-critical that it did not promote workers into leadership organs, the party's leading organs did not consist of workers. Since 1929 (and the situation did not change later), most of the workers were under the influence of yellow trade union leaders (especially in heavy industry) and some were under the influence of the social democratic party. MCP comrades defined workers' class consciousness as "very indistinct."³⁷⁵ The party could

³⁷¹ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 174.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 216-227.

³⁷³ "Minutes," p. 132.

³⁷⁴ Ho Chi Minh's report, 18 November 1930, p. 25.

³⁷⁵ "Resolutions adopted at the Third Congress of Malaya Party," RGASPI 495/62/3/ 7, 9.

not establish organizations in the main industries; instead, the party's and labour union's foundation was among "free profession workers" (*ziyouzhiye gongren*). Those were, likely, self-employed.

Tai Yuen ascribed the 1939 labour unrest to the MLGU leadership.³⁷⁶ In 1939, in its reports to the Comintern, the MCP portrayed the workers' movement as having been under the MCP's leadership since its beginning, but because the communists did "not always correctly understand the conditions and tasks of the workers' movement, they often remained without the leadership of communists, and failed."³⁷⁷ However, at all times, the MCP reported that party involvement in the labour movement was not satisfactory. More common are reports that the party could not capitalize on the wave of labour unrest that happened without any connection to the party.

Red trade union membership in the early 1931 was 5,830. The members included 350 Indian and 70 "Javanese" sailors as well as 30 "miscellaneous" workers, Malays and two Javanese. The majority of them were tin and gum workers and seamen.³⁷⁸ In the MCP reports, the main criticisms of red trade unions were the lack of leadership, the fact that the struggles

³⁷⁶ Tai Yuen, *Labour Unrest*, p. 134.

³⁷⁷ "Spravka o rabote sredi kitaiskih emigrantov v Malaye. sostavlena na osnove materialov 1939-1940 g.g) [Note of the work among Chinese immigrants compiled based on the materials from 1939-1940] RGASPI 495/62/30/10a-54, esp. 20.

³⁷⁸ Chinese labour organizing started in British Malaya in 1925 when the All China General Labour Union sent people to work in Nanyang. First, they worked among what MCP English language reports referred to as "foreign affairs" workers (that is, servants in the houses of foreigners) and seamen. Trade union and worker night schools were established. In February 1926, there were over 300 students and workers in Singapore. In April 1926, the Nanyang General Labour union was established, with 5,392 members overall, including 1,000 seamen, 35% industrial workers, 40% gum cutters, 5% "foreign affairs" workers, 5% shop employees and 14 other professions. "Report on the Labour Movement" in "Minutes," pp. 110-112; "Worker movement in Federated Malay States," RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4.

were mostly spontaneous, not organized by the party,³⁷⁹ and the lack of knowledge of the conditions of the life of the masses. In 1930, the party believed that the masses could be made to do things: “Workers should be made to join the factory committees, which were the way to develop trade unions and are the organizations for the personal interests of the workers.” “If the workers’ understanding of this organization is achieved, it will then be very easy to develop the organization of the militant trade unions.”³⁸⁰ In 1928, the monopolization of labour unions by the party caused workers to protest against the “commandism” and “compulsory strikes,” which were criticized by Li Lisan and others.³⁸¹

In 1930, the problem of not having mass participation was seen in terms of leftism. The demonstration on August 1 was to be training for the masses on how to seize power and a “test to our party: whether it has *any influence* among the masses and whether it can carry out its own share of the world revolution.”³⁸² They included “calling for the masses to struggle without having evaluated the strength” and thus resulted in failure. “In the long run, such comrades will be disliked by the masses but the former, not realizing the origins of their own mistakes, frequently speak ill of the latter alleging that they are unconscious.[sic]”³⁸³ Over the course of the 1930s, another common criticism was having standards that were too high for new trade union members (similar to the criticism of having too high standards for party members), which resulted in a “closed door policy” and little increase in trade union membership. Instead,

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ “Central circular no 4,” 8 August 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/27-30.

³⁸¹ “Li Lisan’s letter”, 1929. The MCP was self-critical labour unions becoming like a “second party,” that is, they did not have a following, did not have “the real character of the worker masses,” and union cadres were all party members. Union leaders were appointed, instead of being elected, and orders were imposed and the workers were forced to go on strike. As the result of these problems, the workers’ were sceptical of the union and did not consider the union to be their own. “Minutes,” pp. 150-151.

³⁸² “Central circular no.3,” 15 July 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/23-25.

³⁸³ Ibid.

the MCP argued that “those working masses who do not understand our policy should not be ignored.”³⁸⁴

Most of the strikes the MCP mentioned were spontaneous strikes, not ones organized by the MCP.³⁸⁵ Generally, British police analysis confirms the documents from the Comintern’s collection. In 1931, the MLU used “the lawful ways” for solving issues such as petitions to the Chinese protectorate for redress of grievances. With the exception of Penang, attempts to establish periodicals failed. “Propaganda was spread verbally, “by inspectors,” rather than in writing. No subscriptions were paid and headquarters were struggling to make ends meet. Among the CC of the labour union there were representatives of rubber and Pasir Panjan labour union, eight from Singapore, one from Ipoh and one from Penang. In the labour unions, there was a total membership of 8,175, about 1,220 of whom were Malays and Indians.³⁸⁶ As for peasants, a section of work among peasants always appeared in all MCP reports and in the Comintern’s letters to the MCP. The party’s resolutions on the peasant movement, a movement that barely existed, did not make it appear that any practical work had been done, and that it was simply the rhetoric and slogans from the CCP and Comintern’s documents.³⁸⁷ The

³⁸⁴ Central Circular no. 9, RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44. “Worker movement in Federated Malay States,” RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4.

³⁸⁵ “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” Undated report from 1930. RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4.

³⁸⁶ A report from 12 September 1931 from Malaya about labour union to CC MCP. CO 273-542, p. 560.

³⁸⁷ “Central Circular no.1. The conclusion of the Third Delegate conference of the C.P. of Malay,” 1 May 1930. RGASPI 495/ 62/13/1-17. The MCP was to organize peasant unions (*Nongmin xiehui*) and lead peasants under the leadership of proletariat to overthrow British imperialism and Malayan feudalism. British centralization of land was causing bankruptcies among the peasants. MCP self-criticisms were the same as in the workers’ movement, including the lack of working plans, education, leadership, organization, and members of various ethnic groups. The MCP talked about the need to raise their cultural and political level, the need to use gray organizations such as farmers cooperatives (*nongmin hezuo she*) or peoples’ schools (*pingmin xuexiao*). Slogans for the peasants were to be the freedom of tilling, trade, belief, schooling, and husbandry. As for the program for the soldiers’

documents collected in the Comintern confirm³⁸⁸ that the MCP was not able to capitalize on the unemployment that resulted from the Great Depression.

In 1933, most of the strikes remained spontaneous, (mainly by tailors and shoemakers), although the number of solidarity strikes grew. Their demands were mostly economic, not political, and the party leadership was infantile and weak.³⁸⁹ The “masses persevered in their concept of legality in struggles.” The MCP reported little work even on the CC level in the previous six months, “not because of laziness, but because the CC was weak and lacked experienced cadres and money”.³⁹⁰

In March 1934, the labour movement, like the party, was reported to be weak and declining,³⁹¹ even while their unionization was celebrated (*tongmeng douzheng de qingshi*).³⁹² Despite the “increased militancy on the part of the working class, most of the strikes lacked organization, and certain sections of the working class maintains the illusion about legality and about the demagogy of the imperialism and capital.”³⁹³ Membership dropped. From December 1933 to March 1934, in the MLU there were 6,035 (695 less than before) members in eight

movement, the MCP intended to work in soldiers’ gray organizations, such as clubs and committees (*shibing julebu, shibing weiyuanhui*). The slogans to be promoted among soldiers were to stand against forced participation in the war, for improvement of the quality of food and civilian (*suibian*) clothing after service, standing up against officers’ beatings, and the right to marry without officers’ approval. “Resolution on party work,” RGASPI 495/62/21/9-13.

³⁸⁸ Yong in “Closing questions,” in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 233-241, esp. p. 237.

³⁸⁹ “Resolution on party work,” RGASPI 495/62/21/11.

³⁹⁰ “A letter from the Malayan party no. 3,” English version, RGASPI 495/62/22/8-12ob.

³⁹¹ “Report of Labour Federation of Malaya no. 1 to the Profintern,” 25 March 1934. RGASPI 495/62/24/13-16ob.

³⁹² Resolution on the labour movement passed by the C.C. of the C.P. of Malaya on March 24, 1934 (abridged translation),” RGASPI 495/62/23/46-49.

³⁹³ In the list of the struggles of April-May 1934 across Malaya, of the 30 strikes about 3 or 4 had Indian workers participating. “Sangyue lai malaiya gongren douzheng” [The struggles of Malayan workers in the past three months], 28 March 1934. RGASPI 495/62/25/9-10.

localities, excluding seamen: 4,512 were Chinese, 518 were Malays, and 52 were Indian. The places where there were Malays and Indians included Malaka, Sembilan, Penang and Singapore.

³⁹⁴ Among these, the party and red union did play a small leadership role. There were only 40 females among the members. Of the 6,000 workers, fewer than 10% were industrial workers, over 70% were agricultural workers, and 20% were ‘others’. Over 90% of them were Chinese.

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The success of labour organizing was reported by the MCP as happening only among rubber plantation workers, who likely were the “agricultural workers” who formed the majority of the red union members, as was mentioned above. ³⁹⁶ This was also the area, along with the “main industries,” whose importance was stressed by the Comintern. ³⁹⁷ Perhaps, the MLU and the party’s relative success in the rubber industry were also because there was no direct communication between workers and management (as was the case for Chinese and Indian

³⁹⁴ According to the 1934 report to the Pan-Pacific Bureau of the Profintern, the relationship between the red labour unions (RLU) and the masses “are not intimate,” and “our daily work activities are isolated from the masses.” Errors of the RLU included right opportunism, passiveness, lack of hard work, putchism, lack of preparation, inability to seize the leadership during a struggle, giving up work among unemployed and women, ignoring the work among young workers and yellow and “rascal” organizations [i.e. secret societies and triads] as “they could not participate in the revolution,” and that factory and unemployed committees were not established. The upper leadership of the RLU was bureaucratized, general instead of concrete, “liberal without control or examination,” lacking education, and neglectful of secret work. Difficulties in the labour movement included having “different and complicated peoples, languages, customs and habits,” arrests, and a lack of experienced cadres and funds -- which they requested from the Profintern. “Report of Labour Federation of Malaya no. 1 to the Profintern,” RGASPI 495/62/24/13-16ob.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ However, in 1933 the MCP stated that the party was unable to penetrate into rubber plantations and tin mines. “Magongzhongyang tonggao di sjiu hao. Guojiqingnianjie de gongzuo jueyi,” [CC MCP circular no.49. Resolution on the International Youth Day] 31 July 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20. In 1939, the MCP stated that the party did not secure a basis in central places, most importantly, rubber plantations, mines, and big industries. “Maijin”, [Forward] A pamphlet consisting of materials produced between December 1939 and early 1941. RGASPI 495/62/28/53-84, esp. p. 59, 64.

³⁹⁷ Comintern’s letter to the CC MCP, June 1 1934. RGASPI 495/62/24/37-45.

workers). Because workers were hired by contractors, there was no precedent or mechanism for labour negotiations,³⁹⁸ and the communists thus occupied the void.

In Johor, the MCP committee even advocated for the collaboration between capital and labour. The party “lagged behind the revolutionary spirit of workers like in the seamen’s struggles and the Johor Bahru rubber cutters, and was isolated like in the Penang gum tree cutters struggle and the Singapore city government workers struggle. Except in Singapore, the party neglected to organize women, the unemployed and yellow trade unions. The CC pointed out that the present condition was very advantageous for the growth of the trade union movement, as the workers’ protests were growing.³⁹⁹ However, the MCP did not take advantage of that situation. A more common way for the MCP to express that the party could not piggyback on spontaneous labour protests in 1932-33 was to say that “the workers’ movement lacked leadership in the daily struggles.” The members of labour organizations (*zhigonghui*) were mostly Hainanese and were an “organization with a narrow interest.” They were not successful in attracting the members of the gray and yellow unions (such as the Three Star society) into red unions; they “have no connection with the organization of the “oppressed nations,” especially in the struggle and they are always alone.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Tai Yuen, *Labour unrest*, p.52.

³⁹⁹ Protests were growing among Singapore’s transport workers, seamen, rubber cutters in Johor, yellow pear workers, along with protests in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang, and Seremban. The party was self-critical of giving up attempts to form a united front from below, for not using tactics in factory committees and unemployed committees, and for making little progress in auxiliary organizations like brotherhoods (*xiong di hui*) and sport societies (*tiyuhui*). Labour organizers in the trade unions were ignorant of the life conditions of the masses and were therefore isolated. With the exception of the Singapore city committee, the Sembilan local committee and the seamen committee, the party had weak leadership in the red trade union, and none at all in Sembilan, Malacca, or Johor Bahru. “Resolution on the labour movement passed by the C.C. of the C.P. of Malaya on March 24, 1934 (abridged translation)”, RGASPI 495/62/23/46-49.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

In the Bolshevik language, the MCP explained its failures as the inability to overcome the influence of reformism on the working class, and the movement's mechanistic leadership. In fact, the MCP's illegal status scared the workers away: "If possible, use open propaganda in order to eliminate workers' fears and suspicions of us. Use propaganda items, such as newspapers, leaflets (*chuandan*), little booklets (*xiao cezi*), and wall posters (*bibao*), especially in the Indian and Malay languages. Form struggles, recommend workers for leadership, and stop appointing cadres based on personal connections (*ganqing*) and bureaucratism."⁴⁰¹ The MCP did not have experienced Chinese comrades in the labour movement. Including those in leadership positions, they "do not understand what the workers suffer. All they can do is 'sing some revolutionary songs' with the workers," the same type of activity that Zhang Xia did in Fujian in 1934 (see chapter 5).⁴⁰²

According to the CC, local party committees had a "disdainful" attitude of the party or individual comrades towards the labour movement; they treated red union movement work as a party work, but at the same time they did not let the red trade union lose its independence.⁴⁰³ 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 (*Wenhua Chengdu tai di, bu neng jieshou geming de yao qiu*)". Some comrades simply paid lip service to this work. In order to develop Bolshevik organization in factories, red unions were to indigenize. Red union members had to "close the gap between the masses and the red

⁴⁰¹ "Central Circular no. 9 The commemoration of October revolution by means of the general solidarity strike," 3 October 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44.

⁴⁰² Seamen, rubber and tin mines were the main industries, and the party had union organizations there. The majority of the unemployed came from these industries. "Report from Malay," 2 January 1931 RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 29.

⁴⁰³ "Resolution on the labour movement passed by the C.C. of the C.P. of Malaya on March 24, 1934 (abridged translation)," RGASPI 495/62/23/46-49.

trade union,” as well as to understand the actual living of the masses and to penetrate them “instead of standing outside shouting radical slogans.” They also had to enlarge auxiliary organizations among those brotherhoods (*xiongdì huì*) and sports societies,⁴⁰⁴ to organize self-defense corps, to develop a program for each industry and each factory, to intensify education and literacy movements, and to work on raising the cultural level of the trade union members (*zhengzhi shuiping tigao*)⁴⁰⁵ Despite the Comintern’s criticism, in 1933 the MCP still advocated for the creation of the separate trade unions based on different nationalities. In order to fulfil the task of the Malaya GLU, since there were no nationality-based workers organizations, “we must gather cadres that work in other nationalities (*minzu huodong de rencai*), make a plan and match their activity, and quickly establish trade unions of each nationality (*geminzu de gonghui*). Once we do that, we must increase the leadership of these unions which will boost the old organization and enlarge the new organization”.⁴⁰⁶

The party sounded especially desperate in March 1934.⁴⁰⁷ Just like they said that it was impossible to attract Malays into the party, they reported that all ranks of the party (*duoji dangbu*) gave up reporting on the masses’ struggles because for the upper ranks of the party (*shangji dangbu fangmian*), the struggles of the masses were “even beyond our understanding.” The CC ordered all party branches to survey the struggles, both those that were led by the party and those that were not, in accordance with the survey plan (*tongjibiao*).⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ This confirms Yong’s point that in 1934 the MCP was in dire straits. Yong in “Closing questions,” in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p. 237.

⁴⁰⁸ There were two kinds of struggles: those of workers and of non-workers, or “regular masses” (*yiban qunzhong*). The MCP members were to record the date, outcome, who participated and how many

As was apparent in the MCP documents of the first half of 1934, the MCP did not play a significant role in the labour unrest of 1934. In the abridged Russian translation of a brochure titled “Malaya today,” produced in Chinese in 1939,⁴⁰⁹ no strikes under the communist leadership were mentioned between 1931 and 1937. The first strike under communist leadership that was mentioned was the 1931 strike at the Malaka plantation. The next one that was mentioned under communist leadership was the 1937 strike of construction workers in Singapore. According to this brochure, in 1937 the proletariat was defeated, but after 1939, it began to struggle more decisively. For instance, in 1938 Singapore port workers refused to accept Japanese cargo. On 10 January 5,000-6,000 people of all nationalities participated in the demonstration. On May 1, 500-600 workers and clerks participated in a demonstration. In 1939, the struggle of the masses increased, and in January, 2,500 government workers in a Kuala Lumpur factory went on strike. After the declaration of war on Germany, the workers’ movement intensified. In November-December 1939, 1,500 woodcutters went on strike and several thousand workers in a rubber factory protested for a wage increase and a decrease in working hours.⁴¹⁰ According to Onraet, in 1937, Indian labour came into concert with Chinese efforts.⁴¹¹

people, the number of days on strike, and who the leaders were. “Magong zhongyang tong zhi: guangyu qunzhong douzheng de tongji he bao gao de gong zuo de jueding,” [CC MCP circular regarding the decision about conducting survey of mass struggles] March 21 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/31-35.

⁴⁰⁹ “*Sokrashcenniy perevod broshury Malaya segonya sostavlennoi na kitayskom yazyke, 1939* (Abridged translation of brochure “Malaya today” composed in Chinese, 1939) Hereafter, “Malaya Today” RGASPI 495/62/29/65-86, esp.67-69.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Onraet, *Police Background*, p. 111.

It is possible that like the December 9 movement in China,⁴¹² labour unrest in Malaya also had limited communist participation. More research needs to be done, but the Comintern's documents convey a sense of the party's failure to handle the wave of spontaneous labour protests in 1934. It is likely that the MCP's role in labour unrest was even more minor than the secondary literature suggests.⁴¹³ After all, according to the head of the Singapore police Onraet, Malayan labour was well looked after by the British.⁴¹⁴ Moreover, according to the British police, local labour troubles were invariably exaggerated in the communist publications.

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The following excerpt from Ho Chi Minh's report about the MCP in 1930 provides a summary of the kind of problems the MCP had: "GENERAL LEVEL: they are devoted, but inexperienced. They wanted to do things, but do not know how to do them. Owing to the lack of training and of education materials, their doctrinal and political knowledge is generally low; thus their daily work is backward." Ho continued: "Nuclei are being formed, but the members in charge of them did not know how to organise the meeting, what to do or to say during the meeting, and how to keep the nuclei working". The MCP called for a public meeting at the naval base in Singapore of the trade unions that were illegal, and this led to arrests. "Very few could explain why there would be a second imperialist war or why they must defend the USSR, and although they know the names of Marx and Lenin, they do not know their teachings."⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² John Israel, "The December 9th Movement: A Case Study in Chinese Communist Historiography," *The China Quarterly*, No. 23 (Jul. - Sep., 1965), pp. 140-169.

⁴¹³ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 201, 216-227. Tai Yuen, *Labour unrest*, pp. 22, 25.

⁴¹⁴ Onraet, *Police Background*, p.115.

⁴¹⁵ CO273-571, p. 57.

⁴¹⁶ Ho Chi Minh's report, 18 Novemebr1930, p. 25.

The sense of failure that the MCP reports project raise the question of what the MCP's activities were if the main activity of the communist party -- labour organizing -- was not well attended by the party. There was another side of the MCP activities, that of fulfilling the functions of a Chinese association, to protect and promote the interests of Chinese residents vis-à-vis the British state.

EVERYDAY COMMUNISM:⁴¹⁷ GOALS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE MCP

Goals: Adaptation and Political Representation of Chinese Migrants

The goals and activities of the MCP as a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party form the second component of this chapter. I call this component “everyday communism” because the activities that the MCP engaged in under the slogans of communist party were in fact designed to protect the interests of the Chinese community in the British colonial state. Those were the everyday concerns and primary goals of the Chinese association that the MCP was.

The MCP's goals were similar to those of other Chinese overseas associations. The party cell was a calling place for those in a new environment, and party connections structured migration front organizations functionally, mirroring existing Chinese associations. Many of the party's activities were built around fundraising for needs back in China, building on the experience of other Chinese politicians who raised funds for China among Chinese communities, such as was the case with Sun Yatsen. The MCP was another Chinese association that spoke on behalf of the interests of the Chinese community, vis-à-vis the colonial state.

⁴¹⁷ My thanks to Professor Timothy Brook for suggesting this expression.

In this, the MCP was a hybrid too. While having the explicitly communist goal of overthrowing the British and establishing a Soviet republic of Malaya, the MCP simultaneously advocated a “democratic movement” and did so as a Chinese association. Comintern representative Fu Daqing put an end to the plans of the MCP-to-be to pursue the fight for democratic rights, and told the MCP to work instead from “the demands of the masses,”⁴¹⁸ that is, to indigenize.

A CCP cell was a social connection that one would seek, much as migrants would look for a native place association. MCP members, when going overseas, would try to find a party cell even when they were only going for a short time. For example, Shieng Kien Chu was waiting for the CCP to connect him with a party cell while he was also waiting for a meeting with the Comintern in Shanghai in 1930.⁴¹⁹ Also, migration was organized along party connections from South China to the Nanyang.⁴²⁰ Party members would issue each other documents securing their entry into the British colony. The connections worked the other way as well; native place ties in securing employment were to be used as a cover for communists traveling across the borders between China and the Nanyang colonies.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ “Minutes,” p. 137.

⁴¹⁹ The letter by Shieng Kien Chu to the Comintern FEB, 26 December 1930, RGASPI 495/62/4/3.

⁴²⁰ In 1935, Zhang Xia, a CCP and Anti-Imperialist League member, was doing communist and anti-New Life movement propaganda in the school where he was teaching in Southern Fujian. After his students stole two mimeographs (or cyclostyles) from the school in order to use them to print communist propaganda, the GMD came after him and he had to flee. After the incident when he narrowly escaped arrest, he wrote to his comrade and a prominent communist in Malaya, Zhang Yuanbao, waited for his response and went to Malaya where he found employment in a middle school. Zhang Jinda, “Mianhuai ZhangXia xiansheng” [Remembering Mr. Zhang Xia], in *Xianyou wenshi ziliao di shiyi ji* [Literary and historical Materials of Xianyou county] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujiansheng Xianyou xian weiyuanhui wenshuweiyuanhui, 1994), pp.47-61, esp. 49-50. Zhang’s biography is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

⁴²¹ The letter by Kong Kong (Guo Guang) to the Comintern’s FEB, 15 August 1934. SMP D 6152. More about this in chapter 4.

The MCP built communist front organizations based on organizations that had already existed and they employed rhetoric that was understandable to the people to which they were trying to appeal. For example, the discourse of the MCP's "Declaration of Singapore MOPR (Red Aid)" section (25 September 1930) has parallels with that of the charity cause that was familiar to the Chinese community. Red Aid was the organization that was supposed to have aided revolutionaries and their families who had suffered from persecution. In the case of Red Aid in Singapore, the organization's goal was to help those who suffered impoverishment as a consequence of the economic crisis (unemployment for workers, and bankruptcy for small merchants). The pamphlet states that the Red Aid organization would "give revolutionaries sympathy, regardless of what party they belong to, their class or place [where they are], their age or gender. Or, in other words, the Mutual Aid Society is a benevolent society that focuses on humanitarianism" (*huan ju hua shuo, hujihui jiu shi zhu zhang ren dao zhuyi de cishan tuanti*). In conclusion, MCP propaganda about Red Aid used the discourse and the appeal of the goal of a humanitarian charity organization.⁴²² Red Aid was the only organization in which workers willingly participated. "Workers give money to the aid organization willingly, we plan to restore it,"⁴²³ an MCP report notes. Thus, the MCP was organizing relief aid for the Chinese immigrants who were affected by the economic depression and British discrimination, as other Chinese associations in Malaya and elsewhere were also doing.⁴²⁴

⁴²² "Malai hu ji zonghui xingzhou dapo qu, Di yizhi fenhui chengxi xuanyan"[The Declaration of the founding of the Branch of Dapo district of Dapo of Singapore of Red Aid society of Malaya] 1930 RGASPI 495/62/5/6-a.

⁴²³ "Otchet o polozhenii v Nan'yane" [Report about the situation in the Nanyang] January 1930. RGASPI 514/1/632/7-28, esp. 25.

⁴²⁴ See Pearce and Hu-Dehart eds., *Voluntary organizations*.

The goals of the MCP and the GMD were identical to the functions of *huiguan*, and included defending the interests of Chinese immigrants.⁴²⁵ The MCP talked exclusively about the Chinese in its reports on the worsening of the economic situation in Malaya (more will be said about this in chapter 6). The MCP campaigned for democratic freedoms, including freedom of assembly, speech, trade, the press, education, immigration into Malaya, strike, and belief.⁴²⁶ The MCP intended to promote anti-imperialist attitudes by using anti-Japanese moods and slogans of the “freedom of business and education.”⁴²⁷ The MCP even proclaimed the Malayan revolution to be democratic-bourgeois (see the section on the Malaya revolution, below).⁴²⁸

Even though the demand for democratic freedoms was also part of the CCP’s United Front program in the early 1930s,⁴²⁹ the Chinese communists who moved to Malaya in search of employment found themselves in a situation different from when they were in China. The “democratic” appearance of the British colonial state in Malaya empowered Chinese communists and gave them the sense of having political rights. By 1930, and perhaps not

⁴²⁵ In Hong Kong, the traditional role of voluntary associations was to be the point of contact and power brokers between the colonial administration and migrants. Zhou and Kim, “Paradox of Ethnicization,” , 244. Also see Li Minghuan, *Contemporary Associations*, 18; Shi Cangjin, *Malaixiya huaren shetuan yanjiu (The Study of the Chinese Associations in Malaysia)* (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe , 2005).

⁴²⁶ Untitled document by CC MCP, 10 August 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28.

⁴²⁷ ”Li Lisan’s letter.”

⁴²⁸ However, the MCP also talked about an armed insurrection: “As to armed insurrection, it is a special bequeath from the ancestors to fight against oppressors. Three years ago, was there not an armed revolt of peasants in Trengganu [1927]. Now, we need only to explain to them the scientific sense of insurrection, and lead them in the political direction.” “Report from Malay” 2 January 1931 RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 28 ob.

⁴²⁹ M.L.Titareno, M. Leutner eds., *VKP(b), Komintern I Kitai. Documenty. T.4, VKP(b), Komintern I soventskoye dvizheniye v Kitae. 1931-1937. Chast 1. (CPSU (Bolshevik), Comintern and China. Documents. Volume 4. The Comintern and the Soviet Movement in China, 1931-1937. Part 1. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003) , “Introduction,” 25-62, esp. 34.*

without the influence of the CCP's "Li Lisan line," the MCP aspired to have communist party's open activity. The concept of achieving social change through political participation was not foreign to the MCP,⁴³⁰ and it planned to openly explain that the legality of the communists' action was legitimate and based on existing laws. There were contradictory views within the MCP regarding the question of the communist party's legality. On the one hand, the MCP was "against the legalist movement." On the other hand, they were for the "legality of the communist movement."⁴³¹ Clearly, MCP members were operating in the political system of a British colony that had appearance of democracy, a place to where they fled from the prosecution of the GMD and from which they were excluded. Indeed, similar to the more secure environment of international concessions in treaty ports in China, British colonies like Hong Kong were safe refuge for political radicals such as communists.⁴³² They were arrested and deported or imprisoned, but they were not physically eliminated as was the case in Chiang Kai-shek's China. Front organizations such as the "anti-imperialist league" were the means to "capture the democratic movement." The MCP planned to propose that workers and peasants be represented in the "political discussion council."⁴³³ Along with the discussions of the

⁴³⁰ As can be surmised from the MCP letter to the Communist Party of Britain, the Chinese communists in Malaya longed for the legality of the movement that the party in Britain had: "of course, party and the Labour Unions are absolutely illegal." The Comintern was to forward this letter to the Communist Party of Great Britain. There is a hand-written remark, "make a copy and send to the CC CP of England." CC MCP letter to the communist party of Britain, 1 June 1930. RGASPI 495/62/6/1-1ob.

⁴³¹ "Central circular no. 1, The conclusion of the Third Delegate conference of the C.P. of Malay," 1 May 1930. RGASPI 495/ 62/ 13/1-17, esp. 2, 10.

⁴³² Michael Share, *Where Empires Collided: Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao*. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), p. 91.

⁴³³ Central circular no. 1, "The conclusion of the Third Delegate conference of the C.P. of Malay," 1 May 1930. RGASPI 495/ 62/ 13/1-17, esp. 11. The communists viewed this council as a British tool to split the liberation movement. For other references to the MCP promoting participation in the "Political Discussing Bureaus" see "To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern," RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4. According to the Minutes of the MCP establishment, "In politics the peoples in colonies have no rights at all but are entirely ruled by the imperialists[sic]. There are men from the oppressed peoples

establishment of a Soviet Republic in Malaya, the MCP members-to-be also put forward demands regarding the reforms of the Legislative council, or the “Political Discussing[sic] Bureau” as they called it, to increase the number of representatives and to promote that the “chairman should be a Malay man.”⁴³⁴ Apparently, the MCP was referring to the Legislative Councils, both of the Federates States and Singapore, where Tan Cheng Lock promoted elections around the same time, in 1930...⁴³⁵ If the proposal was not adopted, the MCP was planning to point out in its propaganda that this commission was only a tool of imperialists.

The MCP was embedded in the political movement of the time for the rights of the colonized in the colony, of which the Chinese immigrants were a category. One of the points in their program was that the MCP was to work in yellow trade unions and to campaign for the legality of red trade unions,⁴³⁶ as was the case in Britain, and as the Comintern also encouraged in China.⁴³⁷ The MCP argued that this “doesn’t mean the ‘openism’ to adapt the law of the

participating in the political discussion bureau, yet they are running dogs of the imperialists and under the direction of the imperialists. Besides, there are native leaders called Sodans [sultans]. The Chinese Political Affairs Department is the tool of the imperialists to overrule the Chinese.” “Minutes,” p, 128.

⁴³⁴ “Minutes,” p, 128.

⁴³⁵ Tan Cheng Lock (1883-1960) was a prominent Malaya-born Chinese businessman and politician, celebrated for his devotion to the Chinese cause. There are parallels between his and the MCP’s activity and discourse. He promoted Malaya self-government in 1926, Chinese participation in Legislative councils, and in 1949, he was the founder of the Malayan Chinese Association that negotiated Malayan independence and had the dual task of maintaining “interracial harmony” in Malaya and securing justice for the Chinese community. K. G. Tregonning “Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (Mar., 1979), pp. 25-76; Norman Owen, ed. *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A. New History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 320.

⁴³⁶ Yellow unions were, as the MCP described them, “labour contract system unions.” They existed in “metal machine companies, railway, rubber plantations, and tin mines” among skilled workers. According to the MCP, “their organization is very loose without any discipline. [...] Yet they are quite energetic to oppose communists.” The most developed red union organizations were “in tin mines, gum works, and seamen.” The MCP saw as its goal to organize red union first among the workers of “communications, municipalities, and metal works”. “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4.

⁴³⁷ Titarenko, *Comintern and China*, Vol4. “Introduction”.

imperialists in order to acquire the open activity of the trade unions.”⁴³⁸ Thus, the MCP embraced both the legal and illegal methods that the Comintern suggested, but apparently without this being a result of the Comintern’s directives. The MCP’s *huiguan*-style activities dovetailed with the Comintern’s interests. The party formulated demands to the authorities -- something that was inconceivable in China under Chiang Kai-shek. It was possible to put forward these demands, however, in colonial Malaya, where communists were treated not as brutally as they were in Chiang’s China. “If police is coming [sic] to make arrests, the masses should gather together to shout slogans, and if someone is arrested, the masses should follow at once and demonstrate before the police station before the masses disperse into separate groups. If wholesale arrests are made, the more, the better. But their confession should be the same. They should say: “I am an unemployed and I went with the others to ask for relief. [sic] You authorities pay no attention to our life and death question and yet you have arrested me. How to deal with me is at your disposal but you fine me is unacceptable.”⁴³⁹ The same was to be explained to “other nations”. After the demonstration, the unemployed should be integrated into a trade union and an organization of the unemployed. “The second goal is to spread propaganda for the general industrial solidarity strike of Malay in order to support the revolution of China and India.”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Central Circular no.1 RGASPI 495/ 62/ 13/1-17

⁴³⁹ “Central Circular no.2 Preparation for the mass demonstration on ‘Aug.1st’ the International Red Day,” The C.C. of the C.C. of Malay, 18 June 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/18-22a, esp. 21-22. This is the text of the original document in English, not a translation.

⁴⁴⁰ Other slogans were to demand wage increases, unemployment relief, and promoting the solidarity of the workers. The party members at local branches were to explain the significance to the members of the party and members of mass organizations that were under the party leadership, such as trade unions, and to promote the demonstration on August 1st. Central Circular no.2, RGASPI 495/62/13/ 22.

Similarly, among the Chinese communities in America there were Chinese associations that leaned towards the “civil right associations” in the 1880s as a response to the American Chinese Exclusion Act. They fought for the right of political participation for the Chinese. Leaders of these groups in America became involved with revolutionary and reformers’ groups, as well as with triads and secret societies. One of the campaigns organized by the MCP was the campaign against the Alien Registration Ordinance (1933), as discussed later in this chapter. The MCP was not the only Chinese organization that campaigned against the Ordinance. In Johor, an Overseas Chinese office, *huaqiao gongsuo*, organized a campaign against the Ordinance (which Johor passed in 1932). In 1938, the Johor office raised funds for an anti-Japanese campaign as well.⁴⁴¹

Considering these parallels in the activities of the MCP and other Chinese associations, the fact that the party consisted of 20% businessmen in 1930 is not surprising, nor was it surprising to have house servants in the labour movement. The reasons for such a membership was that the party’s primary goal was not to fight for the rights of the working class (although that was undoubtedly a central item in their propaganda), but for the rights of the Chinese community in general. The MCP’s focus on the interests of the Chinese community was expressed in its propaganda materials. When explaining that the worsening situation in Malaya was because of the Great Depression, the MCP talked exclusively about the worsening of the situation of the Chinese. This was even more prominent after the British launched their wartime policies (see chapter 6). Indeed, British Malaya – and especially the *huaqiao* - was severely affected by the world Depression. *Huaqiao* remittances from Malaya decreased while those

⁴⁴¹ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 203, cited in P.Pui Huen Lim, *Between Tradition and Modernity: The Chinese Association of Johor Bahru Malaysia*,” in *Voluntary Organizations*, eds. Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, 33.

from Dutch East Indies and Philippines increased as the result of favourable exchange conditions.⁴⁴² Malaya was a world producer of rubber and tin and its labour market was significantly vulnerable to the condition of the world economy. The MCP explained in its materials that the British production rationalization policy, which was designed to boost the competitiveness of British products on the world market, resulted in bankruptcy for *huaqiao* capitalists.⁴⁴³

Parallels can also be drawn regarding the type of activities between these native place associations and the MCP. The Chaozhou associations' only activity today is organizing Hungry Ghost festivals. MCP documents, as well as British reports, show that in the early 1930s the MCP's only activity was organizing commemorative demonstrations on revolutionary anniversaries such as the commemoration of the October Revolution, Labour day, the Day of Youth, Paris Commune, the deaths of Lenin and of Rosa Luxemburg, February 25, the International Day of the Unemployed, (August 1, "International Red Day"), International Communist Youth Day, (September 7), the Canton uprising of 1927, Anti-Christian Propaganda Day (December 25) as well as of China's nationally significant dates, such as "the Jinan Incident," Double Ten Festival.⁴⁴⁴ The similarity is clear.

Much of the MCP's anti-imperialism was anti-Japanese, paralleling the Nanking policy of countering Japan's expansion into the South Seas⁴⁴⁵ and the history of anti-Japanese

⁴⁴² Chen Ta, *Emigrant communities in south China: a study of overseas migration and its influence on standards of living and social change* (New York: Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), p.77.

⁴⁴³ "Report from Malay," 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 28.

⁴⁴⁴ Various documents from the MCP collection from the years 1928-1934 illustrate this point. Also, this is corroborated by the British sources. See, for example CO 273-571, "Monthly review of Chinese affairs, March 1931," pp. 36-38, "Feb. 1931," pp. 25-28. "Jan. 1931, Overview of the communist activities in 1930, pp. 10-14.

⁴⁴⁵ See chapter 5.

movements inside China since the “Twenty-One demands.” According to the MCP, Japanese aggression in China was presented as an attempt to dominate Asia, which spurred revolutionary movements in China, the Philippines, India and Africa.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, it was Japanese imperialism that the MCP considered to be the main target of its struggle. There were voices within the MCP that criticized it for not struggling against “all” kinds of imperialism, namely, British imperialism, instead of just Japanese imperialism.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, the MCP was yet another organization that attempted to speak for the interests of the Chinese against the British colonial state.

The MCP while promoting the interests of the Chinese in Malaya as a Chinese association,⁴⁴⁸ engaged in activities and discourse that both connected the party to China and embedded it in Malaya. Both these connections of the MCP were boosted by aspects of the Comintern’s discourse, including that of internationalism and of the Malayan nation. This makes the MCP a case of interwar globalization with two simultaneous aspects -- indigenization and internationalization. Those trends coincided with the Comintern’s indigenizing impulse and its internationalism.

⁴⁴⁶ Central Circular no.1. The conclusion of the Third Delegate conference of the C.P. of Malay, 1 May 1930. RGASPI 495/ 62/13/1-17, esp. 2-7.

⁴⁴⁷ “An open letter from the CC of the C.P. of Malaya to the working class of Malaya,” 7 November 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/1a-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Kuhn, “Why China Historians.”

CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE ALIEN REGISTRATION ORDINANCE AND FOR THE AID TO CHINA SOVIET REVOLUTION: THE MCP AS A CASE OF INTERWAR GLOBALIZATION, INDIGENIZATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

This section will examine MCP activities that had features of the activities of a communist party, and those that had features of a Chinese association. Two examples of these hybrid activities were the campaign against the introduction of Alien Registration Ordinance, which was detrimental to Chinese migration, and the campaign to aid the Chinese soviet revolution. In carrying out these activities, the MCP as a Chinese association always had justification connections to both China and Malaya. I will analyze these connections in order to establish the indigenization and internationalization aspects of these connections in order to show that the MCP was a case of interwar globalization.

The Campaign against the Alien Registration Ordinance

The hybridity of the campaign against the Alien Registration Ordinance was in the fact that the MCP acted as a Chinese association and attempted to protest against the British state's introduction of this Ordinance. Yet, the MCP as a communist party overall declared its goals as revolution. This campaign is illustrative of the MCP's double impulse as a Chinese association that had to indigenize, since the promotion of the interests of Chinese immigrants went hand in glove with the discourse about making the Malayan revolution. The MCP activities and discourses were embedded in the movement for political participation of the colonized in Malaya, the emerging discourse of the Malayan nation, and the GMD discourse of overseas Chinese policy. Those were the trends of the interwar globalization and they coincided with the Comintern's indigenizing impulse and internationalism.

The MCP campaign against the Ordinance was a way for a Chinese association to promote the rights of Chinese immigrants. This campaign took place in the context when in the early 1930s, Straits Chinese actively tried to participate in the governance of the British colony. An ordinance abolishing the so-called *Mui Tsai* system of domestic female slaves imported from China was introduced. Tan Cheng Lock was campaigning for native elected representation in the legislative council. In 1932, the MCP campaigned against the Alien Registration Ordinance. This Ordinance, introduced on 1 January 1933, complicated the immigration of Chinese into Malaya and put *all* Chinese regardless of their economic status and political affiliation under the same threat of deportation. The MCP thus participated in the politics of the Chinese community and its struggle for the rights of the Chinese immigrants in the British state. The fact that the MCP launched this campaign at a time when the Ordinance had already been approved by the legislative committee of the Straits Settlement, and as the second hearing was about to be conducted, shows that the MCP attempted to participate in the governance of the colony, just like other Chinese associations. The Chinese communists' dissatisfaction was translated into Bolshevik language, which metaphorically expressed both their feeling of being excluded from the British state and their attempts at revolution. Bolshevik revolutionary discourse was the only language available to them to explain the MCP's concern with the rights of the Chinese community, even though this language contradicted in some ways the MCP's activities.

Yet, the MCP, as a Chinese association, had to be connected to both China and Malaya. In carrying out this campaign the MCP used the rhetoric of the Malayan revolution, rhetoric that was granted by the Comintern. The MCP planned to mobilize various classes of Chinese and other communities to campaign against this ordinance, arguing that it was detrimental to

the revolution because as a result of this Ordinance, the revolutionaries were more easily deported. The MCP saw the Ordinance as the imperialists' attempt to incite contradictions among various people (*geminzu*). It also viewed the Ordinance as a means to divide people (as a way to solve Malaya's unemployment crisis), and as an attack by the imperialists' on the revolutionary and anti-imperialist movement. At the same time, the MCP also started to promote the United Front of Malayan "oppressed *minzu*."⁴⁴⁹ The MCP attempted to mobilize the all-Malaya struggle against the Ordinance, and it called for the party's Malayafication (*malaiyahua*).⁴⁵⁰ This call for Malayafication was parallel to the Comintern's encouragement of the involvement of non-Chinese in the party, as well as to the GMD's discourse of the liberation of the Nanyang oppressed nations and Li Lisan's call for a Nanyang revolution. This call also paralleled the popular official discourse of the emerging Malayan nation. Overall, this MCP call for Malayafication, reflected the MCP's impulse as a Chinese overseas association to be embedded in the local environment. The MCP planned to establish a Malaya "national" organization, which was a united front organization, in order to protest the limits on the residence period for immigrants (*fandui xianzhi juzhu da tongmeng*) with the participation of "all *minzu*."⁴⁵¹ In fact, the Chinese were the only group who opposed this Ordinance⁴⁵² and the MCP attempted to mobilize members of other communities, rather than just Chinese, to campaign for the interests of the Chinese community. Thus, the MCP advocated party

⁴⁴⁹ Magong lianzi tonggao di yi hao, Dangtuan zhongyang Guanyu dui qiao dengjilülie yu women de gongzuo de jueyi [Central circular no. 1. Work resolutions of CC MCP and CYL regarding the Alien Registration ordinance] 12 October 1932, RGASPI 495/62/20/1-6.

⁴⁵⁰ "Magong lianzi tonggao di jiu hao, Dangtuan zhongyang youguan fan dui xianzhi juzhulü de jueyi," [Central Circular no. 9. The resolution of the CC regarding the protests against the restrictions on residence] 10 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/20/31-33.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² See for example "United Chambers of Commerce. Malayan Chinese topics. Alien Registration. Proposed New Bill opposed." *The Straits Times*, 20 September 1932, Page 18. In newspapers of the time no protests by other communities are found.

Malayafication by establishing an anti-imperialist struggle. This struggle was based on propagating that Chinese interests were relevant to other communities, and by arguing that the Ordinance was harmful to the revolution.⁴⁵³ Malayafication included considering local conditions when designing party work, using slogans that originated with the masses (i.e., instead of using the party's "abstract slogans"), and learning about the living conditions of the masses. The reasons the Party cited for the unsuccessful Malayafication were same as those cited for unsuccessful Bolshevization: the immigrant mentality (*yimin yishi*), incorrect tendencies such as political stagnation (*zhengzhi kongshuai*), defeatism, pessimism, leftism, rightism, and fearful opportunism.⁴⁵⁴

However, the party was not able to create a large campaign and to garner popular support, citing the masses' "non-belief in themselves." According to police reports, in December 1932 there were two disturbances organized by the MCP in Singapore, one in the Chinese high school (more about student protests in this school will be discussed in chapter 5), and one in Johor to protest against the Ordinance. In Singapore, 59 participants were arrested, and in Johor, 300 Chinese assembled outside a coffee shop and distributed pamphlets, fired crackers and had a clash with police, which resulted in two demonstrators being killed. Otherwise, no disturbances apart from the "distribution of pamphlets and the usual slogan writing" took place.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ "Central circular no. 1," RGASPI 495/62/20/1-6.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Extract from Straits Settlements Police Political Intelligence Journal for December, 1932. 30 January 1933. SMP D4443.

It is likely that the appearance of the signifier *ji* 籍, which means “origin,”⁴⁵⁶ or “citizen,” after *Ma* (Malay) and *Yin* (Indian) around the same time marks the change in the understanding of Malaya by the MCP’s China-born members. For the MCP members who protested against the Ordinance, Malaya became a “country.” That happened both due to the Ordinance and to the discourse of “national party” promoted by the Comintern. At the same time, the 1933 Ordinance further juxtaposed the Malaya-born residents against those born outside of British Malaya and affirmed the MCP’s connection to China. The next campaign that the MCP launched was the campaign for the support of the Chinese soviet revolution.

The Campaign to Aid the Soviet Revolution in China

In 1933, the MCP saw widespread bankruptcies of “bourgeoisie” of all calibre as the potential for their radicalization. Deterioration of the economic conditions of the Chinese were caused by British suppression of *huaqiao* companies in the tin and rubber industries, as well as the British policy of monopolization. Chinese immigration was curbed.⁴⁵⁷ Yet, the Chinese workers were paid more than workers of any other nationality except for Europeans.⁴⁵⁸ However, they were losing jobs. According to an MCP report, as a result of the British monopolization policy, about one million Chinese went bankrupt. Although the accuracy of this number may be questionable, this report confirms that the communist party felt sympathy for the Chinese “capitalists” instead of feeling class hatred toward them, as they should have as

⁴⁵⁶ “Tuan muqian de zhuyao renwu,” [The important tasks of the CYL at present], 20 September 1933. RGASPI 495/62/21/42 -48.

⁴⁵⁷ “*Magong lianzi tonggao di 8 hao -- guangyu yanmidang tuan de zuzhi wenti*,” [Circular no.8 of the CC MCP and CYL regarding the organization of the secret work of the party and CYL], by *Dangtuan zhongyang* [CC of the MCP and CYL] 15 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/29-30.

⁴⁵⁸ “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 28.

a communist party. Another frustration was censorship of the Chinese press.⁴⁵⁹ In its estimation of the radical potential of the bourgeoisie the MCP proved correct, the MCP campaign for the defence of the Chinese revolution among Chinese community proved successful. For one thing, it spoke to the Chinese community's concern about economic opportunities in China since the economy in Malaya was declining. On the other hand, it spoke to the GMD propaganda aimed at strengthening the Chinese overseas identification with China. (For the effect of this policy on the education of the locally born Chinese, see chapter 5) Also, the GMD's rule in China did not look successful.⁴⁶⁰ Finally, it built on the fundraising tradition for the political cause back in China, which had been started by the generation of Sun Yatsen. Moreover, with the introduction of the Ordinance, the MCP felt increasingly oppressed, and apparently this reflected the feeling of the larger Chinese community. In this situation, the Soviet path made sense to the MCP and to the affluent members of the Chinese community who occasionally financed the MCP's activities. Besides, the MCP's enthusiasm was also apparently reinforced by the fact that it reconnected with the Comintern after losing the connection in 1931 (see chapter 4). As the Malayan economy was declining (although by 1933 it started to show signs of recovery⁴⁶¹), and GMD's rule in China looked ineffective, the CCP rhetoric sounded appealing. Moreover, as the CCP was achieving some success in 1934, naturally the appeal of the alleged successes in the Soviet Union also grew. At the same time, the MCP observed a certain revolutionarization of the thinking of the masses (*qunzhongde geming sixiang*). The proof was the struggles of the seamen in Singapore and the rubber plantation workers in

⁴⁵⁹ “*Informatsiya o Malaiskih Shtatah*,” [Information about Malay States] 3 January 1931 RGASPI 495/62/7/2-4.

⁴⁶⁰ My thanks to Professor Chen Zhongping for a conversation that helped me to arrive to this conclusion.

⁴⁶¹ Tai Yuen, *Labour unrest*, p.26.

Jiafoshan, as well as the struggles of the national and petty bourgeoisie who opposed British imperialists because of bankruptcies.

A campaign to raise funds for the Chinese revolution shows that the party was acting in the same pattern as Chinese politicians from late Qing to the GMD; they went from China to the Nanyang to make the local Chinese even more Chinese and to raise funds for their political causes back home.⁴⁶² This was also the MCP's way, as a Chinese association, to stay connected to China. In addition to organizing a campaign protesting the Alien Registration Ordinance, performing dramas, writing essays, and creating "simple" leaflets, the MCP had important activities in its effort to remind the locals of their natal connections.⁴⁶³ The masses were to be encouraged to help the Chinese revolution in spirit and kind (*jing shen shang yu wuzhi shang*).⁴⁶⁴

Ironically, most successful the party propaganda for the aid to the Chinese soviet revolution was not among the party members, nor the imagined MCP "nation" of the destitute masses, but rather among the more affluent constituency who could afford to donate aid and who were interested in promoting better government in their country of heritage, i.e., China.

⁴⁶² Sun Yatsen famously called overseas Chinese the "mother of the revolution." On the role of the *huaqiao* in the Chinese revolution, see Ren Guixiang, *Huaqiao yu Zhongguo minzu minzhu geming* [The role of Chinese overseas in Chinese national democratic revolution] (Beijing: Zhonghua bianyi chubanshe, 2005) and Lin Jinzhi, *Huaqiao huaren yu zhongguo geming he jianshe* [Overseas Chinese and Chinese Revolution and Construction] (Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1993.); Hua jiao ge ming shi bian zuan wei yuan hui ed., *Huaqiao geming shi*. 2 vols. (Taipei: zheng zhong shuju, 1981).

⁴⁶³ [A letter from the Malayan party no. 3] RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7; "Magong zhongyang tongzhi . Zenyang qu jingxing yu fazhan yuanzhu Zhongguo suweiai geming yundong de gongzuo jueyi" [CC MCP circular. The resolution on how to carry out and develop to aid soviet revolutionary movement in China] 24 December 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/34-37.

⁴⁶⁴ "Magong zhongyang guanyu Liening tongzhi guoshi dishi zhou nian jinian yu libu kenei liang lu senbao er tongzhi bei sha dishiwu jinian de gong zuo jueyi. [CC MCP Resolution regarding the 15 anniversary of Liebknecht and Luxembourg deaths and 10th anniversary of Lenin's death] 26 December 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/38-40.

They also saw China as a potential ground for investment. The responses from the party members were not enthusiastic and the CC had a hard time mobilizing party members who ended up in “the crisis of empty talk (*kongtanzhuyi*) and idleness.” Comrades think “that if they issued a circular (*tonggao*), they have done the work.”⁴⁶⁵ in response to the criticisms from some party members that campaigning for aid to the Chinese Soviet revolution was not related to the Malaya revolutionary movement, and was the evidence of the MCP’s “immigrant mentality” (*Zhongguo minzu qunzhong de yimin guangnian*), the CC said that the most important goal of this campaign was not to get the masses to give material aid (preferably gold), but rather to garner support for the Chinese soviet revolutionary movement from the broader masses and the empathy (*tongqing*) and participation (*can*) for the Malaya revolutionary movement.⁴⁶⁶ Thus, the MCP used the campaign to aid *Zhongguo geming* for mobilization purposes for the Malaya revolution by tapping into a fundraising tradition among the Chinese community in Malaya. In this, we can see the MCP’s double embeddedness, both as a Chinese association, and by how they used the indigenization rhetoric to promote its link with China.

Likely, the support that the MCP received from the affluent Chinese in 1934, such as from Yin Hongzhao (see chapter 5), was in part due to its fundraising campaign for the Chinese revolution. Since the GMD’s rule in China appeared to be ineffective, affluent *huaqiao* in Malaya were willing to invest in a political force that claimed to be more nationalist and modern than the GMD. Besides, the CCP appeared to be victorious in 1934, as Chiang’s

⁴⁶⁵ This circular explained how the decisions should be made and implemented. The MCP branches were to carry out discussions as per circular no. 7. They were to decide the tasks of the given branch, to pass on the decision to the lower grades of the party (*xiajidang bu*), to explain it, and to supervise the implementation. Party branches were to unconditionally carry out CC resolutions. “CC MCP circular. The resolution on how carry out and develop to aid soviet revolutionary movement in China” RGASPI 495/62/20/34-37.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

Fourth Encirclement Campaign to destroy them failed. According to the MCP, the rationale for the masses to support a Chinese soviet revolutionary movement was to help solve China's present "national crisis." Imperialists were trying to divide China, while the GMD government was declining and selling off China's national interests.⁴⁶⁷ In its anti-GMD campaign to garner support from the community for the communist version of the Chinese revolution, the MCP was to explain to the "masses" the GMD's propaganda against the CCP, the soviet area expansion and the Red Army's successes in struggling for China's national independence and freedom (*zhongguo minzu zhi duli yu ziyou*).⁴⁶⁸ No doubt, the MCP's logic made sense to the Chinese in Malaya, highlighted by accusing the GMD of collaborating with imperialists (despite the GMD's own anti-imperialist rhetoric). The communists sounded more effective (and nationalist) than the GMD. The MCP used the rhetoric of national independence (*minzu duli*), which appealed to the nationalist feelings of overseas Chinese who had been involved in the raising funds for the improvement of their home communities, as well as for China, since the time of Sun Yatsen. This China identity, as opposed to native place and clan, was cultivated by the GMD propaganda among overseas communities, of which the MCP was a part.

To promote this campaign, the MCP started to work in Chinese associations (*shetuan*).⁴⁶⁹ But again, in this campaign to help China, the MCP used the rhetoric of Malayan multi-ethnic unity. The MCP planned to send a telegram (*diantong*) to congratulate the Soviet

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Among the "masses" of "shetuan," the MCP was to explain that British war preparations had a negative impact on the life of the masses. These included limitations on residency, a tax increase, a food tax import increase, and expropriating people's land to build military facilities there. In the international arena, inter-imperialist contradictions were growing, as was their aggression to Soviet Union. They were also to explain the decisions of the MCP's founding conference regarding the oppression of the revolutionary movement and the masses, the defense of the Soviet Union and aid to the Chinese revolution, and the teaching of Lenin. Ibid.

Area's government and Red Army on their victories, and to protest the GMD's militarist attack on the Soviet Areas and Red Army. They planned to do so on behalf of the Union to Aid China's Soviet Revolution (*Huzhu Zhongguo suweita geming datongmeng*), which was yet to be established for all ethnic groups and political affiliations, or on behalf of a community school (*shetuan xuexiao*). The MCP also planned to organize tours to the Soviet areas.⁴⁷⁰ In the MCP's advertising of Soviet areas, the following successes were mentioned: "in Soviet areas the authority of workers and peasants is established and they build a free and happy life there, and all participate in political and cultural life (*zhengzhi de yu wenhua de shenghuo*). People enjoy real (*shijide*) freedom and political rights; an eight-hour working day, six hours for women and children, and Sundays off." At the same time, in the GMD occupied areas (*tongzhi zhixia*), it was the opposite, and it was miserable: unemployment, no job security, exploitation in the countryside, and militarist wars, cold, and hunger. Finally, the MCP showed that the GDM had exhausted its mandate: the GMD's evil governing caused natural disasters. The GMD was selling the national interests (*mai minzu liyi*) in exchange for imperialist loans. They intended to make China a colony while the Soviet movement's goal was "to establish an independent, free Soviet China with intact territory."⁴⁷¹ It was clear that in 1934, the Soviet areas looked like an alternative to the GMD government in China. It is thus not surprising that the *huaqiao* bourgeoisie occasionally donated funds to the MCP and MLU.

⁴⁷⁰ For tours also see "Magong zhongyang baogao. Malaya de qingshi yu dang huodong cong 1933 nian yi yue dao ba yue. dagang yu ximu" [Report of CC MCP. Situation in Malaya and party activities from January-August 1933. General outline and details] RGASPI 495/62/24/1. The form of competition was suggested to be used for better performance results. "CC MCP circular. The resolution on how carry out and develop to aid soviet revolutionary movement in China] RGASPI 495/62/20/34-37.

⁴⁷¹ "Magong zhongyang yuanzhu zhongguo suweiai geming xuanyan" [CC MCP pamphlet regarding how to aid Chinese soviet revolution], 5 January 1934 RGASPI 495/62/24/2-5.

Indigenizing the Chinese Revolution

Advancing Malay Civilization through the Chinese Revolution

Because of its hybrid nature, the MCP's calls for internationalization and Malayafication, in practice, were to serve the *huaqiao* community. As I have argued above, this was not a case of disingenuous "rhetoric," but rather the result of the social experience of the MCP leadership and the organization of the MCP as a de facto hybrid of overseas Chinese association's behaviours and Bolshevik aspirations. It was a brave new world and a multilingual environment. So it should be no surprise that there were gaps between intentions and results. The details of the MCP's organizations, activities, and self-explanations give us access to these divergent meanings and mechanisms that produced such unintentional results.

In the MCP's internationalist rhetoric, the support of the Chinese revolution was for the good of the world revolution and Malayan revolution. Another major theme in MCP propaganda was aid to the Indian revolution.⁴⁷² That rhetoric was to attract the Chinese and Indian populations to the party.⁴⁷³ Aside from the need to engage the Indian community in the party, the MCP was echoing the precedent of Indian and Chinese intellectuals working together in pan-Asianist societies of the early 20th century.⁴⁷⁴ The internationalism came together with indigenization through these discourses of aid to Chinese and Indian revolution for the sake of Malayan revolution. In the MCP discourse, to engage these two communities in the MCP

⁴⁷² "Magong zhongyang gei ma yin ji tongzhi de yi feng gongkaixin," [Open letter of the CC MCP to Malay and Indian comrades] 10 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/21-24; "CC MCP circular no. 49" RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20..

⁴⁷³ "Zhongyang tonggao diqi hao," [CC MCP Circular no 7] 15 September 1930. RGASPI 495/62/13/36-38.

⁴⁷⁴ See Chapter Two.

revolution was to advance the Malay civilization.⁴⁷⁵ Furthermore, the MCP, by supporting these two revolutions, was contributing to the revolutionizing of the European proletariat and to the success of the world revolution.⁴⁷⁶ Because Malaya's production depended on a labour influx from these two countries, the revolution in China and India became the first condition for the emancipation of the Malay nation (*malay minzu jiefang*). To help the Indian and Chinese revolutions, and to expand the movement in Malaya, the MCP needed to organize Chinese and Indian workers. By doing this, the MCP also would solve two problems: the complexity of nationality (*minzu fuzha*), and low political level of the masses (*minzhongde zhengzhi shuiping jiaodi*), which was believed to be common in the immigrant mentality (*yiminde xinli*).⁴⁷⁷ The political level of the workers would only rise if these two nations (*minzu*), the Indian and Malays, would participate in the revolution.⁴⁷⁸

Despite this rhetoric, in practice, the campaign did not go further in advocating activities like supporting Indians and Malays who “demanded action” in Penang and in Johor, where there was an organization of Indian and Malay workers that published pamphlets for the August 1 demonstration in their languages, and in somebody flying the red flag in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁵ Propaganda for the defence of the Indian revolution included both the discourse of the GMD and of the Comintern. It was GMD propaganda in India that triggered the Indian troops' withdrawal from China H Piazza, “The Anti-imperialist League”; “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29.

⁴⁷⁶ “Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao. [Aid to Chinese and Indian revolutions and the changes in our present work] 15 September 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/36-38.

⁴⁷⁷ Zhongyang tonggao di qi hao [Central circular no,7] 15 September 1930 RGASPI 495/62/13/36-38. .

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. Other slogans included a general strike, a demand for political rights for workers and peasants, as well as organizing demonstrations. Revolution in India was important because it would help to spread revolution in British colonies and bring down British imperialism. Central circular no 4. RGASPI 495/62/13/28.

⁴⁷⁹ “Central circular no,7,” RGASPI 495/62/13/38.

According to the MCP, there was only one hope for the Malaya people to leave behind the state of economic backwardness and to develop their civilization further, and it was that workers and peasants of Malaya must establish the workers and peasant state.⁴⁸⁰

Indigenizing Chinese Revolution through the Malayan Nation

All in all, the leadership of the MCP, as a group that was carving out its “niche,” were new, professionalized, “petty intelligentsia” from China that were looking for employment in Malaya.⁴⁸¹ Their goal was the cohesion and strength of the Chinese community, as was promoted by community leaders such as Tan Kah Kee. Above all, China-born MCP members continued to use the MCP as a fundraising channel for the China cause -- i.e., the Chinese revolution. Only this time, the revolution was “Soviet,” while the “nation” was the same: China. The MCP remained a Chinese association that was both rooted in its native place in China, and in the local environment. The Comintern-promoted discourse of the Malayan revolution under MCP leadership offered the MCP an opportunity to claim leadership over the emerging Malayan nation and, through this, to indigenize. It was from this transitional organizational base - part traditional *huiguan*, part new-style political organization that was speaking through various front organizations - that these “petty intelligentsia” in the leadership of the MCP contributed to the discourse in Malaya’s public sphere, public discourse about the emerging Malayan nation, and attempted to appropriate this discourse.

⁴⁸⁰ “That has proved that the material awakening of the weak nations (*xiaoruo minzu*) is already revolutionary. For that reason, for the people of Malaya (*malaiya de minzhong*) there is only one hope to leave the state of economic backwardness and to try to bring higher development of their civilization (*xiang zhao geng gao de wenming fa zhan*). It is only if the peasants and workers of Malaya can struggle for and establish the state of peasants and workers” (*gongnong de guojia*). [Central circular no.7] RGASPI 495/62/13/38.

⁴⁸¹ Kuhn “Why China Historians”

MCP indigenization and the justification of its China activities through the connection to Malaya were done through the discourse of Malayan revolution. Malayan revolution was nation based, and the nation was Malaya (*Malaya minzu*). In arguing for the Malayan nation, which had originated in the Comintern discourse of national parties, the MCP was also embedded in the public discourse in Malaya of the early 1930s, discourse that was concerned with the emerging Malaya nation as well. The MCP's obsession with "nation" was not unique, whether in Malaya or elsewhere in Asia. There were different ideas about the Malayan nation in the Malay-language public sphere as well. They formed the context, or environment, from which the MCP discourse sprang and to which it aimed to contribute. MCP "national" discourse was developing together with other discourses of Malayan nationalism. Yet, MCP nationalism was also influenced by the Chinese nationalism that was actively promoted by the Nanjing government since the early 1930s. The MCP type of nationalism -- the nationalism of a Chinese association grafted with the internationalism of the Bolshevik discourse -- proved to be successful in the long run. (as Malayan Chinese Association led Malaysia through negotiations to independence⁴⁸²), but it failed in the short run, before the start of the war: a Chinese association's (i.e., the MCP's) aspirations of Malayan nationalism were not attractive to the "Malayan masses" who sensed that it involved the colonial aspirations of the Chinese.

The idea of the Malayan nation was fostered from several directions, including from the British, from the Comintern through its policy of country-based party, from leading political activists such as Tan Cheng Lock,⁴⁸³ and from the Malay intellectuals who were discussing the meaning of Malay *bangsa* (nation). Besides Malay secular nationalism, there was also Islamic

⁴⁸²Lim, "Between Tradition and Modernity," p. 35.

⁴⁸³Tregonning "Tan Cheng Lock," p.32.

nationalism, as well as communist-inspired discourse of an independent Malaya in Marxist language. As a result of this official nationalism, according to Hua Yu Yin, Chinese and Indians in Malaya started to feel Malay in the early 1930s.⁴⁸⁴ In the 1930s, Malay newspapers were filled with articles that discussed service to bangsa. *Warta Bangsa*, the first issue of which was published in 1930, declared in its first issue that its goal was to “raise up” the Malay race, and the bangsa excluded non-Malays, though it was not based on Islam. The British supported the cultivation of Malayan identity in order to counter the rise of pan-Islamic sentiments. In all, the creation of a bangsa community was contingent upon the creation of a Malaya identity.⁴⁸⁵

The MCP aimed to accomplish such a task in 1930-1932 through the discourse of the Malayan revolution. In this, the MCP was much like the Nanking government that promoted *huaqiao* unity at the same time. In addition, MCP aspirations paralleled the newspapers which in the 1930s promoted the spirit of Malay unification and the erosion of the boundaries that divided the Malayan community.⁴⁸⁶ Malay intellectuals talked about the crisis of Malay Muslim society and promoted “the values of rationalism and egalitarianism,”⁴⁸⁷ and this echoed the aspirations of the MCP to propel the Malayan civilization to modernity.

Another trigger for amplified discourse about the Malay nation in the 1930s was the reaction, panic, to increased immigration into Malaya. Toynbee famously wrote in 1931 that Malaya was destined to become “a Chinese province by peaceful penetration.”⁴⁸⁸ A number of “scientific” discoveries of the origins of the Malay race in China likely triggered Malays’

⁴⁸⁴ Hua Yu Yin, *Class and Communalism in Malaysia*, p. 51

⁴⁸⁵ Milner, *Invention of Politics*, pp.272, 273

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 290, 271, note 93 p 280.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 264.

identity concerns while inspiring Chinese intellectuals in their sense of responsibility for the modernity of Malays. Understandably, Malays were alarmed by the rise of Nanking nationalist propaganda and the growth of Chinese immigration, which to them resembled British colonial attitudes. In 1933, a Dutch archaeologist, P.V. van Stein Callenfels, lectured in Penang on the South China origins of Malays. All these developments intensified the fears regarding China's aspirations in Malaya. In accordance with British "divide and conquer" policy, in 1934 the English language Straits Times released a letter from "a Malay" that said that if Callenfels is correct and Malays were "pushed" from South China 6,000 years ago, they had better make sure that they are not pushed out of Malaya again.⁴⁸⁹

Thus, the MCP's claims to Malayan "national" representation were in tune with the discourse of the emerging Malayan nation of the early 1930s. Yet, Nanking's policy, and the large inflow of Chinese immigrants who were both economically more successful than Malays and condescending to them, resulted in fear of Chinese immigration. What is more, for Malays, "Malaya" had a negative connotation, since it was mostly used by immigrants.⁴⁹⁰ This was, likely, one of the reasons the Malays did not want to join the predominantly Chinese MCP.⁴⁹¹ Unsurprisingly, the MCP tried to address these fears with a policy of indigenization.

This indigenization, however, ran through the rhetoric of internationalism and world revolution. The MCP promoted the liberation of the Malaya nation through Malaya revolution and by contributing to the world revolution: "Comrades! The general spirit we are entrusted by

⁴⁸⁹ "Malays' Origins," *The Straits Times*, 28 July 1933, p. 6. Such moods among Malays were partly triggered by the example of a colonial power's pride in race, and partly by the threat from Chinese and Indians. Milner, *Invention of Politics*, note 105 p 281. .

⁴⁹⁰ Tan, "The rhetoric of Bangsa and *Minzu*," pp.9.

⁴⁹¹ According to Cheah Boon Kheng, the MCP China's orientation was the reason why it could not attract Indian and Malay following in the second half of the 1930s. Cheah, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*, p. 32.

the present congress is to share the responsibility of the revolutionary movement of the Malay Peninsula, organise all the proletariat and the poor peasants of Malay in order to become an army of the world revolution to emancipate all the oppressed peoples of Malay.”⁴⁹²

Party Decline and Indigenization through Internationalism

In 1934, the party reported that it was in decline, despite a re-established a connection with the Comintern after a three-year break and after it was promised - and subsequently received - a subsidy. (More will be said about this in chapter 4.) In 1933, the propaganda of the “struggle of the emancipation from British imperialism and united front of Malaya *duoruoxiao minzu* (and *gongnong laokudazhong*)” became more intensive.⁴⁹³ Indigenizing tactics also became more pronounced. The CC was now to provide guidelines based on each locality’s specific situation from reports.⁴⁹⁴ The MCP was to organize various revolutionary organizations into the organizations of various classes of the oppressed masses under the banner of revolution (*Fandi Datongmeng, Malaiya minzu duli lianmeng, chise gonghui, Nongmin weiyuanhui, shibing weiyuanhui, geming xuesheng lianhe hui, funü jiefang xiehui, laodongtong zi tuan, puluo yishu lianmeng*), and at the same time attract progressive elements into party and the CYL.⁴⁹⁵ “Open letter to Malay and Indian comrades (ma yin ji)”⁴⁹⁶ is the only document available in which the MCP addresses Malay and Indian comrades. It is telling that only a

⁴⁹²“Resolutions adopted at the Third Congress of Malaya Party,” RGASPI 495/62/3/1-10 esp. 6-7.

⁴⁹³ An untitled document by CC MCP, 10 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28.

⁴⁹⁴ The CYL also propagated the same manner of indigenization. The organization of the Malay communist league was supposed to be “adequate to the local conditions.” “Minutes,” pp. 123-124.

⁴⁹⁵ An untitled document by CC MCP, 10 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28.

⁴⁹⁶ Magong zhongyang gei maying ji tong zhi de yi fen gongkai xin [An open letter to Malay and Indian comrades] 8 August 1933, RGASPI 495/62/20/21-24. There is also a version of this letter in Malay “Surat Yang Terbuka Kepada Saudara-Saudara Kita Malayu dan Indian” RGASPI 495/62/14-17.

Chinese version of this document is found in the Comintern's archive. This letter tells us that the MCP had an organizational basis among Chinese and Malays and Indians (*ma yin zu*) that had to be strengthened.⁴⁹⁷ The document's content was not different from other MCP circulars, except that it lists some struggles, as inspired by the Chinese and Indian revolutions, with the same rhetoric that the MCP spoke of in relation to the importance of the Chinese revolution to the Malayan revolution.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, the leadership in the anti-imperialist movement was referred to as stagnating (*daigong*). In 1934, the MCP connected the Chinese soviet movement to the freedom of the "oppressed nations" (*xiaoruo minzu*) of the colonies and semi-colonies. All Malaya workers, peasants, soldiers, students, small merchants (*xiao shangren*) of all nations (*duominzu*) were supposed to oppose imperialism and support the Chinese Soviet revolutionary movement, which "is its avant-garde (*xianfeng*)," and "the emancipation army for the world proletariat and exploited [sic] masses." The Comintern's rhetoric of the colonial emancipation resonated well with the MCP discourse of the emancipation of oppressed peoples by the Chinese.

Ultimately, the MCP formula of Malaya independence was indigenization of party organization through internationalism:

"Malayan revolution (*malaiya geming*) is a glimpse into the world of revolutionary movement. There are two choices -- to continue living like horses and cows and protect capitalism the other is to unite peasants, workers students and intellectuals and proletariat and oppressed small nations (*bei yapo xiaoruo minzu*) of the world and together defeat the world capitalism. Malay independence requires unity of many ethnic groups. To achieve that, we must organize the oppressed masses of Malayan weak peoples, such as Malay,

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

Chinese, and Indians, to struggle for Malaya independence and to organize an anti-imperialist front of multiple ethnic groups (*duo minzu zunzhong de*).⁴⁹⁹

Another important task was to strengthen the connection of the toiling masses with the party and capture the demands of their daily life.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, indigenization was the way to remedy the party's decline.

Overall, party membership fell by August 1934 to a total of 558.⁵⁰¹ In July 1934, because of all of their persistent problems,⁵⁰² MCP members were called “‘parlor revolutionists’ if you please’ [sic].” Local cells existed only on paper.⁵⁰³ “The party is unable to penetrate into the masses and lead their economic struggle. They looked at the struggles of the people with blank indifference and, furthermore, waited until the struggle developed its own course.

⁴⁹⁹ “Magong zhongyang fanzhanzheng gongzuo taolun dagang,” [CC MCP plan for discussing the anti-war work], “Magong zhongyang xuanchuan bu” [CC MCP propaganda department]. 10 February 1934 RGASPI 495/62/24/5-9.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ “Magong lai jian.” [A document received from the MCP] 25 August 1934 RGASPI 495/62/27/6. There were 136 members in Singapore, 135 in Johor, 160 in Malacca, 100 in Sembilan, 36 in *Kichow*, 8 in *Kita* and 13 in Penang and Ipoh. “Malaiya de qingshi yu dangde renwu,” [Situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party] 25 August 1934 RGASPI 495/62/27/1-5 esp. 5. Yet, the party did not have clear regulations on acceptance into the party. The procedure was a probation period of 2-6 months, depending on their class origins (*chengfen*), ranging from workers to those who were in reactionary organizations. The candidates had to have loyalty, “considerable” class consciousness (*xiang dang de jieji yishi*), absolute acceptance of the party leadership, and diligence and activeness in doing revolutionary work. “Magongzhongyang Guanyu rudang wenti de jueyi (dagang),” [CC MCP about the question of the acceptance into the party] 18 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/29-31.

⁵⁰² These problems were, as usual, the lack of party organizations in the main industries, including tin, iron, coal, rubber, communication and transportation (shipping, railway, streetcar, motorcars, lighters, and docks), public utilities, the construction industry, and printing and machinery manufacturing. Another often said the problem was empty talk, the lack of knowledge of the conditions of the life of workers, no “business-like plans” of work, a lack of knowledge of how to build party organizations, and a lack of “correct leadership”. “Situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party,” RGASPI 495/62/27/1-5 esp. 5

⁵⁰³ Unsurprisingly, the communist movement was referred to by the British as a “paper organization,” Onraet, *Singapore Police*, p 111. Police confiscated large numbers of documents from the MCP and its front organizations. In one single raid of 24 November 1931 in Singapore the police confiscated 800 documents of 200 different varieties. CO273-542, p.572.

Essentially, it was a closed-door policy.”⁵⁰⁴ “If the party cannot establish close connections (*miqie de guanxi*) with the working masses who are the majority of the Malaya population, the party will not have the powerful force.”⁵⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

The MCP was a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party. The MCP was a new kind of Chinese association that, like chambers of commerce or study societies, united people from different places of origin and emerged as a response to challenges of migration, something that was based on native place ties.⁵⁰⁶ The Chinese communists in Malaya used means that were socially available to them in think about a problem and organize a response in a specific time and a specific place; these were the native place associations, that is, *huiguan*. Class divisions within the MCP into upper and lower grades based on culture, *Wenhua*, or, in

⁵⁰⁴ What that meant was that the party tried to take leadership of the protest actions already underway in order to build party organization from those who participated in “struggles,” and not from “peaceful development.” The MCP expressed this in the following way: despite radicalization of the masses, the party and red trade union failed to lead mass struggles, such as the struggle of Singapore seamen who wanted to join the party, but the party could not expand the organization to include them, as was the case also in Johor and Penang. Another problem was the party’s inability to make use of the “gray” auxiliary organizations, and a lack of work in yellow unions (such as the union of mechanics). According to a 1934 document, “some local committees considered it beyond their dignity to get mixed up with ‘a bunch of yellow scabs and charlatans’ [*liumang tuanti*] like *sanxingdang*, and said that yellow trade unions are empty organizations without a following. To fix this, the party planned to send comrades to “study the actual living conditions of the workers and immediate needs which we shall include in a program of struggle.” “In order to organize workers in a factory we need to set up gray auxiliary organizations such as factory committees, ship committees, music groups, reading clubs, sports etc.,” to establish a factory newspaper in simple language and to organize everyday economic struggles. Local party committee must give assistance to cells, but not impede their independent activity. “Resolution of the CC of the CP of Malaya on the activity of the party in key industries, abridged translation,” 4 July 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/55-56. “The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party,” 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

⁵⁰⁵ “Magong zhongyang yiguanyu zhongyao bumen gongren yundong de jueyi,” [CC MCP resolution regarding workers movement in important industries] 4 July 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/7-14.

⁵⁰⁶ Kuhn, “Why China Historians”

Wang Gung Wu terms, education, was reminiscent of a structure commonly found in Chinese associations. According to Wang Gung Wu, education was the primary condition for the MCP members' allegiance to China.⁵⁰⁷ The MCP was yet another organization that attempted to represent the interests of the Chinese vis-à-vis the British colonial state. Yet, its ultimate goal was revolution. Those two things were in contradiction.

As a Chinese association, the MCP had to be connected to both China and Malaya and was concerned with governments in both places. The MCP promoted the installation of soviet government in both, and in Malaya it was to be under the MCP's leadership.

The "Internationalist" ideology stimulated the MCP's indigenization as a Chinese association that had to be embedded in the local environment⁵⁰⁸ and contributed to the party's survival, but did not bring about a mass following due to the constraints of a Chinese association: language and condescending attitudes to locals. Yet, after the internationalist moment of the 1930s, the party reverted to its Chinese association origins and legitimately focused on the *huaqiao* (see chapter 6). This supports Kuhn's point that the commercialization of a Chinese association strengthens its native ties; in the case of the MCP, this came from the Comintern's infusion of ideology and Bolshevisation goals. At that point, however, due to the constraints of a communist party, the MCP lost its support base altogether.

The MCP's characteristics as a communist party proved fatal in the end in garnering the masses' support because its language was too radical. It succeeded, however, in bringing into the party the support of affluent Chinese who were concerned about how to install a better government in China, something the soviet government showed some success at in 1934.

⁵⁰⁷ Wang Gungwu, "Chinese Politics."

⁵⁰⁸ Kuhn, "Why China Historians?"

Overall, however the party was lacking popular support, both because it suffered from the same structural problems as a Chinese association, and because as any communist party of the time it lacked the mass support and was not successful in organizing a labour movement. Unlike in mainland China, where the communists were applying tactics of the united front with broader classes, including small bourgeoisie and students, by 1935 in Malaya, the communist movement was in decline.⁵⁰⁹

Like other Chinese self-organizations, the MCP had the potential and the aspiration to become a governing organization, i.e. “the state.” These ambitions became particularly obvious after the war began and during the Malayan Emergency. Elite members of the overseas Chinese communities sought the cohesiveness of a Chinese association and embraced the structural ideal of a Bolshevik (or “Leninist”) party, because that would put in place a self-governance model commonly found in Chinese communities. For migrants, the party bore the promise of “democratic” politics and the chance to move up the social ladder.

Starting in 1931, the Comintern set the goal for the MCP to “Bolshevize.” That included self-criticism, the establishment of party organizations in factories of the main industries, and organizing the movement of peasants, women, youth, and the unemployed. MCP reports to the Comintern often left the impression that the party was always on the brink of collapse. The only time this was different occurred several months after the MCP’s establishment in 1930, when the party was expecting the Comintern’s recognition and subsidies and wanted to show how

⁵⁰⁹ Titarenko et al., *Comintern and China*, vol.4, “Introduction,” pp. 25-61.

well they were doing. Essentially, however, as the British noted, the MCP documents dealt mainly with self-criticisms and plans for the future.⁵¹⁰

The MCP's relations with the masses were reminiscent of the effort of earlier Chinese elites to educate common people. Educated elites were frustrated that their attempt "to enlighten the common people by engaging them in discussions about the validity of Confucian precepts resulted only in the subversion of the Confucian teachings by heterodox ideas and [the]degrading of the gentry status." Li Kung lamented that "The common people can be told to follow, but not to know [why they should do so]. Confucians of the late Ming dynasty have often engaged the common people in discussions of "principle" and of the reasons for those principles, which only led to the fact that the common people became more difficult and stubborn." Li was referring to a public lecturer of the late Ming dynasty who sought to mobilize the common people by involving them in discussing Confucian precepts which were presumably innate in all.⁵¹¹ Thus, the communist ideology of the MCP can be viewed as consistent with the relationship between intellectuals and the masses, that is, the intellectuals' vain attempt to educate the masses and redefine their relationship with them.⁵¹² Although the MCP attempted to emancipate the Malays, it held social Darwinian views on civilization, race, and the Malays, views that were espoused by the British. During the Qing dynasty, "the ritualist approach to moral cultivation and to social solidarity through strengthening kinship ties helped re-establish the gentry as the intellectual, moral, and social leaders of local society."⁵¹³ Similarly, communist party discourse was a way for the MCP to establish itself as the leader of

⁵¹⁰ CO 273-542.

⁵¹¹ Kai-Wing Chow, *Ethics, classics and lineage discourse*, (Stanford University Press, 1994), p 228.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the Chinese society in Malaya, and as liberators of Malaya. In other words, they were to embed themselves in local society and carve out a niche that had not been occupied: the niche of leading the liberation of Malaya from the British.

The Bolshevization -- or indigenization, as it was attempted by the MCP -- between 1930 and 1934 failed and did not bring more Malays, Indians, or even Chinese into the party. The MCP's only success was its campaign for the aid to the Chinese soviet revolution, unlike "Malayafication." This confirmed Wang Gung Wu's thesis that the MCP revolution failed on the national (i.e., Malaya) level.⁵¹⁴

Party propaganda was based on the indigenization and "internationalization" of the Chinese revolution through Malayan nationalism expressed in Bolshevik language. This indigenization was a means to connect the world with the local situation and to adapt policies coming from the Comintern and the CCP to Malayan local conditions. Indigenization of the Comintern and CCP revolutions was the MCP's modus operandi. The indigenization was rooted in the idea that the party must first learn about the conditions and troubles of the workers' everyday life. This knowledge was then to be incorporated into the party's propaganda and linked to its propagated activities and situation in Malaya and the world. The indigenization of the Chinese communist movement in Malaya took the shape of promoting policymaking based on local conditions and the goal of involving locals with the party. Slogans that came from the "masses" and that had not been imposed by the party were to be used for mobilization. Indigenization was the internationalization of local needs and the localization and nationalization of international rhetoric. The Comintern's impulse of indigenization matched

⁵¹⁴ Wang Gungwu, "Closing comments: Chin Peng and Malayan Nationalist Cause," Session XI, in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp.226-232.

the indigenization impulse of the MCP as a Chinese association.⁵¹⁵ In this, the MCP was a case of interwar globalization. Thus, the MCP was a showcase of interwar globalization that had two sides -- internationalization and indigenization.

The MCP's indigenization efforts were an attempt to bring non-Chinese into the party and labour unions by building on the rhetoric of Malayan revolution and the MCP leading the Malayan nation to liberation. This discourse originated in the Comintern and rendered the MCP's indigenization impulse legitimate in the context the official British discourse of the emerging Malayan nation. The other side of indigenization was internationalization. Internationalization, that is, linking the situation in Malaya with the situation in the world, was one of the MCP's rhetorical tools to indigenize the Chinese revolution. The Malays were not interested in joining an MCP that was a Chinese organization. However, the MCP discourse sounded more legitimate with the support of the Comintern. Yet, Party membership -- overwhelmingly Chinese -- dropped overall. The ethnic elitism of the Chinese communists in Malaya was combined with the elitism of the communist party members as being the most progressive and modern "elements" of the society. They were anti-elitist elitists.⁵¹⁶ The "masses" were responding in kind and refrained from joining the party.

The emergence of MCP Malayan nationalism was not the only consequence of the Comintern's Southeast Asian activity. The Comintern also strengthened the Chinese maritime network. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁵¹⁵ The FEB agreed that the MCP's "opinion about the tasks of the Communists in the Malaya state are generally correct. We think that your methods of work with the toiling masses in general are not correct, so that you cannot extend our influence and organize the working masses in our organisations." "To the Malayan Comrades," 17 December 1930, RGASPI 495/62/12/3-4ob.

⁵¹⁶ Hung-yok Ip, *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China, 1921-1949. Leaders, heroes and sophisticates.* (Routledge Curzon, London:2005).

CHAPTER 4. THE MCP, CHINESE NETWORKS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND THE COMINTERN, 1930–1939

This chapter is about the unintended consequence of the Comintern having fostered connections between Chinese communists across Southeast Asia. This effort strengthened the Chinese communist maritime network by pushing the MCP to establish connections with other communists in the region while fomenting world revolution. We will see that the circulation of money in the corridors of migration between the Comintern, the CCP, and the MCP shaped developments, as well as the circulation of culture and the ways of communication in this Chinese maritime network. In all, we will be able to see the hybrid nature of the MCP, its constituent parts, and its role as one of at least three international ideological organisations active in Southeast Asia, and in connecting it, and the various different peoples living in the area, to the rest of the world. Most fundamentally, this understanding of the MCP in the 1930s makes the case that local developments—whether in Singapore or Shanghai—cannot be understood without a basic understanding of these trans-local and global interactions.

This chapter will consist of three parts. Part one is about Chinese networks in Southeast Asia, particularly Chinese maritime networks, how they were built, and how they shaped the MCP. Part two is about the Comintern world and how the MCP became a part of it. It will tell the story of the Comintern's interaction with the MCP and how Comintern directives and decisions regarding the MCP were drawn on information and suggestions from MCP reports submitted to the Comintern. It is about what the Comintern wanted the Chinese network to become and why, as well as about how these connections and the interconnected network consisting of communist parties across Southeast Asia were established. The third part is indigenisation and regional connections involving the Comintern, the CCP, and the MCP in the

years between 1932 and 1936. This part will show how the Comintern's attempts to build its network in Southeast Asia by pushing the MCP to build links with local communists there helped strengthen the Chinese network not only in Southeast Asia, but globally by establishing links with the Chinese communists in the United States. This part will also discuss the internal operations of this new network, reminiscent of Hu Hanmin's *Minzu Guoji*, after the Comintern provided an additional sojourning channel, in Kuhn's terms, through which money, ideas, and people circulated between China, Malaya, and the international communist network and its centre, the Comintern.

CHINESE NETWORKS

Chinese Maritime Networks⁵¹⁷

In this part, I will outline the Chinese maritime network of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia of which the MCP was a part, as it came to be by 1930, when the MCP was established. Starting in the late 1920s, CCP cells consisting of immigrants from Guangdong and Fujian were created in many places throughout Southeast Asia, including Burma,⁵¹⁸ the Philippines,⁵¹⁹ Vietnam, Phnom Penh,⁵²⁰ and Taiwan. The Chinese section of the Communist Party of the United States acted as the Chinese communist organisation across the Pacific. The Chinese communist network was built in several ways, both in terms of the movement of

⁵¹⁷ My thanks to Professor Yeh Wen-hsin for suggesting this term.

⁵¹⁸ Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.5.

⁵¹⁹ See, for example, "Doklad chlena filippinskoi KP Meditsinskogo o polozhenii na Filippinah," [Report of the member of the Philippine communist party Meditsinskiy about the situation in the Philippines] 31 October 1928 RGASPI 495/66/7/155-173.

⁵²⁰ Kiernan, Ben. *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.15.

individuals and of the organisational expansion before the Comintern appeared in Malaya and attempted to interfere and adjust the Chinese maritime network for its interests. This section will discuss the reasons why individuals were moving in the region, why organisations were expanding, and how they came to be organised into the maritime communist network

One reason was that the GMD/CCP had dispatched its cadres to foment revolution. Another was that communists were taking refuge in the Nanyang after the failed Guangzhou uprising⁵²¹ and other GMD persecutions of communists in 1927. Another method of network expansion was through individuals looking for employment. As discussed in Chapter 3, from the Party's viewpoint, there were two kinds of migrants—those who had and those who did not have “culture.” Educated Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong and graduates of teachers colleges were looking for employment in the Nanyang as teachers, school prefects, newspaper editors, and writers. Many of them were already Party members by the time they had left China.⁵²² As an invitation was in order for one to come to the Nanyang to work, Party members would invite other Party members back home to help their native compatriots find jobs in the Nanyang. Thus, the network expanded. This expansion of the Chinese overseas network was the consequence of increased Chinese migration overseas and was an illustration of the globalisation of Chinese overseas organisations

⁵²¹ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi-Minh*, p. 134.

⁵²² The communist influence in the county schools in Xianyou started with CCP member Chen Guozhu (陈国柱). Xianyou was one of the counties that were receiving money from overseas Chinese in order to educate in their school teachers for overseas communities. Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China. A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change*. Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, NY, 1940. p. 149-172. One of the primary schools in Xianyou was set up by Chen Jiageng's donations. Zhang Xia, discussed in the next chapter, participated in the CCP kidnapping of a son of a landlord in order to seek ransom money for party activities, since other pupils in the class were poor. Zhang Xia, “Xianyou xiandai zhongxue de geming huoguang” [The revolutionary fire of the modern middle schools in Xianyou county] *Putian shi wenshi ziliao di yi ji*, [Literary and historical materials of the city of Putian] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujiansheng Putian shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1985), pp.43-49.

Networks expanded not only as people sought employment, but also as they were losing it. Once a worker's contract had expired, the worker was free to leave the factory; if there was no friend or relative to help with money (*ji ji*), he would become a beggar, as did many. The British arrested beggars, checked whether they had criminal records, and prepared them for deportation—they took photographs, ten fingerprints, the reason for leaving, the port, etc. When the beggars were taken to Hong Kong, they were kept in jail and were not allowed into the city; the registration paperwork was completed a second time, and each person was given five Hong Kong dollars for the trip home. Esperantist Zhang Xia, whose story is told in Chapter 5, felt deep compassion for those unemployed, sick labourers who did not understand the reason of their misfortunes and just said it was their fate (*mingyun bu ji*) to come back to their home country.⁵²³ Yet some of the deported managed to escape and go to the Philippines. Some teachers who were Party members planned to find employment in the Philippines, Burma, or Hong Kong.⁵²⁴ In 1935, when CCP members moved to Malaya, they were “transferred” (*zhuan*) between the MCP and the CCP.⁵²⁵ The MCP referred to the CC CCP as the “CC” (*zhongyang*).⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Zhang Xia, “Immigrants from Xianyou county in Malaya,” pp. 34-39.

⁵²⁴ When Chen Jiafei was arrested in 1939, it was planned that his wife and five-month-old baby would join him after he found another teaching job in the Philippines or Burma. Chen Jiafei, “Cong Malaiya Bilizhou dao Guangdong Huizhou” [From Perak to Huizhou in Guangdong] in *Putian shi wenshi ziliao di 4 ji* [Literary and historical materials of Putian city. Vol 4.], (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian Putian shi weiyuan hui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuan hui ed., 1989), pp. 28-26.

⁵²⁵ Chen Yifei, “Jinian minzhong teweishuji wang yu ji lieshi” [Remembering the secretary of the special committee of mid-fujian region martyr Wang Yuji] in *Putian wenshi ziliao di 5 ji* [Literary and historical materials of Putian vol.5] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng Putian xian weiyuan hui, 1983), pp. 45-52, esp. 48.

⁵²⁶ See, for example, “Malaiya qingshi fenxi yu dang de renwu. Jieshou zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan laixin de jueyi [The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party. Accepting the CC CCP resolution contained in the letter dated 23 May] 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

The Chinese communist network consisted of both CCP and GMD members, members of other communist organisations, such as the AIL and CYL, as well as those who had no Party affiliation but had communist views. As the network expanded through labour routes, the Nanking government intensified its policy toward the overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) and the discourse of the connection of the *huaqiao* with local liberation movements. In 1930, the founding meeting of the Anti-Imperialist League of the East in Shanghai was attended by Koreans, Indians, and Formosans under the aegis of the CCP. They agreed to request arms and money from the CCP. The local office of the GMD also promised support to the revolutionary movements in India, Indonesia, and Korea independently of the central government.⁵²⁷ Thus, pan-Asian liberation under CCP leadership was also supported by the GMD—apparently, the left GMD. Yet the Anti-Imperialist League did not survive long.⁵²⁸ The Party organisation was not rigid, and there was no strong concept of Party membership, as the MCP had self-criticised and as evidenced by how people would maintain connections with both the GMD and the CCP (see sections about Xu Jie in Chapter 2 and that of Zhang Xia in Chapter 5). Yet these organisations also had their own networks. The Nanyang AIL was expected to develop a regional network, but it could not sustain even its existing influence in Singapore because of a lack of cadres. The AIL consisted of members and non-members of the CP, who were less influential in the organisation than were the members.⁵²⁹

The MCP Regional Network

⁵²⁷ Quinn-Judge, Ho Chi Minh, p. 166. Also see Japanese police records, *Taiwan shehui yundong, Gongchan zhuyi yundong*. (Communist movement), pp. 354-372.

⁵²⁸ Interview with a party historian in Zhangzhou, Chen Fang (陈方, aka 傅泮锋), 21 December 2010.

⁵²⁹ CO 273-542, p.565 (1931), “Minutes,” p. 132.

The Nanyang party did have regional connections prior to the establishment of the MCP, and it was before the Comintern's move to establish a Malaya national party that they had started to consolidate. The establishment of Comintern-endorsed national parties was a step in this process, but it started with the CCP move to consolidate networks in Indochina and to unite Chinese and Vietnamese communist networks (see Chapter 2). Further consolidation involved the establishment of connections with other parties in the region in the process of building the Comintern network.

While the Nanyang party conference that was to become the MCP founding conference was delayed, as the CC CCP asked the Nanyang party to first start more active work and “to re-create Party organisations,” they sent “comrade Li” to Siam and Annam—he was likely the one who was surprised that an independent Indochinese party had already been established⁵³⁰—“to implement the instructions,” but even before Li returned, because they had little money, they decided to hold a conference as soon as possible.⁵³¹ Originally, delegates from “different nations” were to participate in the conference. However, since Malaya comrades were arrested, and the Party organisation in East India was destroyed, they could not participate. Delegates from Siam and Burma were expected to be “very late.”⁵³² The delegate from Burma was Ai Wu,

⁵³⁰ Ho's report. 18 November 1930, RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27. According to Quinn-Judge, the unification of the Chinese and Vietnamese communist organisations was done on April 19, 1930, in Saigon by an FEB agent who was coming from Siam and who was not aware of the establishment of the independent ICP. Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p.165

⁵³¹ There were two possible candidates for the aforementioned “comrade Li” in the Nanyang party: Li Qingxin (李启新) and Li Guangyuan (黎光远).

⁵³² “Schau Ts(z)e-hang report”, ”Minutes,” pp. 86-89.

a famous writer who was delayed because the ship on which he was travelling was put into quarantine.⁵³³

By 1930, the Chinese communist network in the region functioned as follows. After the reorganisation of the provincial committee into the MCP,⁵³⁴ the parties of Siam, Borneo, and Sumatra were to be independent, but since there was a lack of cadres, the Malaya party would help to establish those parties.⁵³⁵ Plans were made to publish an MCP biweekly publication in Malay, Chinese, and English, with occasional special issues and leaflets on the occasions of anniversaries.⁵³⁶ In Sumatra, Party members were publishing two legal newspapers that did not have influence “over the masses.”⁵³⁷ In Burma, according to Ho Chi Minh’s report based on MCP letters, Chinese comrades were in relation with the “Burma party,” worked among Chinese workers, and hoped to organise a section in order to bring it into the Burma party. They also asked the Comintern for cadres.⁵³⁸ The goal of the Burmese communist party was to unite and organise the *huaqiao* to lead the liberation of all Burmese people from British domination. Ai Wu first joined communist cell in Burma in 1928. The CCP cell—apparently the first CCP cell in Burma—was started by Wu Jingxin (吴景新).⁵³⁹

⁵³³ “Ji Ai Wu yi ge ku le yi bei zi, xie le yi bei zi de zuo jia” [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 ren min chu ban she, 1998, pp. 68-91. My thanks to Professor Tertitski for bringing this source to my attention.

⁵³⁴ “Minutes,” pp.136-137.

⁵³⁵ “Minutes,” pp.144-146, 108.

⁵³⁶ “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27.

⁵³⁷ “Minutes,” p. 16

⁵³⁸ “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 29.

⁵³⁹ Wu Jingxin fled China after the breakdown of the United Front with the GMD and was a member of a society, *Engine* (引擎社), in Shanghai. A society by the same name also existed in Southern Fujian, and several members of it were Party members both in China and in Malaya, where they fled after the

Siam was the place of intersection of Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionary networks,⁵⁴⁰ and the CCP attempted to unify Chinese and Vietnamese networks in 1929. Siam occupied a special place in the imagination of the Chinese communists. For one thing, it was, like China, a “semi-colony.” Understandably, Chinese communists remained in their China-oriented frame of thinking, even if their intentions were to indigenise their ideas and organisation. Just as the MCP had complained about CCP directives being inattentive to local conditions, the Nanyang communist organisation approached the Siamese revolution with a Chinese point of reference. In 1929, the Nanyang CYL was in disagreement with the CC CCP regarding the definition of the Siamese revolution.⁵⁴¹ While, in itself, this may have been a reflection of the CYL and Party conflict over representing theoretical orthodoxy, it shows that Chinese communists approached the situation in Southeast Asia with a China-oriented mindset. According to the Nanyang CYL, in Siam, the character of the revolution should have been

Fujian Rebellion (see Chapter 6). In Shanxi, Feng Runhang (冯润璋), who had studied at Shanghai University, organised the society by the same name on the basis of a high school—his biographer referred to this society as a Party front organisation, the function of which was to raise future Party members. “Remembering Ai Wu -- a bitter life, a writer of the lifetime”; entry “Feng Runhang” in Chen Yuying ed., *Zhongguo jin xiandai renwu ming hao da cidian :quanbian xing dingben* [Dictionary of contemporary famous individuals: a revised version], (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 188. The society *Engine* is an example of another organisational network in China that, in frontier enclaves, became one of the founding bonds of local Party organisation, the MCP. *Engine* was established by MCP member Zhang Yunbao in 1933 in Putian county among teachers, journalists, and high school students after the GMD banned The Anti-Imperialist League that same year. The name represented the intended function of the society—to set things in motion. They were not Party or CYL members but were the members of *Hu Jishe (Mutual Aid Society)*, which was a Party front organisation, according to Chen Fang. They published a literary periodical that was forced underground after the fall of the Fujian Rebellion. They used printing equipment at a school, where director 黄良骏, although a GMD member, was “compassionate to the revolution.” Chen Junju, “Fandi da tongmeng yu Xianyou yinjin wenhuashe,” [Anti-imperialist league and cultural society Engine in Xianyou] in *Putian shi wenshi ziliao di yi ji*, [Literary and historical materials of the city of Putian] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujiansheng Putian shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1985), pp. 37-42.

⁵⁴⁰ Goscha, *Thailand*, pp.83-88.

⁵⁴¹ In 1930, the Siam Chinese communist organisation was almost destroyed by arrests. Ho Chi Minh’s letter, 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/29.

different than in the rest of the Nanyang but similar to that in China. According to the CC CCP directive, the Nanyang revolution should have been anti-capitalist and bourgeois-democratic (*fan zichanjiejixing de minquan geming*). The Siamese revolution, so the thinking went, was similar to the Chinese revolution because its object (*duxiang*) was the same. China was a semi-colony where every class had been affected by imperial and feudal oppression in politics and the economy, especially of peasants by landlords. So every class needed a revolution, was against imperialist and feudal elements, and would struggle for its democratic rights. In Siam, the situation was similar. What was the Siamese class structure like? In theory, Siam was an independent country, but in reality, it was controlled by British and French imperialists, and thus every class needed to be liberated from imperialism. Although, in Siam, feudal oppression was not as strong as that in China, the power of monks oppressed the people. Siam was an agricultural country and there existed class stratification—peasants hated landlords. The societies in Siam and China were similar, and the object of the revolution was similar, just as was the essence of the revolution. Other points raised in these “suggestions” dealt with the formulation of the essence of the revolution in the Nanyang, where an anti-capitalist national revolution (*fanzibenzhuoyide minzugeming*) was required. The Nanyang CYL decided that *xing* (性) in *fanzichanjiejixing de minquan 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 anti-capitalist struggle strongly enough.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴²“Nanyang gongzuo baogao,” [Nanyang Working report] by the CC of the Nanyang CYL. RGASPI 533/10/1818/ 4-16, p. 16 “Dui dang jueyi Nanyang geming xingzhi de yijian” [Suggestions regarding the party decision on the nature of Nanyang revolution].

In the Siamese party, after the unification of Chinese and Indochinese branches, there was not one “native,”⁵⁴³ and that party was dominated by Hainanese Chinese.⁵⁴⁴ The Chinese communists had the same attitude to both the local and Chinese “masses” in Siam—they were frustrated with the backwardness of both. Chinese communists reported to the Comintern, “The culture of Siam is backward because of feudal rule in the country. The residents are interested in Chinese novels. Although there is a European bourgeois culture, it is developing only in the cities.” The Chinese communists felt very progressive in relation to both local and Chinese “masses.”⁵⁴⁵ According to Xie Fei, who was from Hainan, only in Malaya were the Chinese relatively progressive in comparison to other places in the Nanyang.⁵⁴⁶

The Chinese communist network in British Malaya did not intersect with the Malay communist network. Most of the Malay communists in Malaya were refugees from the 1927 suppression of the PKI rebellion.⁵⁴⁷ However, they do not appear in any of the MCP documents collected by the Comintern.

The Comintern had an interest in Indonesia since Sneevliet’s times and wanted to re-establish the PKI by establishing connections with Java through the MCP. It promoted contacts

⁵⁴³ Ho’s report. 18 November 1930, RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27, esp. 25, 27.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. Ho Chi Minh used Comintern directives to guide the movement in Siam as a justification for Vietnamese responsibility to help the liberation of the Siamese masses. Goscha, *Thailand*, p. 78. Ho reported that the Siamese CC also began to “nativise” their organisation. For Ho, apparently, nativisation meant to involve non-Chinese: “The Siamese CC was formerly seven members; now, two Annamites have been added to it.” On another note, Ho reported that “There was antagonism between intellectuals and workers. The former thought they knew everything better than the workers, the latter either thought they always must listen to what the intellectuals say, or said that, “because you are intellectuals you are not real revolutionary[sic].” Ho’s report. 18 November 1930, p. 26.

⁵⁴⁵ Chapter 6 will talk about how the way they expressed it changed as they were incorporated into the Comintern network.

⁵⁴⁶ Xie Fei, “Huiyi Nanyang Linshiweiyuanhui de gongzuo” [Remembering the work of the Nanyang Provisional Committee], in *Geming huiyilu Zengkan 1*. [Revolutionary reminiscences]. (Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp.159-169.

⁵⁴⁷ See Cheah Boon Kheng, *The apprenticeship of the PKI*.

between the CCP (and the MCP alter) and other communists in the region to achieve that goal. From 1929, the CCP, and later the MCP, did not want to take responsibility for establishing contact with Java for lack of cadres and money. The CC CCP redirected the Nanyang communists to the Comintern and Profintern to obtain resources for implementing these suggestions and to rely on the Comintern/Profintern in all matters involving “other nations” and in establishing links with the Java party.⁵⁴⁸ In similar language, the CC distanced itself from the responsibility for establishing connections between the Nanyang communist movement and the party of Java in the resolutions of the sixth congress of the CCP in 1928.⁵⁴⁹

The MCP lack of interest in the parties in Borneo and Java stemmed from practicality—they lacked resources. The MCP was in regular working contact with the Siamese party, but it did not want to take responsibility over the party in Batavia, in Java, and in Borneo, as it was “very inconvenient.” The MCP wanted these two organisations to be under the guidance of the “party of Java.” Regardless, the Chinese comrades in Borneo were under the jurisdiction of the Malaya party, but the MCP wanted them to be under that of the Java party.⁵⁵⁰ In fact, the MCP was supposed to help all of the parties in the region except for that in the Philippines.

⁵⁴⁸ “Li Lisan’s letter.”

⁵⁴⁹ “Li Lisan’s letter;” In the political resolution of the 6th congress of the CCP in the chapter “The question of the connection between the CCP and the communist parties of other countries” (*zhongguo gongchan dang yu ge guo gongchan dang lianluo de wenti*) point 6 reads as follows: “Besides that, as for the relations between the workers movement in Annam and the communist party of French Annam, between the Chinese workers movement of the Nanyang archipelago and the party of the Malay archipelago (the communist party of Java), between the Mongolian question and the Mongolian revolution and so on, the realistic ways of mutual connection with those parties should be discussed with the parties of the respective countries.” see “Zhongguo gongchandang diliu ci daibiao da hui de jueyi an. *Zhengzhi jueyi an.*” [The Resolutions of the 6th congress of the CCP. Political resolutions] 9 July 1928, in *Zhonggong dangshi jiaoxue cankao ziliao (1)* [CCP teaching materials, vol.1] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1978) p.171.

⁵⁵⁰ “Economic conditions in Malay,” by “N.A.K.” [Nguyen Ai Kwok, aka Ho Chi Minh] 10 June 1930. RGASPI 495/62/8/4-6.

The MCP tried to act on the Comintern demand to establish connections in the region but preferred Annam to Java. Newly reorganised into the MCP, the Singapore committee of the Nanyang party planned to organise a circle “for cadres education and preparation for colonies where the main questions of revolution and Party work would be explained to the leading comrades.”⁵⁵¹ The committee planned to send an investigator to Annam to establish a Party organisation there.⁵⁵²

The Comintern request to build an indigenous organisation promoted the connections between Party cells across the region and the globe. As in the MCP organisations (that is, the CCP cells) in the MOPR (Red Aid), the AIL, and student organisations, all comrades were Chinese and did “have China experience.” These organisations did not develop among Indian immigrants and Malays.⁵⁵³ The MCP asked for the help of the Javanese and Indian parties and asked the Comintern to ask them to send cadres to help. The Party requested instructions on how to get in touch with the British party (as the party of the colony should apparently have been under the patronage of the party of the mother country, according to Comintern policy) and to send Chinese, Indians, or Javanese from the KUTV or the Comintern or to send cadres who knew different languages to help.⁵⁵⁴ The MCP asked the Comintern and the CCP for assistance in fomenting revolutionary movements among other ethnic groups. The MCP issued an address: “[Regarding] the connection between the Malaya party and brotherhood parties, the communist parties in Malaya districts belong to the Comintern and are under its direction, but for the sake of the geographic cause and want of experience, the Malay party is in need of

⁵⁵¹ “Minutes,” p. 102.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ho’s letter, 2 January 1931. RGASPI 495/62/11/29.

⁵⁵⁴ Letter from CC MCP to Ho Chi Minh, 18 December 1930 RGASPI 495/62/6/5-7 contained in the Ho Chi Minh’s letter to the Comintern, 25 November 1930. RGASPI 495/62/7/4.

assistance from brotherhood parties. Therefore, the Malaya party, besides [being] under the direction of the Comintern, hopes the parties of China, of Great Britain, of Holland and of France give their experiences and instruction from time to time.”⁵⁵⁵ The MCP claimed Comintern recognition while, in fact, it was never recognised as a section. However, the MCP requested assistance nonetheless and attempted to establish its own global linkages.

The CCP played an important role in connecting the Comintern with regional communists. The CCP also played a role in fostering connections between the Comintern and Indochina after April of 1927, and there was no other source of instruction for the Vietnamese than the CCP after the Comintern had left.⁵⁵⁶ Yet the MCP also fostered those connections by asking the Comintern to send them a Chinese Comintern representative.⁵⁵⁷ A CCP regional network existed, but it was not connected with maritime Indonesia—a connection that the Comintern had promoted unsuccessfully since 1923 starting with Sneevliet and Tan Malaka. With the strengthening of Nanking propaganda in countering Japanese South Seas expansion by promoting *huaqiao* Chineseness and unity, diasporic networks started to organisationally consolidate and “nationalise.”⁵⁵⁸ Another factor that helped this consolidation was the

⁵⁵⁵ The MCP letter 1 June 1930 “To the English Komparty [sic], London” RGASPI 495/62/6/1-1ob.

⁵⁵⁶ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 114, 117.

⁵⁵⁷ “Malayan people cannot be separated from these two nations. The toiling masses of these two countries are the social and economic backbone of Malay. We ask you to send a Chinese comrade with experience to help us, to bring us in relation with the Hindus and Javanese parties and to order them to each send one comrade to help us in the propaganda work.” Ho’s letter 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/29.

⁵⁵⁸ Also, in 1929, Hu Hanmin stressed the importance of close ties between the GMD and its overseas members. Chen Hongmin, “Xin guomindang zai haiwai de huodong” [The activities of the New GMD abroad], *Minguo dang’an*, 2002 (1). In 1931, Chinese-American communists called for unification of the European branches of the CCP. Zhang Bao, “Er, san shi nian dai zai meiguode zhongguo gongchan dang ren” [CCP members in America in the 1920s and the 1930s] in *Huaxian wenshiziliao di qiji*. Zhengxie Huaxian weiyuan hui wenshiziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui ed., 1990), pp. 150-160.

Comintern's request to establish connections with other Asian communist parties, in Indonesia specifically.

THE COMINTERN'S WORLD

Comintern Policy towards Malaya and the Chinese Networks in 1930–1931

The Comintern wanted these Chinese networks to become a multinational network of communists in Southeast Asia. The Comintern's ultimate goal was to re-establish the PKI. The Comintern's vision echoed the same method of indigenisation of immigrant communist networks that had been promoted by Ho Chi Minh in Indochina and the GMD in Malaya. This indigenisation, however, was rooted in the civilising aspirations of immigrant communists in Southeast Asia. Besides, the Chinese communists had neither members who knew languages other than Chinese nor the money to establish regional connections. Thus, indigenisation was doomed. The Comintern promoted the connection between the Chinese communists in the region and, in doing this, fostered connections between them. The Comintern offered the opportunity of funds and international legitimisation for China's regional interests through the fostering of migrant network connections to expand the Chinese communist maritime network. Despite this global imagination, the regional networks were limited to connections in mainland Southeast Asia between the organisations in Malaya, Siam, and Vietnam. No regular organisational connections existed with maritime Indonesia. As the Comintern's goal was to revive the communist organisation in Indonesia, the Comintern encouraged the MCP to draw connections with the communists there.

The Comintern criticised the MCP's exclusively Chinese immigrant membership. The reason for that was that immigrants, while convenient for communication purposes, were not the most suitable agents to build local organisations, for they did not speak the language, were culturally alien, and were easily deported back to China by the government upon discovery of their clandestine activity. That is why the Comintern promoted the indigenisation of the Chinese Communist Party in Malaya.⁵⁵⁹ The Comintern built its policies based on the reports and suggestions of local communists, and immigrants were not helpful in this sense if they were to provide information on their host country. Likely, the MCP's own self-criticism and Li Lisan's criticism of their prosecution of the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang, as well as of the "immigrant mentality" (*yimin guannian*), also contributed to the Comintern's negative attitude towards the immigrant nature of the MCP.

Immigrants, moreover, were easily deported. While the Comintern relied on Chinese connections to build its network, indigenisation of that network would solidify its position in the local society. This approach is also found in Comintern opinions on Chinese communist propaganda in the USA—communists born in China could be easily deported from the United

⁵⁵⁹ The Comintern was reluctant to accept immigrants into the KUTV as they were not competent in regard to the conditions in either their home countries and home parties, or their host countries and their parties. In 1928–1929, to the resentment of Comintern leadership, the KUTV had an "inrush" of immigrants enrolled (*naplyv*). The Comintern was only ready to accept the immigrants who had immigrated not long ago. "Vystuplenie Raitera o polozhenii Spetssectora KUTV na 7 fevr. 1929 goda na zasedanii kollegii vostochnogo sekretariata," [Raiter's address about the situation in the special sector of KUTV on Feb 7 1929 at the meeting of the Collegiate of the Eastern secretariat]... RGASPI 495/154/372/26-40, esp. 36. Iosif Lvovich Raiter (1893-1940), born in Mogilev, Belarus, self-taught, the Rector of KUTV since Oct 1928, member of Central Asia research society in KUTV, purged in 1938, executed by a firing squad in 1940 for "espionage", exonerated in 1956. Ya.V. Vasilkov, M.Yu. Sorokin, Lydia i sudsy, Bibliograficheskiy slovar vostokovedov-zhertv politicheskogo terrora v sovetskiy period [People and their lives. Bibliographical dictionary of Orientalist victims of political purges during Soviet times](1917-1991) St.Petersbourg, Peterburgskoye vostokovedeniye, 2003.

States. Thus, the Comintern suggested that Chinese communist propagandists should have American citizenship so that they could not be deported.⁵⁶⁰

Starting from Ho Chi Minh, who relied on Chinese networks to implement Comintern directives,⁵⁶¹ the Comintern cooperated with Chinese networks. The world of Chinese communism in 1929 was quite global. Those who worked for the Comintern as translators were more familiar with world geography than with Malaya geography. The mistakes in translation are telling, with “Guawa,” (Java) mistranslated as “Cuba”⁵⁶² and “Senmeilan” (Sembilan) as “Ceylon.”⁵⁶³ It is possible that such mistranslation can be explained by the fact that the possible translator of Li Lisan’s letter, Shi Huang (1900-1934), was despatched in 1928 by the Chinese faction of CPUSA to Cuba (and Canada) to establish connections with local parties in order to build the network of the Pacific Coast of anti-imperialist work with the view to established an “Oriental branch of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League.” After Cuba, Shi went to Moscow to study and, in 1930, returned to China, where he worked as a translator for the CC CCP. He died in a GMD jail.⁵⁶⁴ Given Malaka’s difficulties in finding a translator in 1924,⁵⁶⁵ there were likely not many more trusted translators available in 1929, so it is very likely that Shi translated Li Lisan’s letter. Besides, Chinese communists who worked in the Comintern were not necessarily working on China. Thus, they had truly international experience, which they used in their Chinese world. Wang Ming, in the Comintern, was dealing with the Chinese

⁵⁶⁰ “How to organize Chinese communists in the US,” RGASPI 515/ 1/ 1111/12-14, esp. 12.

⁵⁶¹ Goscha, *Thailand*, p. 78

⁵⁶² “Li Lisan’s letter ”

⁵⁶³ “Minutes,” p. 132

⁵⁶⁴ Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese immigrant activists*, pp. 145-146; Hu Xuanzhang ed., *Ziqiang bu xi hou de zai wu -- qinghua jingshen xun li* [Self discipline and Social Commitment are Tsinghua spirit] (Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2010).

⁵⁶⁵ Tan Malaka’s letter, October 1924, RGASPI 534/4/106/19-22, esp. 20.

section of the CPUSA,⁵⁶⁶ while Li Lisan had experience organising Chinese workers in France in the early 1920s. The Chinese communists in Paris in 1926 were introduced to the French communist party by Ho Chi Minh, who they ran into and took for a Cantonese in a demonstration. Ho indeed spoke Cantonese, unlike his Chinese comrades.⁵⁶⁷

Just as the MCP was being established, Alimin suggested, in his letter of 23 April 1930, that in order to establish a connection with Indonesia, a base might have been built from Penang, Singapore, Manila, and perhaps China. Alimin further suggested that comrades from “very important parts of the Far East, viz. Siam, Indochina, Malay States, Philippines . . . should be found to carry out preparatory work .”⁵⁶⁸

By 1930, the Comintern had realised the immigrant Chinese communists’ importance in fomenting revolution in the East. On March 20, 1930, an FEB cadre, Rylskiy, wrote to the ECCI that it was necessary to convene a Party conference that year, where questions about “the attitude of the CCP to Chinese immigration in the Philippines and Indochina and the work of

⁵⁶⁶ Gao Hua, *Hong taiyang shi zengyang sheng qi de. Yanan zhengfeng yundong de lai long qumai* [How the Red Sun Rose. Yanan Rectification movement] (Xianggang: zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2011), p. 101.

⁵⁶⁷ Xiao San, “Dui Zhao Shiyan shi shu de huiyi,” [A few stories in remembrance of Zhan Shiyan], in *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xian dai shi yan di jiu shi* [Research Unit on Contemporary History of the Chinese Academy of Social sciences], eds., Yida qianhou, [Before end after the foundation of the CCP], 2 Vol., Renminchubanshe, 1980, vol.2, p.521. cited in Marylyn Levine, *The Found Generation. Chinese Communists in Europe during the Twenties* (Seattle& London: University of Washington Press, 1993) p. 159-160.

⁵⁶⁸ Alimin asked for assistance from Alfonso, as he was afraid of arrest. Alimin’s letter. RGASPI 495/214/752/40-41. Alfonso was a PKI member who, after the suppression of the PKI rebellion, fled to Singapore, from where he was dispatched by Tan Malaka to Shanghai as a representative of Indonesian youth. In his personal file, he was stated to be “the representative of the Youth League.” Alfonso’s way to communism also lay through school student organisations and sport and friendship associations that, according to Alfonso, reflected anti-government moods popular at the time. “Avtobiografia” [Autobiography] 29 April 1932. RGASPI 495 /214/ 67/ 1-7, esp. 3,4. One other Indonesian who joined the MCP on 21 June 1930, was Subagio. He was dissatisfied with the policy of Party Nationalist [sic] Indonesia and wrote a declaration in Singapore on 21 June 1930. RGASPI 495./214/725/37-39.

Chinese communists in these countries” would be discussed.⁵⁶⁹ In a report from the ECCI to the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern in Shanghai, dated 23 October, 1930, the Comintern stated for the first time about the MCP that “the Chinese communists in a number of Eastern countries play and will play the largest role in the cause of the establishment of the organised communist movement.” The FEB was to seriously consider the question of preparing and recruiting cadres of “reliable” (*proverennyh*) Chinese communists for working in eastern countries, including the Far East and Middle East, to which the migration of Chinese workers was growing.⁵⁷⁰ The Comintern used Chinese networks to communicate between the CPUSA and the Philippine party in 1931.⁵⁷¹ Also in 1931, the Comintern promoted internationalist support of the Chinese revolution in the Philippines, as it had in Malaya. The Comintern urged the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands (CPPI) to establish connections with the CCP and planned to use the Chinese working among the Philippine members of the CCP to organise party work in the Philippines.⁵⁷² The Comintern’s choice to seek the help of Chinese liaisons in establishing connections worldwide was based on reports that the Chinese were active in the communist party in the USA. According to “CPUSA Suggestions for Work among Colonial Workers,” only the Chinese had connections with the local communist parties and other organisations under communist leadership in the respective colonies—the Philippines, India,

⁵⁶⁹ Comintern and China, Vol. 3 part 1. p. 828.

⁵⁷⁰ ECCI letter to the FEB, “Malaiskoye pis’mo” [Malayan Letter] 23 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/2/1,2.

⁵⁷¹ There is a note on the back of the 21 September 1931, draft of the letter from the Eastern secretariat of the ECCI to the communist party of the Philippines, “Situation in the Philippines and the tasks of the CPPI” RGASPI 495/66/28/47-62: “*Kuusinen*. When approved one copy to CPPI, one copy to CPUSA to also send through American Chinese bureau to Philippines.”

⁵⁷² Profintern’s “*Direktiviy po rabote na Fillippinah*” [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.

and Indonesia.⁵⁷³ In 1930–1931, the Comintern promoted the cooperation and establishment of joint organisations of Philippine and Chinese workers, as well as the rhetoric of the Chinese revolution. The Comintern also promoted Southeast Asian and trans-Pacific connections for the CPPI. “Through the Party and red trade unions, we must maintain the closest contact with the revolutionary movements of China, Indonesia, and Malaya, as well as of the USA.”⁵⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, Chinese and Philippine workers’ organisations had the same problem as those in Malaya—they did not intersect.⁵⁷⁵

Interestingly, the Anti-Imperialist League was the front organisation for the unification of movements of various ethnic and religious backgrounds in the Philippines, apart from unification of trade unions and the Party.⁵⁷⁶ In 1934, the CCP promoted unity between Chinese and Filipino communists. At the Third National Convention of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Comrade Ko, a Chinese delegate, stated the importance of the establishment of “a united front between Filipinos and Chinese in the archipelago, dedicated to the defense of democracy, peace, and security of the peoples of the Far East and of the whole world.”⁵⁷⁷ In

⁵⁷³ “*Predlozheniya po rabote kompartii SASSh sredi kolonial’nyh rabochih v Amerike*” [CPUSA Suggestions for Work among Colonial Workers] 16 January 1932 RGASPI 532/ 4/ **2015/4**, 5, esp.5

⁵⁷⁴ “The Present situation in the Philippines”, RGASPI 495/66/23/1-24, esp. 18, 22-23. The Comintern encouraged the incorporation of protests against the deportation of Chinese workers into the program of the CPPI. “The imperialist offensive against the revolutionary movement in the Philippines and the tasks of the CPPI,” 26 October 1931. RGASPI 495/66/23/25-39, esp. 37.

⁵⁷⁵ “Draft resolution on the revolutionary trade union movement in Philippines,” 16 August 1931 RGASPI 495/66/23/ 59-67, esp.67.

⁵⁷⁶ “*Resolutsii s pervogo s’yezda ispolkoma TsK*,” [Resolutions from the first congress of the Executive committee of the central committee] in The letter from the Eastern secretariat of the ECCI ‘Situation in the Philippines and tasks of the CPPI,’” 10 January 1932, RGASPI 495/62/ 28/47-62 esp. 61-62.

⁵⁷⁷ “Communist party of the Ph. islands (merger of the socialist and communist parties),” RGASPI 495/66/41/77-86, esp. 86. The conflation of Comintern internationalism and the drive of a Chinese overseas association to indigenise runs through the story not only of the MCP, but of revolutionary associations around Southeast Asia and across the Pacific. The United Front of Chinese and Philippine workers was also promoted by the Comintern in the Philippines. RGASPI 495/66/ 13/ 11-12...

March 1930, it was apparently the Chinese comrade Fu Daqing who was sent to Singapore with instructions “to lay the foundation” for connection with Indonesia and India, and to fix irregular connections with Malaya states and Singapore. At the same time, the Philippines party found a Chinese comrade who spend some time in Java and could be used for connection with “that country,” with which the Comintern had no connection in 1931.⁵⁷⁸

By 1930, Singapore acquired greater importance for the Comintern, as that was the place where the British were building a naval base. The Profintern collected materials from MGLU representative Huang Muhan, as well as PPUTS materials, at the fifth Profintern congress in Moscow in August 1930. According to a letter dated January 1931, apparently sent from London by a Profintern boss to the TOS (PPTUS) representative in Shanghai, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the red union members in Malaya were Chinese, “Our task is not only to organise the Chinese who are in Singapore, but also through them to reach out to the workers of Indonesia and India.” Those immigrant workers would be educated while in Singapore and, after some time, when they returned to India and Indonesia, they would become “serious support for the revolutionary trade union movement in India and Indonesia. We must seriously start working in Singapore based on the importance of this port for the pan-Pacific coast. We must create serious bases in Singapore and Hong Kong, in these two *avantposts* of British imperialism in the Far East. In the future war, these two spots will play exceptionally big roles since they will serve as the main base for the British navy. For this reason, we must approach the work in Singapore and Hong Kong not from the civilian point of view, but from the point of view of organisation of the masses for the fight against the forthcoming war. By saying this, my least intention is to juxtapose the organisation of the

⁵⁷⁸ Stolyar’s letter to “Alex”, 27 March 1931 RGASPI 534/4/370/34-35.

masses based on their everyday life demands to our anti-war goals. I only want to stress that the work in Singapore and Hong Kong has serious independent roles, despite the fact that the number of workers in these two places is not large in comparison to those huge masses that India and China have.”⁵⁷⁹

In January 1931, the Profintern considered the “most important countries” to be India, Indonesia, Indochina, and Japan.⁵⁸⁰ Among those, Malaya and Singapore were not mentioned—the MCP was not a priority for the Comintern in 1931, despite the British naval base that was being built in Singapore.

The MCP in the Civic World of International Communism, 1930–1934: Establishing Connections

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the Comintern provided an opportunity for Chinese immigrant communist associations to carve out a niche by providing a source of ideological legitimisation and organisational resources, though these came with new expectations and requirements. It was an ideal niche⁵⁸¹ that had previously been unoccupied—that of a political party that advocated for the independence of Malaya. In this way, the life of a Chinese association, the maritime network of Chinese immigrants, and the ideals and practices of the Comintern came together in the MCP and similar revolutionary organisations. The fit, of course, was far from perfect or seamless. In practice, the MCP received funding without being accepted formally as a Comintern section. This engagement or synthesis is reflected in the MCP

⁵⁷⁹ Letter from London to the Shanghai representative of PPTUS, “Dear niece”, 1 January 1931. RGASPI 534/4/360/5-13, esp. 10.

⁵⁸⁰ “Instructions to Com. Leon [Stolyar] and Kennedy,” 20 January 1931. RGASPI 534/4/106/18.

⁵⁸¹ Kuhn, “Why China Historians”

members' contacts with the Comintern after the MCP was established. In fact, the way the MCP coped with Comintern demands was quite remarkable. The MCP produced large amounts of documents, the language of which was increasingly theoretical and Bolshevik and full of self-criticism, to match the Comintern request for self-criticism. Apart from that, the MCP never got to the point of being the mass Bolshevik party that the Comintern requested. That, however, was not the reason why the MCP was not accepted as a Comintern section; that resulted, rather, from the interruption of communication. This section will discuss Comintern interactions with the MCP in 1930–1931.

The FEB cadre's attitude to the MCP was condescending, as the MCP was by no stretch of the imagination the Bolshevik party that the Comintern wanted to see. As discussed in Chapter 3, it was rather a Chinese association that spoke the Bolshevik language while attempting to perform the functions of a Chinese association, protecting the interests of the Chinese and working with the organisational resources they had. The representatives of the MCP, which was not a Comintern section, came to Shanghai to demand money, directives, and training from the Comintern.

Although the establishment of the MCP was an attempt to centralise the Party and the CC in 1930–1931 in Singapore, other Party branches and communist organisations attempted to connect with the Comintern on their own. Communist organisations in Malaya were based on native place ties and were not the centralised party that the Comintern wanted. The FEB complained that in the first half of 1931, three different representatives of the CC MCP came to Shanghai claiming to be representatives of the CC, but in fact they represented different

regional groups.⁵⁸² Besides communist organisations such as the CYL, AIL, and labour unions, there were other organisations that could have tried to gain Comintern support. Not all of the Chinese communist networks were under Malaya-based CC jurisdiction but under a China-based leadership organ.

In the summer of 1931, in Penang, a socialist democratic party (*shehui minzhudang*) was organised by the Hailams and Hokkiens. This organisation also called itself the Penang Labour Union of the CCP and was directed from Amoy, from which people were sent to inspect Penang's activities.⁵⁸³ This shows that, as in other Chinese overseas organisations, cross membership and officership was common.⁵⁸⁴ Besides, the MCP continued to promote the establishment of separate communist organisations in Malaya based on ethnicity: "The 'central' replied to the Penang organisation stressing the necessity to organise separate racial committees, which are to be under the direction of the central committee until they are firmly established and then will be passed to the local committees' jurisdiction."⁵⁸⁵ To this effect, a three-person committee was established in Johor to lead a Malaya committee consisting of ten people, and a five-person committee was established for the Indian committee with eighteen members. The Selangor organisation did not have a direct connection with Seremban and Kuala Lumpur and asked for cadres to lead the Tamil and Malay movements. In Perak, a strike by tin miners was claimed to have been led by the Party. The Perak party was doubtful whether separate racial

⁵⁸² Letter from the FEB to Ducroux, 20 May 1931 RGASPI 495/62/2/6-7.

⁵⁸³ CO 273-542, p. 549

⁵⁸⁴ Choi, "Association Divided", pp.128-130. For more about the MCP as a Chinese association, see Chapter 3.

⁵⁸⁵ In Penang, there were 115 members of the party: 18 Hokkiens, 10 Cantonese, 17 Khe (Hakka), 10 Teochiu, 57 Hailams, and 3 Malays. The majority were shop employees, with 46 such members, then 25 rubber tappers, 12 intellectuals, and 11 seamen. According to the police, the bulk of rank and file members were in the Red Labour Union.CO 273-542, p. 548.

committees would diminish the strength of the party and was overall more optimistic due to the tin miners.⁵⁸⁶ Thus, on the local level, the MCP continued to promote the establishment of separate “national” committees. Local committees were not connected to each other but to the CC. Communication between local committees in Malaya was carried out by seamen.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, even inland nodes of the Chinese network were communicating by sea. The Comintern relied on a network of seamen for communication within this Chinese communist network⁵⁸⁸ and sought individual Chinese communists embedded in both the CCP and other local parties to foster links in its own Comintern network. Who did this communicating across the seas? Let us have a look at one such seaman.

A Seaman

Meanwhile, the Communist organization was spreading in the Far East. Chinese seamen on British, Dutch, French, and American ships formed the couriers of the Chinese Communist Party.

—Miller, “Communist menace”⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ The Perak directing organisation had fifteen members. Except for the — (the original text was crossed out), others had strong sentiments but lacked active work. In Perak, there were sixty party members, of whom thirty-four were Hailams, four were Cantonese, and twelve were Hailokhongs (from port Lao Gang). and ten were Khes. Nineteen were shop employees, twelve foreigners’ servants, four intellectuals (Hakka), and six tin workers. In the Negri Sembilan state, there were 195 members, with four Malays, thirty Cantonese, and the rest Hainanese who, in some places, were forming cells (eight people) of CCP refugees from Hailokhong. Negri Sembilan issued propaganda in the name of the AIL and had 110 CY members. There were fifteen hundred labour union members, including Malays and Indians. A Malay committee of four led five hundred Malay peasants. A Map of Kesah showing an itinerary—perhaps of a party inspector—was found. According to a letter from Trengganu by 林生财, there was no organisation in Kelantan.CO 273-542, 550-558.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, pp.48-62.

⁵⁸⁹ Miller, *The Communist menace in Malaya*, pp. 21- 22. My thanks to Professor Tertitski for bringing this source to my attention.

One of the representatives the MCP sent to the Comintern in Shanghai in 1930 was Wang Yung Hai. He was a representative figure among the Malaya Chinese communists and in the Chinese communist maritime network. He was illiterate and was one of the “masses.” He was a representative of the majority of Malaya Labour Federation members,⁵⁹⁰ as he worked as a servant in a foreigner’s house and then as a seaman. His story of interaction with the Comintern is illustrative of how the MCP network was incorporated into that of the Comintern. In 1930, MCP members Huang Muhan and Fu (or Gu)⁵⁹¹ Hung Chu went to Moscow to a Profintern congress.⁵⁹²

In “My Brief Story”—transcribed and translated into English for the Comintern by somebody else, like other communications with the Comintern—the illiterate Wang Yung Hai⁵⁹³ said that he was a poor peasant. At twelve years of age, he went to the Nanyang to work as a servant for five years. Beginning at seventeen years of age, he worked as a fireman on a

⁵⁹⁰In the spring of 1928, the Nanyang federation of labour had four thousand members, of which the majority were domestic servants in foreigners’ houses. “Worker movement in Federated Malay States,” RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4. A look at the 1960s waiters in Chinese restaurants in Britain suggests parallels with the restaurant employees in Malaya in the 1930s and late 1920s. In Britain, waiters received more respect and were paid better than cooks because their jobs required more education, such as knowledge of English. James L. Watson, *Emigration and the Chinese lineage: the Mans in Hong Kong and London*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 110. It is likely, then, that servants of the foreigners also had higher status than other collies. At the same time, in the British sources, the Hainanese were said to be despised by other Chinese sub-ethnic groups and thus were in a lower level of the hierarchy in the Chinese community, more prone to the communist message. For example, see Yong, *The Origins*. For more on the revolutionary activities of the Hainanese see Murray, Jeremy Andrew, “Culturing Revolution: The Local Communists of China’s Hainan Island” University of California, San Diego, 2011).

⁵⁹¹ The document is handwritten and it is impossible to be certain.

⁵⁹² The MCP, CYL, and Labour Federation—all communist organisations of Malaya—were trying to get the endorsement of international communist authorities. In 1934, the Labour Federation of Malaya (MLF) wanted to reconnect with the Profintern and participate in activities for the first time since the 1931 arrest of Ducroux. The MLF asked to send a Malayan, or at least a Chinese, comrade to help with work and, as always, promised international authorities to call an enlarged meeting and to reorganise the Malayan Labour Federation to rectify their errors. It asked for “a representative” to lead the work and resolutions from the Profintern. “Report of Labour Federation of Malaya no. 1 to the Profintern,” RGASPI 495/62/24/13-16ob.

⁵⁹³ Wang Yung Hai, “My Brief Story”, 8 December 1930, RGASPI 495/62/4/1-2.

steamer for five years and was then promoted to machinery worker. Altogether, he worked as a seaman in the Nanyang for a further nine years. Judging from this, he was born in 1903–1904 and was twenty-six years old in 1930. He joined the Party in 1926 in the Nanyang, never having done “revolutionary work” in China and knowing little about China’s problems (perhaps as a way of refuting the possible accusations of applying Chinese policies in Malaya). In 1927, he worked as a “chief of party group,” then as part of the nucleus in the trade union. On board the steamer, he was the secretary of the nucleus of the Party. He was thus part of a lower-level cadre. He then was transferred to be the member of the standing committee of the General Federation of Seamen.⁵⁹⁴ In April of 1930, he was elected as representative of the World Conference of the Red International Labour Union but couldn’t go because he was too busy

⁵⁹⁴ Seamen held protests and negotiations with the Chinese protectorate in 1932 against the contract labour system until, in 1934, the alternative to the contract system, their own organisations, was banned. Tai Yuen, *Labour unrest*, pp. 45-52. As in other cases of labour protests, the MCP tried to gain control of existing struggles. In 1933, the Seamen Federation was headquartered in Singapore and included trade unions in Singapore and Penang. The aim of this organisation was to get rid of the contract labour system, back the right of recommendation, and let workers work by turns. The organisation covered fifty-two steamers, twenty-two nuclei, and two correspondents. It covered steamers in Dutch colonies, Australia, Africa, several irregular petroleum steamers to Europe, South China, and Malaya, both east and west coasts. The MCP, as usual, complained that the political and cultural level of seamen was very low. Most were loyal to Red Labour Unions, and 80 percent paid membership fees. The MCP explained that there were formerly Malayan seamen, but the sails were low, and that changed the situation. Other complaints, as always, were about a lack of education and propaganda work and a lack of cadres, which explained the little success had by MCP propagandist work among seamen. This report was written in the middle of the seamen protest activity to gain the legal status for their own lodging houses (*haiyuan su she*), where they lived while unemployed, and freedom from the contract system. The MCP noted that those struggles were successful because of the “decisiveness of the masses” The MCP reported about the membership of these seamen dormitories: Out of two thousand, all were Chinese, 50 percent Cantonese (firemen), 25 percent Hainanese boys, and 25 percent Fukienese sailors. Most of them belonged to Asian company. Seamen complained that they could not get ashore in Africa, could not oppose the goods that were carried, that the company could change the work of a sailor at any time, and that communication between various departments was prohibited. They also protested beatings by foremen, the use of clannishness according to the place of origin of the sailors to split them, and the arrest of responsible men of their own dormitories of seamen. The MCP reported that there were one thousand unemployed Chinese sailors and “perhaps one thousand Malays, but no precise information available.” “Report of Labour Federation of Malaya no. 1 to the Profintern,” RGASPI 495/62/24/13-16ob.; RGASPI495/62/25/8. In November 1930, Ho Chi Minh reported the seaman union membership at one hundred individuals. Ho’s report, 18 November, 1930., p. 26.

with work. He had the same problem as did the Taiwanese Communist Party representative, Chen Dexing, who also was chosen but, because of the delays, didn't go to Moscow. Instead, Huang Muhan and Fu (in the handwritten document it is not clear if it is "Fu" or "Gu") Hung Chu went to Moscow. Wang Yun Hai had been in Shanghai before for three months to attend a plenary session of the executive committee of the General Federation of Seamen. In October of 1929, he was arrested together with Huang Muhan (in the document, Huang Moh Hang, 黄默涵) and sentenced to one month, but he was released because of insufficient evidence and then banished from the Nanyang. He once led a struggle against "reorganisationists" (apparently members of the GMD) and killed two of them, and he had participated in strike of seamen in *Badoba*.

As did all authors of reports to the Comintern, Wang made a disclaimer to the effect that he was not familiar with the situation enough to take responsibility for the accuracy of information he presented. He claimed that even though he was one of the members of the executive committee of the central committee, he didn't regularly participate in the work of the standing committee, thus refuting responsibility for the accuracy of his report. Zhang Xia, an Esperantist and painter, made analogous remarks about the incompleteness of his knowledge on the diversity of reasons for the migration from Xianyou county, Fujian, to Malaya in his memoir devoted precisely to that matter—the relationship between the migration from that county to Malaya and the revolutionary movement.⁵⁹⁵ It is plausible to suggest that this was a way to waive responsibility for incorrectness and mistakes by saying that one knew little about the matter about which one made a specialised report. This was a way of fending off outside

⁵⁹⁵ Zhang Xia, "Immigrants from Xianyou."

criticism and dealing with the pressure from the Comintern to account for actions⁵⁹⁶ that looked like a consistent and constant failure—no masses, no active work. Obviously, the Comintern took that at face value, and perhaps that, among other factors, contributed to the confusion of the Comintern over Malaya matters and the lack of enthusiasm with regard to the MCP.

In early October or late September of 1930, an MCP delegation came to Shanghai, according to the decision at the second conference, “to report on the work done and present demands.”⁵⁹⁷ The CCP was the intermediary between the MCP and the Comintern.⁵⁹⁸ Wang sent reports to the Comintern through the CC CCP in Shanghai and in the Hong Kong Southern Bureau.⁵⁹⁹ Wang had meetings with somebody from the FEB, then with a CCP representative, but otherwise he was waiting for promised money and instructions. He sent a report to the Comintern prepared by Huang Muhan; Fu (Gu) Hung Chu, who had returned from the world conference of the RILU in Moscow; and Shieng Kien Chu, who was coming from the Nanyang. Two other reports, one of which was translated into Russian, were sent through the CC CCP to the FEB. The reports did not reach the FEB—instead, they were likely intercepted.

Malaya communists realised that it was on the basis of their reports that the Comintern would provide directives for their work in the Nanyang. As in 1929 (see Chapter 2), Malaya

⁵⁹⁶ Also see the disclaimer of the author of the undated report “To the CC of the Chinese party and Comintern. RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4. Wang called the report “incomplete and simple” because comrade Huang didn’t know the situation and present conditions very well. Formally, he was the member of the standing committee of the provisional committee. So were Fu and Shieng. (Wang’s letter, 28 December 1930 RGASPI 495/62/6/17-21.

⁵⁹⁷ Ho Chi Minh’s letter, 25 November 1930. RGASPI 495/62/6/5-7.

⁵⁹⁸ Wang Yung Hai was frustrated that after three months in Shanghai, he was not incorporated into a cell, though he had letters of introduction to the FEB, CC CCP, and seaman union. Wang’s letter, 28 December 1930. RGASPI 495/62/6/17-21.

⁵⁹⁹ According to British analysis, the MCP was first guided by this Southern CCP bureau—“transmission and translation sub-agency of the FEB”—of which Ho Chi Minh was a member until his arrest in 1931. NARA RG263:D2527/4534-35.

communists wanted to draw the Comintern's—and the world's—attention to the Nanyang. Wang wrote: “It is my hope that our reports will be translated into different languages and sent to Moscow in order to attract the special attention of the Comintern to the work of Nanyang.” Being a member of the Communist Party and trying to get in touch with international superiors was a nerve-wracking matter requiring emotional commitment. Wang complained that since he had twice made arrangements with the comrades who the FEB had assigned to meet with him, one month had passed. A CCP comrade had come the day before Wang dictated his letter and did not give instructions but said that the Comintern had mailed them to Wang.

Even after the Malaya Chinese communist organisation became the MCP, the CCP retained its patron position in relation to the MCP. The CCP called a meeting “of the comrades working in Malaya” (Wang Yung Hai and Huang Muhan) to discuss the problems of the Nanyang. They decided that Shieng Kien Chu, who had been sent by the MCP to the CCP for training, would return to the Nanyang and that traveling expenses would be provided by the FEB through the CCP. However, as Shieng had complained, in three months he had not received any money, and he decided to go back immediately to ask the FEB directly for “travel expenses and instructions.”⁶⁰⁰ The Comintern obviously had more urgent matters to deal with in the CCP (consequences of “Li Lisan’s line”) than to foment revolution in Malaya. The Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern in Shanghai was overwhelmed with work and gladly used the help of the Chinese communists, who aspired to liberate the Nanyang and talked about world revolution, even if only for mobilisation purposes, as they explained to alarmed Comintern cadres.⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰⁰ Shieng’s letter to the FEB, 26 December 1930. RGASPI 495/62/4/3; Wang’s letter.

⁶⁰¹ Letter “From Malaya” to the FEB, 7 February 1931 RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3.

The Comintern's Directives and Agents

In fomenting world revolution, pursuing Soviet geostrategic interests, and designing respective policies, the Comintern relied on information and suggestions coming from local communists.⁶⁰² In this way, the Comintern was an international public sphere.⁶⁰³ At the same time, the grand design that the Comintern had for Southeast Asia became a resource for local communists to organise their own interests. To use Kuhn's words, Chinese communists borrowed the Comintern's empire.⁶⁰⁴ This section will tell the story of Comintern agents, both Chinese and foreigners, in 1930–1931, and of their role in Comintern policy-making both at home in Moscow and in the field in China and Southeast Asia. In general, the Comintern was explicitly relying on the Chinese communists in its operations in Asia and “granted” the MCP to the CCP to lead—in fact, the Comintern simply endorsed the existing connection. This section will show that in doing this, the Comintern helped the Chinese communists to build their network and then left with no prospect of coming back after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

At the Comintern's home in the Moscow school for Asian communists, relying on the local communists to draft Comintern policy was the approach to policy-making. Raiter's address regarding the KUTV at the Comintern's Eastern Secretariat meeting in February of

⁶⁰² “Milton's” (Francis Waldron) letter to the Eastern Secretariat of ECCI, 4, June 4 1934 RGASPI 495/66/35/37-37ob.and Tertitski, Belogurova, *TCP and the Comintern*

⁶⁰³ According to Cheek, the CCP propaganda was also directed public sphere. Cheek, Timothy, ‘From Market to Democracy in China: Gaps in the Civil Society Model,’ in Lindau, Juan David & Cheek, Timothy (eds.), *Market Economics and Political Change: Comparing China and Mexico*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD, 1998), pp.219-254, esp. 231-37.

⁶⁰⁴ Kuhn, “Why China Historians”

1929 supports this point: “The Chinese group of the International Lenin School (ILS) prepares materials, and we use them. We can accept or reject them, but we use the work done by these students. By doing so, we are preparing them for leadership work in China.”⁶⁰⁵ As was the case with the TCP, the FEB based their criticism of the MCP on their reports, and these criticisms were identical with the self-criticisms in MCP reports. Not until the Comintern received a number of reports from the MCP, in 1931, did it propose suggestions on their work. In 1930, the FEB did not yet have a concrete work plan to propose to the MCP. The general nature of Comintern directives was noted even by the British in their analysis of the captured FEB documents.⁶⁰⁶ Yet the general recommendations of the Comintern did become the goals that the MCP aimed for.

As a result, the MCP did not go beyond the change in language, but this cannot be seen as a failure. In fact, the Comintern strengthened the Chinese maritime network that would be used during the war and the United Front period. The following paragraphs will look in detail at the Comintern’s interaction with Chinese communists and the Comintern directives: Both demonstrate the decisive voice on the Chinese communists in the Comintern’s concrete plans to put into practice its grand vision of a Southeast Asia connected by the international communist network. The Comintern based their suggestions entirely on local reports, processing them, using theoretical language of Marxism-Leninism to talk about them, and including the Comintern rhetoric (line) that always revolved around Bolshevisation.

What were the Comintern’s recommendations for the MCP? From the establishment of the MCP in 1930, the Comintern promoted the indigenisation of the MCP and a more

⁶⁰⁵ Raiter’s address, RGASPI 495/154/372/36.

⁶⁰⁶ A British report, Communist Activities in China, Federated Malay States etc. (The „Noulens Case“), 7 March 1932, NA:RG263: 2527/45, p. 26.

centralised organisation, as well as the tactics of a “united front from below.” Arguably, of these three big points, centralisation and indigenisation were not coming from the MCP reports. Moreover, the Comintern said that it was difficult to propose a “concrete work plan” regarding MCP work. The Comintern recommended that the MCP “pay special attention to the difference of nationality, languages, and customs in order to organise the masses of the toilers.”⁶⁰⁷ The MCP needed to focus on railway cities, ports, and military bases of Singapore and to choose a trustworthy group of comrades who would work and be supervised by the CC. At regular Party meetings, members would “discuss questions of local character” that would “determine resulting concrete tasks along organisational and agitational lines.”⁶⁰⁸ An all-Malaya conference had to be held, and stable organisational leadership had to be established in cities and villages. Pamphlets in Chinese, Indian, and Malay languages needed to be published with the money collected from “the party members, sympathisers, and broad toiling masses.” The Comintern also suggested how to finance the Party: “The Party should collect party fees, as this would strengthen the organisation and political connection between the workers and the Party.” Trade unions had to be centralised. Chapters of the Malaya Anti-Imperialist League had to be established in cities, factories, and villages and then centralised, as had the CYL of the Malay states.⁶⁰⁹

How did Malaya respond to the FEB letter?⁶¹⁰ The MCP received the FEB letter in English and Chinese on January 1, 1931, and translated it into Malay and “Indian.” They intended to discuss it at a meeting “among the various national comrades”—one Chinese, one

⁶⁰⁷Comintern’s letter sent between December 1930 and January 1931RGASPI 495/62/12/4.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 4ob.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

Malay, one Javanese, and one Indian. The MCP agreed with Comintern recommendations regarding the “method of work,”⁶¹¹ but they argued that the Comintern had misunderstood their work because they only used slogans of the uprising and general strike, terrorism and world revolution for the purpose of propaganda, and that “there were something like that character [sic] done by the masses, but it can be said it is only non-organised mass action.”⁶¹² Another Party conference was to be organised in April with Malayan, Chinese, Indian and Javanese comrades, of which the Comintern would be informed and asked for instructions. Thus, MCP leaders brushed off the accusations that they were promoting “terrorist” slogans. Again, it was the “masses” who were involved in terrorism, not the Party.⁶¹³

The connection between the FEB and the MCP, until Ho Chi Minh’s arrest in May of 1931, was carried out through the CCP, Ho, and those several MCP representatives mentioned earlier, who came to see the Comintern in Shanghai claiming to be the representatives of the CC MCP (but saying that they did not know the situation in the Party, apparently, as the MCP imagined the demeanor of their relation with the Comintern would require). By May of 1931, the FEB wanted to get a source of information from outside the MCP. For this purpose a French communist, Ducroux, was dispatched to Singapore.⁶¹⁴ In a 20 May, 1931, letter, Rudnik,⁶¹⁵ the

⁶¹¹ This was criticized in the Letter “To the Malayan comrades” 17 December 1930. RGASPI 495/62/12/1-2ob. esp. p 1.

⁶¹² Letter “From Malaya” to the FEB, 7 February 1931 RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3. The MCP, as usual, stated that a lack of cadres and finances was the obstacle that prevented the Party from achieving success. In 1931 and 1930, the party lost “over half” of its cadres and about 90 percent of the labour union cadres to arrests and deportations. The new cadres were without experience and had little training. “Labour movement in Malay federated states,” RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4.

⁶¹³ This was the same way the MCP claimed it had used the slogans of general strike and terrorism. CC Letter “From Malaya” to the FEB, 7 February 1931. RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3.

⁶¹⁴ “Between January and May of 1931, three different people arrived here, and each one claimed to be the representative of the CC MCP. They were representatives of various Chinese groups from various places, and even the CCP does not know the recent past of these people or if they are MCP members.

administrative head of the FEB, was also concerned with the opinion of the MCP on the directives the FEB had sent between December 1930 and January 1931—According to Rudnik, the MCP believed that the FEB analysis was “generally characterising the situation correctly—except some few points—and that this letter [would] be used by them [the MCP] as a basis for future work.”⁶¹⁶

Based on the information the Comintern received about the MCP, they did not consider the Malaya communist party to have been established. They suggested that the MCP be established on the basis of the preliminary committee established by the Nanyang communists in April 1930.⁶¹⁷ The FEB still had little idea about whether independent groups for each nationality or a central leadership organ existed.⁶¹⁸

The main recommendations, according to Rudnik, were along the lines of the unification of “party ranks” and all the groups that agreed with the programme and decisions of the CI; of abolishing the organisational independence of all national groups, Chinese, Malay, and even Hindu; of calling a joint meeting or conference and electing a CC for the whole of the Malay States. Rudnik, however, was not satisfied, saying, “We did not receive any answer to all these tasks which were set by us. We did not know what the people are doing, how the work of

Besides the question of whether they are members of the CCP, they immigrated to MS two to three years ago and don't know what is going on now.” For this reason, the FEB did not recognise these individuals as representatives of the CC MCP but met with every envoy: “Nevertheless, we made connections with every arrived friend, gave them instructions, took information, etc.” Apparently, the FEB was misled by the MCP members’ “poor information” and disclaimers about responsibility for the information provided, as well as a lack of “achievements of our Firm [Party]” for their lack of connection with the MCP. FEB's letter to Ducroux, 20 May 1931 RGASPI 495/62/2/6-7.

⁶¹⁵ For more on Rudnik, see Frederick S. Litten “The Noulens Affair,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 138, (June 1994), pp. 492-512.

⁶¹⁶ Rudnik's letter to Ducroux, 20 May 1931, RGASPI 495/62/2/6.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

centralisation is going on, what the forms and content of the party work are, how strong it is, etc., and therefore we decided to ask to speak regarding these matters with the Malaya firm [the Party] and to give them instructions.” Ducroux was to find out where and what kind of organisation existed, what their activity was, whether “people of various nationalities [were] members of the same organisation or [existed] independently,” and whether it had a central leadership, mass work, press, and readership. There were two people sent by the FEB who arrived in Singapore independently from Ducroux: “our friend who left Singapore to help you”—supposedly Huang Muhan—and “clerk Sam for the PPTUS (Pan Pacific Trade Union Secretariat) work,” supposedly a Javanese, Teo Yuanfu, alias Zhang Ranhe, alias Bassa, who also knew the Hokkien dialect.⁶¹⁹ Ducroux was to find out information about him.⁶²⁰

In the meantime, the Comintern wrote to the CC CCP in Moscow, saying, “The political commission of the CI decided on January 20, 1931, to pose the question of recognition of the CP of Malay states (Singapore) as a CI section at the seventh congress. Until then, the leadership of this organisation must be connected with the CC CCP. At the same time, it was decided that the FEB must also directly connect with the communist organisation of Malay states. The Eastern Secretariat is preparing a detailed letter to the communist organisation of Malay states.”⁶²¹ Thus, the CCP was entrusted by the Comintern with the direction of the MCP until the Comintern recognised the MCP as a Comintern section. This wasn’t a big change from what the MCP had previously been doing. The Comintern just endorsed the CCP-MCP relationship.

⁶¹⁹ “Doklad Tovarisha Dyukru” [Report by Comrade Ducroux] 4 January 1934 Ducroux’s personal file 495/270/809/30-34 esp. 31; Yong , *The Origins*, p. 163.

⁶²⁰ Rudnik’s letter, 20 May 1931.

⁶²¹ ECCI letter to FEB, 20 January 1931 RGASPI 495 /62/10/1, letter “From Malaya”, 7 February 1931 RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3.

It was the Chinese who were to be the agents of the Comintern's policy in Southeast Asia. In 1931, "a Singapore Chinese" was to be the carrier of the Comintern message to India and was to implement the Comintern's grand plans regarding Southeast Asia. Ducroux was to find somebody in Singapore to be sent to India, "a trade man, preferably a Hindu," or a Chinese person to work in India among the Chinese there; through this he would look for a connection with the Indian people. Ducroux was also to find "a good steady friend, who could be our connection-man for Malaya States, like Quark"⁶²²(Ho Chi Minh)—apparently, seaman Wang Yung Hai recommended Huang Muhan for this position. The "(trade Union) Secretary," who the centre wanted to send to India—apparently either Zhang Ranhe, alias Bassa, or Alimin, was "not engaged with the Frenchman" and, according to Chinese comrades, had "no qualification for such serious work."⁶²³ Hence, to a decisive degree, it was up to the Chinese communists to decide who was going to be dispatched as a Comintern agent. The Chinese comrades' opinion that a particular comrade had no qualification to do the job was meaningful for the Comintern. All these plans were in the works just five days before Rudnik's arrest and the dismantling of the whole FEB.⁶²⁴

No money was allotted for the MCP according to the documents captured on June 15, 1931, during Rudnik's arrest.⁶²⁵ The FEB had freedom from the Comintern head office in distributing financial aid to the "majority of the firms [communist parties] in the Far East" within a general directive to use money for travel expenses, extraordinary meetings,

⁶²² A letter from the FEB to Moscow, 20 May 1931, RGASPI 495/62/2/6,7.esp. 7

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Letter from the FEB to the "Center" regarding Malaya, Indonesia and India, 10 June 1931. NA: RG263: D 2510/41-50.

⁶²⁵ A British report, "Communist Activities in China, Federated Malay States etc. (The „Noulens Case“)", 7 March 1932, NA:RG263: 2527/45, p. 26.

conferences, etc. Money would be given in small amounts and spent “usefully.”⁶²⁶ The budget was not enough for all the plans the FEB had for various parties. The FEB, numerous times, had pointed out that all these plans would go astray if no decision was made regarding the budget. Apparently, the MCP did not convince the FEB that it was a party worth spending money on. Or the Chinese revolution in the Nanyang was simply not important enough in comparison with the contemporary revolution in mainland China. Ducroux found out that in the MCP, there was no single Malay or Indian, but Indians were in the Malaya trade unions.⁶²⁷

Ducroux spent three weeks in Indochina (March–April of 1931) before he went to Singapore. In Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh introduced him to Zhang Ranhe, and on April 27 he arrived in Singapore. He had meetings in the second half of May with Huang Muhan, Bassa, Fu Daqing (the secretary of the MCP), a Wang who “was sent” there for trade union work and had previously been deported from Malaya⁶²⁸ and, apparently, with some affluent members of the Chinese community. While having a meeting with these on June 1, he, Huang, and Fu were arrested (see Chapter 6). Ducroux’s exposure led to the arrest of Ho Chi Minh and Rudnik and the dismantling of the FEB by the authorities. According to the British police analysis, the FEB had planned to send Tan Malaka or Alimin (Dirja) to Rangoon to act as liaison between the Dutch East Indies and India. Musso was involved as an advisor on Malaya matters and connections with Rangoon. In one of the sources, there is a clearly false piece of information—that Fu Daqing was arrested in Calcutta.⁶²⁹ Yet it gives the idea that it was perhaps Fu Daqing

⁶²⁶ A letter from the FEB to Moscow, 20 May 1931, RGASPI 495/62/2/6,7.esp. 7

⁶²⁷ A letter from the FEB to Moscow, 20 May 1931, RGASPI 495/62/2/6,7.esp.

⁶²⁸ Ducroux report, p. 32

⁶²⁹ Fu allegedly communicated this to Zheng while he ran into him in Guangzhou in prison in 1931. In Zheng’s memory, Fu’s intentions and actuality likely got mixed up. Zheng Chaoling, “Ji Fu Daqing” [Remembering Fu Daqing], *Bai nianchao*, 1998 No.2, pp. 61-63, esp. 63.

who was to be sent to India. Thus, the Comintern, in its plans to connect Singapore with India, relied on the suggestion made by the MCP, who had asked for a Chinese person to be sent there (see above). Indeed, Alimin was sent to China in 1931 to establish connections with the PKI.⁶³⁰

The CC MCP replied to the letter from the Calcutta branch of the All-India Communist Party, sent on April 10, to send a representative to meet with Ducroux in Singapore. Although no trace of the subsidy was found, according to FEB accounts for the second quarter (“June quarter”) of 1931, fifty thousand gold dollars were allocated for the work in the Federated Malaya states and forty-five thousand gold dollars until the end of the year for the work in Burma.⁶³¹ Ducroux denied that he had twelve thousand dollars with him at the time of arrest.⁶³² The Comintern continued to work on the Malaya plan after the FEB was shattered in 1931. The evidence for this is the Comintern letter to the MCP that was prepared by a number of Comintern cadres, including Li Lisan.⁶³³ It is not clear if the MCP ever got this letter.

⁶³⁰ In China, Alimin refused to go to Singapore and Hong Kong, fearing arrest, and was thus made responsible for publication in Malay of the PPTUS *Malayan Worker*. Stolyar’s letter, sometime in late 1930-early 1931, RGASPI 534/4/370/1-12. esp. p. 10-11. Alimin was in China until 1933. In 1934, he came back to Moscow. “Santos Huan’s personal file” RGASPI 495/214/3/ part 1/73, RGASPI 495 /214/ 3 /dossier/ p. 69.

⁶³¹ A British report, „Communist Activities in China, Federated Malay States etc. (The „Noulens Case“), 7 March 1932, NA:RG263: 2527/45, p.35

⁶³² Ducroux denied that the notebooks with addresses gave the police the grounds to carry out arrests in Shanghai and Hong Kong. In fact, he argued that the police had gotten all information from his intercepted correspondence. He hinted that the fact that police got all information in Singapore was a provocation related to Indochina and that the trip was not prepared well from the start. Ducroux’s report , 4 January 1934, p. 34. Unsurprisingly, Ho, after arrest and deportation to England, went to Moscow, where he was exiled for ten years (see Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi-minh*). The Comintern was suspicious of the manner in which Ducroux had easily been let go by the police. His sloppiness in handling secret matters was also baffling. He allegedly threw away a telegram with FEB contacts and addresses. Ducroux denied that and the fact that twelve thousand dollars had disappeared, which had been published in newspapers. Ducroux’s report, p. 33.

⁶³³ Handwritten notes on the first page of a letter to the MCP from the Eastern Secretariat ECCI (drafted by Mazut), 14 April 1931. The notes are the list of Comintern cadres who were to receive a copy of the letter. Among them was “Lilisyian,” Li Lisan. RGASPI 495/62/18/42-53, esp. 42. According to Alimin’s letter from Germany, dated 29 September, 1930, he also wrote a draft of the recommendations for

After the fall of the FEB, the MCP continued to function within the Chinese maritime network and continued to have close relations with the CCP. In September of 1931, the MCP, besides unsuccessfully having attempted to connect with the non-existent FEB and southern bureau of the CCP in Hong Kong, was in touch with the Guangdong provincial committee and Amoy town committee.⁶³⁴

The MCP attempted to establish contact with the Comintern in 1933 and 1934. Between 1931 and 1935, the Comintern did not find MCP activity satisfactory for acceptance into the Comintern. Besides, as we will see, the MCP appeared to have not responded after receiving Comintern money. On July 27, 1935, a note produced by the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern reads, “However, since in the last year and a half this organisation lost connection with the CI and CCP, under the direction of which it worked, and we don’t know anything about its activity and organisation condition, until further information about the condition in this party the Eastern Secretariat abstains from supporting its request to accept it into the CI as its section.”⁶³⁵ The MCP letter with confirmation of the receipt of the money had been intercepted by police. The MCP lost connection with the Comintern until 1939, judging from the fact that this was when the next portion of MCP documents appeared in Comintern files. Thus, in the end, communication was the reason why the MCP was not recognised by the Comintern. By 1936, the Comintern also had information that the PKI had not been restored at

Singaporean comrades and sent it to the Comintern. Apparently, his draft was not used by the Comintern: He wrote this draft without any materials from the MCP and with apparent mistakes, as he himself was ready to recognise. For example, he admitted he wasn’t sure whether his statement that there was no peasantry in Malaya was correct. RGASPI 495/214/ 752/86.

⁶³⁴ CO273-542, CO 273- 547, p. 48

⁶³⁵ Untitled note, Original text in Russian, 27 July 1935 RGASPI 495/ 14 /385/ 12.

all.⁶³⁶ The Eastern Secretariat of the executive committee of the Comintern was abolished in October of 1936 as a part of centralisation of the Comintern apparatus, making it more easily controlled by the General Secretary of the ECCI, Stalin. Of the new secretariats established in place of it, none were responsible for the work in Malaya.⁶³⁷ According to the materials that I was able to find in RGASPI, only the Academic Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems (NIANKP) continued to collect materials on Malaya and Indonesia. Thus, there was no structure in the Comintern to take a serious interest in the MCP until 1939, when the war pushed for drastic measures.

INDIGENISATION AND REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

The Comintern, the CCP, and the MCP in 1932–1936

This section is about the MCP's interactions with the Comintern in 1932–1936. The Comintern continued to promote the building of a communist network to connect Southeast Asia. This resulted in the MCP establishing connections not just in Southeast Asia but with the Chinese communists in the USA. I will first tell the story of the interactions and will discuss the Comintern directive to the MCP from 1934, as well as the MCP's failed efforts to bring non-Chinese into the Party. Ultimately, as the MCP did not have people who could communicate in languages other than Chinese, their connections were limited to fellow Chinese—the MCP thus established connections in Java, but with the Chinese there, extending the *huaqiao* networks as a part of the Comintern plan to connect Southeast Asia through a communist network. The

⁶³⁶“Letter from Santos” (Alimin), 1937, RGASPI 495/16 /8/ 22-27, 63.

⁶³⁷ G.M. Adibekov, Z.N. Shahnazarova, K.K. Shirinya, *Organizatsionnaya struktura Komintern, 1919-1943 [Organizational Structure of the Comintern]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), p. 186-190.

Comintern thus strengthened the Chinese maritime network. This ironic or unexpected result, from the Comintern's perspective, came about in part from the aspects of the MCP that reflect its operation in several respects as a Chinese association, and in part from the Comintern's own policies on indigenisation of the communist movement.

In 1933, the MCP sought again to get in contact with the Comintern after the connection had been interrupted in 1931. The MCP continued to accept Comintern resolutions as guidance for its work.⁶³⁸ The CC MCP was also accepting directives from the CC CCP.⁶³⁹ As the revolutionary movement (*geming yundong*) in Malaya was growing, and the MCP expected the Malaya revolution soon to become a part of the world revolution,⁶⁴⁰ all Party leaders (*lingdao*) were "comrades that came from China" (*zhongguo ji tongzhi*).⁶⁴¹

In late 1933, around October, Wen Decai (闻德才) went to Shanghai, where the MCP had been promised a Comintern subsidy. After eight months of unsuccessful waiting in Malaya, after March 24, 1934, the MCP sent Song Zhuoming (in the original text, Soong Tso Ming, 宋卓明)⁶⁴² to Shanghai to fetch the Comintern-promised money for six months. In its report, the MCP obviously wanted to show the dire straits of the Party in order to get a Comintern

⁶³⁸ "Malaiya gongchandang dier ci kuo dahui de zongjie," [The resolutions of the second enlarged congress of the MCP], 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/22-30.

⁶³⁹ "Malaiya qingshi fenxi yu dang de renwu. Jieshou zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan laixin de jueyi [The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party. Accepting the CC CCP resolution contained in the letter dated 23 May] 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ [A letter from the Malayan party no. 3] 24 March 1934 by Guo Guang (国光) English version RGASPI 495/62/22/8-12ob ; Chinese version "Malaiya alai xin di san hao," RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁴² Perhaps, the "fat Cantonese." Yong, *The Origins*, p. 171.

subsidy.⁶⁴³ The author of the letter, Guo Guang, reported success at Melaka and Sembilan in setting up training classes for Malay comrades.⁶⁴⁴ The discourse of uncooperative local branches being to blame for meager success persisted. Central leadership was blaming local cadres for the lack of cooperation. This shows that the involvement of Malays in the Party was a top-down initiative—it was the indigenisation of an organisation that needed to penetrate on the local level. The tone of the letter was desperate. Guo Guang asked the Comintern to send the MCP a comrade with experience and the knowledge of both English and Chinese, and a Malay (*malai ji tongzhi*), otherwise the work among non-Chinese (*mayinji tongzhi*) would be in question. There was also a lack of cadres to work among youth (*qingbu*). The MCP also asked the Comintern to send them propaganda materials in Malay and the Comintern's resolutions, and suggested that in order for the Comintern to better understand the situation, they should send a comrade to Malaya.⁶⁴⁵ During this period, as before, the MCP felt free to approve or disapprove even of Comintern directives that they had an incentive to conform to. Their relationship was one of "obedient autonomy."⁶⁴⁶ The MCP continued to express approval, in expressions like "This is correct," of the Comintern directives.⁶⁴⁷ In 1934, the FEB letter to the

⁶⁴³ According to the letter, there were not enough people in the CC to prepare reports and to establish work of departments (*bu*), that the party press hadn't published for several months. Guo Guang's letter, RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁴⁴ Largely, the letter stated the same problems as before: connection between local committees and the central committee. The activity reported was again along the lines of the celebration of revolutionary anniversaries. A membership increase was reported in Johor and Johor Bahru, and in Singapore and Selangore in the factories, but arrests decreased the numbers in Singapore and Sembilan. Guo Guang's letter, RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁴⁵ Guo Guang's letter, 24 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁴⁶ Erika Evasdottir, *Obedient Autonomy: Chinese Intellectuals and the Achievement of Ordinary Life* (UBC/University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

⁶⁴⁷ Such as in the document "The Adoption by the Nanyang Provisional Committee of the Resolution of the Tenth Plenum of the [executive committee of the] Comintern and the Resolution of the CC about the Adoption of the Resolutions of the ECCI Tenth Plenum's Resolutions." 15 March 1930. RGASPI 495/62/1/28-44.

MCP was again based on MCP suggestions.⁶⁴⁸ The FEB said that “in this favourable objective situation” the activity of the MCP, the Malayan Federation of Labour (MFL), and the CYL remained “extremely unsatisfactory as during the past year the party and revolutionary mass organisations stood aloof from the mass struggles.”⁶⁴⁹ The “organisational base was not strengthened or extended,” and that fact that they were lagging “behind revolutionary events” was the obstacle for the Malayan revolution. The MCP needed to “do Bolshevik mass work to expand and consolidate the MCP base” in key industries among “Malayan, Indian, as well as Chinese masses” and to convert the CYL, AIL, and red unions into “genuine mass organisations.”⁶⁵⁰ The struggle needed to be carried out under the slogans and “demands of the masses.” The FEB expected the MCP to carry out its past directives and was inquiring, “Why do the directives of the CI to the party and the decisions of the CC of the CPM remain, on the whole, on paper or insufficiently and badly carried out? The imperialist terror and lack of cadres cannot justify the weaknesses and shortcomings, as some comrades maintain.”⁶⁵¹

Other points that the Comintern repeated from MCP reports in its letter were as follows: lack of contact with the masses; lack of involvement of non-Chinese in the party and a neglect to work among them; abstract, instead of concrete, struggles against reformists; a sectarian application of the united front from below; a resistance to drawing Malays and Indians, as well as Chinese workers and peasants, into the united front of the economic and political struggle; a neglect to work in the trade unions, both red and yellow, and in daily economic struggles; the

⁶⁴⁸ Comintern’s letter to the CC MCP, June 1 1934 RGASPI 495/62/24/37-45. This was also the case in the correspondence between the Comintern and the Taiwanese communist party. See Tertitsky, Belogurova, *The TCP and the Comintern*. pp. 154-160.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

inability to formulate and issue slogans to match the economic and political demands of the masses; lack of understanding and an unwillingness to combine economic demands with the political slogans of the revolution; persistent stereotyping and commanding methods of leadership; bureaucratic, instead of personal, guidance and control of decisions; a lack of inner Party democracy and life; a lack of daily activities in the nuclei and lower Party committees; poor secret work; and lack of illegal mass activity in combination with open legal methods of organisation and struggle. The Party had to struggle against opportunism, especially right opportunism and “tailism,” passivity, defeatism, and underestimation of the fighting spirit and capacity of Malayan, Chinese, and Indian workers, left opportunist sectarianism, putschism, and “revolutionary phrase-mongering.”⁶⁵² Other points that were repeated from the MCP reports were the disconnection of higher and lower Party grades and the difficult language of the Party press in Malay and Indian dialects rather than the simpler language “intelligible to the masses.”⁶⁵³

The Comintern continued to promote indigenisation. This policy of indigenisation was reflected in the attention to the local conditions and slogans coming from the masses, which were also, as we know, stressed by the MCP. Yet the indigenisation of the movement recommended by the Comintern was to be combined with internationalisation—that is, with the use of internationalist slogans, a practical organisation of mass action under internationalist slogans and of everyday demands, as well as internationalist antiwar slogans, such as the cry to oppose “the shipment of troops and war supplies to China, India, and Burma, the sabotage and strikes in Singapore naval bases, and propaganda.” The MCP should have been taking into

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

account the peculiar national and social composition of the Malayan population in each of the five regions, centres and enterprises. Slogans based on the Leninist policy on the national question, based on the concrete circumstances, should have been put forward to foment the Malayan, Chinese, and Indian workers and peasants to rise under the banner of proletarian internationalism to fight against the common imperialist-feudal oppressor. The national and class struggle in Malaya should also have been linked with solidarity protests in support of the Chinese and Indian revolutions and in defence of the USSR.⁶⁵⁴ The FEB stated, “It is necessary that the party, by its practical mass work, wed together the united revolutionary anti-imperialist front of the Malayan,⁶⁵⁵ Chinese, and Indian masses at the same time exposing bourgeois nationalism and unmasking chauvinist propaganda like ‘local autonomy for the Chinese in the Straits Settlement,’ ‘Malaya for the Malaysians’ and struggling against chauvinist propaganda of the British. The party must show that national oppression is inseparable from imperialist rule and that Soviet powers, like the USSR, can relieve that.” The MCP was required to stop neglecting the peasant movement. They stated, “For the struggle for national liberation of the toiling masses of Malaya—Chinese, Indian, and Malay—to be successful, it must be linked up with the struggle for land and liquidation of all feudal remnants and then linked with the struggle of the proletariat. The agrarian revolution, to be successful, must be headed by the proletariat and linked with the struggle for national freedom.”⁶⁵⁶

The only concrete points that the Comintern promoted that were not in the MCP letter (besides the rhetoric of the Comintern line and its policy of indigenisation and

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ In Russian, “Malay” and “Malayan” is the same word, *malaytsy*. This, perhaps, also played into the fact that “Malaya” was naturally a “nation” for Russian speakers.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

internationalisation, defense of the Soviet Union, and protest war preparation in Singapore) were the recommendations for the peasant movement and the development of the Party organisation and mass work in certain important settings: railway centers, like Sentul and Singapore; the most important tin mines and smelters; rubber factories and plantations, such as in the regions of Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Seremban; and shipping lines and wharves in Singapore, Penang, Malacca, and in Singapore's naval base. According to the FEB, MCP success depended on "correct and skillful" application of the united front from below.⁶⁵⁷ Besides these points, based on MCP reports,⁶⁵⁸ the Comintern also promoted Bolshevik self-criticism, self-sacrifice and daily mass work in the enterprises and main industries, plantations and villages, leading the struggle on the basis of the united front. The CC had to mobilise the Party to liquidate these defects "for radically reorganising the entire mass work of the Party, for rapidly transforming into life the line and decisions of the CI and the CC of the CPM," to prepare workers and peasants of Malaya "for the decisive struggle for Soviet power," and for the MCP to become a strong mass Leninist party.

Establishing Connections with Java and Indochina

The Comintern continued to promote regional connections for the MCP and continued to push its plan to make the MCP the connection hub and the leader of the Southeast Asian communist movement. The Comintern suggested that "one of the MCP's most vital international tasks" had to be "giving political guidance and organisational support to the

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ For the specific problems identified by the MCP, see Chapter 3.

communist groups and organisations in the Dutch East Indies, Siam, and Burma.”⁶⁵⁹ This was to include such activity as “contacts through the party and trade union, preparing cadres for these countries, mobilising Malaya peasants and workers to support the revolutionary mass movement in those countries, arranging to send poor peasants and native workers from those countries, and to send with the next representative a detailed report about political situations in these countries, mass work and party organisations.”⁶⁶⁰ The MCP was to immediately send a representative to the seventh world congress of the Comintern (25 July 25 -- 20 August, 1935), and the comrade’s report at the Comintern congress would be collectively prepared by the central standing committee. The Comintern also requested a representative from the Dutch East Indies to attend the congress as a delegate. The Comintern also requested three to five comrades for one- to two-year training, of which three would be Malay or Indian workers or poor peasants, and two could be Chinese, providing they were “industrial workers and born in Malaya.”⁶⁶¹ As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the Comintern did not want to deal with immigrants, as they did not know the conditions in the countries from which they were sent and were to be sent to foment revolution. The significance of the Comintern seeking and the MCP being able to locate second-generation Chinese who were ready to go to Moscow, within the context of the MCP as a hybrid of a communist party and a Chinese association, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Apparently in line with the amplified importance of Singapore, the Comintern promoted Singapore as a place for the Politburo to sit and gave the MCP fifteen hundred American dollars

⁶⁵⁹ Another Comintern’s letter to the CC MCP letter dated 1 June 1934:., “*Pismo Ts.K.Malayskoy K.P. o VII kongresse i.t.d.*” [The letter to the CC MCP about the 7th congress of the Comintern etc.] RGASPI 495/62/22/13-13ob.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

as “material assistance” for six months, to be spent as follows: seven hundred dollars for the CPM; three hundred for the Federation of Labour; two hundred for the CYL; and three hundred for further developing and strengthening of the work in the DEI, Siam, and Burma. The FEB requested a report regarding the use of this money.⁶⁶²

Thus, the Comintern continued to work with the CCP in Southeast Asia and continued the course interrupted by the arrest of Rudnik and the dismantling of the FEB in 1931.⁶⁶³ Francis Waldron, alias Eugene Dennis, general secretary of CPUSA in 1946–1957, and a Comintern cadre, alias “Milton,” was responsible for the work in “in South Seas countries”—the Philippines, Malaya, Java, Siam, Burma, and Indochina. In 1934, when a MCP representative, likely Song Zhuoming, was in Shanghai, Waldron, based on reports from the CC MCP, wrote two letters to the CC of the MCP on behalf of the FEB. “The goal is that through the CPM [MCP] we will shortly establish connection with the DEI, Siam, and Burma.” The broader goal was to assist those parties financially, “particularly the Java comrades,” and to find students from these countries to study in Moscow and to serve as delegates to the Seventh Comintern congress.⁶⁶⁴ In late July to early August of 1934, several MCP members arrived at Shanghai from Singapore. They were the students and the delegates to the Comintern congress that the Comintern had requested. Waldron could not tell whether they were students, because the police surveillance had interrupted the connection with them.⁶⁶⁵ The Comintern put off recognition of the MCP as a Comintern section as the MCP’s response letter, containing their confirmation of having received the Comintern subsidy, was intercepted by police. The answer

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ “Milton’s” (Francis Waldron) letter to the Eastern Secretariat of ECCI, 4, June 4 1934 RGASPI 495/66/35/37-37ob.

⁶⁶⁴ Waldron’s letter, 4 June 1934.

⁶⁶⁵ Waldron’s letter to Moscow, 19 August 1934, RGASPI 495/66/35/88 ob.

to Waldron's letter, from Kok Kong (国光) to Kok Bun (国文), a Comintern cadre in Shanghai, dated 15 August 1934, was intercepted at Singapore. The letter stated, "The MCP representative who returned from Shanghai in June has arrived here [Singapore]. Your two letters with money brought back by Koak Jin (曷羸, *He Ying*), one thousand guilders, and eight hundred American gold dollars have been received. We accept your suggestion and prepare to convene a greater meeting in the near future based upon the instruction of the thirteenth plenary session [of the ECCI] contained in one of your letters to readjust the work of our party. The MCP delegate and student have already reached Shanghai but did not get in touch with the Comintern yet."⁶⁶⁶ They were Tan Sin Hoa (陈新华) and Li Kok Cheng (李国桢). They were the liaisons in Shanghai between Comintern agent Guo Wen and those who arrived from Malaya.⁶⁶⁷

In response to the Comintern's continued pressure on the MCP to establish contact with the Java party, the MCP wrote that they had found a possibility "to establish it with some comrades from the old work section who were, in 1926, responsible for the work of the local committee and [had just come] back from Digoel Island [where the captured PKI activists were imprisoned after the suppression of the uprising in 1927], but it is still doubtful whether communist activities exist in Java. To get in touch with them we need a man who speaks Dutch and Malay, but we don't have one [even] speaking English. Connection with Siam has just been established, and we do the work." The MCP was not able to find a Burmese student.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁶ Letter from Guo Guang to the FEB, 8 August 1934. SMP D6152

⁶⁶⁷: Guo Wen's letter to Guo Guang 27 August 1934. SMP D7380

⁶⁶⁸ Letter from Guo Guang to the FEB, 8 August 1934.

In an attempt to establish the regional relations pushed by the Comintern, the MCP got to connect with the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), thus closing the circle of the global connection of the Chinese maritime network. The Chinese section of the CPUSA deserves focussed attention that is impossible to give here. However, the MCP report on how they established a connection with Java gives a good illustration as to how this world web of Chinese communists—this *Minzu Guoji*, if you will—operated. The MCP found an Indonesian comrade to communicate with. They no longer needed a comrade who spoke Malay or Dutch as apparently, the comrade they connected with was Chinese:

Regarding the connections with the Java party that we mentioned in circular number 2, we investigated but do not have many results. Only recently have we received some news from an Indonesian comrade. He, in the past, took part in the Indonesian revolutionary movement. In 1928, he went to New York to work and participated in the American party [CPUSA] and activity and returned only last February. According to him, last year in Batavia there were over one hundred comrades; some were arrested but released soon, and about five hundred revolutionary masses feel the pressing need for revolution, but they are not organised and are not working according to a plan. We plan to connect comrade — [the name was erased] with a more able and decisive comrade to restore the Party organisation there. In order to make those comrades appreciate [*zang tong*] what we say and complement our suggestions, and restore the organisation, we will connect them directly to you, and you will lead [*lingdao*] them directly.⁶⁶⁹

Again, as in the past, the MCP was reluctant to take responsibility for regional connections and the movement. The MCP reported that, “According to that Indonesian comrade, last year the Party was not restored, but this year, according to what we’ve heard from sailors,

⁶⁶⁹ Guo Guang’s letter, 24 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

in February, around the Chinese New Year [*huaren de xinnian*] there was a party that distributed leaflets. We are not sure which party it was, but as the sailor-comrade said, it was most likely our party [*wodang*].”⁶⁷⁰

That party was, most likely, the CCP. According to Musso’s report to the Eastern secretariat of the ECCI, in 1930 Chinese comrades were the only active communists in Indonesia since their deportations back to China were covered by the media. For example, forty-six communists arriving from Singapore with the instructions of the South Seas communist party had been arrested. Because of language problems and surveillance, they were arrested in Indonesia before they could start their mission.⁶⁷¹ An anonymous report from October 1932 stated, “Now, in Indonesia, we receive the impulse to work from our Chinese comrades. Here, pamphlets were confiscated from Chinese comrades, a certain number of them were arrested, and after trial several were deported to China.”⁶⁷² Perhaps there was a certain exaggeration in all this information, but judging from the fact that the Chinese in Indonesia were sympathetic to the uprising in 1927,⁶⁷³ it is quite likely that the Chinese were among the few active communists in Indonesia in 1933–1934. Yet the MCP was not able to find a delegate from Indonesia to attend the seventh congress as the Comintern had requested.

In accordance with Comintern demands, the MCP delegate for the seventh congress and the two students who went to Moscow to study were all locally born Chinese (industrial

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ “*Situatsiya v Indonezii posle vosstaniya*” [The Situation in Indonesia after the Uprising,] 22 September 1930, RGASPI 495/214/752/53-76 esp. 75-76.

⁶⁷² “*Polozheniye v Indonezii*,” [Conditions in Indonesia] 28 September 1932, RGASPI 495/214/756/43-49, esp. 49

⁶⁷³ “*Programma deistviya kompartii Indonezii*,” [The program of the communist party of Indonesia] late 1930s (most likely after 1936), NIANKP materials RGASPI 532/1/460/1-23, esp. 18-19.

workers). The MCP could not find either an Indian or a Malay. They explained to the Comintern that they could have found an Indian student if they had had more time, because the procedure for Indian students to go abroad was difficult and long. Regarding Malaya students, the MCP found two “poor peasants,” but they could not leave their families, and when they were sent for, they turned up but ran away afterwards. The MCP reported that the procedure for Malays to go abroad was also difficult and, in general, for Malays, going abroad was a rare thing “because the majority of them are poor people.” The position of the Indian people was almost similar, the MCP reported.⁶⁷⁴ Despite MCP realisation of the need to bring non-Chinese into the Party, Malays did not want to go the way of the Chinese Communist Party. By 1934, the MCP’s view of the prospects for involvement of non-Chinese in the Party was that it was “hopeless.” According to the Chinese version of his letter,⁶⁷⁵ Guo Guang said that they went to many places to look for comrades and found five comrades in Melaka, Selangor, but they were not willing to leave their homes (*jiating*), not only for one month but not even for one week. “Only in Singapore is there one sufficiently qualified comrade on whom we could rely in work among Malays (*malai minzu gongzuo de zhongxin*), but he cannot leave — [the original is illegible]. 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.”⁶⁷⁶ Instead, the MCP found second-generation Chinese to send to study in Moscow as the Comintern requested.⁶⁷⁷ The MCP “indigenised,” but only within the Chinese community. The reasons for that likely

⁶⁷⁴ Guo Guang’s letter, 24 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ “*Pismo Ts.K.Malayskoy K.P. o VII kongresse i.t.d.*” [The letter to the CC MCP about the 7th congress of the Comintern] 1 June 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/13,13ob, esp. 13.

included the fact that the Chinese had the least difficulty travelling in and out of Malaya and thus were more suitable for travelling to the Comintern congress. Besides, the MCP could not enlist anybody else.

The MCP, instead, suggested that the Comintern find Malay and Indian comrades in Shanghai. They requested, “[Have them] send a telegram to us saying that they have found employment for our Malay and Indian comrades here and asking them to go to Shanghai immediately. This telegram or letter can be used as camouflage. Another option is to secure a seaman job for them, so when they call Shanghai after the New Year you can get in touch with them.”⁶⁷⁸ The MCP was becoming the connecting point for all of Southeast Asia through the CCP’s International of Nationalities.

As this subsection has shown, the Comintern wanted the MCP to be the connecting point for the Southeast Asian revolution and strongly pushed it to connect with Indonesia and Java specifically. The MCP received one Comintern subsidy even before it was accepted as a Comintern section. The MCP, not having the language skills to connect with non-Chinese revolutionaries, instead connected with the CCP cells and found second-generation Chinese students in Malaya for study in Moscow. Thus, the Comintern helped to strengthen the connections between the Chinese in the region and across generations, that is, strengthened its cohesion. What else would a Chinese overseas association, as well as the Nanking government that had been promoting Chinese overseas unity, wish for?

⁶⁷⁸ Letter from Guo Guang to the FEB, 8 August 1934. SMP D6152.

One of Waldron's missions was to establish connection with Indochina.⁶⁷⁹ This goal pushed the connections between Vietnamese and Chinese networks through the MCP. Ironically, the notorious triple police informer and fake Comintern agent Lai Teck (Chinese name 莱特, Vietnamese name Nguyen Van Long) was Sino-Vietnamese. He appeared in Singapore in 1934.⁶⁸⁰ The period between 1935 and 1938 is not covered in the Comintern's collection. If nothing else, Lai Teck is an illustration to how important it was to speak good "Bolshevik." It helped Lai Teck achieve a position of power in the Party.

A letter from the communist party in Bangkok posted in March of 1936 was intercepted by the Singapore police.⁶⁸¹ Written partly in visible English and partly in sympathetic "Annamite,"⁶⁸² this letter shows that there was a connection between the Vietnamese and Chinese communists in the MCP that could shed light on the mysterious figure of Lai Teck. Lai Teck came to Singapore from Siam, having escaped after the Siamese government's suppression of communists.⁶⁸³ The letter talked about China and had Chinese characters for peoples' names. It was written by King (or Kong) in Bangkok, addressed to a "Fong" in Singapore and dated March 4, 1936. If Lai Teck was the only Vietnamese person in the MCP, the letter must have been addressed to him.

The letter discussed money that the letter addressee, Mr. Choo, in Hong Kong, was supposed to give to Fong in Singapore for travel—one hundred "for his sister," and the rest for

⁶⁷⁹ Waldron's letter, 4 June 1934.

⁶⁸⁰ Lai Teck used multiple aliases. See Comber, "Traitor."

⁶⁸¹ It was addressed to Chen Woo Zung 陈和顺. This address was closed, and another was given for Wong Hai Po 王海波. SMP D7376.

⁶⁸² Annamite is Vietnamese. Annam was a region in French Indochina.

⁶⁸³ Comber, "Traitor."

his journey to Annam, one hundred for the immigration tax, and one hundred for a second-class ticket. In sympathetic ink on the back of the letter, Kong asked for “International correspondence” published in 1936 and works on the political economy to send to the Xinhua bookstore address in Bangkok. Likely, both sides of the letter carried a message to the MCP. The letter was addressed to Tran How Thanh (陈和诚 or Tch’an Wo Sing in Cantonese) in Shanghai, who received letters by having them forwarded to Hong Kong. According to a letter from the CC of the Siamese CP to the MCP, dated March 5, 1936, from 李自芳 (Li Tsi Fong) in Bangkok to same Tch’an Wo Sing in Shanghai, Siamese communists had received 585 Hong Kong dollars sent by the MCP (complaining that inflation reduced the amount to four hundred ticals and asking to compensate the difference because the Party’s affairs were in dire straits).⁶⁸⁴ Apparently talking about the “Laos party” that they had attempted to establish (brother Ly Tu Anh; 李秀英; in Cantonese, Li Sao Ying), the SCP requested more money.”⁶⁸⁵

In 1936, the need to connect with the Comintern and to sustain their “frontier enclave” (that is, to bring in more cadres) in Laos prompted the connections between the Siamese party, the MCP, and China. In the same year, the MCP asked the Siamese party to help them establish a connection with the Comintern since they had lost contact “a fairly long time ago and on several occasions”⁶⁸⁶ (most likely since the connection was interrupted after the receipt of funds was intercepted). A CC SCP asked the MCP to help them draw connections with mainland

⁶⁸⁴ “My mother is seriously ill, and I must return in order to look after her, but I do not know whether I have enough money for my journey. That is why I am pressing you for the money question.” the letter of the CC of the Siamese CP to the MCP, 5 March 5 1936, SMP D 7376

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

China in order to recruit the Chinese into the Party.⁶⁸⁷ On the back of the letter in “sympathetic” (invisible) ink, in Vietnamese, there was a report on the conditions in the Indochinese peninsula. After a usual disclaimer that they did not know the situation in Laos well, there was information about major centres and mines and the “party.” The Laos regional executive committee, comprising Chinese, was re-established in October of 1935 (apparently after the suppression of the SCP in 1934⁶⁸⁸) but was short of cadres. The Annam organisation sent comrades to Laos, but they were arrested and the connection with Annam interrupted again. The SCP requested that the Comintern send back the two students who had been sent to Moscow to study and asked to put them in communication with the CCP, or at least with the Guangdong provincial organisation, so that they could recruit the Chinese, who comprised a quarter of the population of Siam, and a large part of workers.⁶⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, they asked the Comintern to send them a Chinese comrade as they also needed Chinese cadres for translation. Thus, the need to connect with the Comintern fostered the connections between Chinese communist cells in Indochina as well.

In the Corridors of *Minzu Guoji*: Money, Culture, and Communication

How did this emerging *Minzu Guoji*, the International of Nationalities led by the Chinese, operate after it fused with the Comintern network? The Comintern provided an additional channel, a synthetic network through which money, culture, and people were circulating.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Goscha, *Thailand*, pp. 88-91

⁶⁸⁹ The letter of the CC of the Siamese CP to the MCP, 5 March 5 1936, SMP D 7376.

Money

The amount of money that the Comintern sent to the MCP was not large. In 1934, a Chinese “bourgeois,” a son of the silver and gold merchant Un, who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, “lent” one third of the Comintern subsidy of five hundred dollars to the CC of the MCP.⁶⁹⁰ The MCP complained that the money provided by the Comintern was not enough for their activities: the five hundred dollars left after paying all their debts was not sufficient for their work and assistance to organisation in Indonesia, Siam, and Burma, and the CYL and labour unions. The MCP asked the CCP to pay the subsidy that the CCP had previously promised. The MCP also borrowed money from funds in support of the Chinese Soviet revolution, collected from “the masses.” Thus, as in 1929, the MCP continued to “borrow” money from the masses. The MCP insisted that the subsidy be calculated from April to September and asked the Comintern to pay “the arrears.”⁶⁹¹

Thus, money was flowing through the corridors connecting enclaves with China and Malaya both ways and through the centre of the world revolutionary network, the Comintern.⁶⁹² The MCP was sending money to the CCP as a contribution at the same time that the CCP was supposed to give the MCP a “subsidy.” According to another MCP letter to the Comintern cadre in Shanghai, Guo Wen, the MCP collected one thousand dollars for the support of the Chinese Soviet revolution: “The MCP was instructed to request that you deduct four hundred dollars from the subsidy you promised to give us for March–June, and the remaining six

⁶⁹⁰ Report, 30 August 1935, SMP, D 6954.

⁶⁹¹ In Singapore and Johor Bahru, the struggles were led by the CC. Two issues each of the Malay Red Flag, Bolshevik, and other publications were published. Short-term training classes were set up in Singapore and Johor Bahru. Guo Guang’s letter, 24 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/1-7.

⁶⁹² Kuhn, “Why China Historians.”

hundred dollars will be sent to you when we have received a more reliable address from you.” The MCP and the masses wanted the CCP to publish in the Soviet papers the amount they collected or to give them a receipt: “The arrears of the subsidy have not been sent to us, either; it is not clear whether four hundred have been deducted already.”⁶⁹³ Revolutionary enterprise indeed required careful accounting.

The Chinese communist organisation in Malaya, like other Chinese overseas organisations, existed on subscription money, school tuition, and “borrowing from the masses”—borrowing from the affluent members of the Chinese community, like Un. Apparently, local chapters were passing money on to their superior organisation in a pyramid-like manner, leaving an amount for their own expenses. However, that was never enough. The Comintern subsidy was desperately sought but was only received occasionally, that is, according to available documents, once, in 1934.⁶⁹⁴ By promising money to the MCP, the Comintern offered a hope of employment to higher level Party cadres, thus cultivating Party elites, the Party bureaucracy. The promise of money and international legitimacy was the leverage extending the Comintern’s influence over the MCP. The MCP labour organisers also wanted to be paid for their work.

In 1929, “the provisional committee badly dealt with the financial problem, and masses were dissatisfied.”⁶⁹⁵ Apparently, the Party borrowed the money and could not repay it.⁶⁹⁶ Also, at

⁶⁹³ SMP D6152.

⁶⁹⁴ Possibly also in 1928 (see chapter 2), but this is not confirmed by documents.

⁶⁹⁵ “Minutes,” p. 132.

⁶⁹⁶ “Nanyang Working report,” 1929, RGASPI 533/10/1818/55-68.

the same time, “the membership fees were extortionate taxes and duties,” as the MCP had admitted at the founding conference.⁶⁹⁷

In July of 1929, the situation was very difficult, and voluntary contributions were introduced “in order to abolish the pattern of getting help from outside of the party.”⁶⁹⁸ This improved the situation. The official Comintern allowance was promised to the MCP after the reorganisation with the goal of building a united front of “various nationalities” and of the MCP’s recognition as a Comintern section.⁶⁹⁹

The comparison of the reports from local Party organisations and from the CC shows that the CC was disconnected from local economies and hence needed external support. For instance, the Singapore town committee complained that the monthly income from rent and comrades’ school fees that were passed on to the central organisation and its monthly budget was forty dollars. Such a small budget did not allow them to establish printing, a secretariat, and branch offices. According to British police analysis, financial shortages resulted in the amalgamation of the Party with the leading organ’s labour union. There were nineteen Party branches under the Singapore town committee.⁷⁰⁰ The monthly expenses for two thousand or more copies for a weekly of the size of *Hong-ki (Hongqi)* in Malay, “Hindustan”, and Chinese languages were 135 in Malaya currency.⁷⁰¹ In 1931, none of the local committees had regular

⁶⁹⁷ “Minutes,” p. 132.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ However, these contributions were abolished at the founding conference and “income contributions” were introduced. Half of the income contributions were to be passed to the new CC. “Minutes”, pp. 130-136, 142,

⁷⁰⁰ CO 273-542 p. 564

⁷⁰¹ 1US dollar was equal to 1,65 Malayan dollar. “*Informatsiyaa o Malayskih Shtatah*” [Information about the Malaya States] 3 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/7/2-4, esp. 2.

press and needed to spend about twenty dollars a month to have one or two comrades produce printed materials.⁷⁰²

Financial questions were consistently raised by representatives from all regions at the founding meeting. Any subsidy, especially that which came with international recognition, like a Comintern subsidy, was important for the MCP, and they were certain they would get it. At the MCP founding conference, they decided that the new Malaya party should pay one hundred dollars to the preliminary committee, the one that was organised of merged but separately organised parties according to ethnic principles (see Chapter 2), until its approval by the Comintern. That is, the MCP and lower level organisations were to subsidise this Nanyang joint committee or secretariat, as they also called it.⁷⁰³ While the MCP lived with hope for Comintern funding, the Comintern promoted the Party's self-sufficiency based on fee collections. Also, at the founding conference, the Party leaders said, "We hope that comrades in various places should be responsible to the finance of the Party."⁷⁰⁴ The trade union leaders, however, held a different view. They thought that it was not appropriate for a trade union leader to have a job other than trade-union organising. The main source of revenue for the Malaya Federation of Labour was membership fees: a two-cent fee came to two dollars per month, as well as donations. Clearly, that was not enough. According to a report on Malaya's labour movement by Wang Mei Hong (apparently Huang Muhan, who ended up as the MCP liaison with the Comintern. See above), "The federation cadres have to have jobs. How can we require that, under such circumstances, they invest their souls into their work?"⁷⁰⁵ Party leaders had to get

⁷⁰² "Report from Malay," 2 January 1931. RGASPI 495/62/11 /27-29, esp. 28 ob.:

⁷⁰³ "Minutes," pp. 119-120.

⁷⁰⁴ "Minutes," p. 135.

⁷⁰⁵ "Worker movement in Federated Malay States," 5 March 5 1931, RGASPI 495/62/9/1-4.

jobs at factories in 1929, when the financial situation was very difficult.⁷⁰⁶ In 1934, the MGLU asked for one hundred dollars in “Singapore money” monthly: “Our present budget is thirty dollars, but we need one hundred dollars. Send us two cadres and one hundred in Singaporean money every month.”⁷⁰⁷ Labour organisers in Malaya thus wanted to be paid for their work. Of course, the budget of the MGLU was not enough. In 1934, the total budget (monthly, apparently) of the labour federation of Malaya was forty dollars. The local RLU received ten dollars per month.⁷⁰⁸ According to Ho Chi Minh, whose information came from the MCP and who, at the same time, complained to the FEB of the lack of attention to the Indochinese party, membership fees in Singapore were no more than ninety dollars, which was not enough to pay rent for party headquarters. Beginning immediately after the establishment of the MCP in 1930, the MCP unsuccessfully demanded the promised subsidy from the FEB and that a Comintern representative come to Malaya help with their work. Thus, the donations from the “masses” were crucial for the MCP’s survival. Chapter 6 will talk about how the MCP sabotaged their efforts by excluding the “bourgeoisie” from the nation as they defined it.

Overall, the system of donations for the party was the same as it had been at the time of Sun Yat-sen, who raised funds for the establishment of a better government of China. Starting from 1933, according to the available documents, the MCP also collected money for the Chinese Soviet revolution, which would install a better government in China proper.⁷⁰⁹ As in the late

⁷⁰⁶ “Minutes,” p. 132

⁷⁰⁷ “Report of Labour Federation in Malaya, No.1 . 24 March 1934, RGASPI 495/62/24/13.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ On August 6, 1930, they listed monthly party expenses through Ho Chi Minh: the printing house required 110 dollars, propaganda 5, organisational expenses 50, the secretariat 50, communication 30, and work among youth 10. The total was three hundred dollars, with a monthly income of two hundred and a deficit of one hundred, which the Party was asked to cover. In October 1930, party CC required the following budget from the Comintern: house rent and publishing expenses required 450 (in Malay

1930s, the MCP was sending money to party organisations back home and was using the money provided by the Chinese bourgeoisie to foment Chinese revolution in Malaya and back in China. The Comintern provided an additional channel for the circulation of money and incorporated the Chinese revolutionary enterprise into the global market of anti-colonial liberation.

Culture

Money and culture flowed through the corridors connecting the nodes of the merged Chinese and Comintern networks. The language of self-criticism was the culture of the relationship between the MCP and the Comintern. The Comintern encouraged this culture of self-criticism as a part of Bolshevisation as the only way for constant self-improvement of the communist parties.⁷¹⁰ The role of criticism and self-criticism in the organisational culture of the CCP has been the subject of many studies.⁷¹¹ Mao stated, “Conscientious practice of self-criticism is still another hallmark distinguishing our Party from all other political parties.”⁷¹² Its promise of future triumph through self-improvement helped members to cope with a present reality of constant failure—police surveillance, lack of funds, and the struggle to maintain the Party’s existence. Success in the present was nonexistent; success in the future could be

currency), expenses to hire five workers 40; communication expenses 10, paper 13, ink 3, wax patterns [voskovki] 20, for a total of 135. Information about the Malaya States] 3 October 1930. RGASPI 495/62/7/2-4, esp. 2.

⁷¹⁰ “Constant criticism by the communists of the mistakes committed, permanent control of their own actions, evaluation of the experiences gained in protests, examination of shortcomings and achievements in their work -- this is extremely important for the development of the communist party.” “The Philippines, Resolutions on the trade union question,” 16 October 1929, RGASPI 495/66/18/70-73 esp. 73.

⁷¹¹ Frederick Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-1965* (ME Sharpe, 1979-1992).

⁷¹² The goal was to “develop a democratic style of work, to fear neither criticism nor self-criticism.” Mao, “On Coalition Government” (April 24, 1945), Selected Works, Vol. III, pp. 316.

embraced.⁷¹³ This culture also could have been the reason why the Comintern was attractive, as it also included criticism of the superiors, the Comintern itself.

Malaya communists criticised their party for the lack of a mass following and of non-Chinese in the Party. They complained about their lack of funds and cadres to implement the Comintern's directives, hoping the Comintern would provide money and manpower. The MCP was an active participant in the Comintern's policy-making; in their correspondence with the Comintern, they often expressed their agreement ("generally agree") or disagreement with the Comintern's suggestions as well as criticising it for not paying enough attention to the Nanyang (see the section on Wang Yung Hai). The MCP also criticised the CCP for not issuing special directives for the Nanyang. At the time, the Comintern and Communist Party represented a democratic institutional culture that appealed to the Chinese communists in Malaya.⁷¹⁴ The Comintern's encouragement of criticism thus created what Hung-yok Ip calls the "revolutionary intellectuals' self-construction as the deserving elite of the revolution," which "elevated the Party as a revolutionary vanguard most capable of self-improvement."⁷¹⁵ It also tuned in to the

⁷¹³ "By mutual criticism we can rectify our mistakes," said Ho Chi Minh at the founding conference. "Minutes," p.145. I expect that at the second representative conference, we could see the appearance of the true Malay party. Not surprisingly, in the report prepared by the MCP envoys to Shanghai at the end of 1930, there is more praise of Party work than self-criticism as they were eager to show the Comintern that they were working hard. RGASPI 495/62/11/3. Thanks to Professor Brook for this point.

⁷¹⁴ It is interesting to contrast this critical culture to GMD institutional culture. A 1960s refugee from the PRC with experience under both the GMD and the CCP contrasted the catharsis achieved through criticism with the KMT's tendency to stifle the expression of grievances: "The Communists always encourage people to talk and to express their opinions. If you talk about problems, you prevent misunderstandings and maintain unity in work. During the Nationalist era, things were not this way; you would hold back your opinions, and eventually you would become enemies." Lowell Dittmer, "The Structural Evolution of "Criticism and Self-Criticism," *The China Quarterly*, No. 56 (Oct. - Dec., 1973), p.709

⁷¹⁵ Ip, *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China*, p. 217.

Chinese intellectuals' perception of service to authority, like their traditional relationship as advisors of Chinese state authorities as an "honourable vocation."⁷¹⁶

Also, as we have seen throughout this study, it tuned in to the employment and adaptation needs of the Chinese intellectuals who became Party cadres. According to Wang Gung Wu, "the Chinese had a keen sense of social leadership and they had traditionally seen political leadership as deriving from deep-rooted ideas of status and the potential for public office."⁷¹⁷ The Comintern provided one of few channels for upward mobility for first-generation immigrants. The culture of self-criticism also spoke to Chinese epistemological optimism, the confidence that self-improvement could be achieved through a rigorous method of self criticism or self-cultivation.⁷¹⁸ This accounted for "the paradoxical co-existence of elitism and anti-elitism of the communist party."⁷¹⁹ Finally, the Comintern was "international" and *avant-garde*, that is, modern, and in the 1930s, modern was a good thing.

Malayan Chinese communists had no problem with criticising the Comintern and suggesting that their competence was higher than the Comintern's in the matters of the Nanyang. After Wang Yung Hai realised that the Comintern paid little attention to Nanyang's problems, he wrote two letters to criticise them through two channels of connection with the FEB: the All-China Federation of Labour (translated into German) and the CC CCP. No such letters are found in the RGASPI. As MCP members had, on other occasions, criticised the CCP, Wang criticised the Comintern for giving instructions that were "good on paper but [could]

⁷¹⁶ Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China. Deng Tuo and the Intellegentsia* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷¹⁷ Wang Gungwu "Chinese politics."

⁷¹⁸ Thomas A. Metzger, *A Cloud Across the Pacific : Essays on the Clash Between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005), p. 284.

⁷¹⁹ Ip, *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China*, p. 5, 217.

hardly have effect in action.” He wrote, “The most urgent problem at present is to set up a strong and regular connection with the FEB, which should understand the conditions in Malaya in order to guide more closely the work in the Nanyang. If there is no whole, concrete, practical instruction, as well as material assistance, the party of Malaya can never get from the present condition of half-living, half-dying.”⁷²⁰ Wang suggested that the organ dealing with the regular connection with the Comintern should be the Malaya Executive Committee and that Malaya comrades should be in charge of it in order to give instruction to the MCP. He wrote, “I should like to suggest that you organise immediately an organ to make a regular connection with Malaya—the Malaya Executive Committee—in order to make arrangements and inspection under your guidance. This organ must have regular connections with the FEB and the SPLU (Secretariat of the Pacific Labour Conference). . . . But there must be comrades of the party of Malaya who are responsible for the work of the organ and who understand the condition in Malaya and give correct instructions.”⁷²¹ He was saying the same thing as had the head of the Taiwanese CP, Xie Xuehong, and the Nanyang communists in relation to the CCP’s instructions. Wang insisted that a person from Malaya who understood local conditions should have been appointed to work in the FEB rather than someone appointed by the FEB, as otherwise it would be impossible to move forward. Before the Malaya party appointed such a comrade, Wang suggested that Huang Muhan, who was then in the All-China Federation of Seamen, could serve such a function.⁷²² Huang described the organisational plan regarding this

⁷²⁰ Wang Yung Hai’s letter.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Huang Muhan stayed in Shanghai and prepared a report apparently based on the reports from the MCP, sent after Shieng returned to Malaya. Huang’s report summarised main points addressed in the reports discussed above. It was translated into Russian “Labour movement in Malay Federated States”. No English version of this report can be found in the archive. Another report was “The general condition of the trade union movement in Nanyang RGASPI 495/62/11/10-21a) handwritten copy and

committee to the FEB person who came to see him, and he promised to convey it to the FEB for discussion. In the end, Huang became the liaison with the FEB, while Wang asked for money.⁷²³ Thus, communists considered the Comintern their employer and requested pay and subsidy accordingly. They also felt that they were in a position to make suggestions and requested that the Comintern accept them. Like TCP liaison Weng Zesheng, Wang requested that the FEB meet regularly, twice a week. His function was the same as Weng's was in Taiwan: He transferred reports coming from Malaya to the Comintern, but he was not living in Shanghai long term, as Weng Zesheng was.⁷²⁴ Ho Chi Minh complained to the FEB in the same time period of the same lack of due attention from the Comintern to the matters of the Indochinese party. A British report from 21 February 1931, stated, "Because there is no voice coming from Comintern [or any of its affiliated organisations], the masses of Indochina feel that their suffering and sacrifice [are ignored by] our organisations [and] that they are forgotten and lone, that they have no backing from international solidarity."⁷²⁵ According to British analysis of the captured FEB documents on Indochina, most frequent themes in their letters to the Comintern were requests for recognition, directives, and financial assistance.⁷²⁶ The case was the same in the Taiwanese Communist Party.

typed up copy RGASPI 495/62/11/22-26 (translated into Russian RGASPI 495/62/9/9-14). According to Wang's letter, Shieng prepared a report" of recent works and struggles" and Huang Muhan prepare "a detailed report in the history of the party in Nanyang since its establishment with a map of the Nanyang about the condition of work". Wang's letter.

⁷²³ In the previous two months, he had borrowed forty-five dollars: five for bedclothes. fifteen for clothes, and twenty-five for daily expenses. He also asked for money to repay the debt and stated, "For my living expenses hereafter, you should be responsible." Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Communist Activities in China, NA RG 263: D2527/45 p. 30.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

MCP members were similarly acting on the “ritualistic ethics,” to borrow from Chow,⁷²⁷ of self-criticism. MCP self-critical reports to the Comintern had ritualistic meaning and were functional. The MCP wrote, “Report-making is helpful in strengthening and developing the party work.”⁷²⁸ To report (*baogao*) was the orthopraxis and expression of loyalty. It was a culture of exchange between the Comintern and local communists and served their mutual legitimisation—the MCP gained political legitimisation through performing self-criticism, for which, in return, the Comintern provided resources. If the Soviet Union was, for the MCP, the inspiration and the “bright future,” the Comintern was the World Revolution Headquarters (*shiejie geming de zongcan mobu*), an administrative centre established by Lenin.⁷²⁹ *Baogao* and self-criticism were a performative in Austin’s sense and must be considered in the context of the situation in which they were issued.⁷³⁰ This context was that of the relationship between the Comintern and the MCP, where the MCP performed self-criticism in return for Comintern ideological and material resources. The report had a result on a functional level: The use of communist ideology was a demonstration of loyalty to the Comintern.⁷³¹ Thus, the number of participants in demonstrations, instead of being concrete and verifiable, was usually a symbolic number representing large numbers of *wan* (tens of thousands).⁷³² Besides performing self-

⁷²⁷ Kai-Wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics and Lineage Discourse*, Stanford University Press, 1994) p. 7

⁷²⁸ Guo Guang letter, 24 March 1934.

⁷²⁹ “Gongzuo jue ding” [Work Resolution regarding the 15th anniversary of Luxembourg’s death and 7th anniversary of Lenin’s death], 1930. RGASPI 495/62/20/38-40.

⁷³⁰ John Langshaw Austin *How To Do Things With Words*. 2nd ed. Edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).p. 52.

⁷³¹ Thanks to Professor Cheek for this point.

⁷³² For example, in the Ipoh region after tin mines were closed, and rubber production was suspended., there were “one hundred thousand” unemployed miners. “An open letter from the CC of the CP of Malay to the working class of Malay,” 7 November 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/1a-4.

criticism, the MCP also tried to show the Comintern that things were improving.⁷³³ Self-criticism was a discourse, a mode of communication, and a form of praxis, a way to get things done.⁷³⁴

Communication

Communication was ineffective, and its speed was low. Correspondence was often intercepted. Investigation trips were the way to gather information. The CCP reported to the FEB, “The connection with Nanyang is through steamships, but where there are no seamen we have no connection. When there was a serious mistake or dispute, we sent an investigator, but sometimes we have no way of delivering our literature, and it requires a large sum of money, and because of this, the important job of investigating work is impeded.”⁷³⁵ An investigator united cells in the East Indies.⁷³⁶ Investigation campaigns were important as the Party was to “confirm” whether recommendations from superiors fit local conditions. For example, the then-Nanyang party commented, “The party has not done an investigation of the conditions of life in

⁷³³ For example, they reported that the Party’s condition did not change, but the relation between the Party and the “youth” (CYL) was better than it had been before the congress. The work among Malays and Indians started in the Kuala Lumpur branch, which had established training courses for “aborigines.” “[A lot] of opportunities for agitation but no experienced workers.” Three newspapers—from the Party, CYL and trade union—were published. On August 1, forty people in Singapore were arrested. On a Singaporean naval base, a strike was announced. Central circular no.1, RGASPI 495/62/13/1-17, esp. 16-17.

⁷³⁴ See also Liu Shaoqi’s Letter to the Party Centre Concerning Past Work in the White Areas. 4 March 1937, in Tony Saich Benjamin Yang, *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis* by Tony Saich; Benjamin Yang (Me Sharpe, Armonk, 1996), pp. 773-386.

⁷³⁵ “Report about the situation in Nanyang.” January 1930, RGASPI 514/1/632/14.

⁷³⁶ At the founding conference it was suggested that the “work of investigation” should be intensified as it was “the most effective method to connect various grades of the party and to intensify the political instructions,” to investigate and understand the practical conditions of lower party organisations, and to transfer the decisions and instructions for lower party organisations from upper party organs. “Very little inspecting work” was attributed to the lack of cadres and finances. “Minutes,” pp. 108-109.

Malaya society, so the character of the Malaya revolution has not been confirmed.”⁷³⁷ Incomplete reports were blamed for inadequate directives: “On the other hand, the directives of the CC given to Nanyang were composed on the basis of far-from-complete reports and for this reason are themselves not complete.”⁷³⁸ Investigation campaigns were a common practice in the world of the Guangdong provincial committee, in Hong Kong specifically. The investigator in that case was the Taiwanese party member and the Comintern cadre Weng Zesheng.⁷³⁹

It terms of Chinese statecraft practices, it would be interesting to invoke here the practice performed for a few years during the mid-eighteenth century. In order to raise the efficiency of the existing bureaucratic apparatus in the performance of its ordinary tasks, the so-called “things to promote and to prohibit” (*xingchu shiyi*) audit procedure was conducted, whereby magistrates were to annually tour every village of their constituencies and report in full detail on what they had been able to do to improve conditions. According to Pierre-Étienne Will, it was “a rather unique combination of mobilization from the top and activism among the rank and file, or, differently put, of an encounter between a succession of competent and interventionist emperors and a bureaucracy with at least an active minority of highly committed professionals, of which Chinese imperial history gives few other examples.”⁷⁴⁰ By this, Will means the communist mobilisation; however, Will sees the comparison between the two as

⁷³⁷ “Minutes,” p. 128.

⁷³⁸ “Minutes,” pp. 128-29

⁷³⁹ He Chi. *Weng Zesheng zhuan (Biography of Weng Zesheng)* (Haixia xueshu, Taipei, 2005) p.230.

⁷⁴⁰ Pierre-Étienne Will, “The 1744 Annual Audits of Magistrate Activity and Their Fate,” *Late Imperial China* 18.2 (1998), pp. 1-50. Scholars such as Kuhn, for example, would see the extension of bureaucratic practices to control the entire populace as an example of the increasing penetration of state into society in twentieth-century China. See Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford University Press, 2001)

“far-fetched,” for in the latter the target was the populace, not the local officials.⁷⁴¹ The MCP case shows that perhaps such a comparison is conceivable. Thus, right after the establishment of the Comintern-endorsed party, the Party had a bureaucratic apparatus and elitist view on the “masses” despite the democratic promise of its ideology.

Connections Established

As a result of the Comintern’s efforts, the PKI was not restored, but the MCP established connections with the Chinese communists in Java. Furthermore, on 6 January 1936, Alimin asked the Comintern to send him to India to continue efforts to restore the PKI that had so far been unsuccessful.⁷⁴² The Comintern and the CCP’s interests in building parties in Southeast Asia came together during the time of the anti-Japanese united front. According to a note from the head of the cadres department, Gulyaev, to the secretary of the ECCI, Dimitrov, “Zhou Enlai, who knows Santos (Alimin) from his work in the past, after conversation with him, considers that it makes sense to utilise him in China for establishing connections with brotherly parties. Asking your permission to send comrade Santos at the disposal of the CCP so that he could leave together with Zhou Enlai.”⁷⁴³ At the same time, the Comintern was picking up on the growing importance of the *huaqiao* in wartime Southeast Asia by their anti-Japanese efforts, and in the late 1930s, a number of reports on the conditions in Chinese communities in Burma,

⁷⁴¹ Will, “The 1744.”

⁷⁴² Alimin’s letter, (“Santos”) 6 January 1936 RGASPI 495/16/8/22-27.

⁷⁴³ “*Zapiska ot zaveduyuschego otdela kadrov Guleyaeva k sekretaryu IKKI Dimitrovu*” [A note from the head of the department of cadres Gulyaev to the secretary of ECCI Dimitrov] 13 February 1940. RGASPI 495/214/3 b dossier/ 82.

Malaya, and the Philippines were prepared in the Comintern.⁷⁴⁴ Alimin worked in Moscow until mid-1939 in a foreign-language publishing house and as an editor of the translation of Lenin's writings into Malay. After that, he was dispatched to Indonesia but stayed in China working in the CCP and "struggled in the Chinese army against the Japanese."⁷⁴⁵ According to Chin Peng, who mentions meeting Alimin in 1945, Alimin continued to work on establishing a connection between Siam, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies.⁷⁴⁶

The Comintern continued to promote the unity of Chinese and other parties in Southeast Asia. Indigenisation of the anti-Japanese China Salvation Movement was promoted in the Philippines. In a memorandum on the Philippine Islands discussed at the Politburo of the CPSU meeting on 9 June 1938, the struggle of the Chinese people was mentioned in relation to the anti-Japanese struggle. The Philippines Party was to support the struggle of the Chinese people. The organisation of the Friends of China was to be transformed into a mass organisation of Filipinos and Chinese.⁷⁴⁷ Moreover, in the late 1930s, the Comintern continued to promote a pan-Asian and/or pan-Pacific vision based on communist networks. The basis of this network was networks of Chinese and Indonesian revolutions linked together:

We must establish connections between the national movement of Indonesians and the Chinese revolutionary movement in order to neutralise the attempts by Dutch and British

⁷⁴⁴ "Spravka o rabote sredi kitaiskih emigrantov v Malaye. sostavlena na osnove materialov 1939-1940 g.g) [Note of the work among Chinese immigrants compiled based on the materials from 1939-1940] RGASPI 495/62/30/10a-54; "Spravka o Bireme i o rabote sredi kitaiskih emigrantov v Bireme," [Report about the situation in Burma and about work among Chinese immigrants in Burma] 27 January 1942. RGASPI 514/1/959/3-22; "Polozheniye kitayskih emigrantov na Filippinah," [The conditions of the Chinese immigrants in the Philippines] 28 January 1942. RGASPI 514/1/929/3-25.

⁷⁴⁵ "Santos Huan's personal file" RGASPI 495/214/3/ part 1/73, RGASPI 495 /214/ 3 /dossier/ p. 69.

⁷⁴⁶ Chin Peng, *My side of history*, p. 157.

⁷⁴⁷ "Memorandum o filipinskih obschestvah" [Memorandum about Philippine societies] RGASPI 495/20/ 564/8. The same idea is in promotion of the goal of "aid and unity with the USA and connection of the struggle of the Philippine people with the struggle of the people of China and Spain." "Resolution of CPPI," 8 September 1939. RGASPI 495 /20 /561/2-11, esp. 10.

imperialism to isolate the Indonesian liberation movement and suppress the Chinese revolutionary movement. Contact needs to be established with other national movements—in other colonies, such as in French Indochina and India. Then, friendly relations with left proletarian movements in Australia, New Zealand, and Japan must be established to round up the revolutionary bloc in the East, which would lead the struggle against military preparations that aim to prepare the new great war in this part of the world that is led by Britain with the active support of Holland. All measures must be taken to strengthen the Pan-Pacific Workers Secretariat.⁷⁴⁸

Thus, we see similar rhetoric and activities in the Comintern and the CCP in relation to the Chinese members of the CPPI and the Chinese workers, as well as in the same promotion of the internationalist support of the Chinese revolution, as in the case of the MCP, both in the Philippines and in Indonesia. The Comintern promotion of the cooperation of Chinese and Indonesian revolutions was based on the fact that the Chinese were supportive of the 1925–1926 PKI uprising: “While building Party and labour unions and while reviving work, efforts should be made to connect the struggle for independence of the national-revolutionary movement of Indonesia with the struggle of the Chinese revolution, remembering that Chinese in Indonesia were sympathetic to the uprising.”⁷⁴⁹

Thus, the Comintern and Chinese networks came together in the later 1930s. After the war, in 1949, the parties of Malaya, Indonesia, and Burma proposed to the CCP to organise a Cominform of the East, but Mao rejected the proposal because of the civil war in China.⁷⁵⁰ The leadership over revolution in the East by the CCP was “granted” by Stalin and Liu Shaoqi’s 1949 agreement on a Moscow-Beijing “division of labour” in fomenting the world

⁷⁴⁸ “*Programma deistviya kompartii Indonesii*,” [The program of action of the communist party of Indonesia] late 1930s (most likely after 1936), NIANKP materials, RGASPI 532/1/460/1-23, esp. 18-19.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, ‘Hidden Currents during the Honeymoon. Mao, Khrushchev, and the 1957 Moscow Conference,’ *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, (Fall 2009), pp. 74–117.

revolution.⁷⁵¹ Founded in prewar times, communist networks continued to work: The parties of China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand helped the MCP in the 1950s.⁷⁵² The Comintern network in Southeast Asia, into which the Chinese communist network was incorporated, laid the foundation for the MCP's postwar connections.

CONCLUSION

In an attempt to rebuild the PKI and to foment world revolution, the Comintern promoted the trans-Southeast Asian connection of all Chinese communist organisations, including the Party, the AIL, and trade unions. As the MCP did not have cadres who spoke languages other than Chinese, they ended up connecting with the Chinese in these places and thus extended the Chinese communist network. The Comintern, while pursuing Soviet strategic goals in what would become "Southeast Asia,"⁷⁵³ itself became the tool of local communists and was used to legitimise their local power arrangements in the aftermath of the war. By 1934, when the Comintern had already lost connection with the MCP, the MCP had established connections with Chinese comrades in Java. The *Minzu Guoji* was established with the help of the Comintern.

The Comintern's goal matched the need of a Chinese association to be rooted in the local environment.⁷⁵⁴ That is why it worked for a time. In this process, the Chinese maritime network was central and shaped how communists interacted with the local population, seen in

⁷⁵¹ Chen Jian, "Bridging revolution and decolonisation," esp. 144-145.

⁷⁵² Ang Cheng Guan, 'Southeast Asian Perceptions of the domino theory', in Goscha and Ostermann, *Connecting Histories*, pp. 301-331, esp. 318.

⁷⁵³ Emmerson, "Southeast Asia".

⁷⁵⁴ Kuhn, "Why China Historians."

the MCP's attempts to bring non-Chinese into the Party. Comintern interactions with the MCP, however, were also a shaping force—this was not simply a case of a foreign effort transforming itself into another typical Chinese association. Rather, it was a case of combination or synthesis. The Comintern's contribution to this process included the promise of financial aid⁷⁵⁵ and the source of ideological resources, as well as the fostering of links between communist movements in the region, as well as the “organisational culture” of the Bolshevik organisation. The Comintern also offered a democratic participation model that was outside of, and alternative to, the British state, based on the culture of self-criticism promoted by the Comintern. This democratic culture included the Comintern policy based on suggestions of local party leaders, with the Comintern functioning as an international public sphere that required self-criticism and allowed room for criticism of the Comintern by the local communists. The relationship between the Malaya Chinese communists and the Comintern can be termed, borrowing from Erika Evasdottir, as “obedient autonomy.” Malaya Chinese communists picked and chose what they pleased from the Comintern's resources, both ideological and material.

The Comintern played a significant role in the Malaya communist movement and was a competitive player in the market of anti-colonial movements. As a result of incorporation into the Comintern network, the MCP gained another channel of exchange that connected China, Malaya, and the global economy of the Comintern. Yet the Comintern's “monetisation” in the inclusion of the MCP into the Comintern world economy strengthened the MCP characteristics of a Chinese association, just as Kuhn argued that commercialisation strengthened the native

⁷⁵⁵ In every letter to the Comintern, the MCP asked to send them literature published by the Comintern, Profintern, and TOS; finances; and qualified cadres, especially those speaking English or Malay, both for the CC and for nuclei. The main difficulty of the work in Malaya in terms of establishing press in Malay and “Indian” were the “complex people of the Malay states ” and the lack of cadres and finances. These were the main reasons for unsatisfactory work. For example, see the letter from MCP to the Comintern,” 7 February 1931. RGASPI 495/62/10/2-3.

place-ties between overseas Chinese. The MCP, as a Chinese association, maintained a flow of money and culture in the corridors of connection with China and the local environment. The Comintern subsidy was sought, but at the same time, the MCP was fundraising for the Chinese Soviet revolution and remitted money to the CCP.

An unintended consequence of Comintern internationalism in mainland Southeast Asia was not only the creation of nation-states, as Chapter 2 has argued, but also the strengthening of Chinese networks based on diasporic ties according to the Comintern's requests to build a Southeast Asian communist network. The Chinese maritime network in Southeast Asia was started by the GMD. It grew through the native place-ties of people looking for employment, both intellectuals and labourers. The Comintern extended its network by an additional channel across the Pacific too, while cultivating the Chinese network.

Before the Comintern's defeat, it had a mutually reliant regional relationship with the CCP; afterwards, the CCP inherited the Comintern's methods and networks in Southeast Asia. The CCP was reluctant to establish trans-Insulinde connections because the CCP did not have resources; the Comintern fostered these connections and helped the CCP to establish a global network. The Comintern relied on the Chinese transnational communist network and was not in confrontation with the Chinese communists in Southeast Asia, as some studies assert.⁷⁵⁶ Rather, the Comintern used the Chinese Southeast Asian network for the connection between the parties and for setting up new parties because it was the only network available to them at the time and place. The Comintern pursued its interests in Southeast Asia through the CCP and its branches, of which the MCP was the largest, with most of the leaders coming from China, shortly banished and replaced by new arrivals.

⁷⁵⁶ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 147-149, 154.

Another important aspect of the Comintern's role was its request that second-generation Chinese be involved in the Party and be sent to Moscow to study, a request that the MCP fulfilled in 1934. This meant that the Comintern had stimulated the MCP's work in regard to bringing second-generation Chinese into their Chinese association, an ultimate goal of any Chinese association. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. BECOMING COMMUNIST: CHINESE STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS IN MALAYA (1928-1940)

This chapter shows the role of contingency and unintended consequences in the growth of the MCP after the start of the Japanese invasion in Malaya, despite the inability of the MCP to attract large numbers of young, locally born Chinese during the 1930s. Attracting the youth or the locally born Chinese into the organization was a matter of organizational survival for the MCP in its role as a Chinese association, too. This paralleled Comintern concern with the Youth League, as well as with getting second-generation Chinese into the MCP. Most of all, these efforts mirrored the Nanking policy in the Nanyang of promoting identification with China through Chinese education. This chapter will discuss the relationship between second-generation Chinese immigrants and communism from 1928 to 1940. Were communist ideas attractive to the second-generation Chinese? What did communism mean to them and their teachers? What were the places in which the revolution happened and in which one could become a communist in the Chinese Nanyang network? How did revolutionary organisations figure in this process—the CCP, the Comintern, and the GMD?

This chapter will consist of three parts. Part one will show how the GMD Nanking overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) education policy promoted Chinese nationalism and Chineseness among locally born Chinese and how this was manifested in schools in British Malaya and the Straits Settlement and in student protest movements. This GMD policy of countering Japanese southward expansion had the unintended consequence of increasing the popularity of communism among teenage locally born Chinese, who were attracted to communism by the modernity, cosmopolitanism, and simultaneous nationalism and internationalism of its discourse in Malaya. These factors served to channel youth iconoclasm and protest against

school authorities and teachers. Part two will show how the MCP unsuccessfully attempted to co-opt student protests and organisations, just as it had the labour movement discussed in Chapter 3. This includes the Communist Youth League (CYL), its conflict with the party, and its inability to attract a following. The third part of the chapter is about how and where one could become a communist in Malaya and South Fujian. The conduits of communist ideas were schoolteachers, who most often maintained contact with both the communists and the GMD. They instilled in their students patriotic and communist ideas. Their activities as MCP members show that communism for them was, to a large extent, an intellectual and patriotic endeavour. The young Chinese appropriated the Esperanto language and French revolutionary music, along with Chinese patriotism and studies of Marxist literature, from their teachers before they joined the MCP guerillas in response to the Japanese massacre of Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya.

COUNTERING THE JAPANESE SOUTHWARD EXPANSION

GMD *Huaqiao* Education Policy

As Japanese aggression in China and southward expansion in the South Seas started to escalate, from 1931 especially, the Nanking government started to take action. One of the tools to counter that expansion was education of the overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*), which was to cultivate identification with China and anti-Japanese behaviour, such as boycotts, as well as Chinese pan-Asian ideas.⁷⁵⁷ This policy was expressed in voluminous publications that promoted identification with China and a sense of the inseparability of the liberation of overseas Chinese and that of local “oppressed” peoples from the European colonial

⁷⁵⁷ Li Yinghui, *The Origins*, pp.506-507.

governments. The titles of such publications, such as “The History of Chinese Colonisation of Nanyang,”⁷⁵⁸ are self-explanatory. One Japanese scholar referred to this Nanking policy as the policy of “restoring the tribute states.”⁷⁵⁹ In the early 1930s, the voices urging the establishment of the Nationalist International (*Minzu Guoji*) of the East became louder.⁷⁶⁰ In 1930, under the supervision of Dai Jitao, a new periodical called *Xin Yaxiya* (New Asia) emerged and espoused Chinese pan-Asianism as its ideology. According to Duara, its mandate was to justify China’s sovereignty over the peoples of the hinterland.⁷⁶¹ According to an address by the president of the Institute of Culture in Shanghai (*Wenhua Xueyuan*) and the president of the Control Yuan of the national government, Yu Yujin, published in *Cultural Biannual* in February 1931, and entitled “A review of the misery of the weak races of the East,” The address stated, “The only fault of the weak races of the East is that they are not united. They must form an organisation for the overthrow of Imperialist [sic], and Chinese [sic] must be its centre.” To achieve that, the

⁷⁵⁸ Liu Xuxuan, Shu Shicheng, *Zhonghua minzu tuozhi Nanyang shi* [The history of the Chinese colonisation of the Nanyang] (Shanghai Guoli bianyi guan, 1935)

⁷⁵⁹ Kawashima Shin, “China’s reinterpretation.”

⁷⁶⁰ The discourse of *Minzu Guoji*, popular among the left GMD, was amplified after the publication of Hu Hanmin’s “Communist International and Nationalist International Hu Hanmin, recorded by Zhang Zhenzhi, “*Minzuguoji yu disan Guoji*,” *Xin yaxiya* [New Asia], 1930, 1-1, pp. 23-27. In the 1930s, some articles on *Minzu Guoji*, which was an important theme in the discourse of the left GMD, included Han Hui, “*Minzu yundong yu minzu Guoji*” [Nationalist movement and Nationalist International], *Xin dongfang* [New East] 1932, 3-8, pp. 108-129; Hong Weifa, “Guanyu *minzu Guoji*” [About nationalist International], *Xin yaxiya*, 1932, 3-4, pp. 48-54; Tian Ren, “Tongxun: gouzhu dongfang *minzu Guoji* de jichu shi women weida de shiming,” [News report: to build the foundation of the Nationalist International of the East is our great mission] *Xindongfang*, 1932, 3-8, 156-165; “Gaozhong weiwen zhi bu: nationalist International” [High school essay: Nationalist International], *Xuesheng wenyi congkan* [Anthology of Student writings] 1931, 6-9, 79-90. Tong Xuenan, “*Minzuguoji ji de xuyao*” [the need for Nationalist International]. *Jingguang* [Unwinking light] 1932, 1-1, pp.69-72; Cheng Shengchang, “Tongxun: zuzhi dongfang *minzu Guoji* wenti zhi taolun” [News report: discussing the question of the organization of the nationalist international of the east] *Xindongfang*, 1931, anniversary issue, pp.404-413.; Guo Sizheng, “Bei yapo *minzu guoji zuzhi wenti*,” [The question of organization of the Nationalist International of the oppressed peoples] *Xinping* [New peace], 1931, pp.10-11, pp. 92-116.

⁷⁶¹. See Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), p. 102-103.

GMD was to establish an organisation that was reminiscent of Hu Hanmin's proposed *Minzu Guoji*. It was

“The organisation of an Eastern International by the Chinese Kuomintang with the Three People's Principles of Dr. Sun Yatsen as the revolutionary doctrine for all weak Eastern races who are struggling for international, political and economic equality. In this way a League against imperialism would be brought into being in the East which would serve as the headquarters of the movement for freedom and as an organisation for maintaining connection with the Eastern proletariat.”⁷⁶²

The Nanking government used the education of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia to cultivate their identification with China and thus counter the Japanese southward expansion that impeded the overseas Chinese economy, which, in the end, would be detrimental for China. This policy translated into education policies towards overseas Chinese as follows. In November 1929, at the meeting of the representatives of various circles called by the GMD regarding the education of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao jiaoyu huiyi*), it was resolved to promote identification with China (*minzuxing*) and citizen education (*guomin jiaoyu*), including Mandarin education (*guoyu jiaoyu*), working against “slave education” and making China the *avant-garde* of world development.⁷⁶³ At the meeting of the central standing committee of the GMD on September 3, 1931, among the regulations adopted to enforce the Three People's Principles education with regard to the overseas Chinese, the stated goal was to raise the status of the overseas Chinese to parity with other races. To achieve that, “racial consciousness” was to be cultivated, and the “standard of living and self-managing and productive ability” was to be improved. The school curriculum was to be the same as that in China, while knowledge essential to local existence was also to be promoted. Special attention would be paid to the

⁷⁶², “Monthly review of Chinese affairs,” February 1931 p. 23, CO 273-548.

⁷⁶³ Li Yinghui, *The Origins*, pp. 505-507.

Three People's Principles ideology and the relation between the overseas Chinese and the national revolution, as well as to the relation between Japan's southward expansion and the livelihood of the overseas Chinese. Regarding the relation between the "weak races" of the world and the Three People's Principles, students were "to understand their local environment and their own position with the object of extending the influence of the overseas Chinese." Otherwise, ethics were to be modelled on the "old-time Chinese culture" and "physical culture education," with "lectures on current events in Chinese [to] be frequently delivered so as to arouse the patriotism of overseas Chinese."⁷⁶⁴ Thus, the GMD promoted indigenisation with the goal of empowering the Chinese community, just as the MCP was doing at the same time and as the Comintern promoted. The discourse of the emancipation of the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang and Chinese overseas unity was tied together in the discourse of the Nanking GMD policy towards *huaqiao*, which aimed to cultivate the Chinese identity of locally born Chinese. This GMD discourse, as we have seen in Chapter 2, was duly appropriated by the MCP and promoted at the same time as Nanking policy in 1932–1934. This trend was the consequence of the need for a locally embedded Chinese overseas community. For understandable reasons, the British resisted the introduction of Chinese nationalist education in schools in British colonies. In 1932, Nanking printed textbooks for schools in the Nanyang, but the British government prohibited their import because they contained "nationalist propaganda."⁷⁶⁵

The agents of this Nanking nationalism—what Anderson would perhaps term "official" nationalism⁷⁶⁶—were the schoolteachers who were recruited in China.⁷⁶⁷ They were graduates

⁷⁶⁴ CO 273-572, pp. 539-540

⁷⁶⁵ Ta Chen, *Emigrant communities*, p. 279

⁷⁶⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

from the new teachers' schools established by the GMD in the 1920s, and increasingly in the 1930s, as part of the Nanking policy of establishing control of the countryside.⁷⁶⁸ Many of those teachers had communist ideas, even if they were formally GMD members,⁷⁶⁹ and they transmitted their nationalist ideas with communist flavour to their students in the Chinese-language schools.

What kind of message did this policy translate to in schools? What would Malayan-born Chinese learn in Chinese schools? The GMD discourse was close to the MCP discourse of the liberation of the Nanyang and the overall establishment of a just world. "General principles of Propaganda for the overseas Chinese to study" by the GMD central propaganda department, stressed the importance of complying with Nanking educational policy to develop identification with China. It stated, "In his will, Dr. Sun urged us to help the weak races and to lead the world's revolution in order to set up an 'utopia' for the world." It concluded, "Only then can we be in position to offer resistance to the imperialistic encroachments and be vanguards of the world's revolution."⁷⁷⁰

Anti-Japanese sentiment was introduced in school textbooks in 1930 as part of the educational policy in China, as well.⁷⁷¹ The origin of the Malayan Chinese schools' patriotic mood, however, is found in the 1920s. The institutional origins of Malayan communism were China's teachers colleges and schools, which were set up in the mid-1920s, when the GMD and

⁷⁶⁷ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p277. Chinese schools' prefects according to Nanking regulation had to be recruited in China. Li Yinghui, *The Orgins*, p. 508

⁷⁶⁸ Cong, Xiaoping, *Teachers' schools and the making of the modern Chinese nation-state, 1897-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), p.128.

⁷⁶⁹ Yoji Akashi, "the Nanyang Chinese Anti-Japanese and Boycott movement, 1908-1928 -- A Study of Nanyang Chinese nationalism," *Journal of the South Seas Society*, vol. 23 (1968), p. 77.

⁷⁷⁰ "Monthly review of Chinese affairs," March 1931.CO 273-571, p. 550 .

⁷⁷¹ John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927 1937* (Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 49.

CCP shared not only commitment to patriotism and revolution but also to political institutions. According to Fitzgerald, the Central China Teachers College in Wuhan in the mid-1920s maintained that every new teacher was a member of the GMD.⁷⁷² In Guangdong, Chen Jiongming appointed Chen Duxiu to oversee education prior to 1923. In 1925, the GMD ordered textbooks to be published on the history and principles of the Party. School reform was one of the first initiatives of the GMD government after it came to power in Guangdong.⁷⁷³ Based on the conclusions of Cong Xiaoping that in the 1930s, teachers' schools in Shandong and Hebei were centres for communist organizing and on the data from Fujian literary and historical materials I use in this dissertation, it is plausible to suggest that teachers' schools had the same role in Fujian.⁷⁷⁴ A lot of teachers found employment in the Nanyang. Since all teaching universities in Guangdong were organised by the GMD, all teachers who went to Malaya were educated along the same lines. There they taught the second-generation Chinese, whose parents were eager for them to be "Chinese." The "nationalism" of the GMD teachers infused the MCP's ideology. It is not surprising that the teachers in the Chinese schools in the mid-1920s were referred to as "emissaries from Moscow."⁷⁷⁵

Schools, Chinese associations and newspapers are commonly referred to as the three pillars of Chinese overseas communities.⁷⁷⁶ In Southeast Asia, the modern Chinese schools

⁷⁷² Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 268.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁷⁴ See last part of this chapter and Cong, *Teachers' schools*, p.17); Zhang Xia, "Immigrants from Xianyou."

⁷⁷⁵ *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1927, p.9 cited in Kenley, *New Culture*, p. 55.

⁷⁷⁶ See, for example, Leo Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians* (New York: St. Martin's Press ; Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), p. 12.

were financed by *bangs*, dialect communities, and run by provincial lodges (*huiguans*).⁷⁷⁷ Patriotic, and sometimes communist, ideas that teachers born and trained in China were promoting in Chinese schools were the policy of Nanking, which spoke the language of revolution, patriotism, and protection of overseas Chinese in the rhetoric of “anti-imperialism.”⁷⁷⁸ In combination with the communist ideas the teachers themselves often propagated, the cosmopolitan and patriotic aura of communist ideas attracted Chinese students, resulting in the rise of their popularity. Schools were hotbeds of communism, and police often raided them, discovering copious communist propaganda. Teachers also often wrote for local Chinese-language newspapers and supplied them with proletarian literature, as will be discussed in the next section. Teachers would also spread cosmopolitan communist culture. A teacher, Zhang Xia, would sing *La Marseillaise* with his students in Fujian, while the same actions were performed by MCP members working with the youth in Singapore. Zhang Xia, discussed in the “teachers” section of this chapter, was teaching Esperanto and Western music to his students. While this kind of work was criticised by the MCP as insufficient and inappropriate,⁷⁷⁹ students were nonetheless exposed to a common culture of communism and, in fact, the *avant-garde* and radical culture of the Western and contemporary world.

⁷⁷⁷ Yen, *A Social history*, pp. 301-304. In Indonesia, *huiguans* also promoted education and financed schools. Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 159; Mary Somers Heidhues, “Chinese voluntary and Involuntary Associations in Indonesia,” in Pearce and Hu de Hart, *Voluntary Associations*, pp. 77-97, p. 78.

⁷⁷⁸ Supervision of the education of overseas Chinese started in late Qing and was discontinued in 1949 with communists taking power in China. Yen, *A Social history*, p. 302. On GMD revolutionary rhetoric, see Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*.

⁷⁷⁹ Zheng Tingzhi, Li Ruiliang ”Yikejianding de wenhua zhanshi -- Chen Junju (陈骏驹)tongzhi de yisheng” [The life of an exemplary warrior of culture Chen Junju] in *Putian wenshi ziliao di qi ji* [Literary and historical materials. Putian city, Vol. 7]_ (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng Putian shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui [The committee for literary and historical materials of the Putian city committee of people’s political consultative conference of Fujian

What were students learning from their communist teachers? What kind of books were the students reading? These books included *World Weekly* (*Shijie Zhoukan*), *How to Study the New Socialism* (*Ruhe Yanjiu Xin Shehui Zhuyi*, which was translated by the police as *New Sociology*), and *Pioneer* (拓流着). The school where this literature was found was declared unlawful. According to *Lenin Youth*, apparently published by communists, the students were to study social sciences, and current situations and social problems in the world and ways to fix them. Furthermore, they were to organise science societies to study Marxism and materialism instead of reading “the histories of heroes,” which was apparently a reference to Chinese novels. Moreover, the students were to join the masses and participate in the movement, leaving their books behind.⁷⁸⁰ But overall, it was the nationalist message that stayed with the students who attended Chinese schools. A salesman from a Chinese rubber factory in Singapore said the following:

Since I graduated from the Chinese school, I have become more and more sympathetic towards China. I hope that our countrymen at home will whole-heartedly co-operate one with another to save the country in this national crisis. I have been living in Nanyang for many years, and I admire the colonial administration for its ability to maintain peace and safety and to conduct clean politics, but I hope that political stability will soon prevail in China, too, so that China may steadily advance on the road toward becoming a strong nation.⁷⁸¹

province, 1991] ed. pp. 122-129, esp. p.123. Zhang Xia, “The revolutionary fire,” p. 44. MCP members’ inability to do anything but “sing some revolutionary song” was criticized by the central committee in 1931. “Report from Malay,” 2/1/31. RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 29.

⁷⁸⁰ CO 273-572, “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs,” May 1931, “Lenin Youth” No 18, 6 May 1931, p. 24.

⁷⁸¹ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 160.

Concern with Second-Generation Chinese, Malayafication, and Connection to China

Nanking's concerns during its expansion in the Nanyang were focused on second-generation Chinese and the maintenance of their identification with China. In this, Comintern ambition matched the indigenisational ambitions of the Chinese associations such as the MCP and the GMD, as both the MCP and the Comintern wanted to see locally born Chinese in the MCP. This policy resulted in concerns from overseas Chinese about their children when more Chinese settled in Southeast Asia and Chinese immigration was restricted by colonial governments. The concern they had with bringing up their children became paramount.⁷⁸² It is not surprising, then, that Chinese communists in Malaya saw the second-generation Chinese as crucial for the Malayan revolution.

An illustration of this trend is the writings of Xu Jie, who, like other Chinese intellectuals, was creating a local *huaqiao* enclave subculture and did not attempt to assimilate into the local culture, which he considered lower than Chinese culture.⁷⁸³ In his writings we find elements from Nanking official discourse, as well as from the CCP's (conveyed by Li Lisan in his letter, discussed in Chapter 1), as well as from CYL reports to the Comintern. The CYL's and Xu's complaints about the second-generation Chinese were identical. They both illustrate Nanking's efforts to "re-nationalise" the *huaqiao*. According to a CYL report, young Chinese only wanted to learn English and math and to go overseas or back to China to study, but they did not want to read Chinese, as their textbooks praised New York, Washington, and

⁷⁸² Wang Gungwu, "The limits," p.420.

⁷⁸³ As "a well-known Peranakan Chinese who [taught] school in Java" explained, the Chinese did not want to assimilate into local culture as "it [was] so very much simpler than that of the Chinese." Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 159.

London.⁷⁸⁴ Xu was also sceptical about these young Chinese who spoke Malay and English, had a “full mouth of coffee and betel nut,” and could cry out “Long live the king” but were embarrassed that their fathers were *Taishan ah-shu* (uncles from Taishan—China).⁷⁸⁵ The MCP declared at the founding conference that it could not abandon the youth who were being influenced by a British education, which introduced military training as Britain prepared for the war in schools and expanded boy-scout organisations.⁷⁸⁶ Chen Da noted in 1934–1935 that Chinese schools mostly gave students enough education to do business, whereas Chen himself thought that “schools should also enlighten [students] on the elements of civilisation and give them an attitude receptive to new ideas.” These enlightened overseas Chinese, Chen Da admitted, were few in number.⁷⁸⁷ The CYL also reported in 1929 that Chinese students had

⁷⁸⁴ “Nanyang Working report,” RGASPI 533/10/1818/55-68, esp.56-57.

⁷⁸⁵ Xu, “Two youths,” pp.18-33.

⁷⁸⁶ “Notice Issued by the CC of the Communist Party of the Malay States Relating to the Conclusion of the III Delegate congress of the Nanyang Communist Party,” 25 May 1930 , RGASPI 495/62/3/24.

⁷⁸⁷ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p.157. I do not have direct evidence that the appeal of communist ideas to the students was their modernity and cosmopolitanism. However, it is perhaps possible to extrapolate from the evidence in China and Japan that that was the case for at least some Malayan young *huaqiao*, who generally were considered *luohou* by the mainland intellectuals like Xu Jie, or even Chen Da, as the point he makes demonstrates. Van de Ven has noted that communist cosmopolitanism was a core appeal of communism in the interwar years. Van de Ven, “War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority”. In Japan, communism was also fashionable among youth. According to a Comintern newspaper clipping and translation of the Japanese press, “The Japanese youth is inclined to mimic all things foreign, from music and dance to communism.” RGASPI 532/ 4/ 528/X. Chen Da, in his study of emigrant communities in Fujian of 1934–1935, notes that for some years the vogue for the Shanghai dress, *qipao*, increased rapidly among the foreign-born Chinese in Nanyang, who were educated in Chinese schools and became interested in their mother country. Through their influence, this style of costume became popular in the emigrant communities in South China. (Ta Chen, *Emigrant communities*, pp. 102-3.) For young Nanyang-born Chinese, the Shanghai dress had “patriotic associations.” Perhaps communism was like that, too. In a similar way, the communist movement was a popular youth cultural movement that represented modernity and political progressiveness in post-WWII Sarawak. Seng Guo Quan, “The Origins of the Socialist Revolution in Sarawak (1945-1963),” (M.A. thesis (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2008) There is no doubt that the attractiveness of cosmopolitanism and the related notion of being modern played into the cosmopolitan image of communist ideas since the early 1920s in Asia at large. Abidin Kusno, “From City to City: Tan Malaka, Shanghai and the Politics of Geographical Imagining,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume 24, Issue 3 (2003), pp. 327-339. Singapore was one of these cosmopolitan places: In a letter of June 10, 1930, Ho Chi Minh

capitalist outlooks, believed in new warlords and Chiang Jieshi, and were only concerned about making money, not about politics in China.⁷⁸⁸

From Xu Jie's writings we can derive that the remedies to that lack of awareness, and a way of becoming more Chinese, were communism and revolution. In one of his stories, Xu Jie contrasted this majority of locally born Chinese with his two protagonists, who were communists. Xu Jie was surprised to find that there were communists among second-generation Chinese who had received English-language education. For Xu, the behaviour of the young Chinese and their lack of enthusiasm to learn Chinese were indicators of a slave mentality, while knowing Chinese meant being revolutionary and progressive. The story's message, as illustrated by the quote at the beginning of Chapter 2, is clear: The Chinese who knew the Chinese language and studied social sciences were the hope for the Nanyang revolution and would liberate their oppressed fellow countrymen, including Malays and Indians. This short novel starts with two encounters—one with a Malay and the other with an Indian—on the road in Kuala Lumpur. Both the Malay and the Indian wore the look of colonial oppression, which Xu compared to the facial expression of one of the protagonists of his story, a locally born young Chinese. The story ends with the passage quoted at the beginning of Chapter 2, in which Xu reflected on the importance of the second-generation Chinese to the Nanyang revolution. Xu's novel is based on a real story of two second-generation Chinese youth in Kuala Lumpur, Li De and Ai Lian, who were contributors to *People's Concern* and students of a Methodist English-language school and who later joined the "Youth Revolutionary Party" (*Qingnian Geming Dang*), which was apparently meant to represent the CYL. In the story, these two

called Singapore "the nest of cosmopolitan capital." RGASPI 495/62/8/4. My thanks to Professor Van de Ven for discussion on this topic.

⁷⁸⁸ "Report from Nanyang," CYL, RGASPI /533/10/18, pp. 65,66.

youths failed because of their “childish attitude”; they were arrested while distributing pamphlets in the streets. The story that the novel is based upon also illustrates how second-generation Chinese became involved in the communist organization: After Liang Yulian, a real Malaya-born young Chinese published in the literary supplement *Desert Island* (*Ku Dao*, 枯岛), which was edited by Xu Jie, the CYL contacted him, and he joined the CYL.⁷⁸⁹ It is clear that, according to Xu, one had to be Chinese and communist in order to be anti-imperialist and progressive.

Indeed, by 1934, the second-generation Chinese who learnt the Chinese language in Chinese schools became central for the revolution in Malaya. In 1934, they were wanted by the Comintern, and in 1934 the MCP was able to find some who were ready to go to Moscow.⁷⁹⁰ Others were contributing, if not their revolutionary actions, their money and language skills, even while not being MCP members. According to Shanghai municipal police, Un Hong Siu, or Yin Hongzhao (尹鸿兆, also known as Lau Ma, 老马, or Ma Tsu, 马祖) financially assisted various MCP members and was translating communist literature which had been received from America, including the FEB June 1934 directive, into Chinese for the local party for several years.⁷⁹¹ Un was an example of the bourgeoisie, who had communist views and supported the Party financially, which was essential for Party livelihood. Un was from the family of a gold and silver merchant, was educated in the Confucian school in Kuala Lumpur, and was a member of the Kuala Lumpur Young Men’s Progressive Society. When Un studied at Jinan

⁷⁸⁹ Xu, “Two Youths” pp. 18-33; He, *Xu Jie koushu*, p. 173- 175.

⁷⁹⁰ See Chapter 4.

⁷⁹¹ Perhaps, this letter is “Pismo Ts.K.Malayskoy K.P. o VII kongresse i.t.d.” [The letter to the CC MCP about the 7th congress of the Comintern] 1 June 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/13,13ob. or Letter for the FEB to the “CC CPM,” 1 June 1934. RGSPi 495/6224/37-45.

University, he attempted to establish a branch of that society there. He also participated in the movement to overthrow Ten Hong Lian, the chancellor of the university. In 1932, in Malaya, he organised several “subversive” short-lived societies independent of the MCP. Yet since July of 1933, Un had been in correspondence with Bun Teck Chai, the ex-secretary of the MCP, who was imprisoned at the time in Hainan and was considering funding the reorganisation of the MGLU Railway Branch in the YMS railway workshop at Sentul, Kuala Lumpur.⁷⁹²

Un was an example of the affluent Chinese, the bourgeoisie, who were sympathetic to the communist cause and who funded the Communist Party. Un was also an example of a Malaya-born Chinese who was sent to study in China, which was a trend in the early 1930s that resulted from the economic depression when the Chinese overseas looking for economic opportunities in China and sending their children to study there. That was also their response to the Nanking calls for “re-nationalisation” of *huaqiao*, as well as an attempt to establish commercial relations with China. Twenty percent of the children of emigrant families were sent to study in China. A middle-class wholesaler with few children set forth his views: “Formerly we used to send our children to the government schools so that after graduation they could become government clerks or commercial salesmen in some European business. But these opportunities have decreased in recent years. Therefore, some of us have come to send our children to the Chinese schools to later find employment in China.” According to Chen Da, it was for this reason that the Chinese showed enthusiasm for improvement of education in home communities.⁷⁹³ That was also, perhaps, the reason why they supported the MCP, which was working on establishing a more effective government—a Soviet one—in China. Likely, that

⁷⁹² “Letter from H.B.M. Consulate-General concerning Malayan Communists.” D.S. Jones. 30 August 1935, SMP D 6954.

⁷⁹³ Ta Chen, *Emigrant communities*, p. 279.

was also the reason for the success of MCP aid to the Soviet revolution campaign, discussed in Chapter 3.

Expatriate intellectuals were the agents of this policy, and they condemned this cultural elimination. The nationalism of the *huaqiao* required reproduction and reinforcement by these agents,⁷⁹⁴ and Xu Jie was one of them. However, Xu's participation in the nativist movement and his being a GMD agent—the dual urge to maintain Chinese identity and to develop a local subculture—illustrates the “bilateral nature,” in Kuhn's words, of the Chinese community that needed connections in both China and hosting societies.

According to Chen Da—although he was quick to say that this was an incorrect perception—in the 1930s, a Malayafication of education took place; that is, the usage of Malay as the language of instruction for Straits-born Chinese increased, while English remained the main language of instruction.⁷⁹⁵ For Straits-born Chinese, English-language education was strategic, as it provided access to positions of power in the colonial system. In 1933, in British Malaya, there were 373 Chinese schools with a student body of eighteen thousand boys and six thousand girls. Straits-born Chinese sent their children to government schools. Modern Chinese schools were introduced after Kang Youwei visited the Nanyang in 1903–1904. The first were established in Singapore and Malaya in 1905 and 1904. This was both the consequence of the Qing policy to promote Chineseness and of the local Confucian revival.⁷⁹⁶ In Singapore, in 1935, there were 183 staff and 1,373 students in Tan Kah Kee–established schools, and 588, or

⁷⁹⁴Wang Gungwu, “The limits,” pp. 417-419.

⁷⁹⁵ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, pp.274-5

⁷⁹⁶Yen, *A Social history*, pp. 180-181, 300-301. This was a worldwide GMD policy. For example, in the US, Chinese-language schools were established by Qing in the late nineteenth century and then in the 1930s by the Republican government . Zhou Min and Kim, “Paradox of Ethnicization”, p.235.

42 percent, came from “emigrant families.”⁷⁹⁷ Chen Da thought that the introduction of Mandarin education in the 1930s as a means to consolidate Chinese people was a positive change. There were complaints that teachers who came from China—Mandarin teachers were needed—did not want to learn about Malaya. It was hoped that with time, locally born teachers would come to teach Mandarin in schools.⁷⁹⁸ Chen Da’s point illustrates, again, that locally born Chinese resented the metropolitan nationalist arrogance of the intellectuals who came to teach overseas Chinese how to “be Chinese.” Another illustration of this resentment is a police report about a teacher at the Tong Boon school in Penang who was arrested on 31 March 1931, who had with him, among other communist literature, a constitution for a student union, as well as a notebook stating that he was one of a group of unemployed journalists who had come from China to monopolise articles in the local press and to supply proletarian literature to the newspaper. However, that project failed.⁷⁹⁹

In the 1930s, reforms in the education system were introduced, including a unified examination system, first for Hokkien schools in 1930, which resulted in the introduction of a

⁷⁹⁷ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 161. Overall, the number of students in both English- and Chinese-language schools grew over the 1930s, with a sharp drop in enrollment in English-language schools in 1938. It is not implausible to suppose that this was caused by the start of the full-fledged war in China, which resulted in the rise of a patriotic mood among the Chinese community. Based on the figures in the Straits Settlements, the number of students in Chinese schools was double that in English schools. Chinese-language schools enrollment, male and female, in 1932 in the Straits Settlements was 16,533 and 5,495, and in the Malaya Federation, 14,384 and 5,446. Over the 1930s, it was steadily growing, and in 1938 the number in the Straits Settlements reached 34,373 and 12,794 students, and in Malaya, 32,272 and 12,095. English-language school enrollment in the Straits Settlement was also growing, with a sharp drop in 1938: In 1932, numbers were 13,066 and 4,812 to 17,792 and 68,44 in 1937, and 12,444 and 5,404 in 1938. Fan Ruolan, *Yimin, Xingbie yu huaren shehui: Malaixiya huaren funü yanjiu (1929-1941)* [Immigration, Gender and Overseas Chinese Society: Studies on the Chinese women in Malaya, 1929-1941] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2005), pp. 128-129, 121.

⁷⁹⁸ Ta Chen, *Emigrant communities*, p.277.

⁷⁹⁹ CO 273-572, p.281

unified annual exam for all Chinese schools in 1935.⁸⁰⁰ The sense of a unified Chinese identity being cultivated in the young Chinese in schools built by Tan Kah kee, where students received Mandarin education, is hard to overestimate.⁸⁰¹ As a result, the young Chinese had adopted the identity of overseas Chinese as well as that of their dialect clans. Tan Kah Kee advocated the replacement of dialects by Mandarin, which Nanking promoted as the “National Language” (*guoyu*) and which was the *lingua franca* of educated Chinese everywhere,⁸⁰² as well as the language of education in schools. Tan Kah Kee organised schools for teachers, perhaps illustrating Chen Da’s point that the community hoped to train locally born teachers, who would not resent learning about conditions in Malaya. All this undoubtedly resulted in a greater sense of identification with China among locally born students.

THE COMMUNISTS AND THE YOUTH

Communism as a Youth Subculture and Channel for Protest

If the 1930s were a time of preoccupation with modernity, the overseas Chinese considered themselves modern, as did their compatriots.⁸⁰³ The overseas Chinese encountered communist ideas as part of the zeitgeist of diasporic nationalism and world cosmopolitanism. Although locally born, Chinese students remained a minority in the Party until the Second

⁸⁰⁰ Zheng, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, p. 313.

⁸⁰¹ First, Mandarin as the language of instruction as opposed to dialect education in schools was promoted by Lim Boon Keng, a powerful leader in the Singapore Chinese community, in 1906. Yen, *A Social history*, p. 304.

⁸⁰² Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 167.

⁸⁰³ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p.45.

World War.⁸⁰⁴ They were the ones who had the ability to understand the Aesopian references—to avoid censorship—to communism, from literary supplements to Chinese newspapers (*fuzhang*). For example, the article in the literary supplement to a *Lat Pau* issue from 1930 was an example of the kind of propaganda the MCP was spreading, which was criticised for not speaking the language of the “masses.”⁸⁰⁵ To avoid censorship, the article talks about communism without naming it. Communist ideas were easily accessible—to those who could read and figure out those meanings.⁸⁰⁶

Students also picked up radical ideas in class at Chinese schools, where many teachers were proponents of Marxist ideas.⁸⁰⁷ For the students, communist ideas meant strikes and protests against teachers. Students got involved in activities to depose school administrators and teachers that they disliked both in China and in Malaya. Un Hong Siu, the translator and sponsor of the MCP, was one example. In China, students assaulted a newly arrived university administrator.⁸⁰⁸ In 1930, more than forty students were expelled from a Chinese high school in

⁸⁰⁴ C.M. Turnbull, “Overseas Chinese Attitudes to nationalism in Malaya Between the Two World Wars,” in Ng Lun Ngai-ha, Chang Chak Yan, *Overseas Chinese in Asia between the Two World Wars*. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1989), pp. 367-374, esp. 370

⁸⁰⁵ For example, see “Malaiya qingshi de fenxi yu dang de renwu (jieshou Zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan ri lai xin de jueyi)[The analysis of the situation in Malaya. resolution to adopt the CC CCP May 23 letter] 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40. Even according to the British, “Much of this propaganda must be above the intelligence of the masses.” “Communism in 1930,” CO 273-571, p. 57.

⁸⁰⁶ At the MCP founding conference, there was criticism regarding insufficient propaganda, which was only based on newspaper materials. “Minutes,” p.140. In 1940, the MCP was careful not to easily distribute newspapers so that workers could appreciate the Party newspaper. “Zhongyang changwei dui danqian gongzuo xinde jueyi (New resolutions on the party work of the Standing committee of the CC)” 1940 April 6, RGASPI 495/62/28/45-52. Hereafter, “CC New Resolutions”.

⁸⁰⁷ Schools were referred to as “hotbeds” of communism. See, for instance, Yong, *The Origins*, p.144. The British government denied to register a school if teachers were found to have communist sympathies or if communist literature were found at a school. “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs,” May 1931, pp.20-22.

⁸⁰⁸ Israel, *Student Nationalism*, p. 92.

Singapore for disturbances. In 1931, the students at this school demanded “revolutionary” holidays on May 4 (Student Movement Day) and 5 (Sun Yatsen’s assumption of office, President’s Day) for school union meetings, at which they demanded reinstatement of the expelled students. In 1931, the students of the overseas Chinese high school in Singapore launched a self-government movement.⁸⁰⁹ This school was the symbol of Chinese unity and was run by Tan Kah Kee. Communism and protests against GMD indoctrination, and simply against teachers, were the subculture of the Nanyang second-generation Chinese. A father writing to his son, who was living in the Chinese settlement of Cholon, near Saigon, in 1934–1935, would warn his son, “Don’t permit yourself to be disturbed in your work by talk about communism and other unworthy subjects.”⁸¹⁰ Students were likely attracted to communism by these protests against school authorities.

Among those who ended up in Comintern schools in Moscow were locally born Chinese from Indonesia and China-born descendants of returned immigrants. One of them was an Indonesian Chinese, Van Sen, whose Chineseness I establish based on his name, and a comrade, whose translation of his Russian alias was “Leaderson,” Liderov, from Amoy, whose father was a returned immigrant from Indonesia. Both their autobiographies illustrate the pattern of teenagers becoming communists. Van Sen (b. 1907) started to work with a Chinese merchant at the age of six to help his family make ends meet. He learnt how to be a tailor from his mother, but because of her cruel punishments, he left home at the age of seventeen and worked different jobs. In 1927, he became a sailor in Singapore. In 1933, because of cruelties towards sailors on his ship, he did not return on board and instead, with the help of local communists, went to

⁸⁰⁹ Zheng, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, p. 306; “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs,” May 1931, “Lenin youth,” no 19, 13 May 1931, CO 273-572 p. 20, 25.

⁸¹⁰ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p.154.

Moscow. He was exposed to communist activities in Java. He helped organise party meetings and then propagandised what he heard on his own initiative, but he was not accepted either into the party or the CYL because he was too young. Comrade “Leaderson” (b. 1904), at the age of seventeen, was the head of a primary school in Amoy, where he was expelled for participation in a movement to overthrow the director of the school. At twenty-two, he was the head of a department of a secondary school in Shanghai. His employment did not last over a year, and the rest of the time he lived “as a dependent of his family”—his father was a merchant in Indonesia but went bankrupt and returned home to become a farmer. Then, Liderov worked at the “Amoy Academy of Literature (*Amoyskaya Akademiya Slovesnomy*) and, after a year, was fired for demanding the celebration of May 1. He studied at Shanghai University, was a GMD member (1919–1922), joined the CCP in 1927, worked as a party organiser in a school, was arrested, fled to Wuhan, and from there was sent to Moscow by the CC CCP.⁸¹¹

Tan Kah Kee did not approve of the Chinese youths’ interest in communism, specifically the student protests against teachers in the Overseas Chinese School in Singapore (*Xīnjiāpō Nányáng Huáqiao Zhōngxuéxiào*) that he had established.⁸¹² Perhaps Tan Kah Kee’s efforts—as well as Nanking policy and Comintern requests for the second-generation Chinese to be sent to Moscow in 1934 to study⁸¹³—all came together in the MCP mobilisation campaign among youth. Like other MCP endeavours, it was not successful. Instead, the CYL and the

⁸¹¹ “*Biografiya studenta Liderova*” [The Biography of student Liderov] undated, RGASPI personal file 1930, not numbered.; “*Avtobiographia tov. Van-Sena*” [Autobiography of the comrade Van Sen] undated. RGASPI 495/214/43/14.

⁸¹² Zheng, *Overseas Chinese nationalism*, pp. 306-307, 313.

⁸¹³ “*Pismo Ts.K.Malayskoy K.P. o VII kongresse i.t.d.*” [The letter to the CC MCP about the 7th congress of the Comintern] 1 June 1934 RGASPI 495/62/22/13,13ob, esp. 13.

Party were rival communist organisations who, in Kuhn’s terms, attempted to carve out the same niche—that of the political party leading Malaya to emancipation.

“Youth” Organisation: the CYL and the Party, 1928–1930

“If the instruction is not strict, it is the laziness of teacher.”

Ho Chi Minh at the MCP establishment conference, at around 4:30 AM on April 23, 1930⁸¹⁴

Ho Chi Minh’s quote speaks to the irony of the relationship between the CYL and the Party, who were supposed to be in a student-teacher relationship: Like students who rebelled against their GMD teachers at school, the CYL rebelled against the MCP. Ho announced the establishment of the MCP.⁸¹⁵ His wise handling of the squabble between the CYL and the Party over cadres and authority was accomplished by placing responsibility on the Party and on the subordination and acceptance of Party leadership by the League, as well as by citing this Chinese proverb to an audience of Chinese, with whom it appeared to have been effective. Yet the CYL was not allowed to participate in the newly established MCP elections because the CYL representative was not formally recognised. It was decided that comrades who did not understand that “the relation between the party and the League should be based entirely upon the relation of revolution should be expelled from the party.”⁸¹⁶ Ho had experience dealing with these kind of problems: he had established a Youth League in Canton in 1925 and hoped to recruit Vietnamese immigrants in Southern China, who were servants, soldiers, and secretaries

⁸¹⁴ “Minutes,” p. 140,146.

⁸¹⁵ Ho’s role in the MCP establishment is explored in Chapter 2.

⁸¹⁶ “Central circular no.1,” RGASPI 495/62/13-17, esp. 16-17.

for the French.⁸¹⁷ These were the same social groups that formed the majority of the CYL and Party membership in British Malaya.

At the MCP founding conference, the CYL wanted to be recognised and to work directly under the Youth International.⁸¹⁸ Ho promised recognition after “good work” with Party’s help.⁸¹⁹ The CYL was not alone in its attempt to gain international recognition directly; in 1930, different groups of Chinese communists in Malaya attempted to establish contact with the Comintern in Shanghai, presenting themselves as the representatives of the MCP (see Chapter 4). International recognition—from the Comintern or the Youth International—was a tool to establish orthodoxy and legitimacy on the local level and was a potential source of money. Between the MCP and the CYL there was a conflict over ideological orthodoxy in regard to the nature of the revolution in Siam.⁸²⁰ There were no age limits for those entering the CYL before the MCP founding conference. There it was decided that those under twenty years of age were to join the CYL, those between twenty and twenty-three were to join either the CYL or the Party, and those older than twenty-three were to join the Party.⁸²¹ Originally, the CYL and the party appeared separately in Malaya, or so they claimed. According to the founder of the CYL, Fan Yunbo, when the Guangdong committee sent him, Xu Jiafu, and Huang Changwei—two other natives of Wenchang county, Hainan—to build an organisational network to Singapore in the Nanyang in order to acquire aid for the revolution in China in April of 1926, there was

⁸¹⁷ Goscha, *Thailand*, p. 65.

⁸¹⁸ In May and September 1930, the CYL received letters from the Communist Youth International. CO 273-572, “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs”, May 1931, p. 28 .

⁸¹⁹ “Minutes,” pp. 143, 144-146.

⁸²⁰ See reports by the CYL to the CC CCP, for instance, “Nanyang gongzuo baogao” [the Nanyang working report] 1929.

⁸²¹ “Minutes,” p. 143.

neither a communist party nor a “new GMD,” that is, a reorganised GMD. There was only the CYL organisation under the direct leadership of Ren Bishi.⁸²² Many of those in that organisation had white beards and were over thirty and forty years old. This was also the case in China in the early 1920s.⁸²³ In China as well, the Youth League members did not want to join the Party regardless of their being over age in the 1920s, for fear of persecution.⁸²⁴

Like the MCP, the CYL was a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist organisation. The CYL was similar to the Party in organisational structure. In the summer of 1928, the secretariat of the CYL in Singapore had four divisional committees (two in Penang, one each in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur); special divisions in Seremban (Negri Sembilan), Muar, and Matu Pahat (Johor); special branches in Johor, Soa Boey Kang (NEI); naval bases in Singapore, Pa Seng (NEI), and Chung Lam Kong; and the Siam special committee. The membership was as follows: Singapore 428, Penang 55, Malacca 102, Kuala Lumpur 30, Johor 84, NEI 14, and Siam 45, for a total of 738.⁸²⁵ In January of 1929, both CYL and MCP members were predominantly Cantonese (mostly *Hailams*⁸²⁶). In 1929, the CYL criticised both

⁸²² Perhaps Ren Bishi, who held a high post in the CCP, was mentioned in order to justify Fan’s legitimacy. Interestingly, Ren Bishi also participated in the establishment of the Taiwanese Communist Party. Tertitski, Belogurova, *Taiwanese communists*, p.75.

⁸²³ H. Maring’s letter to Zinoviev, Bucharin, Radek and Safarov, 20 June 1923, Tony Saich ed., *The Origins of the First United Front in China*, pp.611-619, esp. 613; Du Hanwen ed., *Hainan wenshi ziliao di 19 ji* [Literary and historical materials of Hainan] Hainan sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, (Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005) p. 57; “Canjia geming de pianduan huiyi, Fan Yunbo koushu” [Memoir about taking part in revolution. Oral history of Fan Yunbo] in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao di 18 ji* [Literary and historical materials of Guangzhou, Vol 18], (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshanghui yi Guangdongsheng guangzhoushi weiyuanhui wenshiziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. 1-12, esp. p. 1. According to the British, the CYL in Malaya was organised in late 1927 by Phua Tin Kiap (Fan Yunbo) based in the Nam Pheng night school CO 273-542 p 3, 239, 425.

⁸²⁴ Maring’s letter, 20 June 1923, p. 613.

⁸²⁵ “Kuomintang and other societies in Malaya”, July-September 1928, CO 273-542, pp.5, 6.

⁸²⁶ Ho Chi Minh’s report, 18 November 1930.

the Party and the League for being insufficiently active, and Fujianese and Malays for being backward (*luohou*).⁸²⁷

The reason for the conflict between the CYL and the Party that started in 1929 was that the CYL did not recognise the authority of the Party.⁸²⁸ There were three conflicts over who, the Party or the CYL, had the upper hand in the transfer of members with concurrent membership in both organisations. The problem of CYL subordination was also complicated by the authority of the CC CCP in Guangdong to oversee the Nanyang committee. In January of 1929, the CC CYL complained about the lack of directives and cooperation in industrial work from the Party and about the mistrust of the Party by the leader of the CYL, as well as about his alleged misuse of Party funds and the mechanistic relationship between the Party and the CYL. Instead, the CYL worked through sport groups and clubs, as it did in Siam.⁸²⁹ Besides, the local organisations of the CYL were supposed to hand in money to the provisional committee, according to the Party, but they did not. Instead, the CYL was expecting money from the Party, as its the monthly income was half of what was needed (60 Yuan out of 120 Yuan). The CYL had to borrow the deficit “from the comrades,” and a CYL cadre was also reported to have absconded with Party funds.⁸³⁰ The head of the CYL, Lung, was accused of standing against the Party and of having a non-proletarian ideology for not carrying out directives of the CC CCP and not holding joint meetings with the Party. At the founding conference, the CYL members

⁸²⁷ “Report from Nanyang,” RGASPI /533/10/18,/ 65,66.

⁸²⁸ According to a British police report, “Communism in 1930,” “CYL is a distinct organisation from the party which goal is to prepare young people for the membership in the party. The problem between CYL and the party was the right of the CP to transfer a comrade from the CY to the party without the sanction of the CY [sic].” CO 273-571, p. 254

⁸²⁹ “Nanyang Working Report,” RGASPI 533/10/1818/56, 59, 68. “Minutes,” p. 107. There was only the municipal committee of the CYL in Singapore in 1930.

⁸³⁰ “Minutes,” p. 123. The CYL decided to establish economic committees in September of 1931 for collection of subscriptions. CO273-542, p.570.

distanced themselves from Lung, saying that he had “acted on his own initiative” and that they had to obey. Lung became the secretary of the reorganised provisional committee, and a standing committee of three members was established in the summer of 1929. He went back without permission to south Guangdong when the conflict escalated.⁸³¹ As a result, many comrades left the League.⁸³² The CYL advocated the view among its members that according to Marx, the conflict between the Party and the League was inevitable. The Party criticised the League for its overage members, saying that it “could not youthinise,” for being Chinese sojourners, and for having loose organisation.⁸³³ Some suggested that Lung should be expelled, and if the CYL disagreed, the whole committee should be reorganised.⁸³⁴ Perhaps the conflict

⁸³¹ “Minutes,” pp.98,99.

⁸³² According to a January 1929 report, the membership of the CYL in Nanyang dropped from 930 to 890 (310 members in industry, 190 unemployed, 390 professionals (*ziyouzhiyezhi*); 871 males and 19 females). “Nanyang baogao” [Report from Nanyang] RGASPI 533/10/1818/4-16. Li Yu Joo (Too -- the handwriting is unclear) was kept for examination because he was dissatisfactory to the provisional committee. Li Jing (Ting) Piao was reactionary but was not expelled from the League. *Minutes*, pp.123-124.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁴ “Minutes,” pp.98,99. The CYL was involved in another conflict in October of 1929. The CYL district committee at *Siaopu*, or *Siaopao*, which had 130 CYL members and 78 members of the AIL, lacked a propagandist and secured a comrade from the Party district committee, Yi Ming, without informing the Party provisional committee. They expected Yi Ming to become a CYL member and not be sent back to the Party. When the AIL was established in Singapore, a comrade who could speak Cantonese and Mandarin was needed. In early 1930, this man, who used to be responsible for a nucleus in the AIL, became the head of the AIL at the Party’s request in Singapore, but the CYL opposed it, saying that district work was important, and refused to let the Party transfer the comrade. As in the mainland, where members used “theoretical” and policy slogans to justify their views, the League was accused of supporting Chen Duxiu, putting Lenin and Sun Yatsen in the same respect as revolutionary leaders, and, finally, were labelled “reorganisationists” (i.e., the GMD). “Minutes,” pp. 101- 103. Also see Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade*. Apparently, the relationship between the reorganisationist GMD and the communists was not good, unlike the communist relationship with the Nanking GMD. Communist Party individuals often floated, like Xu Jie, between the Communist Party and the Nanking GMD. Perhaps that happened because there was more concrete competition over the revolutionary legitimacy between the GMD “reorganisationists” and communists than between the communists and Chiang’s GMD in Malaya. The third mention of a similar conflict was between the CYL and a Nanyang labour union. A CYL cadre was moved to a labour union, and, after some time, moved back without permission of the Party fraction of the union and thus provoked confrontation between the provisional committee and the young workers movement. CYL mistakes were attributed to the fact that they did not expel reactionary

was related to the processes in the CC CCP in Guangdong, which were manifested in Li Lisan's letter about the Nanyang revolution, discussed in Chapter 2.

In January 1929, the CYL provisional committee had thirteen members, including the standing committee, which consisted of five members. In a city committee (apparently, Singapore), there were five people, three in the standing committee. In the leadership organ (that is, the CC) 80 percent of members were workers, and 20 percent were intellectuals. Workers were all “free labourers” or professionals (*ziyou zhiye zhi*) or were unemployed. Relatively few (*jiaoshao*) were industrial workers; it should be noted that the Chinese expression *jiaoshao* often means “none.”⁸³⁵ The Ipoh (*Japo*) league had sixty comrades, six nuclei, one hundred young workers, and two hundred child workers.⁸³⁶ In *Futsing*, there were forty CYL members.⁸³⁷ In 1929, with the exception of the secretary of the Kuala Lumpur organisation—an intellectual with a petty bourgeois outlook, who engaged in a conflict with the Party (perhaps Lung)—the rest of the city committee's leaders were workers.⁸³⁸ At the MCP establishment conference from April 22–23,⁸³⁹ the League had one thousand comrades, 60 percent of whom were “foreign affairs workers” (that is, servants in foreigners' houses), 20 percent shop employees, and 20 percent industrial workers.⁸⁴⁰ At the founding conference, there

comrades, did not Bolshevise, and didn't understand the subjection of the minority to the majority. “Minutes,” p. 112.

⁸³⁵ “Nanyang baogao” [Report from Nanyang] RGASPI 533/10/1818/4-16.

⁸³⁶ Minutes,”p.106.

⁸³⁷ “Minutes,” p. 100.

⁸³⁸ “Report from Nanyang”, RGASPI 533/10/1818/4-16 “Minutes”, p. 141.

⁸³⁹ “Minutes,” p. 109.

⁸⁴⁰ “Minutes,” p. 107.

were complaints that a district committee did not pay attention to the work of the CYL and did not do CYL work.⁸⁴¹

From 1932, in the Comintern-collected MCP documents, the MCP and the CYL appeared as one in the combination *dangtuan* as part of the Central Committee (*dangtuan zhongyang*).⁸⁴² One of the possible reasons for this change was financial difficulties.⁸⁴³ The letters to the Communist Youth International (Russian acronym KIM) containing the CYL application for acceptance were signed by the CC CYL. However, the Party continued to criticise the CYL as it had criticised its own comrades in the 1930s. In 1933, the Party had criticised itself for not being able to help and guide the work of the CYL.⁸⁴⁴ However, the Party continued to criticise the CYL after unification, just as before, at the MCP founding conference.⁸⁴⁵

The CYL and the Youth, 1931-1934

“Malaya is a very backward colony. The cultural level of the youth is very low; therefore, it is difficult to carry out propaganda and agitation.”

⁸⁴¹ “Minutes,” p.104.

⁸⁴² In 1933, the organisation of the CYL in Singapore changed; section committees were cancelled, and nuclei were directly led by the municipal committee. This was likely due to financial difficulties. The Singapore town committee of the GLU reported their inability to establish certain departments due to a lack of finances to the CC MCP. CO 273-572, p.562. It is around this time that, in the MCP documents, the party and CYL are referred together as one organisation, *dang tuan*. For example, see next note.

⁸⁴³ “Dangtuan zhongyang Guanyu waiqiao dengji lülie yu women de gongzuo de jueyi ,” [The resolution of the CC of the MCP and CYL on the work regarding the Alien registration ordinance] RGASPI 495/62/20/1-6. “Magong lianzi tonggao de 8 hao -- guangyu yanmidang tuan de zuzhi wenti,” [The CC MCP and CYL circular no.8 regarding organization of the secret work], 15 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/29-30.

⁸⁴⁴ “The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party,” 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

⁸⁴⁵ “Minutes,” p. 132.

---Malayan CYL, 1934.⁸⁴⁶

In 1934, the YCL in Malaya wrote, “Peoples in Malaya are too complicated and have different languages, habits and customs, so we cannot smoothly do our work.”⁸⁴⁷ By 1933, the Party had started to seriously deal with the youth, since students’ thinking (*sixiang*) had undergone “active leftist revolutionarisation” (急剧左倾革命化) and the intellectuals’ (知识阶级) hatred towards British imperialists had increased.⁸⁴⁸ Large portions of documents seized in 1932 by the police dealt with the youth rather than with the labour movement.⁸⁴⁹ However, despite making efforts to be relevant to the youth and to attract them into communist youth organisations, the Party did not succeed.⁸⁵⁰ The MCP attempted to adapt its propaganda to the targeted audience—youth, soldiers, women, and peasants (the last was dealt with the least). The MCP criticised its own propaganda for using language not understandable by youth. The CYL work style was criticised for being that of a “research institution” instead of paying attention to the practical work of CYL members, and for focusing on the internal work of the CYL instead of on the youth.⁸⁵¹ Other problems included mechanistic, formalistic, “bureaucratic” tendencies,

⁸⁴⁶ “Report of the CC of the CYL of Malaya to the League International,” 28 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/20-22ob., 60-66.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ “A letter from Malaya No.3,” 24 March 1934, by Guo Guang, RGASPI 495/62/22/8-12ob.

⁸⁴⁹ Khoo Kai Kym” The beginnings,” p. 279, 280.

⁸⁵⁰ The Party used the same propaganda themes to attract youth. These themes appealed to internationalism and Chinese patriotism. They were an understanding of capitalism and its inevitable collapse; the successes of the Soviet Union and the advantages for the youth there in economy, culture, and every sphere of life; the need to overthrow capitalism to achieve the same successes as the Soviet Union; and a raising of awareness of the forthcoming world war (*sixiang tigao*). “The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party,” 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

⁸⁵¹ The same point is made that CYL members worked only in “organs instead of the youth masses.” in “Zhengge tuan de zuzhi gaikuang,” [General situation in the CYL] 25 August 1934 RGASPI 495/62/27/7.

a factional work method, and a lack of Bolshevik self-criticism.⁸⁵² Although the relationship between the League and the CC had improved, the CC was weak and not aware of the living conditions of the masses, about which they resisted learning, and it did not have organisations in rubber plantations or tin mines.⁸⁵³ In 1933, the MCP criticised the CYL for shortcomings identical to those of the Party: insufficient propaganda about the Soviet Union, antiwar and anti-British propaganda, pessimism, leftism, bureaucratism, and a lack of work among peasants. For instance, some comrades in Singapore did not understand the anti-war activity and thought that the war between imperialists was beneficial to the class struggle. Also, the CYL CC leaflets only said that war was dangerous (*weixian*) but could not explain why and what should be done. The CYL was also criticised for not using anti-imperialist sentiments already present among the people, such as opposition to the Registration Ordinance.⁸⁵⁴ Propaganda among young workers in Singapore and Selangor was more backward than in the past. Another problem common to the MCP and the CYL was the shortage of leaders in 1934.⁸⁵⁵

CYL activities were the same as those of the MCP: campaigning for aid to the Chinese Soviet revolution, fundraising, hosting anniversary celebrations, distributing propaganda by

⁸⁵² Slogans generally used by the MCP in a number of leaflets that addressed toiling youth were as follows: to protest the Second World War, where the youth would be sent as “fodders to cannon” to the front line to die; to encourage the youth of various oppressed nations in Malaya to unite.” [Address by Singapore committee of Malaya comparty and league of communist youth of Malay in the leaflet to the youth] RGASPI 495/62/5/2,3, 6 (English, Chinese and Russian translation).

⁸⁵³ The analysis of the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the party,” 5 September 1933, RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

⁸⁵⁴ “Magong zhongyang guanyu fan zhanzheng gongzuo de jueyi,” [CC MCP resolution on antiwar movement] 10 February 1934 RGAPSI 495/62/23/11-15. More on the MCP campaign against the Alien Registration Ordinance can be found in Chapter 3.

⁸⁵⁵ “A letter from Malaya No.3,” 24 March 1934, by Guo Guang, RGASPI 495/62/22/8-12ob.

handbills, and holding meetings and drama performances.⁸⁵⁶ “Intellectual” CYL members were active in the “New Cultural movement” and organised performances of proletarian dramas in Singapore three times, which, as in China,⁸⁵⁷ was another popular kind of propaganda that could reach the illiterate. In Malaya, it was the most popular form of public entertainment.⁸⁵⁸ The New Drama Society published sixteen issues of “Drama Leading Press” until police surveillance and financial difficulties put an end to its distribution. They organised young people interested in proletarian culture and reading societies in Singapore, *Mapoo*, *Fuyong*, and Penang. Of all these societies, we only know some pseudonyms of the members of the New Drama Society that started from the *Moluo* (摩洛, Moloch) society in Penang. They were Little Bomb (Xiao Dan, 小弹), Thousand Masses (Qian Zhong, 千众), Spitting Horse (Sima, 嘶马), Standing on Heaven (Tian Li, 天立), Snow White (Xue Wa, 雪娃), Fragrant Chaste (Fen Zheng, 芬贞, maybe not a pseudonym), Cold Current (Leng Liu, 冷流), and Residual Cold (Can Leng, 残冷). They aspired to establish a just and better world.⁸⁵⁹

The MCP and CYL planned to fix problems by following the CC line and indigenising—adapting propaganda to local demands after learning about them. A “theoretical

⁸⁵⁶ In a Nanyang high school on April 4, 1931, in Singapore, police confiscated anti-capitalist and anti-foreign publications called “Wall Newspaper” (*Bibao*), “Political Economy” (*Zhengzhi Jingji Xue*), *Proletariat* (*Puluo*), and *War Drum* (*Zhan Gu*). CO 273-572, p. 281.

⁸⁵⁷ Israel, *Student nationalism*, p. 159.

⁸⁵⁸ Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p. 169.

⁸⁵⁹ He Siren, “Bingcheng de Nanyang xingxin xiju yundong (1930-1931). Xinma xiju yundong zuoqing yi shi de kaiduan,” [New Drama Movement in Penang (1930-1931). The beginnings of the leftist thinking in drama movement of Chinese in Singapore and Malaya] in Yang Songnian and Wang Kangding, *Dongnanya huaren wenxue yu Wenhua* [Culture and literature of the Chinese in Southeast Asia], (Xinjiapo: yazhou yanjiuhui congshu, 1995).

struggle” was to be launched against reactionaries through drama performances where the “correct theory of the party and CYL” was to be demonstrated. The need to overcome incorrect thinking (*kefu bu zhengque de sixiang*) and backwardness had become a paramount slogan among peasants in anti-imperialist work, as had opposing imperialist education.⁸⁶⁰ For an “-ism” to label backwardness, the CC used a transliteration of the Russian word for tailism, *khvostism*, in the linguistic polyglot manner of the youthful protagonists of Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*.

In 1934, the CYL, like the MCP, was reported to be in crises because it could not fulfil the task of leading the youth, organising a Party newspaper that would use simple language, or carrying out oral propaganda in each local branch. The members were overage, and the CYL was not a mass organisation, which had to be corrected (*qunzhonghua* and *qingnian hua*). Propaganda corps (*xuanchuandui*) had to be more effective. Rather than just talking (其名无其实), they needed to explain the political platform of the Malayan revolution and the CYL demands to the youth masses. The reasons for CYL failures were such things as unfavourable conditions inside the country,⁸⁶¹ an immigrant mentality, and political terror. Comrades withdrew from the organisation, argued (*naoyijian*), didn’t work (*budong zhuyi*), and lacked discipline. There was a large turnover of cadres (*liudong*, or “drifting phenomena” in English) and romanticism, that is, “romantic actions” (*liangman xingwei*).⁸⁶² Branch meetings were not

⁸⁶⁰ “Report from Malaysia on the organization of the Young Communist League,” 28 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/24/19.

⁸⁶¹ Interestingly, the country is now Malaya and the name “Nanyang” is not used. Instead, the region is referred as Malaya through the discourse of the Malayan revolution. “Magong zhongyang tonggao di 49 hao. Guoji qingnian jie gongxue jueyi,” [CC MCP circular no.49 regarding International Youth Day] 31 July 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20.

⁸⁶² “Report from Malaysia in the organization of the young communist league” 28 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/24/19. In the Chinese original document there is a breakdown according to the place of origin,

concerned with practical matters. The reason for this was that there was no organisation among Malays and Indians, women, young soldiers, peasants, workers in main industries, the unemployed, and workers in railways, plantations, mines, and factories. There was vacillation in local organisations, like in Malaka, Selangore. The Party comrades were to help the CYL rectify the errors and strengthen education, cell work, creative work, and the spirit of self-criticism, and to achieve Bolshevisation. The Party's rivals among the youth were military-style and sport associations established by the British. To counter that, the "most powerful" (that is, athletic), "especially CY," comrades were to be dispatched to these associations to found Party cells and youth organisations, such as the Pioneers or communist sport organisations, and to lead anti-war propaganda.⁸⁶³ These were the tasks that the CYL was to achieve before International Youth Day in 1933.⁸⁶⁴ Twice, in September of 1933 and again in March of 1934, the CYL wrote to the Youth International and requested to be accepted. They did so despite maintaining a joint CC with the MCP. In the letter signed "CC CYL," the CYL recognised its own shortcomings for the same issues discussed above. The CC had nine members, and eight after one was arrested. The CYL demanded that the Youth International send "leading comrades" who knew English to help with CC work, or to send five comrades to receive training, recent Chinese documents, and money—\$100 monthly. Apparently, in response to this request, a Comintern member wrote "\$35" between lines. The CYL declared monthly expenses

jibieshang (籍别上): 356 members were Hainanese, and there were 75 people from Fuzhou, Xiamen, Hakka, and Chaozhou (福厦客潮). "Magong zhongyang lai jian. Zheng ge tuan de zuzhi gai kuang," [Incoming document from Malaya. The organizational situation in the CYL] 25 August 1934 RGASPI 495/62/27/7.

⁸⁶³ The CYL was attempting to organise the youth through sport activities. On November 11, 1930, the CC sent out a circular to organise red recreation centres and football teams. CO 273-572 p. 210-212.

⁸⁶⁴ Untitled document by CC MCP, 3 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28.

over \$150 and a monthly income of \$80.⁸⁶⁵ Like the MCP, the CYL continued its quest for international funding, cadres, and recognition.

Even though, by 1934, the majority of the CYL members and young workers in Red Labour Unions were shop employees and workers in rubber plantations, CYL membership, the majority of which was made up of first-generation Chinese immigrants, started to decline like Party membership. This was due to arrests and deportations, and no new members were accepted. The CC of the CYL of Malaya had ten organisations (*danwei*) under its control: Selangor, Singapore, Penang, Malacca, Perak, *Semeinon*, Johor, *Mopore*, *Jifoxinshan*, *Peng Yang*, and Siam.⁸⁶⁶ Of 431 CYL members, 419 were male, 12 were female, 411 were Chinese,⁸⁶⁷ 20 were Malayan, 140 were “shop employees” and “waiters of foreigners” (洋务),⁸⁶⁸ 228 were workers on rubber plantations, 16 were yellow pear planters, 2 were blacksmiths (铁厂), and 65 were students and intellectuals. The rest were workers in tea factories. The problems included lack of activity, discipline, secret work, and non-proletarian consciousness—“settling of personal accounts at the expense of party interests.” The CYL was called “an organisation of the narrow interests of Chinese youth (*zhongguominzu*) of rubber-tree

⁸⁶⁵ “Report of the CC of the CYL of Malaya to the League International,” 28 March 1934. RGASPI 495/62/23/20-22ob., 60-66.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ The English translation of this document makes it clear that they were first-generation Chinese, “Chinese by nationality.” It is also possible that it was another example of the multiple translations of *minzu*. “Report from Malaysia,” RGASPI 495/62/24/19.

⁸⁶⁸ The majority of Hainanese were house (domestic) servants and employees in coffee houses and shops. CO 273-537. “The Kuo Min Tang in Malaya 1926,” p. 10. Also see Onraet, *Singapore police background*, p. 111. An example of a Hainanese, a domestic servant, being active in strike activity in 1927 can be found in CO 273-542, “Kuo Min Tang,” 1928, p. 140.

cutters.” Members were not attending meetings and not paying membership fees, were not reading printed matter of the League, and did not have working responsibilities.⁸⁶⁹

Already, in 1934, communist youth organisations needed incentives to engage youth. The CYL was going to introduce a revolutionary competition, the *Stakhanovite* movement,⁸⁷⁰ as well as to lower the requirements for new members to just two conditions:⁸⁷¹ some knowledge of the revolution and loyalty to the League.⁸⁷² Young workers in the RLU (1,259 people, among which there were 120 Malays and 1,139 Chinese, 95 percent of whom were male) were also mostly workers in rubber-tree plantations. The rest were shop employees or waiters, and only a few were industrial workers who were in a “proper” trade union and who should have been the majority; the young workers’ movement was limited to “waiters of foreigners and shop employees.”⁸⁷³

The CYL was conducting propaganda through conversation at the meetings of workers, individual conversations, and “various subordinate organisations,” such as reading clubs and football clubs. Their goals were to establish young pioneer organisations (“young vanguards”) and a youth detachment in the paper issued by the RLU for young workers.⁸⁷⁴ The CYL was criticised for not being able to grasp the demands of the masses in order to mobilise them. The CYL was to turn economic struggles into political ones, with the demands of clothing and houses and to oppose arrest, beating, imprisonment, and deportation for struggles. They were

⁸⁶⁹ “Report of the CC of the CYL of Malaya to the League International,” 28 March 1934. RGASPI 495/62/23/20-22ob., 60-66.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ “General situation in the CYL “ RGASPI 495/62/27/7

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

also to link the struggles of the unemployed with those of the employed.⁸⁷⁵ Propaganda materials were mostly in Chinese, and among Comintern-collected materials there were only one or two leaflets in Malay, with a few more in English, for instance, “Lenin’s Youth” and “Training.” Propaganda materials were distributed and sold (*tuixiao*) as was decided at the founding conference.⁸⁷⁶ Papers were supposed to touch upon various problems of the youth in simple language; content was to fit the interests of the youth, and more pictorial papers were to be published. The Party published “Minors’ *Avant-Garde*” (*shaonian xianfeng*) and a children’s pictorial. Some handbills found in Penang, Malacca, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan were written in Jawi (Malay).⁸⁷⁷

There were other youth radical organisations, such as the Malaya Youth Party, that apparently consisted of Hainanese, as well, since fifty participants were Hainanese and since the Hainanese dominated all leftist Chinese organizations in Singapore overall, the demonstration on 7 September 1931, and the Youth Day in Singapore. They distributed handbills published by the Singapore Student Federation and the periodical *Zhengli Bao* (Truth), an apparent allusion to the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* (“truth” in Russian). The September issue of *Truth* criticised Chinese high schools for disciplinary measures taken to prevent students from reading socialist literature.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁵ “Report of the CC of the CYL of Malaya to the League International,” 28 March 1934 RGASPI 495/62/23/20-22ob., 60-66.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁷ In November of 1931, a police raid discovered the periodicals *Malayan workers*, *Malayan workers pictorial*, *Lenin youth*, *Children pictorial*, *Students truth* (xuesheng zhengli bao). CO 273-542, p. 211, 569.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 367-68

However, the student protest movement remained outside the grasp of the MCP, although there was communist influence in schools. The MCP mostly attempted to co-opt student protest activities, as had both the GMD and CCP in China. In 1930, when there were student protests (discussed earlier in this chapter), the MCP was involved in cyclostyling materials of the Singapore student association based at the Chinese high school in Singapore.⁸⁷⁹ The CYL proposed to oppose the system of schools (*xuexiao zhidu*), to advocate for free education for young workers, to prepare young cadres, and to work on everyday education (*richang jiaoyu*) in order to raise the political and cultural consciousness of the youth (*tigao qingong de zhengzhi yu wenhua shuiping*).⁸⁸⁰ However, the MCP admitted that it was behind the student movement against teachers. The MCP saw student miseries as a recipe for future unemployment, as a bankruptcy of families caused by the lack of money to go to school and acquire a profession, and finally as destitution. Like the CYL in 1929 and Xu Jie in 1934, the CYL did not have a lot of respect for those students who had no “democratic liberties” and were “bound with all kinds of inherited morality and doctrine,” “stupefied” by the British, with their superstitions, religion, and Christian education “to make them slaves.” The British organised political youth activities and provided schooling for workers, but they numbed (*mazui*) their brains with education in religion, military training, and sport organisations, where they advocated opposition to the struggles of the workers and peasants.⁸⁸¹ The Bible was used

⁸⁷⁹ CO 273/571 cited in Khoo, “The beginnings”, p. 275.

⁸⁸⁰ “Tuan mu qian de zhuyao renwu” [Present important tasks of the CYL] in “Malaiya qingshi de fenxi yu dang de renwu (jieshou Zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan ri lai xin de jueyi) [The analysis of the situation in Malaya. Resolution to adopt the CC CCP May 23 letter] 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/41 43.

⁸⁸¹ “Magongzhongyang tonggao di siji hao. Guojiqingnianjie de gongzuo jueyi” [Circular of CC MCP no 49. Resolutions of the CC MCP on the international youth day] 31 July 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20.

as a textbook,⁸⁸² and the government banned the printing of educational materials—apparently referring to the ban of textbooks from China.⁸⁸³ Politically active “revolutionary” students were arrested and deported, and tuition was increased. The CYL mentioned that it was behind in student struggles, like those at the Hua Ching school in Singapore, for “liberty of thought and movements and against the closing of the schools,” and, at the “China school” (lower middle and primary school), against “useless teachers and oppression of the school.”⁸⁸⁴

The CYL attributed the failure of student protests to the lack of CYL leadership. Also, despite the influence of communism on student protests, the CYL also admitted that it had undermined the student protests. The CYL had five local units of student organisations under its leadership. The Student Association consisted of 154 members, all Chinese; among those, 38 were girls. The CYL considered the highest organ of the student union in Malaya to be the Federation of the Revolutionary Students in Malaya, established on November 9, 1933, by the CC CYL. Work was planned in Johor Bahru and Singapore.⁸⁸⁵ Yet unlike other student unions, it did not have a press organ. The CYL considered irregular publications by those unions—apparently outside CYL influence—to be “empty of content.”⁸⁸⁶ The daily life of the members of the student unions was superficial, and their political level was low. Those struggles led by the CYL could not develop because of “infantile tactics.” Overall, student union membership,

⁸⁸² “Central Circular no.1. The conclusion of the Third Delegate conference of the C.P. of Malay,” 1 May 1930. RGASPI 495/ 62/13/1-17

⁸⁸³ Untitled circular by CC MCP, 3 August 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28.

⁸⁸⁴ “Present important tasks of the CYL.”

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid.

like that of the Party, declined in Singapore,⁸⁸⁷ with forty-five members compared to over eighty the year before and, in Penang, thirteen members in 1993 compared to forty members the year before. The problems were, besides exclusively Chinese membership, bureaucratism of the leading organ, abstract discussions and instructions, and a general lack of understanding of the life of students and of the lower ranks of the CYL. Pioneer (*shao nian xianfeng dui*) organisations, all Chinese, existed at Singapore, Penang, and *Silanwu*, totalling 133 members, 90 percent of whom were male, 83 percent students, and 17 percent members of the toiling masses. The criticism was that the life of such organisation is ‘superficial and dry,’ children felt tired, and some of them even left the organisation.”⁸⁸⁸ Apparently, communist leadership was detrimental to the student movement, as the MCP proposed that nobody should interfere with the independent student movement and student self-governing society.⁸⁸⁹

In order to co-opt the student movement, the MCP and CYL were to use indigenising tactics. That involved promoting “everyday life” slogans, such as stopping tuition increases, permitting males and females to study together, organising student organisations at the government English-language school and among Indian and Malayan students, opening up student unions (*xueshenghui*) and uniting the organisations and activities of students, young peasants, and workers so that students could help in the revolutionary movement. The CYL planned to send comrades to schools to organise student unions, “understand the students and make [their] work fit for them.” To strengthen class consciousness in children, the CYL was to

⁸⁸⁷ In 1931, the Singapore Student Union had ninety members; 30 percent were Hakka, 20 percent Hainanese, 20 percent Cantonese, 10 percent Hokkiens, 10 percent Teochews, and 10 percent other groups. 70 percent were boys. The union was not well organised and not active, the aid society only existed in name, and AIL membership was 110, with 50 percent Hainanese, 40 percent Hakka, and 10 percent Hokkiens. CO 273-542 p565-67.

⁸⁸⁸ “Present important tasks of the CYL.”

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

cultivate collective life habits and bravery. Emphasis would be on fun, not on “inflexible propaganda,” especially in Penang and Singapore.⁸⁹⁰

It is clear that the CYL members did not belong to the student “masses.” The CYL was working like an upper-level Chinese association in “mass” organisations, trying to recruit members in various strata of the population: women, peasants, workers, and students. In regard to women’s organisations, in 1931, in Selangor, one pamphlet was issued by the women’s suffrage association of Malaya. In Johor, a Hainanese person was arrested holding a banner with a slogan of freedom of divorce and marriage signed by the Negri Sembilan General Labour Union.⁸⁹¹ Women appeared to be a relatively successful category for the mobilisation work of the MCP,⁸⁹² as in 1939, the number of women among the middle level leaders of the MCP in Singapore was 9 out of 21.⁸⁹³

⁸⁹⁰ “Present important tasks of the CYL.”

⁸⁹¹ CO 273-542, pp. 367-68.

⁸⁹² Women figured prominently in the working force in British Malaya in the 1930s. See Fan, *Immigration, Gender*. The MCP worked in a women’s association, and 60 percent of the women there were “girls who [were] dissatisfied with the feudal system of the ruling class.” According to the police, the women’s association existed only in Singapore (sixty members in 1931: 70 percent Hainanese, the rest Cantonese and Khes) and in Penang. CO 273-572, p.566. Apparently, in the same association in 1932–1933, 50 percent were “girls from families,” perhaps housewives. Of the total of 81 members, 33 percent were students, and 17 percent were factory workers. The same problems as usual were listed in the work among women: little work or education, bureaucratism, no “advanced toiling girls” in the CYL, lack of understanding of women’s needs, and a predominately Chinese membership. “CC MCP circular no.49 regarding International Youth Day,” 31 July 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20. The CYL was to work in gray organisations, such as sisterhoods of girls at public schools and in reading classes, and to encourage all relations of the revolutionaries (wives, sisters, relatives, friends of comrades) to involve themselves in the women’s association. The CYL described the core of the women’s movement to be schoolgirls and housewives. Circular no.15, RGASPI 495/62/24/47-8.

⁸⁹³ Among 21 “middle cadres” of city organization there were 9 women. “*Biograficheskiye svedeniya I harakteristiki na rukovodyaschiye kadry kompartii Malayi, danniiye v dokladah Pen Haitan, byvshiy zav.otdelom propgandy singapurskogo gorodskogo kommiteta partii Malaiyi..*” [Biographical data and personal references for the leading cadres of the MCP provided by former head of propaganda of Singapore city committee of the MCP Peng Haitang] RGASPI 495/62/30/1-10.

In 1937, the MCP organised the Student Anti-Japanese Backing-Up Society (*Xuesheng Kangri Houyuanhui*). MCP united front policy was realised, as Onraet pointed out, through “the Racial emancipation league, (*minzu jiefang lianmeng*) established in 1936, and worked through youthful members in sport clubs, art clubs and other places where young people of many races in Malaya met in friendly contest or intercourse.”⁸⁹⁴ However, in 1938, the Multi-racial Liberation Youth League (*Geminzu Jiefang Qingnian Tuan*) was abolished by the Party, and the Party again decided to take up the leadership of the student movement.⁸⁹⁵ After the Japanese invasion of February 2, 1942, many people from the student movement were brought up by the Party and became party guerrilla leaders.

An account from the overseas Chinese school in Kuala Lumpur concerning student protests against GMD indoctrination gives an idea of the scope of student protest activities in prewar years. In Kuala Lumpur, at a Chinese school (*huaqiao zhongxue*) in 1939, students studied such books as *History of the World Revolution (Shijie Gemingshi)*, *History of the Chinese Revolution (Zhongguo Geming Shi)*, *Theory and Methodology of Ideas (Sixiang Fangfa Lun)* and *New Literature (Xinwenxue)* with their teachers.⁸⁹⁶ This was done both during class time and after, with teachers and with student cadres. They also carried out short-term courses during vacation and studied the Communist Manifesto, Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, Stalin’s *Short Course of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Mao’s *On Protracted War (Lunchi Jiuzhan)*, *New Democracy (Xinminzhuyi Lun)*, Liu Shaoqi’s *How to Be a Good*

⁸⁹⁴ Onraet, *Singapore Police Background*, p. 115. Yong, *The Origins*, p.196, 204.

⁸⁹⁵“Zhanqian dixia douzheng shiqi xuesheng yundong de ruogan qingkuang.” [Situation in the student movement during the underground prewar period], in Song Ping, Yong Zhong, Ah Chuan, Fang Shan eds., *Zhanqian dixia douzheng shiqi. Jiandang chuqi jieduan, Magong wenji, cong hu xilie*(Prewar underground period. The foundation of the party. Documents of the MCP) Ershi shi yi shi ji chuban she, 2010, pp. 135-138, esp. p. 138

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

Communist (Lun Gongchandang Yuan De Xiuyang), and other “progressive” books, such as *Red Star Over China (Xixing Manji)* and *Mass Philosophy (Dazhong Zhexue)*.⁸⁹⁷

THE PLACES AND WAYS OF BECOMING COMMUNIST

The Places of Revolution and How to Get There: Roads, Crossroads, and Temples

Schools, newspaper houses, and *huiguans* were the places where the revolution happened and where one could become a communist in the Nanyang. They were also meeting points, places for the exchange of ideas and information. Above all, these were places where people were stuck together regardless of their will, like ships and prisons, or places where they went for free meals and for communication, like Christian temples.⁸⁹⁸ The communists

⁸⁹⁷ “Xue lanyi jiaying de xuesheng yudong,” [Student movement in Selangor], in *Prewar Underground*, pp. 138-146, esp. p. 140.

⁸⁹⁸ Christian temples occupied a special place in the communist movement in Southern China. A Christian temple was a place to go and have a meal. As well, it was a meeting place for the revolutionaries to exchange information. Interview with Mr. Chen Fang. Also, Christian temples were places where both GMD and CCP members intermingled and where they would leave their political disagreements behind. Future head of Perak county MCP branch and the head of the MPAJA fifth guerilla unit, Zeng Shaowu, during the Fujian Rebellion, apparently escaped arrest by the GMD because he was a Christian, like the head of the thirty-sixth division of the 102nd regiment of the GMD army, Li Liangrong(李良荣), who was sent to Yongchun to suppress the rebels. Li, apparently to avoid carrying out arrest in the temple or giving a fellow Christian a warning, invited Zeng to join him in the military club during a Sunday service, which, to Zeng, was the indication that his Party activities were exposed. He then made arrangements with Wang Nanzi (aka Wang Ren, 王南子, 王仁) to leave for Malaya. Wang, the librarian in the same school where Zeng was teacher, had an impeccable revolutionary pedigree since he had studied at the Moscow University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) and apparently was a worthy reference to justify one’s activity. Zeng’s father was also an illustration of the intersecting networks of the Christians and revolutionaries in Southern China: He was a local priest, an engineer, and a teacher and became the representative of Yongchun county in the National People’s Congress, a standing member of the Political Consultative Commission, and a member of the committee of the overseas Chinese after 1949. After the Japanese surrender in December 1945, he was the head of the chamber of commerce of Singapore (*xinjiapo shanghui*). Zeng was decorated by the British and participated in the Emergency, and he perished in 1951 during a clash with the British. Sun Jianbin “Jue bu dang wang guo nu. Mianbei Kangri xianbei Jiang Qitai, Zeng Shaowu, Lin BoXiang ,” [Do not

attempted to bring Indian immigrants into the Party by disseminating propaganda in Hindu temples.⁸⁹⁹ British prisons were also places where revolution was fomented. Roads and crossroads in dramas and fiction by MCP activists illustrated how these intellectuals, who propagated communist ideas in prisons and temples, imagined revolutionary change in the masses; *Engine*⁹⁰⁰ [characters], an intellectuals' society, was the engine to get to those imagined places. Some imagined the revolutionary destination as the Garden of Eden.

The GMD, like the CCP, placed the responsibility for the revolution in the hands of intellectuals.⁹⁰¹ The MCP essay "What Workers Should Stand For" reiterated the intellectuals'

become slaves: Remembering the leader generation of resistance to the Japanese Jiang Qitai, Zeng Shaowu, Lin Boxiang] in *Quanzhou wenshi ziliao di 24 ji*, [Literary and Historical Materials of Quanzhou Vol 24] (Zhongguo renmin xieshang huiyi Fujiansheng Quanzhou shi weiyuan hui wenshi ziliao weiyuan hui, Quanzhou wangbao yinghua guang, 2005). Churches and missionaries facilitated labour immigration from at least some places in Southern Fujian to British Malaya. Zhang Xia, "Chinese immigrants from Xianyou."

⁸⁹⁹ In September of 1931, the British police intercepted two copies of a paper in "Sikh script" published by the "Eastern Oppressed Peoples' Association" in Nanjing, addressed to the Sikh temple in Singapore. They also intercepted copies of "Red Flag," a booklet of the Three Peoples' Principles (which contrasted Sun's Three Principles with Marxism), and a book that talked about the latest achievements in the USSR. The British detained the GMD propaganda along with the communist propaganda as "undesirable." CO 273-548, "Monthly Review of the Chinese Affairs," September 1931, p. 64.

⁹⁰⁰ One of the members of "Engine" was Chen Junju. He also participated in the Mutual Aid Society (*hu ji hui*) through which the party conducted its activity, the AIL, and the *Zhonghua Minzu Wuzhuang Ziwaihui* (Chinese National Armed Self-Defense Committee). Chen never went to Nanyang, but he belonged to the same social circle that produced many MCP members, like Zhang Xia. He was born in 1918, and in 1933, at the time of the Fujian Rebellion, he was fifteen years old. He was not a Party member but participated in Party auxiliary organizations. His brother was a Party member and a student in the same school, and he joined the rebels during the Fujian Rebellion. The activities of the organisations involved in the Fujian Rebellion are referred to as "patriotic" (*aiguo yundong*). In the school where Chen studied, Zhan Xia organized musical and theatrical performances of "European" music, including the music of Soviet composers and *La Marseillaise*. About eighty students of primary and middle schools participated in the Party-led activities. The leaders were arrested. Chen joined the party in 1933. In 1937, Chen himself became a teacher in the central primary school of Xianyou county and organized an anti-Japanese travelling propaganda drama troop (*Xianyou kangri jushe*). Chen's story is an example of how students became communist in Southern Fujian. Zheng Tingzhi, Li Ruiliang "The life of an exemplary warrior of culture Chen Junju," p.123.

⁹⁰¹ In 1925, at around the same time as the GMD debated joining the Comintern and Hu Hanmin supposedly discussed his National International with Sun Yatsen, Dai Jitao reinterpreted Sun's Three Principles as "traditionalist nationalism." Dai placed hope on Chinese intellectuals to wake up the

roles: “The honourable historical task of the revolutionary intellectual is to help to develop industrial workers who are the backbone of the communist movement and who can help to bring the working class to the actual place of hegemony in the revolution of the Malaya people against British imperialism.”⁹⁰² The key intellectuals in Malaya were schoolteachers.

Teachers

The life of the founder of communist organisations in Malaya, Fan Yunbo, is illustrative of the path of the teachers of the second-generation Chinese in Malaya. He was first active in student movements in Guangdong and later was the secretary of the CYL at Sun Yatsen University (*Zhongshan Da Xue*). In 1925, he transferred to the Party (from *wenshi ziliao* it is, of course, not clear if he was a GMD member as well) and started as the principal of Huanan School in Malacca. In May of 1927, the Nanyang provisional committee sent him to Hankow to take part in the fifth conference of the CYL and the third conference of labour unions as a representative for both. In 1929, he was sent to Annam and Siam to find members of the military who had fled to the Nanyang after the defeat of the Guangzhou rebellion. In 1930, he returned to Hong Kong and became responsible for the finances of the CCP Southern Bureau (*nanfang ju*), the node of the Nanyang CCP network. He was arrested in 1931 by the GMD, released in 1937, and continued to work in Southern Bureau of the CCP, which was then administering the united front. The fact that in 1949, the founder of the communist organisation in Malaya ended up in a native place association—he became the head of the Hong Kong native

Chinese people from their slumber. Individual ethical cultivation and mass political education offered the keys to national renewal, but Dai had a distaste for Marxism and a mistrust of communists. Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 229.

⁹⁰² “What the workers should stand for” 11 November 1930. RGASPI 495/62/5/9-14, esp. 12.

place association of Wenchang county⁹⁰³—is symbolic and illustrative of the nature of the communist movement in the Nanyang.

Fan was one of many⁹⁰⁴ schoolteachers who graduated from teachers schools. They were imbued with nationalist ideology and transferred that to their students in the Nanyang. The modernity of communist ideas also matched the professional interests—modernity and news—of journalists and editors, who often become teachers, and vice versa. Communism was modern. Not only Chinese communists were journalists; Ho Chi Minh was a journalist.⁹⁰⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, in 1924, the Comintern was planning to dispatch a journalist to establish an intraregional connection in Southeast Asia. The dispatched journalist was Tan Malaka, the first Asian Comintern representative in Asia.

Writers on the Road and at Crossroads

Several writers who were MCP members were engaged in writing plays staged in Malaya and Singapore. Those plays had recurrent themes and settings, such as roads and crossroads. Those were, apparently, the metaphors to describe the state of being of the protagonists of the plays. These metaphors can also be used to describe the sojourning writers

⁹⁰³ Huang Xuyan, Lin Zhiji, “Fan Yunbo de geming de yisheng,” [Revolutionary life of Fan Yunbo] in Du Hanwen ed., *Hainan wenshi di 19 ji*, [Literary and Historical Materials of Hainan] pp. 57-64. (Hainan sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao wei yuan hui; Haikou nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005); “Canjia geming de pianduan huiyi, Fan Yunbo koushu,” [Revolutionary memoir. Oral history of Fan Yunbo]. *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao di 18 ji*, [Guangzhou Literary and historical Materials. vol.18] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshanghui yi guang dong sheng guangzhou shi weiyuan hui wenshi ziliao wanjiu weiyuanhui; Guangdong remin chuban she, 1980), p.1-13.

⁹⁰⁴ The number of Chinese schools in Straits Settlement and Federated Malay States increased from 252 in 1921, to 716 in 1930, to 933 in 1937. The number of teachers increased from 589, to 1,980, to 3,415, respectively. Leong “Sources, Agencies.”

⁹⁰⁵ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 36.

and teachers in Chinese schools, who were often at the crossroad between the GMD and the Communists. This subsection will talk about several MCP cadres and writers.

As the MCP head of the propaganda department in 1933, writer Ma Ning (马宁, 黄振椿, 黄震村, born 1909), who was also a founder of the Chinese Leftist Writers Union (*Zhongguo Zuoyi zuojia Lianmeng*) in 1931, spent 1931–1934 in Malaya, editing and publishing *Mapu* (Malaya Proletariat) and *Nanyang Wenyi Monthly* in Singapore. He joined the CCP in 1930, and in 1931, he fled from Shanghai. In 1932, in Singapore, he participated in the biggest youth literary organisation there (励志社, established 1920) and staged few one-act plays with a message against feudalist consciousness (*yishi*). Like other petty intelligentsia who ended up in the Nanyang, he had a job as a school prefect in a Singapore *Malaiya huaqiao gongli zhenghua* middle school (马来亚华侨公立振华中学部主任). After the Mukden incident of September 18, 1931, they started an anti-imperialist propaganda campaign. After this the school was closed, Ma Ning went underground with the MCP to the mountains to become the head of a primary school.

While publishing a “drama” (*xiju*) in the supplement (*fukan*) of *Guanghua Daily* in Penang, Ma Ning promoted the New Drama Movement (*Nan Xinxingxiju De Yundong*), in which CYL members were active. Ma Ning’s dramas had similar motifs as Xu Jie’s writings.⁹⁰⁶ One of Ma Ning’s plays featured an Indian worker who shared his piece of bread with a Chinese

⁹⁰⁶ *Mahua wenxue*, the literature of the Chinese in Malaya, had two trends—*Nanyang caise* and *puluo wenxue*. Yu Yueting, “Ma Ning yi ge bei yiwang de liao bu chao de “zuoyi” zuojia.” [A Forgotten Extraordinary Left-wing writer Ma Ning] in Zhao Ting ed., *Shifan qun ying guanghui zhonghua (di er shi juan)* [Teachers heroes, Shining China. Vol.20] (Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994) pp. 176-185. The MCP communist ideas and their indigenisation fitted both currents.

unemployed rubber worker. In each of the three stories, there is a road. On the road, Xu Jie met a Malayan, whose gaze frightened him with the expression of colonial oppression. Ma Ning's work was about Malayan Chinese society and attacked the backward feudal thinking of the *huaqiao* (*luohou huaqiao fenjian shehui*). One of his plays was about a Chinese person who went to the Nanyang, got a "little wife" (*xiaolaopo*) and went bankrupt. This play created a lot of discussion in the Chinese community. The third story containing a road was by Lin Xianqiao (林仙桥) who, in November of 1930, was banished for the play. This play, *Crossroad* (十字街头) was the story of a rubber worker and a miner (two categories of workers that the MCP wanted to recruit the most) who decided to commit suicide to solve the problems of their livelihoods. They lay down on the road to be run over by a car. A road worker tried to steal from them, thinking that they were dead. When he realised that he was trying to steal from miserable people like himself, his thinking turned progressive (*sixiang jinbu*) and they decided to struggle with the imperialists, who monopolised their road in life.

The arrest of Lin Xianqiao caused an outcry in the Chinese community and was reflected in MCP documents as illustrative of the damage that the new alien registration would cause the revolutionaries.⁹⁰⁷ Newspapers, numbering between 100 and 150 across Malaya, did not dare to publish literary supplements after this incident.⁹⁰⁸ However, in early 1931, schools and *huaqiao* associations across Malaya declared that the stage was to become a weapon in the anti-colonial struggle—this was the New Drama Movement, which proclaimed its goal as

⁹⁰⁷ "Ma Ning. Zai Nanyang fazhan Zhongguo de xinxing juyun." [Ma Ning. Chinese New Drama movement in Nanyang] in Zeng Qingrui, *Zhongguo xiandai huaju wenxue 50 jia zhaji* [China's modern drama. 50 notes]. (Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2008), pp. 259-268. Also see chapter 2.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

opposing the artsy style (*wenming fengge*) and instead bringing real life onto the stage.⁹⁰⁹ Ma Ning's revolutionary involvement with the MCP eventually led him to a decent post in the Fujian government in New China; he was the head of the department of culture of the Fujian province (*fujiansheng wenhuashu shuzhang*) and the head of the department of cultural connections of the Fujian province (*fujian sheng wenlian zhuren*). In 1938, with the fourth army, he went to Jianan. After the end of the war, he went to Singapore again but was deported.

Ma Ning was also a key figure in the establishment of the Malaya Anti-Imperialist League (AIL), *Malaya Fandi Datongmeng*. He became the head of its propaganda department and edited the periodical "Mafan" (an abbreviation for "Malaya Anti-Imperialist League") and established the Proletarian Art Union of Malaya (*Malaiya Puluo Yishu Lianmeng*).⁹¹⁰ Apparently, as part of the activity of the AIL, Ma Ning participated in a conference held in the jungle near Johor Bahru. This was a conference of the delegates of "Chinese immigrants" (*qiaomin*) from India, Vietnam, Burma, Malaya, and China, referred to as *Quan Nanyang Ge Zhimindi Ge Minzu Daibiao Da Hui*, the All-Nanyang Colonial Peoples Delegate Congress.⁹¹¹ This illustrated the continuation in the MCP of the idea of Chinese leadership in the emancipation of colonial peoples of Southeast Asia, the idea that was the goal of Hu Hanmin's *Minzu Guoji*.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁹¹⁰ Chen Yutang ed., *Zhongguo jinxiandai renwu minghao da cidian: quanbian zengdingben*. [Dictionary of pseudonyms of Modern China](Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005) p. :22; Yu Yueting, "A Forgotten."

⁹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

The Fujian Rebellion, Esperanto, and an Unfinished Piece for a Homemade Violin

How did the Nanyang communist network work? The Nanyang had been the place to go in order to flee from disturbances in South China for centuries. The twentieth century was no exception. Apart from refugees from Shanghai and those looking for employment, there was another kind of refugee—that from the Fujian Rebellion in 1934, or the *Minbian*. There was also a pattern of migration built on Party networks where a Party member would help another Party member back home do the paperwork to invite him to come to Malaya for employment.⁹¹² Many of these trends are illustrated in Zhang Xia's life story, presented in his memoir. This section is based on Zhang's memoir and other recollections about him. I believe his life was an illustration of a class of the cultured, *you wenhua de*, of the Chinese society in Malaya, the Party, and their involvement in “non-cultured” lives.

Zhang Xia's memoir sheds light on the pattern of migration and social organisation in overseas communities. From Xianyou county (仙游县), Fujian, a lot of people went to Malaya, although not as many as from the Fuzhou region or Southern Fujian, but many of those participated in revolutionary work (*gemin gongzuo*) and patriotic movements (*aiguo yundong*). Huang *Wenhua*'s (黄文华) father went to Malaya's Perak Sitiawan (实兆远) and became a rubber-tree cutter. Huang *Wenhua*, who immediately joined the MCP after the Japanese occupation started, became a leader of the resistance and, after the war, became the CC

⁹¹² Tickets overseas cost 50 Yuan or 120–150 for a first-time traveller, a “new guest” (*xinke*). This money was usually borrowed from a pawn house or from the director of the school where the migrant was apparently going to be employed in Nanyang. Upon arrival, the traveller had to get an approval that his profession was in need; otherwise, he could be turned away. At the time of the “Long March,” 1934–1935, in Xianyou county, many young revolutionaries fled to Malaya and the Dutch East Indies by this method. Zhang, “Chinese immigrants,” pp. 37, 48.

secretary. This represents the pattern of involvement of the second-generation Chinese in the MCP. Two others from Xianyou county who became revolutionaries were Zhang Yuanbao and Fu Panyang (傅盘卿). Fu went to Singapore in 1930, became the head of the primary school of the provincial association (*Huiguan*) of Xing'an county (兴安会馆), and was active in the revolution. After the start of the Japanese occupation, he went to the mountains, and after the war, he was captured and banished by the British back to China, where he became a primary school teacher again. Zhang Xia himself fled to Malaya in 1935 from GMD persecution after the Fujian Rebellion to work as a teacher and was encouraged by CC MCP “martyr” Zhu Xiao (朱晓) to join the MCP.⁹¹³ Zhang spent six months in the jail in Johor Bahru, and afterwards he was deported to China. There he was arrested by the GMD, and in 1946, he fled back to Malaya to the *huaqiao* middle school at the nearby Kajang. Zhang was then arrested in 1948 by the British for involvement in communism and was banished back to China.

According to Zhang, many revolutionaries fled to Southeast Asia from Xianyou county and worked as teachers to participate in “revolutionary” activities: Xu Qing (许或青), Zhang Zhaohan (张兆汉), Cai Yuan (蔡明善), Chen Hongbin (陈鸿宾), and Huang Ming (黄明). According to Zhang Xia, most of those from Xianyou county who went to Malaya had a “low cultural level” (*wenhua shuiping dide*). Many of them opened bicycle-repair shops (自行车修理店) or became car drivers. Those whose “cultural level” was “high” (*wenhua shuiping bijiao*

⁹¹³ In light of Zhang’s troubled relationship with the Party, discussed below, this looks like justification for his actions by way of showing his revolutionary pedigree.

gao) worked as teachers (执教), and many became rubber-tree cutters, as those who could become capitalists were relatively few (*neng cheng ziben jiade jiao shao*).⁹¹⁴ Rubber workers were the majority of MCP and CYL members. Zhang Xia died in 1993 in Fuzhou (振辉).

Zhang was from a “working on the land” family and was descended from three generations of painters of paper lanterns. He played the organ and drums. In 1927, Xianyou county’s middle school founded a teachers’ class (*gaozhong shifanban*), where Zhang studied for one year. In 1929, he started to teach art classes at the middle school. From 1932, Zhang participated in the Mutual Aid Society (*hujihui*), which was a front organisation of the CCP, but he had also been a GMD member since 1927. In 1933, in the Anti-Imperialist League, he spread communist ideas among students. In 1935, after the Fujian Rebellion, he apparently fled from the GMD to Malaya, where his compatriot (*tongxiang*) Zhang Yuanbao was based, as well as his fellow teachers and communists Zhang Zaohan (张兆汉) and 许青.⁹¹⁵ This illustrates the migratory patterns built on revolutionary networks. Zhang Xia became an art teacher and secretary in Sitiawan at the Nanhua middle school (*Nanhua zhongxue*) near Zhang Yuanbao’s (大巴埠) in Perak province. He taught there what he had taught himself—Western music theory,

⁹¹⁴ Zhang, “Chinese immigrants,” pp. 34-39.

⁹¹⁵ Zhang Xia, “The revolutionary fire.” Zhang Zhaohan (张兆汉), born in Xianyou, joined the CYL in 1928 and joined the CCP in 1937. He was the secretary of the CYL of Xianyou county, the secretary of the special committee of the *minzhong* (like Zhang Yuanbao), the head of the guerrilla troops of the *minzhong*, a member of the political committee, the secretary of the children’s division of the drama troops of the salvation society of the Xiamen CCP, the director of Chang’s *guominribao*, the director of the Singapore office of *Xinhua she*, and after 1949 was the head of the united front of the Fujian province CCP and the director of the committee of the overseas Chinese of Fujian Province. Gao Kaiming, Gao Zhichan, *Dongjiang congdui de ernümen* [Sons and Daughters of Dongjian] (Zuojia chubanshe, 1993) p. 188.

acoustics, violin, and guitar. He organised student orchestras and composed pieces in which Western and Chinese musical instruments performed together. For the art classes, he took students outside for sessions *en plein air* and hired an Indian worker as a model for drawing, for there was a shortage of plaster replicas suitable for early stages of learning. He also taught embroidery and basket-weaving during craft lessons.⁹¹⁶ In 1936, because he didn't get the pay he expected, he had a quarrel with the principal of the school, Wang Shujin, the head of the local branch of the GMD (*qufenbu*), and consequently moved to a primary school in 新波培.

This illustrates the relationship between the GMD and the communists in Malaya. Together with the editor of literary supplements (*fukan*) and of *Zhonghua baoshe*, Wang Xuanhua, in Ipoh, Zhang established the Association of Overseas Chinese Culture Workers of Northern Malaya (*Beima Huaqiao Wenhua Gongzuozhe Xiehui*). The resulting revolutionary fervour attracted the attention of the authorities, and he was pressured to leave the province of Perak. In 1937, through a recommendation from his colleague from the 1932 communist underground in Xianyou county, Fu Naizhao (傅乃超), Zhang Xia found a position as art teacher in Johor's Kota Dinggi. After the start of the anti-Japanese war, Zhang was the head of the propaganda department organised by the MCP Anti-Japanese Backing-Up Society of the Overseas Chinese Workers (*Huaqiao Gongren Kangdi Hou Yuan Hui*).⁹¹⁷ In 1937, Zhu Riguang,⁹¹⁸ an MCP leader from Hainan, encouraged Zhang to join the MCP.⁹¹⁹ In 1938, Zhang organised an anti-

⁹¹⁶ Zhang Jinda, "Remembering Zhang Xia," p. 47.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ Zhu Riguang and Zhang Yuanbao perished in 1947. Zhang Jinda, "Remembering Zhang Xia," pp. 52, 59.

⁹¹⁹ Zhang's claims that some famous but already dead members of MCP had a trusted relationship with him should be taken with a grain of salt.

Japanese propaganda troop and travelled to perform dramas, and he organised a local Wilayah Pembangunan Iskandar (柔南) chapter of the All-*Huaqiao* Anti-Japanese Backing-Up Society (*Huaqiao Gejie Kang Di Hou Yyuan Hui Rou Nan Zonghui*). In 1938, after Zhang was arrested, his wife was transferred by Zhu Riguang to a workers' evening school to teach.

As in other prisons across the world, conversion to communist ideas often took place in prisons in British Malaya. Moreover, the stories from MCP members' memoirs about their prison experiences shows the scope of the "revolutionary activities" that the MCP members engaged in—those were far from the heroic struggles of the veterans of the GMD persecution in China. Zhang spent six months in prison. While in prison, he met three MCP members who had already been there for three years. They asked Zhang to tell them about the international situation and Chinese resistance war, and Zhang used this time in prison for propaganda among prisoners. He established a branch of an anti-Japanese society at Johor Bahru's prison (*kang yuanhui xinshan jianyu fenhui*) where, besides Chinese, there were also Malaysians and Indians. By the time of the Chinese New Year, Zhang instigated prisoners to demand a more bountiful meal in celebration of the Chinese New Year—coffee with milk, two eggs, an increase in the ration of oil to three *qian*, and three *liang* of pork—for Malays and Indian who did not eat pork, lamb or beef was to be provided. This, no doubt, was an effective propaganda method for communists. When the authorities refused, the prisoners went on a hunger strike until their demands were met. This was the kind of strike that the MCP organised. The protests against the treatment of authorities in jail showed the level of concern of the communists in Malaya. A teacher and editor, Chen Jiafei (陈贾飞), while under arrest in Singapore in 1939 (after two years there), went on a hunger strike with his fellow deported because they felt insulted that

they were only allowed to start eating after the prison guard gave them the order to do so. They demanded that the guard apologise—and only then would they start eating. Chen proudly explained that the authorities compromised not because they were afraid of public opinion but because they were afraid of the “atmosphere of hatred against Japanese.”⁹²⁰

The following story is another example of propaganda and the use of rhetoric in the Chinese revolution of the late 1930s. In 1939, Zhang was arrested and banished to China, and on the ship to Hong Kong there were about one hundred other banished travellers with him. Among them he began a “propaganda organisation.” During six days on board, Zhang, Zhu Zonghai, and Zhang Guisheng translated Zhang’s report into Hainanese and Cantonese, with the message to unite and fight the Japanese. They also organised a commemoration of the death of Sun Yatsen, who, to be sure, was not held in high esteem by the CYL members in 1930. (See the section on the CYL.) As a result, the group donated more than \$200 in Malayan currency for the needs of the refugees of the motherland. The activity was overseen by the captain of the ship and policeman on board, who apparently did not attempt to prevent this “communist” activity.

Back at home, the overseas adventures of people like Zhang were both suspicious to the CCP since the late 1930s and persecuted by the GMD. After returning to China, Zhang could not stay in his native Xianyou county because of GMD government surveillance, so he worked in Dehua county in a middle school as a music teacher. In the situation of war scarcity, he taught his students how to make wind and string instruments. In 1940, his wife brought him a recommendation letter from the Anti-Enemy Backing-Up Society (*Kangdi Hou Yuan Zonghui*) from Singapore, but since it was not an MCP recommendation, Zhang had trouble with the

⁹²⁰Chen Jiafei, “From Perak to Huizhou in Guangdong.”

underground CCP at home, too. Yet *huaqiao* networks were maintained at home. Zhang's wife found a job in a school established by a Burmese *huaqiao*. Zhang Xia was known in southern Fujian as the only person who could play western musical instruments, and a violin was specially ordered for him from Hong Kong, along with a wind instrument.

Zhang's "ideological flexibility" did not sit well with the GMD, either. In 1942, Zhang had problems with the GMD, as he was accused of being a "party traitor" (*jian dang*), and only his elder sister's connections helped to refute the accusations. In 1943, he returned to his native Xianyou county and established a connection with the CCP after eight years of being out of touch. Zhang bought a textbook of Esperanto and studied it with two other students, who later gave up because it was too much on top of their heavy study burdens. In 1935, when he taught at Sitiawan, Malaya, his teaching load was light, so he taught Esperanto. One of his students was the future MCP leader Wu Tianwang (伍添旺). Zhang maintained an impressive international pen-mate network. He was in contact with Ukrainian children, airport workers, teachers in Austria and Sweden, the Spanish Esperanto association, telegraph and telephone workers in Japan and America, and a British merchant in Tibet. They exchanged illustrated journals from different countries, stamps, and their own works of art. How much more cosmopolitan can one get?

Cosmopolitanism was a part of the overall intellectual and cultural eclecticism that was a characteristic feature of the world of Chinese communism in Malaya. It is illustrative of the conceptual climate of the time and place. In 1945, when Zhang was arrested by the GMD in Putian city, there was a provincial exhibition in mid-Fujian. When his prison guard saw Zhang's works, he suggested that Zhang should take part in the exhibition. Specifically for this exhibition, Zhang made a painting in the dry-brush style (*gangbi*), adding color, entitled

“Garden of Eden,” based on the creation story from the Bible. The painting depicted Adam and Eve, and on the apples in the trees, the Esperanto word *KOMUNISMO* was written. The painting was taken to the exhibition by the prison guard. Zhang Xia was critical of Christianity in his memoirs, but this didn’t prevent him from imagining and depicting the world of communism in the language of Christianity.⁹²¹ Christian temples and imagery were a part of the world of Chinese communists in South China, of which the Malayan communist organisation, the MCP, was a “frontier enclave.”

In 1946, Zhang took a trip to Taiwan. Then, in 1947, he went to Singapore to teach at Singapore Primary School. At the time, the MCP was legal, and colleagues of Zhang from nine years before, Zhang Mingling and Ying Minqin (张明令, 应敏钦) who later became CC MCP members, told Zhang and his wife to go to Selangor to teach in a school where a lot of students were MCP members.

With Zhang Xia and Xu Jie we see a pattern of individual involvement with the two parties, the Communists and the GMD. This ideological flexibility shows that perhaps, after all, Communists did have a good reason to worry about the intellectuals’ loyalty. Zhang was an MCP member, yet his relationship with the CCP was not stable. The GMD also imprisoned him and yet asked him to participate in the exhibition. His sister had connections that saved him from GMD persecution. In 1948, Huang Ming told Zhang to organise a democratic youth union (*minzhu qingnian lianmeng*) and later officially introduced him to the CCP. In June of 1948, they were again arrested and banished by the British. Finally, after he returned home in 1949,

⁹²¹ Christianity played the key role in migration from his native Xianyou county to Nanyang, as the recruitment of the labour needed by the British was carried out by missionaries. Zhang, “Chinese immigrants.”

he joined the Propaganda and Art Department and worked in the Institute of Peoples' Education of the City of Xiamen (*Xiamen Shi Minzhong Jiaoyuguan*). He also held high positions in the city United Front committee, was the secretary of the city consultative committee and of the Overseas Chinese Association (*Qiaolian*), and he was also the head of the city Culture Department (*Wenhuaguan guazhang*).

One month after Shanghai Municipal Police arrested the head of the Comintern office, Yakov Rudnik, who was one of the masterminds of the Comintern's synergy with the CCP in Southeast Asia, the *Overseas Chinese Avant-garde (Huaqiao Xian Feng)* published an article entitled "Protection of Overseas GMD Members" in Canton on July 15, 1931. This article makes it clear that teachers and journalists were sent by the GMD as agents of Party policy. According to the article, South Seas Chinese suffered the most from oppression by the imperialists:

Our comrades there are courageous and in spite of everything fight on, with the result that large numbers of party members, journalists and teachers, are deported. Under the iron heel of foreign government our comrades are prevented from carrying out propaganda for party principles. Public propaganda, verbal or written, immediately engages the attention of the local authorities, but teachers are in a better position and can easily carry out propaganda. They are intellectual and widely distributed over the countries in the South Seas. It is possible for them to carry out verbal propaganda among the young and by this means to influence the families of students, which is of great assistance to our party organisations. The teachers in the lower schools in West Borneo are nearly all party leaders. Since most of them have their families in China, they can, if deported, go elsewhere without much hardship, but the seed of the revolution is then already sown in the place they leave. Propaganda conducted by teachers has met with great success and arousing the enthusiasm of the overseas Chinese and it is precisely due to this reason that overseas Chinese schools are oppressed by colonial governments. Teachers in these colonies live in constant danger

of being arrested or deported, and it is of paramount importance to give them adequate protection.⁹²²

An article translated from the *Chinese Critic* of 27 August 1931, complained that the Dutch restricted the immigration of “undesirable” Chinese and intelligentsia, and that books were examined when one entered the colony. Furthermore, if quotes from Marx, Lenin, or Stalin were found, one was sent back. The translated by the police excerpt says the following:

“In the Dutch East Indies, communism may mean two entirely different things, when a Chinese is strong pro-GMD, or even merely an ardent nationalist, he or she is likely to be labelled a ‘communist,’ and the native who is opposed to the Dutch rule is just as much a ‘communist,’ though the lawyer of one of the arrested leaders of the ‘communist’ movement pointed out that what that defendant did was no more than what William of Orange did for the Spanish there a hundred years ago. With that understanding of the meaning of ‘communism’ and ‘communist,’ we can then grasp the significance of the Reuter report: ‘Over 180 Chinese are being deported from the Dutch East Indies as a result of police investigations into communist propaganda in the Riau Archipelago’ which form a part of the Dutch East Indies. Such anti-Chinese movement abroad, while deplorable certainly furnish a splendid China for the ministry of foreign affairs to show that it is really interested in the welfare of the overseas Chinese and to prove its competence in protecting the Chinese abroad. The ability of the Chinese government to protect its national abroad was seen not only as a way to raise the prestige of the government but also as a tool to facilitate negotiations for the abolition of extraterritoriality and rendition of settlements and concession and the way to get the gratitude of overseas not only moral but material.”⁹²³

So, since schools were hotbeds of communism, according to the British, who were those “communists” who were influential in schools—the GMD, the Communists, or both?

⁹²² “*Huaqiao xian feng*” [*Huaqiao Avant-garde*]15 July 1931, Canton, translated and cited in “Extracts from Chinese newspapers” in “Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs” September 1931, CO 273-572, p. 39.

⁹²³ CO 273-572, pp. 371-72.

War and Flowers for China: The GMD, Communists, and Youth in China and Malaya

Life stories of teachers like Xu Jie or Zhang Xia—who circulated between China and the Nanyang and maintained contact with both parties even after 1927, when the two parties were supposed to be deadly enemies—speak to the same point. The social trajectory of the Chinese nationalist revolutionary organisations, the GMD and the CCP, was stretching above ideological convictions and party membership. Also, the CCP and GMD had similar problems “mobilising” the youth and drew on the same international models. In December of 1935, the first plenum of the Fifth GMD CEC called on the Party to emulate successful examples of Party youth training in communist Russia, fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany.⁹²⁴

As in China, the Malayan student movement—in which both parties, the Communists and the GMD, attempted to channel their efforts—remained an independent force. There were comparable problems between the CCP and GMD and youth organisations in China, such as overage members, as well as parties’ unsuccessful attempts to co-opt the student movement.

At the same time that the MCP was dealing with the rebellious attitude of the CYL and decided the age criteria for the CYL, in 1931, the GMD national congress decided to form a youth corps (*qingnian tuan*) as a replacement for the probationary term for GMD membership. In 1932, it was decided that youth corps members would be between twelve and seventeen years of age (*shao nian jun*).⁹²⁵ From 1927–1937, students felt alienated from the GMD, except

⁹²⁴Huang Jianli, *The Politics of Depoliticization in Republican China: Guomindang Policy Towards Student Political Activism, 1927-1949* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 1996), p. 103, 173.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

for right after the Xian incident of 1936,⁹²⁶ and the united front during the war was a serious ideological threat to the GMD. In 1938, the GMD organised a youth corps to counter CCP influence among students (*san minzhuyi*, youth corps).⁹²⁷ In December of 1940, 32.4 percent of members were over twenty-six years of age. In July of 1939, the age limit was revised from thirty-eight to twenty-five years of age.⁹²⁸ As in the MCP, there was rivalry between the GMD and the youth corps. The corps mandate was adjusted to serve the student population because of the rivalry between the GMD organisation and its youth wing; some comrades felt that the corps was meant to replace the Party. In 1939, Chiang Kai-shek said that the youth corps needed to come under the leadership of the Party. In the early 1940s, students were not given any leadership roles in the GMD youth corps. Members under thirty years of age did not have a voice in policy-making and practical work. In 1943, at the Youth Corps Congress, out of 321 representatives, only 25 were students. Huang Jianli suggests that in this, the GMD took measures to control the student movement by channeling it.⁹²⁹

Neither the GMD nor the CCP were successful in recruiting students and were boring for the students. The bore of the pioneer organisation was not the product of the state socialism of the years of Brezhnev's *zastoi* but existed before the Communist Party came to power in its early, underground stage. Students found GMD classes of political indoctrination boring. The GMD produced documents on how to make students listen to the Party classes.⁹³⁰ In Kuala

⁹²⁶ Israel, *Student nationalism*, pp. 184-187 cited in Huang, *The Politics*, p. 193; also Wen-hsin Yeh, *Alienated Academy*, The alienated academy : culture and politics in Republican China, 1919-1937 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990)

⁹²⁷ Huang, *The Politics*, pp. 196, 118, 121.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 137, 142, 144, 147, 92. Corps and GMD party merged in 1947. *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 186.

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Lumpur, MCP members, students, boycotted the classes and petitioned Chinese community members as well as British authorities to get rid of GMD Party education and “reactionary teachers” in school.⁹³¹ The difference between the MCP and the GMD was that while the GMD attempted to curtail the student movement, the Communists were encouraging it.

Furthermore, the student movement in Singapore and Malaya, as in China, had a patriotic drive and advocated the prevention of Japan’s takeover of China through diplomacy.⁹³² As in China, where, in the context of the united front, students could advocate for national struggle against an enemy without a Party commitment,⁹³³ in Malaya many students remained outside of either party. In China, the student movement turned students to the CCP rather than the converse;⁹³⁴ in Malaya, this happened after the start of the war. In China, students regarded communist discipline as mobilisation for national salvation, while GMD discipline was denounced as fascist coercion.⁹³⁵ In China, students would only follow a government that they regarded as progressive and revolutionary.⁹³⁶ As Israel notes about China, disillusioned intelligentsia were enjoying leftist literature, but few actually joined the CCP or the CYL.⁹³⁷ There was the same absence of rigid ideological commitments among Chinese intellectuals in Malaya.

Yet student activism in Malaya had a different flavour than that in China. As Israel points out, in China, students were disappointed with the GMD and Sun Yatsen’s lofty

⁹³¹ “Situation in the student movement. ”

⁹³² Israel, *Student Nationalism*, p. 156.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

ideals.⁹³⁸ Perhaps it was different in Malaya, where Sun's ideals had a stronger patriotic meaning. They meant "Chineseness" and not only a solution to social problems. In China, students protested against Nanking's insufficient anti-Japanese policies and against its foreign minister, similar to the MCP aversion to "people's diplomacy."⁹³⁹ The GMD influence in schools in 1930s mainland China remained coercive.⁹⁴⁰ In Malaya, the GMD was banned in 1930, as the Communist Party had been. In China, GMD oppression produced more student radicalism than it destroyed, so when the December 9, 1935, movement erupted, it was appropriated by the CCP.⁹⁴¹ The opposite happened in Malaya and Singapore: The GMD cultivated the students, but they joined the MCP because it was the only option available at the time to fight Japan.

In Malaya, the GMD promoted Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism, and the GMD was banned. This, however, did not prevent students from going on strike against GMD indoctrination or against the school authorities. Yet because of the conflation of the GMD message with the genuine worry about China among the Chinese communities (of which Chen Ping's conversion to communism, triggered by the impulse to liberate China, described in his memoir, is also an illustration⁹⁴²), the nationalist message had a receptive audience, which Communists hijacked or inherited in the package with GMD nationalist discourse. Communists

⁹³⁸ Ibid., p.40.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., p. 51-52.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.38.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁹⁴² Chin Peng first considered joining the GMD military college, but after reading Mao's *On Protracted War* was convinced by it more. Chin Peng, *My side of History* (Singapore, Media Masters, 2003), pp. 47-51.

also inherited the social niche of the GMD followers, which included intellectuals, merchants, and the “middle class.”

The British pointed out that Communist propaganda was effective because “of the anti-Imperialist cry, which has its appeal to all Chinese whether Communist or not.”⁹⁴³ Indeed, the British feared all Chinese, regardless whether they called themselves Communists. And yet the British were not far off the point, since both Communist and non-Communist Chinese eventually joined forces, and many joined the Communists after the beginning of the Second World War.

Over the 1930s, communist ideas were popular among students. However, not many were MCP or CYL members. Even if a large portion of the MCP members in the late 1930s were students,⁹⁴⁴ according to the reports submitted to the Comintern from 1939–1940, “Chinese immigrant schools and newspapers” were the GMD centre of activity.⁹⁴⁵ Thus, apparently, MCP influence was at least not overwhelming in schools, although my argument is based on negative evidence: None of the analytical reports compiled in the Comintern mention that students were among the supporters of the MCP. Perhaps the large numbers that Yong cites for the Anti-Enemy Backing-Up Society (AEBUS) members on the eve of the war, which are based on a recollection of a participant on the eve of the war and British intelligence that the MCP worked through the AEBUS,⁹⁴⁶ were correct, but perhaps the communist influence in AEBUS was not through the MCP organization but on the level of communist-leaning ideas of

⁹⁴³ CO 273-571, “Communism in 1930,” p. 57.

⁹⁴⁴ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 257.

⁹⁴⁵ “Spravka o rabote sredi kitaiskih emigrantov v Malaye. sostavlena na osnove materialov 1939-1940 g.g) [Note of the work among Chinese immigrants] RGASPI 495/62/30/10a-54 esp17, 10.

⁹⁴⁶ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 246-248.

the AEBUS members, which inspired their anti-teacher and anti-GMD propaganda, and their China Salvation activities. After all, Fujian CCP did not recognize Zhang Xia's reference from AEBUS, as was discussed in the previous section. However, in 1939-1940, 8 out of 18 leaders of Singapore party organisation worked in an AEBUS.⁹⁴⁷ In this sense, my argument that students joined the MCP because they were educated by GMD teachers clarifies Yong's conclusions and poses a question for future research. In my view, the MCP had those students join in after the start of the Japanese invasion because they were educated in GMD schools, where they had been infused with a sense of being Chinese. In a way, the fact that the majority of the MCP-led guerilla army of the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) were not Party members⁹⁴⁸ supports the fact that the students could have been supporters of the MCP without being formally in the party before the war in the AEBUS—perhaps even without the Party's awareness. After all, the MCP was self-critical about its “closed-door” attitudes to the “masses” and too-high criteria for the CYL members in 1933–1934, which prevented the CYL from growing.⁹⁴⁹ In my view, the MPAJ received many new recruits because it was the MCP that led the anti-Japanese resistance, and it was the only choice for the young Chinese who witnessed the Japanese massacre of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya.⁹⁵⁰ The effect of the Japanese atrocities on Chinese mobilisation comes through clearly in memories of those who joined the anti-Japanese resistance led by the MCP. I base my conclusion on the recollections of the late Ms. Ling Hanmei (凌寒梅), who joined the MCP propaganda troops during the war as a

⁹⁴⁷ “Biographical data”.

⁹⁴⁸ Hack, “The Malayan Emergency,” pp.3-37, in *Dialogues with Chin Peng*.

⁹⁴⁹ “CC MCP circular no.49 regarding International Youth Day,” 31 July 1933 RGASPI 495/62/20/15-20.

⁹⁵⁰ Hayashi Hirofumi, “Massacre of Chinese in Singapore and its coverage in postwar Japan,” in Akashi Yoji, Yoshimura Mako, eds. *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 234-249.

teenager, as well as on a conversation with Fuzhou journalist Mr. Lin Xiaoyu (林小宇), who shared with me his reflections on the interviews he had conducted with MCP members deported by the British in the late 1940s and are now settled in Fuzhou. All his interviewees spoke about their experience of the Japanese atrocities against the Chinese in Malaya.⁹⁵¹ This is the only partial information that I have; I did not have access to interview recordings. Perhaps, when more information becomes available, the conclusions will be different.

However, contextual evidence also speaks to the validity of this hypothesis. The role of the students and the power of the student movement, which no political party was able to co-opt, has been explored in this chapter. Moreover, the student movement had a profound effect on key events in the history of the anti-Japanese resistance, such as the united front of the communists in the GMD. Similarly to China, where the National Salvation Movement reached nation-wide proportions only after the December 9 student movement,⁹⁵² the second united front was adopted by the MCP as a response to the student movement. In a 1936 Comintern analytical report based on the “Work among Chinese immigrants in Malaya,” the Malay student union and other public organizations advocated for the United Front of the GMD and CCP.⁹⁵³

In a similar fashion, the Chinese students who participated in the China Salvation Campaign in Malaya boosted Party numbers after the start of the Japanese occupation. Girls

⁹⁵¹ Mr. Lin Xiaoyu was also one of the editors of a collection of life-stories of returned Chinese (*guiqiao*): *Guiqiao de Gushi* [Stories of Returned overseas Chinese], ed. Huang Jinshan, (Fujiansheng qiaobao she , Fuzhou shi Gulou qu qiaolian: Haifeng chubanshe, 2007). Stories in this book, however, do not reflect the interviews in absolute accuracy—from what I’ve heard from the editor—because of the censorship of the information related to the Nanyang Chinese communists, and especially to MCP members.

⁹⁵² Israel, *Student Nationalism*, p. 131.

⁹⁵³ “Spravka,” p. 25.

who were selling flowers for China Salvation,⁹⁵⁴ organized by teachers like Zhang Xia,⁹⁵⁵ joined the MCP after Singapore was occupied in February of 1942. Born in Malaya, a daughter of GMD official Ling Hanmei said she would have gone to study in China on a GMD scholarship if those had not been cancelled.⁹⁵⁶ Instead, she joined the MCP after the start of the Japanese invasion. The Japanese slaughter of the Chinese in Singapore pushed young Chinese into the MCP, which organised the anti-Japanese resistance.⁹⁵⁷ For example, Chen Chengzhi (陈诚志) was born in China but came to Malaya with his father to make money as a labourer.

After the start of the war, he was working in a restaurant; subsequently, he joined the MCP guerrillas and participated in “dog-eliminating squads,” squads to fight the Japanese.⁹⁵⁸ The

⁹⁵⁴“Half a million Blood Flowers in commemoration of the Double Tenth. Tenth day of the tenth month anniversary of the Chinese Republic, are being sold in 65 town and rural districts in Singapore today. Anti-Japanese campaign: Double-Tenth Being celebrated quietly 200,000 Chinese Selling “Blood Flowers,” *The Straits Times*, 10 October 1939, Page 10.

⁹⁵⁵ Zhang Jinda, “Remembering Zhang Xia,”]. For the same fundraising campaign, see Huang Yifei, “Huiyi xinma huaqiao lieshi Zhang Yuanbao,” [Remembering martyr overseas Chinese Zhang Yuanbao], *Xianyou wenshi ziliao di si ji* [Literary and Historical materials of Xianyou county. Vol. 4] (Zhongguo renminzhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng xianyouxian weiyuan hui wenshi wei yuan hui. 1986), pp.38-43

, esp.39.

⁹⁵⁶ Interview with Ms. Ling Hanmei in Fuzhou on 21 December 2010.

⁹⁵⁷ There are conflicting opinions on whether the Japanese occupation united or fragmented the Chinese community. According to Turnbull, the Japanese massacre of the Chinese in Singapore, and the retribution imposed on the Chinese, further distanced the Chinese-born from the Straits-born. Overall, the Chinese were not so much concerned with China but with Malaya, with their native place rather than with China. Turnbull, “Overseas Chinese”, p. 373. However, according to Su Yunfeng, the experience of war consolidated the Chinese. Su Yunfeng, “The Contribution and Sacrifices of the Overseas Chinese in Malaya and Singapore During the War Against the Japanese Invasion, 1937-1945,” in *Overseas Chinese in Asia*, pp. 303-324.

⁹⁵⁸ Chen Chengzhi, “Wang shi huiyi” [Reminiscence about the things past] in Tong’an wenshi ziliao di 4 ji [Literary and historical Materials of Tong’an County. Vol.4] (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng Tong’an xian weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao gongzuo zu ed., 1984)

majority of the MCP wartime cadre came from the Chinese-language schools.⁹⁵⁹ Thus, the GMD project in Malaya succeeded: It boosted MCP numbers during the war.



Figure 6. Flowers for China. Fundraising for China Anti-Japanese resistance. Students holding paper flowers, late 1930s.

This photo was taken by the author at the exhibition organized by the Singapore National Archives, “Syonan Years: Singapore Under Japanese Rule, 1942–1945, at Old Ford Factory exhibition gallery, Singapore, December 26, 2010.

The flowers were made by students, members of civic associations, and individuals. More than 180 schools and clan associations participated. The Straits Chinese Relief Fund Committee of Singapore (*Xinjiapo Haixia Huaren Chou Zhen Hui*) was established in 1938 and was chaired by a prominent

⁹⁵⁹ “Xue lanyi jia ying de xuesheng yundong” [Student movement in Selangor] in Song Ping, Yong Zhong, Ah Chuan, Fang Shan eds., *Zhanqian dixia douzheng shiqi. Jiandang chuqi jieduan, Magong wenji, conghu xilie*[Prewar period of underground struggle. The foundation of the party. Documents of the MCP] Ershi shi yi shi ji chuban she, 2010, p. 138-146, esp. 146.

leader of the Chinese community, Lim Boon Keng. The activities of the committee included selling flags, flowers, and souvenirs, and organisation of funfairs, variety shows, and magic shows featuring local and foreign artists. According to the explanatory text to this photo from the exhibition about the occupation of Singapore by the Japanese, the unexpected outcome of the activities of this fund was the solidarity of China-born and Straits-born communities. These young students would become teenagers during the war; this was the generation that joined the MCP-led guerillas.

CONCLUSION

In 1947, the inspector-general of the Straits Settlements Police from 1935 until 1939, Rene Onraet, saw the threat of the overseas Chinese communities for the British, Dutch, and French colonies, where “China [lived] in their millions.”⁹⁶⁰ From the vantage point of 1947, this 1935 assessment would have been seen as an exaggeration. The MCP’s attempt to co-opt the student movement was ineffective in mobilising the youth, despite the popularity of communist ideas among the students and teachers. The CCP indigenisation succeeded among the second-generation Chinese, thanks to the educational efforts of the GMD, which promoted Chinese nationalism. If the MCP’s success was to bring independence to Malaya, as Chin Peng asserts,⁹⁶¹ then the success of the MCP and the Comintern depended on the Nanking policy of promoting Chinese identification by the Chinese in Southeast Asia, in order to counter Japan’s expansion in this region. The success of the communists in Malaya was comparable to that in China, where, in John Israel’s words, “idealistic youth [had] been psychologically driven to seek a totalistic ideological orientation that the party of Sun was unable to provide. Communists were fortunate to be out of power during these years. The CCP won the allegiance of an

⁹⁶⁰ Onraet, *Singapore Police*, pp.111-112.

⁹⁶¹ Hack and Chin, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, pp. 234-235.

impatient generation.”⁹⁶²This chapter has shown that the rise of communism in Malaya was not a result of MCP efforts but rather was an unintended consequence of GMD education policies and propaganda and of the Japanese atrocities against Chinese communities.

The meaning of communism in Malaya for students lay in getting rid of resented teachers and curricula. For teachers, it meant patriotism (*aiguo zhuyi*) and an idealistic belief in communist ideas—for which they would commit violence. While Nanking was busy making the overseas Chinese more Chinese, people were living their civic lives in a social buffer zone between the boundaries of two nationalist associations, the GMD and the CCP. The GMD and the CCP from South China conflated Chinese nationalism in Malaya and in their frontier enclaves. GMD and CCP social boundaries were like the Siamese concept of “boundary” before the arrival of the British—the buffer zone between two polities.⁹⁶³ This was the MCP’s survival space, as well. Once the MCP became rigid in its anti-bourgeoisie and anti-British language and narrowly defined its “nation,” it lost its base of support. We turn in the final chapter to the role of language and discourse in understanding why the MCP would do this.

⁹⁶² Israel, *Student Nationalism*, p. 194.

⁹⁶³ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (University of Hawaii Press, 1997)

CHAPTER 6. LANGUAGE, POWER, AND THE MCP'S LOST NATION, 1939-1940

This chapter is about how the MCP lost its support base because of its language, but at the same time gained a discursive foundation for Malayan nationalism and for taking power and governing. Thus, the Comintern's requirements that the MCP embrace and espouse the goals of Bolshevization both empowered and hindered the MCP. In analyzing how a set of concepts played this role, I build on the approach known as *Begriffsgeschichte*, or history of concepts. Specifically, I draw upon Reinhart Koselleck's analytical category, the concept, a "word representing an idea that is both powerful enough in a certain discourse to direct thought and ambiguous enough to hold within it a range of meanings." According to Koselleck, "Each concept establishes a particular horizon for potential experience and conceivable theory and in this way sets a limit."⁹⁶⁴ The concepts in this chapter are carried by the Chinese words *minzu* (Nation/ nationality/ people), *wenhua* (culture) and *zhengzhi* (politics/govern).

Because of the United Front policy with the GMD, which focused on propaganda in Chinese associations, and because of the deterioration of the economic conditions of the Chinese communities, the MCP as a Chinese association was finally able legitimately to focus on the interests of the Chinese in Malaya. As a communist party, it gained a chance to propagandize its views to a larger audience while also doing China Salvation work. This work was facilitated by the atmosphere of the Second World War and popular protests that erupted in response to the British introduction of wartime economic policies and anti-labour legislation. The MCP had a chance to attract a mass following. However, instead, this opportunity showed

⁹⁶⁴ Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," pp. 82-3.

clearly what had been obvious through the 1930s: MCP radicalism scared away the MCP's target constituency. On the other hand, the by now significantly more theoretical language of Marxism-Leninism in MCP discourse had another consequence for the MCP. This language stressed the values and discourses that reflected and empowered the MCP in its growing ambitions to take power and govern. Those included the change in the discourse of modernity from cultural advancement to political awareness, the importance of propaganda in the army, and the call to arms, which became crucial for the MCP during the war.

This chapter consists of two parts. Part one will show how the political language it adopted both empowered and weakened the MCP as it continued to be a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party. I will show that the MCP's "nation" (*minzu*) was at the same time both Malaya and China, and proletarian; the former empowered the MCP, while the latter weakened it. The latter meaning of *minzu* deprived the MCP of its support base, as did the MCP's anti-British discourse. The MCP became a national party without a nation. Part two will explore the changes in the MCP discourse on the meanings of being progressive, of political commitment, and in regard to the party's attitude toward the armed forces, all of which demonstrated its growing ambitions to govern. We can observe these developments through analysis of the change in discourse of key terms in the MCP texts: *minzu*, *wenhua*, and *zhengzhi*.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The MCP's way of using the word *minzu* in its texts reflected its dual nature as a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party. As a Chinese association, the MCP had to be rooted in both ends of the migration corridor: the MCP's nation was both Malaya and China—that is, it was multilayered. This was central to the strengthening of the discursive foundation of

the MCP's Malayan nation that had been laid by the Comintern. As the MCP was also a communist party, its nation had to be proletarian. When the United Front promoted the rhetoric of conflation of national and class interests, the MCP misunderstood this rhetoric and took proletarian interest to mean "national" interest. This cost the MCP its nation, i.e. its support base. In the following section I will show how in the way MCP used this expression, *minzuliyi* (national interest), it was clear that the *minzu* was sometimes China, and sometimes Malaya. *Minzu* resembles what literary theory has called a floating signifier, as it referred to Malaya and China in different contexts. Alternatively, we can see its meaning as moving -- or "sojourning" -- between Malaya and China.⁹⁶⁵ This overlapping usage of *minzu* allowed the MCP to participate in both national projects. *Minzu* was also used in the meaning of "nationalities" for the "various ethnic groups" living in Malaya. In addition, *minzu* was used in the context of class division and referred to the proletariat. The bourgeoisie were excluded from the MCP's *minzu*. The MCP limited its nation to the proletariat, or "the masses," who were not interested, it turned out, in participating in a party that advocated policies that were detrimental to one's personal wellbeing and safety. The overlapping meanings of *minzu* carried over, and *minzu* continued to mean different things in different contexts. *Minzu* continued to mean "nation," "nationality," "people," and the Malayan "national movement," (*minzu yundong*) which included "all nationalities" (*ge minzu*). In the English language discourse of the day, *minzu* pointed to "race." However, because the English-language MCP documents do not use either

⁹⁶⁵ This issue has been explored more fully in the introduction to this dissertation.

the word “race,” nor is the relevant Chinese word, *zhongzu*, used to any significant extent, I will not analyze this meaning of *minzu*.⁹⁶⁶

The MCP’s *Minzu*: Sojourning Nation

Only under the leadership of the proletariat and Party is national emancipation (*minzu jiefang*) possible.

CC MCP, 1940⁹⁶⁷

As in the early 1930s, the MCP at the end of the decade was embedded in the public discourse of Singapore and Malaya. The idea of an emerging Malayan nation was in the air by the start of the Second World War and was amplified by the British official nationalism after Britain entered the war. This was not too unusual, as English-educated Chinese elites were also talking about the emerging Malayan nation as the younger generation of Chinese, Malaysians, and Indians were brought up in similar lifestyles of combined education in English schools. According to one article in *The Straits Times*, harmony had already existed in Malaya by then. Yet the author was concerned as to whether Malaya would remain a peaceful society; with the rise of “narrow nationalism” and “racial prejudices,” the hope was that they were “building up a Malayan unity, an affinity of morals, of thoughts, of aspirations,” in other words, “a Malayan

⁹⁶⁶ One of the few usages of the word “race” found in MCP texts is as follows: “We are not animals and we want to preserve our races.” “An open letter from the CC of the C.P. of Malaya to the working class of Malay,” 7 November 1930, RGASPI 495/62/6/1a-4.

⁹⁶⁷ “Magong dier ci zhong zhihui yi yijuean,” [The resolutions of the second plenum of the Executive Committee of the CC MCP] 20 February 1940, RGASPI 495/62/28/18-36, esp. 25. Hereafter, “Second Plenum Resolutions.”

nation.”⁹⁶⁸ Members of the Chinese community, however, were imagining themselves as a part of the Malayan nation, and retained their Chinese identity. For example, after the start of the Japanese invasion of China, Chinese writers in Singapore and Malaya abandoned their search for “Nanyang color” and devoted their writing to China.⁹⁶⁹ Yet, according to Chin Peng, the MCP identified with Malaya and felt responsible for fighting for its independence.⁹⁷⁰ Having an allegiance to both Malaya and China was the way the Chinese overseas communities functioned, namely, by maintaining links to both ends of their sojourning corridors: China and their host environment. This allowed them to reconcile two identities and nationalisms, China’s and Malaya’s.

This embeddedness in the local environment and the connection to China were expressed in MCP documents through the discourse of “national interests” (*minzuliyi*). In MCP texts, *minzu* referred to Malaya, China, and even India. This ability to use one concept to represent what—to us—looks like significantly different objects reflected the MCP’s comfort with these multiple or overlapping ideas of national identity, over which nation, *minzu*, they belonged to. My point is that what appears to us as a logical contradiction or confusion was *not so* for the MCP authors. One of the goals of this dissertation has been to recover the world in which the activists of the MCP lived, and to sufficiently translate their experience to readers today in order to show how such a multivalent *minzu* could serve the MCP leadership quite satisfactorily, and more so, that such a use of *minzu* could come quite naturally to people in that

⁹⁶⁸ “Malayan nation: Harmonious society,” *The Straits Times*, 3 August 1939, Page 10.

⁹⁶⁹ Yeo Song Nian and Ng Siew Ai, “The Japanese occupation as reflected in Singapore-Malayan Chinese literary works after the Japanese occupation (1945-49)” in Diana Wong, Patricia Pui Huen Lim, *War and memory in Malaysia and Singapore* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 107-108.

⁹⁷⁰ “According to Chin Peng, “My generation dreamed of doing away with British colonialism in Malaya.” Chin Peng, *My side of history*, p.9.

environment. The MCP's use of *minzu* in this way also provided flexibility and gave the MCP the opportunity to participate in both Malayan and Chinese national projects. Thus, the phrases “national interests” (*minzuliyi*) and “nation” (*minzu*), referred to either or both Malaya and China in different sentences.

For example, in the context of the MCP's decision to change its policy from pro-British to anti-British, *minzu* meant both China and Malaya, or was ambiguous. The MCP described the Chinese bourgeoisie's point of view in “MCP resolutions of the second enlarged CC Plenum,” published in February 1940: the bourgeoisie “saw Britain as China's “international friend” (*guoji youren*), in the same manner as Malays and Indians saw Britain as a protector and Hitler as an enemy. Hence, for national interests (*minzuliyi*) we must not fight against the British, or carry out protests and during the hardship of war we must all bear the burden.”⁹⁷¹ In the same document, the MCP described Malaya's special characteristics as follows: “Feudal forces in each of Malaya's nationalities (*malaiya geminzu*) sell off national interests (*minzuliyi*) and join the front of national traitors.”⁹⁷² Those traitors were those who established legal labour organizations and yielded to British demands, diminished the revolutionary influence among the masses and suppressed the revolution.⁹⁷³ Here, *minzu* refers to Malaya.

In the MCP brochure, “Forward!” (*Maijin*), produced sometime after December 1940, the term “Malayan people” (*malaiya renmin*), clearly echoing CCP and Soviet discourse, was juxtaposed to national traitors (*minzu pantu*): “Day by day deepens the anti-imperialist struggle of the whole Malayan people (*quan ma renmin de minzu fandi douzheng*).” However, in the preceding sentence the discussion was about “national traitors” and was used together with

⁹⁷¹“Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 30.

⁹⁷² Ibid.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., p. 23

hanjian. The “Malayan people” were the Malayan nation. , “national traitor” (*minzu pantu*), refers to those collaborating with the Japanese: Here, *minzu* refers to the Chinese.⁹⁷⁴ Yet, in the resolutions of the second plenum, in establishing a democratic republic, the MCP wanted to “rely not on British running dogs, but on [their] own ‘national forces’ (*minzuziji de lilian*).”⁹⁷⁵ Whether *minzu* refers to Malaya or China here is ambiguous.

The MCP interpreted the United Front idea of conflating class interests (*jieji liyi*) with national interests (*minzuliyi*) as not including the bourgeoisie, but by presenting the national interest as the interest of proletariat. The MCP excluded from its nation the affluent overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*), who had been its supporters in the past.⁹⁷⁶ The MCP continued in “The resolutions of the second plenum” that the call for the concord of labour and capital (*laozihuzuo*) advocated by the Chinese chamber of commerce and Chinese consul Gao Lingbai, and is nothing else but “selling off the national interest” (*minzu liyi*) because they present their class interests as the national interest.⁹⁷⁷

The MCP continued that, “The theory of labour and capital cooperation (*laozihuzuo*) was promoted by the Nanyang merchants and is in fact selling out *minzuliyi* and sacrifices the interests of the workers.”⁹⁷⁸ Clearly, *minzu* in this sentence referred to the workers.

⁹⁷⁴ “Maijin”, [Forward] A pamphlet consisting of materials produced between December 1939 and early 1941. RGASPI 495/62/28/53-84, esp. p. 60.

⁹⁷⁵ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 28

⁹⁷⁶ The Taiwanese communist party was also supported by wealthy party members, such as Lin Rigao, and a sympathizer in Fujian. He Chi, *Weng Zesheng zhuan*[(*Biography of Weng Zesheng*)](Taipei: Haixia xueshu, 2005), pp.204, 239.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁸ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 30.

In the resolutions of the second plenum, the MCP concluded that the united front of various nationalities represented the interests of all strata of the population (*ge jieceng ren min*) and that the concessionist bourgeoisie had to be opposed. Thus, the MCP's *renmin* did not include the bourgeoisie. Apparently, a Comintern reader made a comment against this paragraph: "Where is the United Front?" (*tongyi zhanxian hezai?*)⁹⁷⁹

The Malayan proletarian nation was emerging under the *huaqiao* leadership of the MCP between 1930 and 1934. While it was not yet clear who belonged to the MCP, the Alien Registration Ordinance of 1933 showed that its members were excluded from the official Malaya nation as they all were born outside of Malaya. As a consequence, the MCP stopped using the term "Malayan nation," but still continued to promote a "Malayan revolution" that would emerge on the basis of the United Front of Malaya's oppressed *minzu*. Around 1933, the term *malaiya* started to exclusively denote Malaya as a "nation" while the term *malai* remained the signifier for Malays. However, the MCP's dual national allegiance was obvious from the way it used *minzu* to denote both Malaya and China even then. To be sure, the bourgeoisie that the MCP excluded from its nation was the overseas Chinese bourgeoisie. The evidence of that is that in describing the Malayan multiethnic emerging nation, the only "bourgeoisie" that the MCP mentioned was the Chinese bourgeoisie. One text points to this fact clearly as the MCP argued that the "comprador bourgeoisie" in Malaya "were mostly Chinese."⁹⁸⁰ Since July 1938 the MCP, at the same time as it shifted to pro-British policy, started to advocate for labour-capital cooperation.⁹⁸¹ This policy was criticized after the MCP's radicalization in September

⁹⁷⁹ "Second Plenum Resolutions," p. 26

⁹⁸⁰ "Malaya today," p.67.

⁹⁸¹ Yong, *The Origins*, pp.246-248.

1939.⁹⁸² By 1940, the MCP's nation, like Li Dazhao's China in 1920, was a "proletarian nation."⁹⁸³

***Minzu* as the National Front of "Various Peoples"**

Minzu also referred to Malaya and all three ethnic groups of MCP concern (Malayan, Indian, and Chinese) in the expression "*minzu tongyi zhanxian*," "national united front" or "united front of nationalities." The Malaya *minzu* was to be liberated through the liberation of the Chinese (*zhongguo minzu*), both *huaqiao* and mainland, and other oppressed nations. This "nationalist internationalism" was contributing to cultivating the spirit and discourse of unification of the "Malayan nation." The MCP's "nation," as in the "national movement," was the National United Front (*minzu tongyi zhanxian*)⁹⁸⁴ that the MCP claimed to have established before the war and which included all ethnic groups (*geminzu*) and all classes (*ge jiceng ren*

⁹⁸² Responding to accusations in fostering unconditional cooperation with bourgeoisie, the CC MCP said that, "the party never said to comrades that unconditional cooperation with capitalists is possible." In February 1940, the MCP advocated that the slogan of labour-capital cooperation (*laozi hezuo*) meant to abandon the class interest position. However, the proponents of this cooperation argued that this slogan was a part of party's national United Front tactics (*minzu tongyi zhanxian celue*) that was used in order to bring the revolutionary part of bourgeoisie to the national liberation movement (*minzu jiefang yundong*). "Second Plenum Resolutions," p. 29.

⁹⁸³ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, pp.88, 175. According to Jowitt, defining nation as working class and not as middle-class allows Leninists to attack the institutional base of peasant society. Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (University of California Press, 1992), p. 27.

⁹⁸⁴ In the "strategy of anti-imperialist united front, in order to solve the nationalities question (*minzu wenti*), the party had to pay attention to the common interest of different *minzu* and the particular interest of particular *minzu* and redefine the strategy in accordance with the revolutionary situation." "Resolutions of the Second plenum," p. 29. The formulation *minzu wenti*, is reminiscent of Stalin's "nationalities question." There is no explicit reference to Stalin's discourse on nationalities in the MCP documents. It is possible that it is another case of slippage between metropolitan language and local adaptation of international discourse. In the sections entitled "*Minzu wenti*," the MCP usually talks about the three ethnic groups of Malaya, so there are parallels with the nationalities. At the same time, as in the early 1930s, *minzu* continued to denote both "peoples" and "nation," China and Malaya, as I showed in this section. My thanks to Professor Cheek for this point.

min).⁹⁸⁵ The National United Front included workers and peasants, shop workers, clerks (literally, “urban petty-bourgeoisie,” *chengshi xiao zichanjieji*) and soldiers, but excluded the “capitulationist” bourgeoisie.⁹⁸⁶ The MCP’s “national front” did not include the bourgeoisie. Thus, Malaya emerged in the world of the MCP as a proletarian multinational nation-state not dissimilar to the federation of nationalities within the Soviet Union. The MCP was sceptical about this “harmonious society” mentioned in the *Straits Times* article cited above. According to the MCP, it was British dominance that provided a check on hostilities between the different ethnic groups.⁹⁸⁷ The MCP remained the only political organization that advocated for the independence of Malaya. In 1935-1940, even in the workers’ organizations that were legal, there was no United Front of different ethnic groups; most of the labour movement was comprised of Chinese.⁹⁸⁸

In the late 1930s, the discourse of internationalism (*guojizhuyi*) appeared in MCP documents. I refer to this internationalism as the second stage in the internationalism of the Chinese revolution, in parallel with Fitzgerald’s two stages of nationalism (the GMD and CCP stages).⁹⁸⁹ The first phase was the internationalism of Sun Yatsen’s time. The anti-Japanese war and worldwide China Salvation Movement shaped the vocabulary of another cycle of the conjuncture of nationalism and internationalism in the MCP. The internationalist aspect of the

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁶ “Maijin,” p. 58.

⁹⁸⁷ According to MCP analysis, Malays were poor and they could not compete with the Chinese, who outnumbered Malays in Singapore 2.5 times, even in agriculture, where they were predominant, because “their tools are dated.” Indians mostly worked in rubber plantations. Japanese owned the richest iron mines in Malaya, in Johor and in Trengganu, while Arabs and Jews were house owners in the cities. “Malaya today,” p. 66-67.

⁹⁸⁸ “*Spravka*,” p. 38.

⁹⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p.348.

Chinese revolution and Chinese nationalism were inseparable from the MCP's nationalism.⁹⁹⁰ If in the early 1930s, "internationalism" meant support for the Chinese revolution, now it meant support for the liberation of China. Yet, because of the MCP's inability to involve non-Chinese in the party, this rhetoric was not fruitful for party mobilization. The MCP, as before, was imagining political organization by ethnic groups and presented itself to the Comintern as the only "real political party" in Malaya, as the Malaysians and Indians did not have one.⁹⁹¹ "Although its influence among various 'nationalities'"⁹⁹² was not strong, the MCP argued that it could become a central factor in the political life of Malaya's various nationalities.⁹⁹³ Although the MCP advocated a united front of all nationalities, their propaganda, even if written in English, addressed the Chinese. For example, although the title of the address—"To fellow commercial countrymen of all nationalities," urging them to protest against the commercial

⁹⁹⁰ Internationalism meant allying with the Soviet Union (as it supported China), and with workers and peasants of the capitalist countries in order to emancipate Far Eastern and Nanyang colonies and to liberate China. Internationalism also meant anti-imperialism beyond anti-Japanese Chinese nationalist anti-imperialism, as well as the effort at a joint labour movement by Malaya's ethnic groups. Relations between Malaya's different ethnic groups were to be handled by the principle of internationalism. The brochure section entitled "relations between different nationalities in general" attributed the beginning of the international spirit of the proletariat of "all nationalities" to the workers' strike at a rubber plantation in the Malacca region in 1931, when a few Malay workers took part, and to a coal miner's strike in 1937 with five-to-six thousand participants of different nationalities during which ten people were killed by the police. Other examples include a strike involving two thousand tram workers in 1938, and a strike by workers at a heavy machinery government factory in the spring of 1939. Chinese "patriotic" Anti-Japanese actions were also regarded by the MCP as an act of internationalism, such as was the Singapore port-workers' refusal to unload cargo from Japanese ships in August 1939. "Malaya Today," p. 30-32. Indeed, the nationalist and internationalist were hard to separate for the Chinese communists in Malaya.

⁹⁹¹ "Malaya Today," p.82.

⁹⁹² In the Russian original *natsionalnost*. Ibid.

⁹⁹³ The MCP set the following program for Malays (*Malai minzu*). The Malays were to focus on their independence movement and the establishment of an independent democratic republic, and to get rid of British puppet sultans and landlords. The party must bring together workers, peasants, urban residents - (*shimin*) and form a small everyday struggle for the larger struggle of promoting the transformation of the economic awakening (*jingji juewu*) into the awakening of the independence movement (*duliyundong de juewu*), and from economic struggle to promoting their fraternal feelings towards the Chinese and Indians and their united movement. "Resolutions of the Second Plenum," p. 28.

enactment act—addressed “commercial circles of all nationalities” (*geminzu shangjie tongbao*), it called on them to go to the Chinese protectorate and make a petition against the act.⁹⁹⁴

The MCP’s multiethnic United Front was a continuation of its earlier impulse as a Chinese association to embed itself in the local environment, and it was also a way to maintain its Malayan nationalism discourse. The MCP’s continuing discourse of the cooperation of various peoples was also reinforced by United Front rhetoric of cooperation between the *huaqiao* and local communist parties.⁹⁹⁵ The MCP’s multiethnic United Front was the solution to the MCP’s main goal—Malaya’s national independence. The party planned to explain to the *huaqiao* how British policy affected them as it “indirectly compromised with Japan and sold out anti-Japanese war interests.”

Today, in order to help the anti-Japanese war of our motherland, we need national liberation (*minzu jiefang*). That means supporting the Chinese anti-Japanese war; democratization and constitutional (*xianzheng*) movement; isolating capitalists so that they don’t dare to capitulate; that we must achieve liberty of residence and business for *huaqiao* in Malaya and protest deportations; must participate in the Malaya all-peoples liberation movement and anti-war struggle (*geminzu de jiefang yundong* and *fandi fanzhan douzheng*); aid the independence movement of Malays (*malai minzu de duli yundong*); and fight together for the establishment of the Malayan democratic republic.⁹⁹⁶

⁹⁹⁴ “To fellow commercial countrymen of all nationalities strong protest against the commercial enactment act,” signed by a MCP Singapore EC, 18 November 1939 RGASPI 495/62/28/103-4. Chinese version is “Wei fandui shangye zhuce tiaolie gao *geminzu shanglei tongbao shu*,” RGASPI 495/62/28/106.

⁹⁹⁵ Guixiang Ren et al., “Chinese overseas and the CCP-GMD relation.”

⁹⁹⁶ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 26.

In MCP discourse, to liberate Southeast Asia was to help the liberation of China. It was in line with the CCP-GMD United Front policy.⁹⁹⁷ Thus, the Communist Party, the *avant-garde* of the proletariat of all colonial countries of the Nanyang, had to do several things for the success of national liberation movement (*minzujiefang yundong*); it had to organize the *huaqiao*'s China Salvation Movement and the revolutionary unity of the *huaqiao*; it had to promote the friendship and joint struggle of the *huaqiao* with local brothers from the oppressed nations/peoples (*dangdi beiya po minzu xiong di*); it had to aid the Chinese resistance war; and it had to oppose capitulationist actions (*touxiang*).⁹⁹⁸ Thus, for the success of the resistance war and the national revolution in China, as well as to boost China's international prestige, colonies in the Nanyang had to be liberated by the joint struggle of the *huaqiao* and the local oppressed nations.⁹⁹⁹ The MCP lamented that "the *huaqiao* still only care about how to aid the resistance war, support unity and protect the progress." Thus, *huaqiao* participation in the liberation movement of Malaya was essential to their salvation.

⁹⁹⁷ The pressing need of today's China is to aid the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of the colonial countries of (*Nanyang ge zhimindi de guojia renmin de geming douzheng*). The liberation movement of Chinese people (*zhongguo renmin de jiefang yundong*) supports the anti-imperialist struggle of the colonial countries of the Far East and Nanyang (*peihe yuandong Nanyang gezhimin di guojia minzu de fandi douzheng*). The struggle of the oppressed peoples (*minzu geming douzheng de bei yapo minzu*) and their national liberation (*minzu jiefang*) was possible only if it opposed imperialist war and allied with the Soviet Union. The MCP advocated that "the slogan of rising together of national revolutions of China and of the colonies in Nanyang (*nanyang ge zhimin di de minzu geming tong Zhongguo de minzu geming*) has a pressing meaning today". That is why, "not only for the interests of the independence of the motherland (*zuguo duli*), but also for their own security *huaqiao* in the colonial countries of Nanyang, must stand together with all other oppressed nations brothers (*gebei yapo minzu xiongdi*) and carry out an anti-war and anti-imperialist movement and overthrow their local imperialists (*dang di de tongzhi*) and establish an independent and free country." "This is the most realistic, the most powerful way to help anti-Japanese war of the motherland (*zuguo kangzhan*); nobody can do this honourable duty for us. "Maijin," p. 58

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid. An example of such cooperation was the fact that the Indian branch of the MCP in Singapore adopted a new name, "Friends of China society." Yong, *The Origins*, p.204.

A compilation of MCP historical materials, published in 2010 and citing MCP documents, explicitly talks about the Chinese leading role in the liberation of Malaya. In February 1940, the plenum of the executive committee of the central committee decided that although the *huaqiao* did not play a leading role in the emancipation movement, because their immediate target (*duxiang*) was not British imperialism, they would become the leaders in the future once they made an effort together with Malays (*Malay minzu*).¹⁰⁰⁰ According to how the decision of the July 1941 seventh plenum in Singapore and the events that followed are interpreted in MCP history, the victory in the Malayan anti-Japanese war and the Malayan national liberation movement (*minzu jiefang*) offered the chance to push for Malayan *minzu* and enhance its ultimate prospects of independence. This depended on the progress of the national liberation movement and the victory of the resistance wars both in China and the Soviet Union. It is evident here that the Malaya anti-Japanese war and Chinese resistance war were of one accord (*yizhide*).¹⁰⁰¹ Thus, the MCP had two goals: to liberate Malaya, and to liberate China. Nationalism and internationalism were not contradictory, but rather were two aspects of the same process of the liberation of the overseas Chinese.

This dual national project stemmed from the MCP's nature as a Chinese association. As a Chinese association, the MCP's main goal remained protecting the economic interests of the *huaqiao*. Importantly, this nationalist internationalism shows that there was no contradiction between the MCP nationalism and its internationalism. The seeming contradiction between the two is the main point of MCP historiography. Moreover, it presents the Emergency in a new light, showing that there was no contradiction between the MCP fighting for Malaya and its

¹⁰⁰⁰ “Magong de zhuzhang he celue (1939-1943)” in *Zhanqian dixia douzheng shiqi. Jiandang chuqi jieduan, Magong wenji, conghu xilie* (Prewar period of underground struggle. The foundation of the party. Documents of the MCP) Ershi shi yi shi ji chuban she, 2010, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82.

protection of the interests of the Chinese. In the same manner as in the 1920s and 1930s, the MCP's focus on the *huaqiao* and its new discourse of internationalism, *guojizhuyi*, were connected to the discourse of the combined emancipation of the *huaqiao* and of the oppressed nations. This "internationalism" was explicitly related to the Comintern's proletarian internationalism. "Internationalism" represented modernity and progressiveness in juxtaposition to backwardness (*luohou*) and "narrow nationalism" of the masses. "Internationalism" was also the new justification for the old connection between emancipating the *huaqiao* from the oppression of the colonial governments of the Nanyang, and emancipating the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang and of China proper from imperialism: it justified the impulse to be embedded in the local environment while also staying connected to China. It was liberation and it was modern.

However, despite the MCP goal to "organize a joint organization of workers of various *minzu* in the spirit of internationalist solidarity and as a model for emulating,"¹⁰⁰² the MCP was not able to attract non-Chinese into its ranks. The MCP blamed this on British "divide and rule" policies that resulted in Malayan and Indian masses joining reformists unions during the protest wave of 1939.¹⁰⁰³ The MCP did not have a following among the non-Chinese part of its "nation." The MCP criticized the ten-point program for focusing too much on the *huaqiao*, an orientation that was not sufficient to represent the needs of the whole nation,¹⁰⁰⁴ and on China Salvation work, just as in 1929 when Li Lisan accused the Nanyang party of "making a Chinese

¹⁰⁰² "Second Plenum Resolutions," p. 31.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid. On Indian labour protests in 1940, see Tai Yuen, *Labour Unrest*, pp. 177-193.

¹⁰⁰⁴ "Dui Liu zhong kuoda hui jueyi celue bufen de jiancha" [Partial examination of the resolution of the 6th enlarged plenum] undated, early 1940, RGASPI 495/62/28/86-89, esp.87.

revolution in Nanyang.”¹⁰⁰⁵ “Internationalism” at times contradicted the MCP’s “patriotism” of an overseas Chinese association. CCP members overseas had to be both Chinese and internationalist: In 1939, MCP members lamented that “some comrades adopt a neutral attitude toward the imperialist war; some comrades call themselves *huaqiao* and forget they are internationalists (*guojizhuyizhe*)!”¹⁰⁰⁶

The MCP’s Proletarian Nation, the Bourgeoisie, and the British

The MCP’s complications in its relations with the bourgeoisie were a result of the tension between the MCP’s two sides; one as a Chinese association, and the other as a Bolshevik party.¹⁰⁰⁷ As a Chinese association, it relied on affluent community members for support, but as a Bolshevik party, it had to exclude them. This tension is clear from MCP texts. The following section will show that the MCP discourse of a proletarian nation and its anti-British discourse demonstrate Koselleck’s point that concepts both empower and hinder social actors. The Bolshevik concept of proletarian nation and the

¹⁰⁰⁵ “Some comrades treat the China Salvation work (*jiu guo gongzuo*) of the party as the party’s central work, but while doing China Salvation work, they satisfy the capitalists’ demands and misinterpret the policy of the United Front. “Maijin,” p. 66.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid. This MCP new *guojizhuyi* parallels the CCP discourse. For example, the influence of Mao’s speech at the 6th plenum is obvious: “Can an Internationalist (*guojizhuyi zhe*) communist party member be also a patriot (*aiguozhuyizhe*)? I think, not only can he, but he must.” “Zhonguo gongchandang zai *minzu zhanzheng zhong de diwei*” 14 October 1938, speech at the 6th plenum of the CC, *Maozedong xuanji, dier juan*, (Renmin chubanshe, Beijing 1991) pp. 519-536, esp. 520. Also, Bo Gu argued that there is no contradiction between revolutionary nationalism and internationalism, Bo Gu, *Guoji zhuyi he geming de minzu zhuyi*, [Internationalism and revolutionary nationalism] *Jiefang* [Liberation] 1938, No. 36, pp. 16-20. Another source stated that the nationalism of the GMD (*Guomindang de minzuzhuyi*) and communist internationalism (*gongchandang de Guoji zhuyi*) must merge (*heqilai*) Heng De, “Guoji xingshi lun *minzu zhanzheng zhong de zhong guo gong chan dang*” [Discussing the CCP in the national war and international situation] . *Xin li* , [New Force]1938, Vol.12, pp. 6-8. Starting with the internationalist brigades in Spain, internationalism was the prescribed by Comintern and now the CCP carried it out on the international scene.

¹⁰⁰⁷ In 1939-1940, the tension was also, perhaps, the result of the fact that besides the negative effect on the war that brought soaring prices of daily necessities, it also brought economic boom (Tai Yuen , *Labour Unrest*, p.134), which was beneficial for the “bourgeoisie”.

anti-colonial attitude translated into anti-bourgeoisie language that the MCP adopted as a communist party from the time of its establishment. These put limitations on the MCP's interaction with the bourgeoisie, but the bourgeoisie's interest in a better government in China and the MCP's ambiguous attitude toward the bourgeoisie facilitated the latter's support of the party in 1934. This radical language intensified as the impending revolution era -- the beginning of the anticipated world war and mass protests -- undermined the MCP's support base. Also, as the united front with the GMD and the MCP's attempts to co-opt the protest movement in late 1939 both failed, the bourgeoisie became the MCP's more successful rival for the hearts of the masses. Perhaps this was the reason that by 1940, the MCP started to identify the national interest exclusively with the interests of the proletariat, despite the rhetoric of the United Front, which conflated national and class interests. By 1940, the MCP had no business owners among its members, unlike in 1930 when they made up 20% of the MCP membership and occasionally donated money for the party's activity. Another discourse that alienated the MCP's potential following was the anti-British discourse. As the result, the MCP became a national party without a nation.

Alienating Party Supporters

As early as 1921, Comintern envoy Sneevliet, while visiting Shanghai, noted:

The immigrants, these are the capitalist elements of the Kuomintang. These Chinese have always financed the workers' party and expect it to reunify China, to establish law and order, to eradicate the divisive influence of the constantly fighting Tuchuns [warlords] and the defence of China's independence from foreign dominations. This Chinese bourgeoisie is situated in the colonies and has only begun very recently to set up firms in China. It has no clear political goal. The leadership of the Kuomintang can never really express the needs of this group.¹⁰⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰⁸ Report of Comrade H. Maring to the Executive, Moscow, 11 July 1922, in Saich, *The origins of the first United Front*, pp. 305-323, esp. 318

This quote reinforces Kuhn's point about the business-oriented nature of the Chinese community regardless of their original class background and level of affluence.¹⁰⁰⁹ It is no surprise that in 1928-1929, Xu Jie lamented, as he was trying to convince a *huaqiao* merchant to embrace communist ideas,¹⁰¹⁰ that the *huaqiao* did not understand that the world economy had an impact on the Nanyang, and that they still thought that the Nanyang was the place where everybody would become rich.¹⁰¹¹ According to Ho Chi Minh's report about the situation in the MCP in November 1930, amongst 1,500 members: "The great majority are workers: seamen, builders, rubber workers, miners, etc. There is a small number of intellectuals (school teachers and students), and independents (such as restaurant keepers). To a certain extent they follow the commune economic process of the emigrating Chinese: either trying to save some money to develop what little they possess in their home land, or to possess something if they have none."¹⁰¹²

In 1930, small business owners were represented in the MCP. Twenty percent of the 1,400 party members were "liberal businessmen." In Singapore, among the Chinese community that the party targeted, 20% were merchants, 60% were "toiling masses and liberal businessmen." Both were the main target of the MCP's constituency, as many small business owners went bankrupt during the depression, while the labourers lost their jobs.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁹ Kuhn, "Why China Historians"

¹⁰¹⁰ Xu Jie, "Mansion in Coconut Grove," pp. 34-48.

¹⁰¹¹ He, *Xu Jie koushu*, p.190.

¹⁰¹² Ho Chi Minh's report, 18 November, 1930, RGASPI 534/3/549/25-27.

¹⁰¹³ "To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern," Undated report from 1930, RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4. According to Yong, in the early 1930s, party leaders were petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and working class. Yong, *The Origins*, p. 167.

At least since 1928-1929, the Nanyang party had borrowed money from the “masses” and was not always able to repay it.¹⁰¹⁴ Yet, from the beginning, the bourgeoisie was to be excluded from the newly established revolutionary Malayan nation led by the Malayan National party. Fu Daqing, representing the Comintern opinion, stated that the national bourgeoisie was not a revolutionary force in Malaya.¹⁰¹⁵ The MCP was left with the unresolved contradiction that the bourgeoisie was helping finance the party, but had to be excluded from the Malayan revolution.

At the founding conference, before Fu made his resolution, the MCP members-to-be attempted to solve this contradiction between the two models - one of a Bolshevik party, and the other of a Chinese association - and decided not to exclude the bourgeoisie from their revolutions. It was clear to them that the national bourgeoisie was oppressed and weak, except for in the Philippines and Ceylon, and had “the demand of independence for developing its class interest. This is the sort of anti-imperialist revolutionary action.” “In Burma, Siam, Java, Annam and Malaya the exploitation is so severe that there is no national bourgeoisie beyond agents of imperialist wholesale dealers. They are counterrevolutionary, but they are so weak although we cannot say they are not bourgeoisie and have the thought of the patriarchal society[sic],” “yet it has to oppose the imperialists and work hard to secure freedoms of assembly, speech, press, commerce,¹⁰¹⁶ organization, education, and strike[sic].”¹⁰¹⁷ Furthermore, this movement for democratic freedoms “should be carried out by the proletariat who will seize power.” According to the MCP founding meeting minutes, “We should not forsake the democratic movement because of the counter-revolution of the bourgeoisie. We

¹⁰¹⁴ “Nanyang gongzuo baogao”, 1929, RGASPI 533/10/1818/55-68.

¹⁰¹⁵ “Minutes”, p. 136-137.

¹⁰¹⁶ An example of the kind of regulations the MCP was protesting against was the ban on selling food in the street. A Report, 2 January 1931. RGASPI 495/62/11/28

¹⁰¹⁷ “Resolutions adopted at the Third Congress of Malaya Party,” RGASPI 495/62/3/1-10 esp.3.

must lead the majority of the oppressed masses to secure the true democratic right. Therefore, we have to attempt to establish the Democratic Republics in the Malaya states. This is the essential condition to make a united front of the oppressed peoples.”¹⁰¹⁸ Thus, the “bourgeoisie,” or specifically small business owners, or “independents” as Ho Chi Minh called them, had a role to play because they were interested in a political force that would represent them in their movement for democratic rights in the countries where they were living.

In 1931, the situation did not change much, as, according to an article in *La Dépêche Indochinoise* of March 7, 1933, a Comintern agent, Ducroux, was arrested together with Fu Daqing, the secretary of the MCP, and to-be Comintern liaison with the MCP, Huang Muhan, on June 1 1931 in the company of “rich Chinese who had a book about communism with them.”¹⁰¹⁹

In 1932, during the campaign against the Ordinance that was discussed in chapter 3, the MCP argued that although the national bourgeoisie of all *minzu* (*ge minzu zichan jieji*) were not usually a revolutionary force, and although they feared a worker-peasant revolution, at the time of economic crisis they, like others, were dissatisfied with the British imperialists. They therefore became useful to the anti-imperialist movement. The MCP, hence, was to utilize this attitude among the bourgeoisie. However, the party had to make sure not to compromise the goals of the Malayan revolution, but rather to lead the bourgeoisie to abandon their capitalist mentality, to enlarge the anti-imperialist organization, and to lead the movement of small bourgeoisie (*xiao zichan jieji*), including the members of the Malaya Anti-imperialist League (*mafán*). Throughout, the MCP insisted that the driving force of the Malayan revolution

¹⁰¹⁸ “Minutes,” p. 119.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ducroux’s personal file. RGASPI 532/ 1/ 460/ 39.

(*malaiya geming*) remained the proletariat and peasants, and not the petty urbanities and national bourgeoisie.¹⁰²⁰

By 1932, the MCP realized that the “bourgeoisie” was also their rival for the allegiance of the “masses.” To prevent the Chinese community from siding with the Chinese bourgeoisie, the MCP was to explain that the Chinese capitalists exploited the invocation of national interests in order to get other classes to support them in achieving the interests of their capitalist class, thereby selling out the interests of their own class.¹⁰²¹ The MCP’s proletarian nation was emerging. In this case, the national interests (*minzu liyi*) were those of the Chinese, and their representatives were the MCP.

The MCP began to argue that the bourgeoisie used the backward masses (*luohou qunzhong*) “to walk the road of peace under their leadership.” According to the party, the petty bourgeoisie (*xiaozichan jieji*), intellectuals, and the foreign proletariat (*waiqiao wuchanjieji*) were disadvantaged, as they did not have economic and political freedoms. Here we can see how the lack of equal rights, compared with the rights of those born in Malaya or of those with British citizenship, pushed the MCP members to adopt the “Bolshevik” language in order to express this state of disenfranchisement metaphorically and to do so in the language of class contradiction. Yet again, after the larger protests of the Chinese community against the Ordinance, the MCP regarded the national bourgeoisie as oppressed by the “fascized” British imperialists.¹⁰²²

¹⁰²⁰ Dangwu wenti jueyi an” [Resolution on party work] in “Malaiya gongchandang, Diyici kuo da hui jue yi an,”[the First Enlarged congress of the MCP] 5 April 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/1-21, esp. 9-13.

The success of the campaign for the support of the soviet revolution in China, a campaign that garnered some funds from affluent members of the community, including among locally born Chinese, was discussed in chapters 2 and 4. Besides small business owners, there were apparently bigger capitalists who supported the MCP. For example, though Tan Kah Kee was always critical of communists, he was never criticized by the communists in return.¹⁰²³ Yeap suggested that Tan was sympathetic to communists.¹⁰²⁴ Thus, over the course of the 1930s, the MCP had been implementing the cross-class alliance without calling it the United Front, and was successful like the CCP in China.¹⁰²⁵

After the British declaration of war and the eruption of protests, the MCP was inconsistent over what to do with the bourgeoisie and how the latter related to the China Salvation Movement. The position of the Chinese bourgeoisie was greatly affected by British wartime policies. “British wartime policy affected all strata of the population (*ge jieji ren min*) and the national economy (*minzu jingji*). Fascists under the mask of nationalism¹⁰²⁶ suppress the national liberation movement (*minzujiefang yundong*). As a reaction to that, sultans are helping the British, but the national bourgeoisie (*minzu zichanjieji*) are not satisfied with the British

¹⁰²³ Zheng, *Overseas Chinese nationalism*, p. 306-307, 313.

¹⁰²⁴ Ye Zhongling (Yeap Chong Leng), “Chen Jiageng dui magongtaidu de zhuanyi: cong ’ruoji ruoli’ dao gongkai chongtu,” (The change in Chen Jiageng’s attitude to the MCP: from ambiguous to open conflict) in *Yazhou Wenhua*, no.28, June 2004. My thanks to Professor Yeap for his help in locating materials in NUS library in December 2010. In a sense, there is no contradiction in Tan’s “sympathy,” as both Tan and the communists had the common goal of Chinese overseas unity beyond language/dialect or political divisions. Tan, the MCP, and the Nanking government all aimed for “nationalization” of the *huaqiao*.

¹⁰²⁵ Stranahan, *Shanghai Underground*.

¹⁰²⁶ For examples of British nationalist propaganda, see “New G.O.C. on growing strength of empire,” *The Straits Times*, 29 July 1939, Page 12; Britain’s crusade for liberty, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 September 1939, Page 4.

policy and are progressive (*jinbu pai de*) like Tan Kah Kee.”¹⁰²⁷ In the beginning, the MCP was optimistic about the bourgeoisie, whose economic interests were undermined by British wartime policies and the economic downturn as much as those of the *huaqiao* workers and small bourgeoisie (*xiaozichanjieji*).

The MCP was concerned about the situation of big Chinese bourgeoisie in Malaya, but apparently, it expected the bourgeoisie to be anti-British. In describing the effect of British policies on Malaya since 1930, the MCP talked only about the deterioration of the Chinese economic interests.¹⁰²⁸ The MCP presented the situation in 1939 as follows: Besides unemployment (fifteen thousand unemployed, according to the MCP), salary cuts, and an increase in working hours, the percentage of Chinese ownership of rubber plantations and tin mines decreased. A decade earlier, the majority of rubber plantations were in the hands of Chinese immigrants; by 1939, they only owned 15.9%.¹⁰²⁹ In 1912–1913, Chinese emigrants owned 80% of tin mining, but by 1939 this had dropped to only 34%. According to the MCP, although the Chinese played an important role in the Malayan economy, they remained dependent on British imperialism. In accordance with the 1934 land law, Chinese property could be taken by the British at any time. As the MCP explained, Malayan Chinese were interested in a strong China so that it would be able to protect their property. The MCP

¹⁰²⁷ “Malaya today”, p. 76.

¹⁰²⁸ “Spravka,” p. 18-19. However, it should be noted that this analytical report, which is devoted to the work among Chinese immigrants, may have overlooked the sections in the documents that talked about the effect of war policies on the economies of other ethnic groups.

¹⁰²⁹ Big plantations were growing in size, while small plantations, owned by Chinese and Indians, disappeared. The 1937 economic crisis affected the export of tin and rubber. The Chinese, unlike the British, were not allowed to use the newest mining equipment, and they did not have new technologies in fishing, unlike the Japanese. After the start of the war the British banned the import of tin, iron and rubber without government permission and instituted government control of overseas money remittances and imposed new taxes to aid Britain. The British limited Chinese participation in rice and tea production. “Malaya Today,” pp. 71-72; “Spravka,” p.46.

lamented that the British deprived the *huaqiao* of the liberty to save China (*jiuguo ziyou*) and put obstacles in the way of their fundraising activities.¹⁰³⁰ It is clear from this that the MCP was concerned with the general economic position of the Chinese community in Malaya, and not just the economic position of the proletariat.

Four months later, as the MCP realized that the bourgeoisie did not support the MCP's anti-British rhetoric, the MCP contended that in the process of a national liberation struggle (*minzu jiefang douzheng*), capitalists had become the "loyal stooges" of British policy. For the MCP, the indication of that was the publication by the Chinese consulate (*lingshiguan*) in Singapore and Perak's Chinese chamber of commerce (*zhonghua zongshang hui*). That included slogans of cooperation between capital and labour (*laozihезuo*), Sino-British friendship, and an increase in production, as well as the Three Principles and progressive (*jinbu de*) slogans of anti-Japanese war and unity. To the MCP, that meant that the interests of Malayan Chinese capitalists (*mahua da zichanjieji*) were the same as British interests: to put China into a position of colonial slavery. The next section will discuss another MCP discourse that alienated its support base: its anti-British policy.¹⁰³¹

Mass Protests and Anti-British Policy

Since it was established, the MCP had to explain to its Chinese constituency why they had to oppose the British. The pamphlet on the anniversary of Lenin's death in 1930 is an example of this anti-British propaganda, written in simple language and using imagery that was

¹⁰³⁰ "Maijin," p. 59. "Spravka," pp. 18-19. British suppression of the Chinese community's efforts to aid China, the closure of Chinese organizations, deportations, and press censorship were all also resented by the MCP. Another problem was that unemployment aid was abolished, and mandatory military training for men was introduced. "Malaya today," pp. 75-77.

¹⁰³¹ "Maijin," p. 79-81.

understandable for the “masses,” just as the MCP always had its ideal propaganda discourse. It opened with a question: “Why shall we protest against imperialism?” The pamphlet explained that imperialism is like a tiger sitting in front of one’s house where one’s wife and children are. “You call for a friend and you must either force the tiger to leave or kill it. ‘Our Malaya’ (*womende Malaya*) is exactly in this situation. [...]British imperialism is the tiger that prevents us from improving our own lives.”¹⁰³²

The MCP’s anti-British attitudes were reminiscent of the anti-British attitudes of the GMD in Malaya. In a conversation between the Governor of Malaya, Cecil Clementi, and 17 office holders of the British Malaya branch of the GMD on 20 February 1930 regarding the ban on the GMD for its anti-imperialist stance, Png Chi cheng (Fang *Chih-cheng*), in reference to the first issue of “Hong Kong GMD News,” published in November 1927, calling for the overthrow of the British, remarked: “The words used in the Kuo-ming Tang document about anti-imperialism do not mean we oppose the British, it means we oppose the people who encroach upon Chinese. [...] Imperialists do not mean any particular nation but those people who encroach upon Chinese.”¹⁰³³ Over the 1930s, Nanking policy that was designed to counter Japanese expansion through “Sinicisation” of the overseas Chinese communities was also “anti-imperialist” in relation to other imperialist powers who owned colonies in Southeast Asia. This was discussed in chapter 4. The MCP’s anti-British attitudes were consistent with that. Besides, the MCP was, after all, a communist party that was to fight for Malaya’s independence.

¹⁰³² “Shijie wuchan jieji geming lingxu liening tongzhi qushi di qi zhou nian jinian,” [Commemorating the Seventh anniversary of death of the leader of the world proletarian revolution comrade Lenin] Singapore city committee of the MCP 21 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/5/26.

¹⁰³³ FO 371/14728/2083, cited in C.F. Yong, R.B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in Malaya and Singapore, 1912–1925* (University of Hawaii Press, 1990) pp. 248,252 .

It was little surprise that the party's radicalism prevented the "masses" from joining the party since at least 1934: the MCP was outlawed and participants in the demonstration would sometimes get killed by the police.¹⁰³⁴ In 1938, as it was the CCP policy, the MCP adopted a pro-British policy. It was documented at an Anti-Enemy Backing-up Society (AEBUS) meeting and published in *Nanyang Sin Pau* on 30 July 1938 as "Our Attitudes." The MCP accepted that Great Britain was China's friend, as well as advocated for "capital-labour" (or, employer-employee) concord. AEBUS was the venue for the MCP's China Salvation Movement and had many local branches across Malaya. According to Yong, the MCP used AEBUS up until September 1940.¹⁰³⁵ However, in the documents compiled by the Comintern, a "Malay society of Chinese immigrants for the Anti-Japanese resistance and support of China," -- probably, AEBUS -- is not mentioned as being under influence of the communists.¹⁰³⁶

According to Yong, in May and September 1939 the MCP pledged its cooperation with the British government on the condition that universal franchise and other democratic freedoms would be given to all nationalities. In this period, the MCP also advocated for parliament. Otherwise, the MCP reserved the right to mobilize workers against the British.¹⁰³⁷

The MCP adopted the same stance against world capitalism and dutifully celebrated the Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939. The USSR was a model for helping the

¹⁰³⁴ During the 1 May 1940 demonstration, there was a clash with the police when two demonstrators were killed. "Spravka," p. 37.

¹⁰³⁵ Yong bases his conclusion on the British documents, and on the fact that six out of twelve leaders of the AEBUS in Singapore in December 1937-August 1938 were intellectuals, MCP members, and one CCP member. Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 246-248. Chin Peng in his memoir also talks about the AEBUS as a front organization for the MCP. However, in his memoir it is not clear either just how strong the MCP presence was there, as he talks about the "nationalist patriotic leanings" of the AEBUS and discussions there had "strong political overtones," but no concrete role for the MCP. Chin Peng, *My side of history*, p. 47, 48.

¹⁰³⁶ "Spravka," p.25.

¹⁰³⁷ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 261-262.

oppressed peoples of the world, the MCP declared. It praised the “classless” Soviet Union for helping the national liberation movement of the oppressed peoples (*beiyapo renmin he minzu jiefang yundong*) through the Molotov-Ribbentrop’s pact that divided Poland between the USSR and Germany, and which granted the Soviet Union sovereignty over the then independent and future Soviet Baltic republics, as well as regions in Bessarabia (now Moldova) and Bukovina and Hertz (now parts of Ukraine). The MCP, like the CCP,¹⁰³⁸ was not shocked at the pact.¹⁰³⁹ According to the MCP, its anti-British stance was “in accordance with the Comintern resolutions’ spirit and Malaya internal situation.” The MCP policy was to push British out of Malaya and establish Malaya democratic republic (*minzhugongheguo*).¹⁰⁴⁰

When the wave of protests came, it surely looked like revolution to the MCP. For the MCP, the start of the war was a fulfilled prophecy¹⁰⁴¹ and an opportune time to start the revolution in the Nanyang with the widespread protests against the British war-time policies of

¹⁰³⁸ Van Slyke, *Enemies and friends*, p. 121.

¹⁰³⁹ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” pp.54-55.

¹⁰⁴⁰ “The ten point political program on the struggle for the independent free democratic republic: the 6th plenum’s ten point program cannot last as the situation changed and the orientation toward maintaining the peace doesn’t hold anymore. Here is another 10point program in accordance with the Comintern resolutions’ spirit and Malaya internal situation: push British out of Malaya and establish Malaya democratic republic (*minzhugongheguo*); establish parliament assembly of all parties and anti-imperialist organizations, in each state selected by all people; freedoms of assembly, speech, print, belief, strike etc; wage increase, unemployment and disaster payment, develop national economy, self-governing of customs; 8 hr day; social security, male-female equality etc, women maternity leave, Mu Tsai system to be abolished; democratisation in the military, education in national language, free, unite all oppressed nations of the world, all peace loving nations oppose imperialist war and defend Soviet Union. On the margins of this page a Comintern reader made a note: “what is the tactics (celue) to carry this out?” “Second Plenum Resolutions”.

¹⁰⁴¹ In October of 1939, the MCP sounded victorious. It declared that prewar resolutions adopted at the third standing committee meeting of the executive committee of the MCP’s second CC on 13 June 1939, were correct in predicting the imperialist war that triggered the growth of the national liberation movement of Malaya. “CC New Resolutions,” pp. 54-55.

economic rationalization and anti-labour legislation.¹⁰⁴² On 2 September 1939, the British declared war on Germany. The MCP obviously inflated the number of people who participated in struggles in September 1939 -January 1940, claiming that they numbered hundred thousand.¹⁰⁴³ After the start of the war, and especially as the second plenum of the standing committee of the CC decided to intensify its economic struggle and national control,¹⁰⁴⁴ class relations encompassed the national interest as the national bourgeoisie, Indians, and Malayan *huaqiao* all peacefully surrendered.

The pre-war pro-British policy was something the MCP now resented, and it argued that cooperation with the British (*yuyinghezuo*) in order to protect Malaya caused infantilism (*youxiang*) within the party. Now, the MCP decided that as the political party of class interests and national and social liberation (*minzu and shehui jiefang*), it could not cooperate with the main enemy of all nationalities (*geminzu*) who was suppressing their rights in politics, the economy, and culture. Yet, the MCP did not rule out cooperation with the British in the future.¹⁰⁴⁵ The MCP stopped its anti-British policy not long afterwards, and prior to October 1940, when the CCP in Hong Kong (apparently the Southern bureau that coordinated the United Front in Southeast Asia) instructed the MCP to stop the anti-British policy.¹⁰⁴⁶ In February of 1940, the MCP considered it possible to put up with the British: “We do not say in our program to

¹⁰⁴² These measures were introduced shortly after British declaration of war and resulted in longer working hours and decreased pay in Singapore. “Spravka,” pp.29, 32

¹⁰⁴³ “*Malaya Today*,” p.34.

¹⁰⁴⁴ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p.25.

¹⁰⁴⁵ “Dui liu zhong guo da hui jueyi celue bu fen de jiancha,” [Partial examination of the decisions of the 6th enlarged plenum,] RGASPI 495/62/28/86-89. April 1939 Yong, *The Origins*, p. 198. For anti-British policy see Tai Yuen, *Labour Unrest*, p.169.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 232. Hong Kong was the link between the CCP and the Southeast Asian Chinese community in 1938-December 1941 when Hong Kong fell to the Japanese. Peterson, *Overseas Chinese*, p. 20.

kick the British out of Malaya because at least they do not help fascists. So we say, “Establish a democratic system” rather than kicking out the British. However, in the long run, we must plan to kick out the British and establish the self-determined democratic republic, because their interests are incompatible with the interests of all Malaya’s oppressed peoples (*ge beiyapo minzu*).”¹⁰⁴⁷ Apparently, the MCP reverted to a pro-British policy as a result of local conditions, as Stephen Leong suggested, and at the time that was indicated in an MCP official history source, *Nandao zhichun*.¹⁰⁴⁸

The MCP recognized that the anti-British policy¹⁰⁴⁹ was not popular with the masses and would push them away from the party. The MCP referred to the anti-British slogan as a slogan imposed from above: “However, in a not favourable situation, the Party must not call the masses under its slogans (such as “overthrow British imperialism” and “oppose imperialist war”) . . . but work from the slogans that are initiated by the masses and in accordance with the “degree of awakening” of the masses (*juewu chengdu*), for only in this case can masses come to the Party.”¹⁰⁵⁰ Clearly, the MCP would find itself at odds with the mood of the Chinese community if it were to advocate an anti-British policy, as the Chinese community commonly opposed the Japanese and supported the British: “Generally, those who uphold the resistance movement have more influence than capitulationists, but they do not resist British imperialists.”

¹⁰⁴⁷ Above this paragraph a Comintern cadre wrote “Dui zichan jieji de taidu shi mohu de.” -- “The attitude to bourgeoisie is unclear.” “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 28

¹⁰⁴⁸ Leong, *Overseas Chinese nationalism*, pp, 549-573. “Nandao zhichun” [Spring in the Southern Islands] in Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Apprenticeship of the MCP*, pp. 103-124.

¹⁰⁴⁹ An example of the MCP’s anti-British discourse is the following: “The only road for Malaya people is to overthrow the British to achieve national independence (*minzu duli*).” The MCP interpreted the widespread protests as “anti-imperialism of toiling masses and small bourgeoisie is growing daily”. “Malaya today” p. 66.

¹⁰⁵⁰ “Zhongyang changwei hui dui dangqian gongzuo de xin de jue ding.” [New resolutions on the party work of the Standing committee of the CC MCP] RGASPI 495/62/28/45-52.

For example, the corps for the resistance to Japan and Salvation of the Motherland, which had members that the MCP had tried to recruit (small bourgeoisie, traders, intellectuals, students, workers, shop clerks), did not oppose the British ¹⁰⁵¹



Figure 7. Anti-British drawing, *Qianfeng bao* No. 5, January 1, 1940.

This anti-British drawing is from *Qianfeng bao* No. 5, January 1, 1940.¹⁰⁵² It addresses compatriots of all peoples (*geminzu tongbao*) - - in Chinese -- and promotes “national” unity (*minzu tuanjie*), demonstrating continuing multiple meanings of *minzu*. This publication addresses “all peoples” in Chinese and advocates for “national unity”. Whether intended or unintended, the message here is the

¹⁰⁵¹ “Maijin,” pp. 81–82.

¹⁰⁵² CO 273/662/50336. This image is used with the permission of the NUS library. The photograph is taken by the author.

national China unity and national Malaya unity are about the same *minzu*. This is another example of anti-British propaganda that is simple and understandable for common Chinese, and that is built around British breaching social norms such as raping, butchering and forcibly seizing domestic animals, relieving themselves in public, drinking, summarily arrests and suppression of protests.



Figure 8. MCP propaganda against trade union registration ordinance that was introduced by the SS government in 1939.

This is an example of the MCP propaganda against a trade union registration ordinance that was introduced by the SS government in 1939 and came into effect on 28 January 1940.¹⁰⁵³ The MCP campaigned against the ordinance, as it required all trade unions to register with the registrar of trade unions, which had the power to refuse the registration if the union was perceived to potentially

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid. The image is used with the permission of the NUS library. The photograph is taken by the author.

participate in unlawful activity. Both this and the industrial court ordinance of 1940 prescribed to settle industrial disputes by industrial courts.¹⁰⁵⁴

Because of its anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie discourse, the MCP was unable to attract a following in other Chinese associations where the MCP started to work as a part of the CCP United Front efforts. Ironically, that happened during the MCP United Front strategy of spreading propaganda among the members of other Chinese associations and now justified the focus on *huaqiao* for fundraising for China's anti-Japanese resistance. This allowed the MCP to legitimately focus on the interests of the Chinese community after ten years of criticism by the same "immigrant communists" for having an "immigrant mentality" as the demands of the Chinese in Malaya were "to liberate China," as the MCP contended.¹⁰⁵⁵ In 1939, the MCP was duly advocating for what was termed a "bourgeois" revolution in correspondence with its mandate as the protector of Chinese interests.¹⁰⁵⁶ After the British declaration of war, the introduction of the wartime measure and the start of the mass protest wave, the MCP launched an anti-British policy that alienated its potential support among Chinese associations. As a result, the MCP was not able to capitalize on the widespread protests in the fall of 1939, and lost its nation, despite active participation in the China Salvation Movement.¹⁰⁵⁷

¹⁰⁵⁴ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 277

¹⁰⁵⁵ "Maijin," p. 29

¹⁰⁵⁶ The MCP advocated the following : the election of a parliament by all Malay states; punishment of fascists, national traitors, and corrupted bureaucrats; national independence ; democratic freedoms; wage increases and unemployment and natural disaster relief; development of the national economy, education in national (*minzu de*) languages, and free education for the disenfranchised; development of national culture and unification of all oppressed people of the world; support for the Soviet Union, the resistance war in China, and the national-liberation movement of India; and a united anti-imperialist front of all nationalities. "Malaya today," pp. 41, 47.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Yong, *The Origins*, pp. 242-268.

The MCP Working in Other Chinese Associations

The success of the work conducted by the CCP Southern Bureau (*nanfang ju*) in *huaqiao* communities depended on its work in Chinese associations (*shetuan*).¹⁰⁵⁸ The MCP worked in provincial lodges (*huiguan*), as well as in China Salvation organizations. Aid to China campaigns, such as the anti-Japanese boycotts, were the activities that the MCP reported to the Comintern.¹⁰⁵⁹ The MCP was establishing a secret network of study societies in legal “mass” associations, such as provincial associations (*huiguan*) and among secret societies (such as the Three Stars Society, *San Xin Dang*).¹⁰⁶⁰ Yet the MCP was not successful in these, either. At first, the MCP reported an increase since September 1939 in the number of masses involved in activities organized by the party. This increase was perhaps related to the fact that the MCP attempted to tap into the protests that were caused by the British wartime policies.¹⁰⁶¹ However, judging from other parts of the same party reports, the party’s popularity continued to decline. Two reports, compiled in Russian and based on the MCP documents, have a self-congratulatory

¹⁰⁵⁸ Guixiang Ren; Hongying Zhao, *Chinese overseas*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Its activities included some strikes in 1937 and participation in the 9 January 1938 rally of Chinese immigrants in Singapore at “International day of aid to China.” Aid to Chinese campaigns in some places “was not without MCP leadership,” and contributed to strengthening the motherland salvation United Front in the Bandarimaharani MCP-led anti-Japanese boycott. “Malaya Today,” p. 84.

¹⁰⁶⁰ The Party’s strategy was to develop secret organizations in mass legal organizations to conduct educational work and establish small groups (*xiao zu*) -- newspaper reading group (*du bao ban*), research society (*yanjiu hui*) etc. “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 33.

¹⁰⁶¹ In the report prepared by the Comintern, there was an increase in the party influence reported. Since September 1939, the number of masses involved increased: in Pahang, it increased seven times; in Selangore four times; in Penang three times; and in other places, the increase was more than double, with the exception of Malacca, which saw only a 30-35% increase. The party led more than 300 workers’ protests with more than 80,000 participants in April-September 1939. Starting from September 1939, in Singapore alone there were 120 protests, with over 40,000 participants. “Spravka,” p.46. This kind of exaggeration in Comintern reports apparently came from the MCP “Maijin”. According to the first half of the report, the number of participants at the demonstration on May 1 included 30,000 members of the General Labour Union. Since August 1939, the number of masses who participated in the struggle increased twenty-fold. These struggles awoke 1 000 000 masses since January 1939, and there were 200-300 strikes and 10 times more masses participated. The MCP also reported that the “persuasion” of “opportunists” in Singapore brought about the increase in Party membership. “Maijin,” p. 59.

tone, which can be attributed to the selectiveness of the reports' authors; they were writing at the time of Stalin's repressions in Russia and would not have wanted to report negative information about a communist party. This is evident from the fact that they state that the MCP carried out Stalin's decisions while it was out of touch with the Comintern starting in 1934. They also state that the MCP had been receiving Comintern materials through the CCP, judging from the quotes of Stalin, Togliatti, and Mao in the materials.¹⁰⁶² Yet, the information in these reports is still useful in an absence of evidence of other kinds of party activities, which would have been reported if they were mentioned in the MCP reports.

The party slogans did not interest the members of Chinese associations. Citing the "backwardness of the masses," the MCP abandoned work in the China Salvation Movement (*kangyuan zuzhi*) and other Chinese associations. Moreover, the MCP, because of the "backwardness of the masses," abandoned even China Salvation Movement work (*kangyuan zuzhi*) and work in other Chinese associations in some places.¹⁰⁶³ The executive committee of the CC criticized this and argued that the party had to revive, support and revolutionize the China Salvation work and intensify the collection of donations and the propaganda in these organizations, as they were anti-imperialist and organizationally independent.¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁶² See, for example, "Maijin," p. 79.

¹⁰⁶³ The criticism was that comrades conducted propaganda in legal organizations, despite the fact that the masses were backward. Some comrades "applied a rightist point of view" and were afraid that masses would go the reactionary way, and, like in Perak, canceled open work in Chinese associations (*gongkai shetuan gongzuo*). The right course of action was not to be afraid that the masses were backward (*luohou*) but rather to implement the party line correctly. Another problem was not letting new members enter the party ("narrow closed doorism"). According to the MCP itself, the party thought that they advocated for the interests of workers and peasants and a multi-ethnic united front (*minzutongyi zhan xian*), but in fact it was "a secret organization with a narrow class outlook" (*Mimi de xiaai de jieji guandian*) because it did not involve petty bourgeoisie (*xiao zichan jeiji*). "Second Plenum Resolutions," 28.

¹⁰⁶⁴ "Maijin," pp. 55-56.

Similar to the 1932 campaign for the support of Chinese revolution (*zhongguo geming*), the party was “behind the masses”. In 1940, the Party admitted that it was not influential even among Chinese immigrants. The party reported that in Trengganu, Selangor and Johor the party organizations were weak and communist influence was almost unnoticeable.¹⁰⁶⁵ The number of Malays and Indians in the party was negligible, and the number of workers among leaders from the CC to lower level cells was very small. The leaders of the party organization were, “as a rule,” Chinese communists.¹⁰⁶⁶ The situation with the MCP’s influence in the Chinese community was gloomy:

There are two forces among the broad masses of workers and peasants, around seventeen thousand people; all are Malay sprouts (*malai douhua*), immigrants from bankrupt villages back home (*guonei*). [They are] middle, poor peasants and agricultural labourers, bankrupt middle businesses owners from the cities and lower level (*xiaceng*) labourers. Since the 1929 world economic depression, a lot of local (*bendi*) petty capitalists (*xiaozichan jieji*) went bankrupt and became proletariat (*wuchanzhi*). For these historical factors, the revolutionary force of the masses of Chinese immigrants in Malaya (*mahuaqiao zhong*) for the most part cannot have proletarian class consciousness (*meiyou neng gou juyou duncun de wuchanjieji yishi*). There are about several tens of thousands of (*shuwan*)¹⁰⁶⁷ workers under the party’s influence who went through training of economic struggles, and their class consciousness (*jieji juewu*) has risen. However, we must admit that the greater part of the masses has strong nationalist ideas (*nonghou de minzu guannian*),” which, because of British oppression, [...] grow day by day. They support anti-Japanese war, unity, and they are progressive. However, party influence over this force is not common (*bu pubiande*), and what is common (*pubiande*) is backwardness (*luohouxing*). Another force is the urban petty bourgeoisie, urban residents, students and intellectuals (*chengshi xiaozichan jieji shimin xuesheng zhishi fenzi*). This force has been oppressed by the British for years. The national

¹⁰⁶⁵ “New CC Resolutions,” p. 51.

¹⁰⁶⁶ “Spravka,” pp.48-49. The MCP reported that the Stakhanovite movement was launched in the struggles in various places in Malaya and was productive. “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p.24.

¹⁰⁶⁷ According to *The Straits Times*, 25 October 1937, Page 13, MALAYAN REDS ALSO PLAN “UNITED FRONT.” The MCP itself claimed to have 10,000 members.

bourgeoisie are almost all bankrupt and are more and more disappointed with Malaya as the war unfolds and they see *kangzhan* as investment opportunities in China. They support the anti-Japanese war and unity (*tuanjie*) and are progressive, but they are pessimistic about its perspectives and have vacillation and fear. The comprador capitalists and defeatists have influence over the masses with their ideology of nationalism and its backwardness (*minzu guannian ji qi luohou xing*) and opportunist policy (*touji zhengzhi*). Because of all this, and the narrow class-mindedness of the comrades and mechanistic application of the Party line. . . it makes the job of defeatists easier. For instance, because comrades everywhere raise anti-British slogans, masses support concessionist (*toujian touxie pai*) slogans. Also, the slogan of class struggle helped the activity of concessionist organizations. This is a grave warning that if the party doesn't abandon its class narrow-mindedness, the danger of breaking from the masses is looming.¹⁰⁶⁸

Thus, anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie discourses alienated the masses, although the party claimed to have a symbolic “large” number of followers—“several tens of thousands.” The MCP’s rivals, the “capitalists,” whom the MCP excluded from its “nation,” had influence over the masses, not the MCP.¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus, the MCP was to lead Malaya’s proletarian nation in the “national” movement. Yet, since 1930, most “nationalists” and those most likely to respond to the party’s message were capitalists,¹⁰⁷⁰ who were now excluded by the MCP... The capitalists’ had demonstrated their response to the party’s message since 1929 through their occasional support for the party. Thus, the MCP would no longer have its *minzu* to represent if it excluded the bourgeoisie, since the MCP did not have influence over the Chinese immigrants who had strong nationalist moods. Neither did the MCP have a non-Chinese following. The MCP’s United Front with other ethnic groups, that is, the “Malayan nation,” remained an objective, not

¹⁰⁶⁸ “Maijin,” pp.79-80.

¹⁰⁶⁹ However, Chin Peng, whose family owned a bicycle shop like many other Chinese immigrants, could also be considered as belonging to the “petty bourgeoisie.” See Chin Peng, *My side of history*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷⁰ According to a 1930 report, merchants and intellectuals had stronger national ideology. “To the CC of the Chinese Party and the Comintern,” undated report, 1930, RGASPI 495/62/11/1-4.

a reality. The MCP remained focused on the *huaqiao*. In the end, the MCP did not represent either the Chinese or Malayan nation. As a result, the MCP was leading a “national” movement without a “nation.” The next section will discuss the discourse that alienated the MCP’s potential supporters in the Chinese associations. This discourse was the MCP’s anti-British policy.

National Party without a Nation

In 1940, the party started to realize the detrimental effects of its anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie rhetoric as it lost its support base. The MCP was responding to the wave of protests against British wartime measures.¹⁰⁷¹ However, the MCP’s attempts to organize the population under its leadership during the protests were not resulting in what they expected. Pro-British attitudes were growing and according to Tai Yuen, in 1940, the overall downturn of labour protest activities was the result of pro-British attitudes.¹⁰⁷² It was the bourgeoisie who gained the support of the masses, instead of the MCP. Due to its radical language, the MCP lost its “masses” to the “bourgeoisie.”

Party membership on the eve of the war was already half of what it was in the early 1930s. It numbered around five hundred.¹⁰⁷³ This number is inferred based on the document

¹⁰⁷¹ As the MCP put it, many struggles of the masses were under the slogan of the CC MCP 12 September 1939 resolution “against increasing people’s burden in wartime.” “Second Plenum Resolutions”. pp. 21, 22.

¹⁰⁷² Tai Yuen, *Labour Unrest*, p. 172.

¹⁰⁷³ However, it also should be remembered that if the party identity was “weak” (*dang guanian* as the MCP complained. Perhaps, many just did not join the party formally, but were involved in the movement. As before the war, the MCP continued to lament the relative backwardness of the masses (*xiangdang luohou de qunzhong*) and its own inability to provide activities appropriate for the masses’ objective revolutionary condition. The party’s cultivation of Marxism-Leninism was insufficient” (*dang dui maliezhuyi de xiuyang bu gou*) and discipline was loose. The development of party organization was

dated January 1940, which said that the numbers had doubled and that claimed that the party had one thousand members,¹⁰⁷⁴ with cells in many industrial centres throughout Malaya and Singapore. This data contradicts Yong's estimates that by December 1941, the MCP had five thousand members.¹⁰⁷⁵ It is hard to imagine that in one year, the membership had grown so significantly, but it is not impossible. However, the protests were so widely spread -- according to the MCP in just four months, from September 1939 to January 1940, more than one hundred thousand workers participated in strikes, even if we suppose that the numbers are exaggerated.¹⁰⁷⁶ Yet the MCP was unable to capitalize on this.

a priority over the development of mass organizations. The party's development was halted by arrests, temporary termination of activity, expulsions, and the abolition of the *arrière-garde*. The party did not match the revolutionary demands of the masses, and since the executive committee plenum, the number of masses connected to the party had plummeted instead of increasing by three-fourths, as planned. Some joined the yellow trade union. Some in the past had just covered the upper strata (*shangceng*), but with all the masses calculated, or with calculations made on the basis of representing the few awakened masses, the real number was 70-80% of the claimed figure. The number increased in Malacca and Johor Bahru and Kedah. In south Malaya, Singapore and Johor Bahru, the masses went through struggles and training and were more reliable than in the past. However, in north Malaya, in Penang, Perak organizations expressed dangerous liquidationism (*quxiao xing*). The majority of the struggles happened in Singapore. Since the EC plenum, there had been some 250 struggles in which fifteen thousand people took part, and among them, ten thousand were workers from Singapore. The party still did not secure a basis in urban centres or the most important rubber plantations, mines, and big industries. The party not only could not lead the national liberation movement (*minzu jiefang douzheng*), but even often became the obstacle standing in the way of the masses. Other shortcomings were the lack of ideological unity, a lack of attention to the development of the organization, the failure to involve industrial workers, insufficient propaganda among Malays and Indians, and not enough exposing British colonial policy and the Japanese invasion while doing work in the China Salvation Movement. "Maijin," p. 62, 64, 81; "Second Plenum Resolutions, p. 25)

¹⁰⁷⁴ British exaggerated the numbers of the MCP membership. According to The Straits Times, the MCP itself claimed to have 10,000 members, nuclei of "well-trained agitators" who were building up cells. "Pan-Asian creed" of the MCP was also noted by the police. However, the British realized that because the majority of MCP leaders were banished in the 1930s and it was not possible to have a stable leading centre. "Malayan Reds also plan 'United Front,'" 25 October 1937, p. 13. The British, however, in the newspapers, usually exaggerated the strength of the communists in Malaya, unlike in the CO records. According to a 1928 official police statement, the communists had "good organisation, clever leaders and the will to progress." "Communism in Malaya. present positions," The Straits Times, 16 November 1928, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Yong, *The Origins*, p. 275.

¹⁰⁷⁶ "CC New resolutions," pp. 44, 45.

In 1941, the MCP criticized itself for maintaining the position of narrow class consciousness instead of maintaining the position of the unity of class and national interests (*jiejie liyi he minzulili shi yizhi de*).¹⁰⁷⁷ In March of 1940, the MCP started a political unity movement (*zhengzhitongyi yundong*) to increase the party's connection to the masses. The CC criticized this connection as weak as a result of the comrades' insufficient understanding of its resolutions and for having little understanding of lower level comrades (*xiaceng tongzhi*).¹⁰⁷⁸ The party offered a self-criticism for the weak cohesion (*tongyi*) between the Party and the lower-level labour movement (*xiaceng zhigongqunzhong*).¹⁰⁷⁹ There were still not many party cells in the main industries, as was the case in the past.¹⁰⁸⁰

The party analyzed its failure as follows. Propaganda and the discussion movement (*taolun yundong*) did not revolutionize the masses "beyond superficial lectures." Other errors were that the protests were "legalist," that the party did not understand the meaning of political unity, bolshevization, or anti-imperialism. Because of all these reasons, the comrades' work performance was "ordinary." The MCP tried to solve the problem of disconnection with the masses by making regulations that each member must establish connections with ten or several tens of members of the masses. The party was said to be not an *avant-garde* of the masses, but

¹⁰⁷⁷ "Maijin," p. 68. This idea can be traced back to 1932 in China. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, pp.11-12.

¹⁰⁷⁸ "Maijin," p.65.

¹⁰⁷⁹ To solve the problem of lower level cohesion in the labour movement (*zhigong yundong*) (*xiaceng tongyi zhanxian*), the party was to participate in yellow unions and other "organizations of the masses," to establish reading societies (*dushuhui*), to promote non-party activists to the position in the party branches and secretariat, and to involve non-party members in the party while at the same time educating them. The party was to tell the masses where the struggles took place and encourage them to participate. "The party must avoid becoming the tail of the masses and fit the education to the moods of the masses in order to develop the party." The Party was also to develop organizations of other ethnic groups (*geminzu zuzhi*). "CC New Resolutions," p 47.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid.

rather often behind the masses. That was the situation when the struggles “had already become a part of everyday life for various nationalities, but the party did not work at the lower level of the United Front struggles.”¹⁰⁸¹ Comrades only needed not to be lazy (*bu pa mafan*) and to creatively (*chuangzaode*) lead the masses, especially after the suppression of the struggles.¹⁰⁸² For the first time, the party was called backward (*dang zuzhi de luohou*). “If the party doesn’t Bolshevice, it will be behind the masses.” Even where the party would organize small groups of five to twenty people, not only could it not handle the masses, but instead it was the masses handling the party (*bawo*). Where there used to be tens of comrades and hundreds of masses, there now remained only tens of masses and just over ten comrades. Closed-doorism based on class outlook (*jiejiguandian*), or narrow-minded rightists’ closed-doorism, was growing and prevented the membership from increasing.¹⁰⁸³ The Party criticised comrades for overestimating the progressiveness and revolutionary spirit (*geminxing yu jinbuxing*) of the masses. Only masses in Singapore were noted for being “different,” “not backward”¹⁰⁸⁴ In one

¹⁰⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid. The criteria for the new members were not uniform. The following procedure was in place for accepting new members (*dang duixiang*) into the party. Before a person could become a party member, he had to be given party printed materials to read and to have a discussion about party matters. At the same time, the party had to understand from different sides the person’s family background, social connections (*shehui guanxi*), personal habits, positive and negative sides, and decide whether the person was ready to become a party member. The purpose was to filter out those who were planted in the party. Once the person became a party member, the party had to help him to complete a reserve (*houbu*) period, and with class warmth (*jieji reqing*), educate him and to determine whether he could be accepted into the party. The person who introduced the new party member held full responsibility toward the party. Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁴ On the other hand, the MCP was self-critical for overlooking the backwardness of the masses and their historical development, and being misled by their “anti-imperialism.” The party’s connection with the masses declined and was only connected with upper strata of the mass organizations; membership dropped as a result. There was also a problem of underestimating the “masses” potential. Some comrades even decided to stop working in legal organizations (*shetuan*) like in Perak, and to dissolve old *shetuan* (apparently, the whole organization was established by communists). Comrades “underestimated the revolutionary demands of the masses, and overlooked the historical route of

of these celebratory reports prepared by the Comintern in 1941, it was mentioned that from September 1939 to January 1940 the “majority” of workers’ strikes were under the MCP’s leadership.¹⁰⁸⁵ However, the MCP’s own reports show that this was not the case. The MCP regarded this strike wave as larger than the one in 1936-37, but even in this report prepared by the Comintern, the MCP was criticized for having a “disdainful” attitude toward the labour movement organization.¹⁰⁸⁶

As these quotes show, the MCP’s relations with the “masses” were the same as they had been in the early 1930s. Yet the MCP had never sounded so desperate. The reason was that the MCP had been defeated by the bourgeoisie in the battle for the masses. The organizations of the masses “became the tools of capitalists,” and “the party lost its independence.” As the result of the party’s anti-British rhetoric, the bourgeoisie was more successful in attracting the masses while the party lost its support base. The MCP was not popular among the masses, while the GMD had a tangible benefit to its membership -- opportunities back in China.¹⁰⁸⁷ The party

development of the masses while trying to mobilize them (*qunzhong zuzhi gongzuo*). Especially in Northern Malaya, they saw that the anti-imperialist mood (*qingxu*) is growing, but overlooked the history of the backwardness of the masses. Another problem was that some comrades made union work some kind of secret organization work. All legal work stopped, and thus in north Malaya the membership increase in the past several months dropped greatly.” “Maijin,” p, 64. 81.

¹⁰⁸⁵ “Spravka,” p.34, 35.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., p.37.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Besides, the MCP was defeated by the GMD in their competition for the allegiance of the “masses,” as they were both involved in China Salvation work. According to an analytical report compiled in the Comintern -- where there was no reason to downplay the success of the party, as the tone was otherwise celebratory -- the report says that the GMD’s followers were not united, and included the immigrant bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and workers. According to the report, most of the GMD members in Malaya were immigrant bourgeoisie and culture workers. The GMD existed semi-legally and worked through legal mass social organizations, newspapers and schools “established by Sun Yatsen.” Students, apparently, were not involved en masse with the MCP either. The GMD was a rival for the hearts of the masses. In its reports to the Comintern, the MCP denied that the GMD had support, but people had joined the GMD for future career and investment opportunities in China. “Spravka,” pp.17, 10, 20; “Malaya today,” p. 78. The reports noted that the GMD started to work among the masses and carried out drama performances and meetings, unlike in the past. The United Front was not working well, as the

was self-critical in saying that not standing on the side of the unity of class and national (*minzu*) interests, but instead only paying attention to the interests of workers and peasants (*gongnong*), had opened the party to attacks by reactionary capitalists for being the representatives of narrow class interests. The capitalists, in contrast, put forward the slogans of capital-labour cooperation (*laozi hezuo*), cooperation with the British (*zhongying qingxi*), and peoples' diplomacy (*guominwajijiao*).¹⁰⁸⁸ The party realized that it was detrimental to "national" unity: "Besides, if our party counts on workers' and peasants' movements and not on an all-national movement (*quan minzu yundong*), how can we struggle against the enemies? This will help enemies to break the nation's unity (*fenhua minzu de tuanjie*)."¹⁰⁸⁹ The MCP's *minzu* was its anti-imperialist front and included residents of central cities—urban masses, such as -shop workers, coolies, handy-craftsmen, the proletariat, peasants, and some small traders (*xiao zichan jieji*).¹⁰⁹⁰ To the MCP, to mobilize them meant to mobilize (*dongyuan*) the whole nation (*quan minzu*) "without which we can't speak about mobilization of most of the people (*da duo*

GMD "lied to the masses" that the CCP no longer existed. The MCP and GMD targeted the same social circles. The Corps for the Resistance to Japan and for the Salvation of the Motherland recruited Chinese to serve as officers in the army in China. Their mass base was the petty bourgeoisie, traders, intellectuals, and students. They "reluctantly accepted" workers and shop clerks into their organization. This organization did have members among the social strata that the MCP was trying to recruit. However, shop clerks, who were the majority of MCP members, were not accepted into this organization. In Kuala Lumpur, organization members were "big capitalists" and writers. This illustrates that workers wanted to join the Corps of Resistance to Japan rather than joining the MCP. "Malaya Today," pp. 78-79, 81-82.

¹⁰⁸⁸ "Maijin," pp. 81-82.

¹⁰⁸⁹ In order to neutralize the effect of the British hiring labour unions (*gonghui dangs*) to break up workers' struggles, the MCP decided to work among secret societies (*sihuidang*) and apply a "warm national feeling" (*qingqie de minzu ganqing*) in order to unite them (*lianjie*). "Maijin," pp.42- 46. Here, *minzu* was both Malaya and China since the societies consisted of Chinese. The party was to appeal to the feeling of national identity to attract the members in secret societies into a communist party. Like in the CCP, the MCP in its United Front tactics was seeking non-ideological methods to attract friends and kinship ties. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁹⁰ "Second Plenum Resolutions," p. 32-34.

shu ren minde liang).”¹⁰⁹¹ However, this nation was not under MCP influence. The MCP was not successful in capitalizing on the labour unrest of late 1939. In the MCP’s view, the masses harboured a fear of the party (*haipa xinli*) because of the enemy’s propaganda.¹⁰⁹² The MCP complained that the workers’ class awakening (*juewu*) was not at all clear, and their economic awakening superseded a class awakening (*jingji jue wu chao guo jieji jue wu*).¹⁰⁹³

Thus, in early 1940, the MCP started to realize the detrimental effect of anti-British and anti-bourgeoisie rhetoric. The party criticized past policies for their narrow class consciousness, that is, not taking into consideration the small bourgeoisie, as well as internationalism, in their propaganda among workers.¹⁰⁹⁴ Thus, the tension between the MCP’s goals as a Chinese association (position of the Chinese vis-à-vis the British colonial government) and its goals as a Bolshevik party (overthrow of the British) resulted in the MCP’s loss of support entirely. To deal with these problems and to carry out mobilization successfully, the party was to abandon its narrow-minded class outlook and implement open Chinese organizations (*gongkai shetuan*) and establish party organizations according to the territorial division (streets),¹⁰⁹⁵ not the organization of party cells according to industry, as had been the policy before. In February of

¹⁰⁹¹ “Maijin,” p. 82.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid., pp. 65.

¹⁰⁹³ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p.23.

¹⁰⁹⁴ “Narrow-minded patriotism” (*aiguozhuyi*) was linked to a narrow-minded class ideas (*xiaai de jieji guannian*) “Many comrades think that the core of the national liberation struggle is workers and peasants (although there are a lot of factories, plantations etc. where there is no party nucleus) and they overlook the petty bourgeoisie (*xiao zichan jieji*). They think they are the core of the national liberation struggle, while in fact they exercise closed doorism.” They focused on workers and peasants and labeled the ‘middle bourgeoisie and the backward masses (*xiao zichan jieji* and *luohou qunzhong*)’ as having ‘vacillation,’ ‘defeatism’ (*dongyao* or *toujian*) and ‘capitulationism’. The Party was criticized for summarily advocating (*luan tichu*) the slogan that workers have no motherland (*gong ren wu zu guo*), which was not along the lines of the anti-imperialist United Front (*fandi tongyi zhanxian*), and overlooked the interests of the petty urban bourgeoisie. “Maijin,” pp. 82,83.

¹⁰⁹⁵ “Maijin,” pp. 70-71.

1940, the MCP reverted to the slogans of encouraging the development of national capitalist enterprises and advocated the establishment of a parliamentary republic again.¹⁰⁹⁶ But it was the MCP's Bolshevik discourse that empowered the MCP in its ambitions to come to power. The second part of this chapter will show how the Bolshevik language not only deprived the MCP of its "nation," but also provided it with discourse that justified its ambitions to govern.

THE LANGUAGE OF POWER

To Change the Environment: Awakening, Discipline, and Sacrifice

Now the situation in the Party is like when one just crossed the bridge and is set out to travel on the big road to a faraway destination.

The CC MCP, early 1940.¹⁰⁹⁷

Apparently, as the MCP realized its failure to capitalize on the protest movement and recognized the loss of its support base, it decided that it needed to take more radical measures.

This urge for more radical measures was reflected in the proclaimed goal "to change the environment." The MCP quoted Mao as the teacher: "As our teachers taught us," a "Bolshevik party did not fall from the sky (*yi ge buershenwei ke bing bu shi cong tian kong diao xialai de*) but appeared through struggles and suffering. However, until now there are comrades who treat revolutionary theory (*gemin de lilun*) as something off topic (*mo bu zhaobianjide dongxi*). They are fatalistic (*tong tian you ming*). The struggles are not initiated by

¹⁰⁹⁶ But "Not a Soviet republic as Malays' national liberation (*minzu jiefang*) is not at the stage of the national struggle of workers and peasants (*gongnong minzudouzheng*), so it is still the period of bourgeois revolution (*zichan jieji geming*). The question of land reform, however, remained a point as well. "Second Plenum Resolutions," p. 68

¹⁰⁹⁷ "Maijin," p.67.

the comrades from the small struggles. Because of comrades' ideological (*yishi*) vacillations, the party doesn't have the power to change the environment (*gaizao huanjing*). The party is weak. The results of political mobilization show that the party cannot become the political leader of the national liberation movement. The party is so backward (*luohou*) that it becomes an obstacle to the forward development of the national liberation movement."¹⁰⁹⁸

This second part of the chapter will show how the changes in MCP discourse reflected and empowered the MCP's growing ambitions to become a state. I will do that by discussing the change in how the MCP expressed what it was to be *avant-garde* (that is, modern), as well as its amplified discourse of sacrifice for the party the increased importance of propaganda in the army, and its contemplation of armed action. The MCP did increase propaganda in the army and accepted the need for armed struggle, with which it had previously been uncomfortable. The change in the MCP's language was first triggered by its wish to be accepted as a Comintern section, something that required the MCP to become a "Bolshevik party." The MCP learned how to speak Bolshevik from the CCP. By the late 1930s, the MCP discourse of modernity and progressiveness had changed from the cultural level (*wenhua shuiping*) to the political level (*zhengzhi shuiping*). The MCP attempted to govern in overseas communities, as did other Chinese associations like secret societies. Now that the MCP was a communist party, it was ready to take armed action to install itself in power.

¹⁰⁹⁸ "Maijin," p.65.

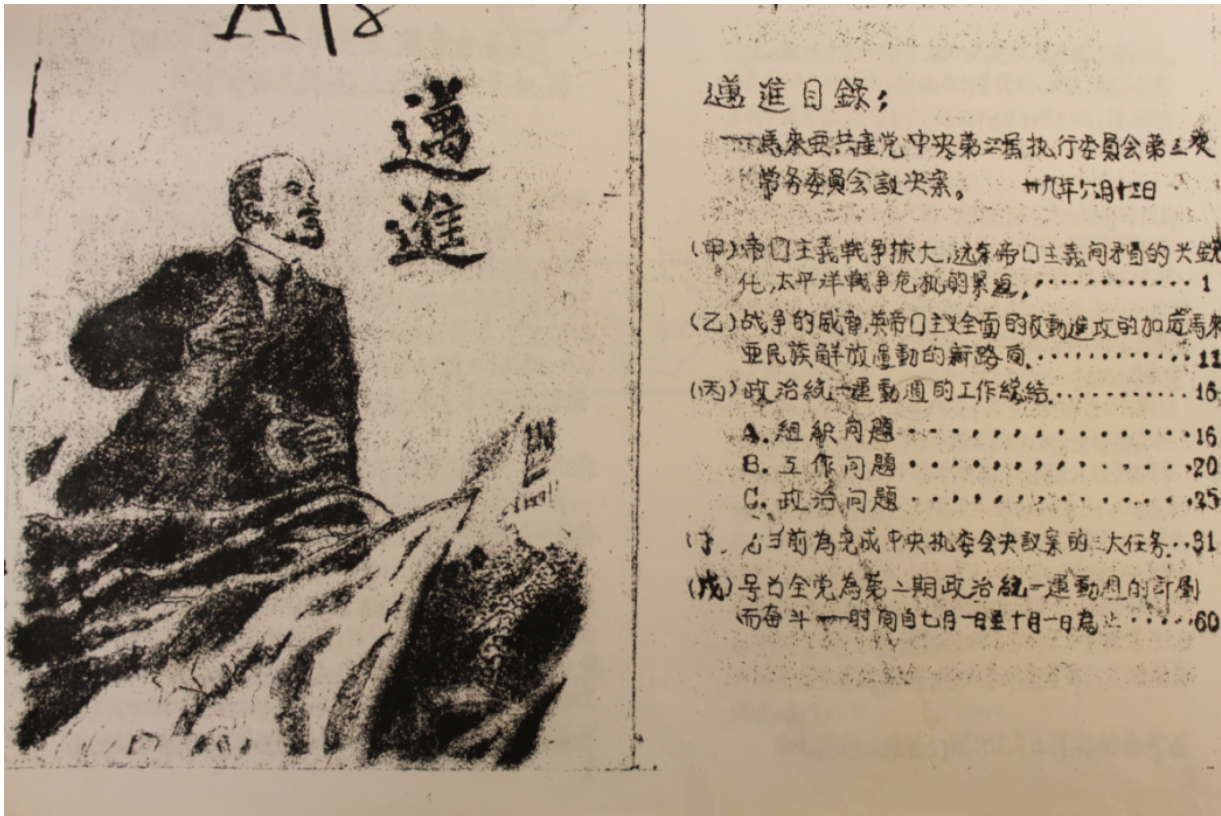


Figure 9. MCP publication “Forward!” (*Maijin*), issued after December of 1940.¹⁰⁹⁹

Thus, the discourse of strengthening the theoretical level, discipline, and sacrifice for the party was amplified. All three had been promoted by the Comintern since 1934.¹¹⁰⁰ The discourse on sacrifice was also strong in the CCP, where the Eighth Route Army spirit of self-sacrifice made it work for the Red Army.¹¹⁰¹ Sacrifice for the party and sacrifice for the nation converged. “As Malaya’s revolutionary situation is getting ripe, the party must raise the

¹⁰⁹⁹ RGASPI 495/62/28/53, used with permission.

¹¹⁰⁰ Comintern’s letter to the CC MCP, June 1 1934. RGASPI 495/62/24/37-45.

¹¹⁰¹ According to Carlson, cited in Van Slyke, *Enemies and friends*, p. 136.

comrades' theoretical level of Marxist-Leninism and their decisiveness to sacrifice.”¹¹⁰² “If Party members today do not understand communism, how can there be a guarantee that tomorrow they will be willing to sacrifice and shed their blood for the communism?” Party membership was not uniform. “Some comrades are ready to sacrifice for the party; some comrades do not read the party program carefully.”¹¹⁰³ The lack of discipline and irresponsible chatter (*luan tan*) destroyed many party organizations.¹¹⁰⁴

Class awakening was a condition to becoming a party member. During the strikes, party members were to use refined techniques to raise the class consciousness of the masses (*yong jiqiao de shuofa tigao qunzhong de jieji juewu*).¹¹⁰⁵ “Awakening” was a signifier for political awareness and modernity. “The reactionary and progressive opposition (*fandong de yu jinbu de*) gives the masses education and raises the revolutionary awakening of the masses (*tigao qunzhong de geming de juewu*).”¹¹⁰⁶ For the MCP, as for the CCP, awakening “was an awakening to membership in the nation-state.”¹¹⁰⁷ The party was to awaken the masses and bring them into the MCP’s nation. To be backward and to have a low level of awakening (*juewu de chengdu hai di*), like the workers did, meant to have not experienced bloodshed and to have no rich political experience.¹¹⁰⁸ As this sentence illustrates, “politics” and political experience had emerged by then as the measure of modernity and progress in MCP discourse.

¹¹⁰² “Maijin,” p.65.

¹¹⁰³ “Analysis of the situation in Malaya and party’s tasks. Adopting the resolution in the CC CCP letter of 23 May,” 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

¹¹⁰⁴ “Maijin,” pp.73-74.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.68.

¹¹⁰⁷ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p.88.

¹¹⁰⁸ “Spravka,” p. 38.

The Language of Liberation: From Culture to Politics to Army

The MCP's growing ambitions to govern over the course of ten years is best illustrated by the change in the discourse on what it was to be suitable for membership in the *avant-garde* party, in other words, a discourse on modernity. Modernity and progressiveness changed from being measured exclusively at a cultural level in 1929 (*wenhua shuiping*), to being measured exclusively at a political level (*zhengzhi shuiping*). From about 1930, modernity was considered to exist at both a political and cultural level; in 1939–1941 it was at the political and theoretical (*lilun*) level.¹¹⁰⁹

Even at the founding conference, the party was to strengthen its educational work in order “to promote the political level and to strengthen the confidence of Party members to revolt” and “particularly, to promote the theoretical level” in order to correct mistakes.¹¹¹⁰ The discourse of culture was also used by the MCP to describe the attractiveness of the USSR. In the Soviet Union, culture was high and the cultural level of the masses was rising (*qunzhong de wenhua shenghuo tigao*).¹¹¹¹ Illiterate Russian workers who were ruling a powerful state were an example of how Indian and Chinese illiterate workers should not hesitate to take leadership roles.¹¹¹² In 1933, culture and politics were both a measure of modernity. In all localities where

¹¹⁰⁹ The goal was for comrades to constantly raise their theoretical level (*tigao lilun shuiping*).. “Maijin,” p.71.

¹¹¹⁰ “Minutes,” p. 132.

¹¹¹¹ An untitled document by the CC MCP, 10 August 1933. RGASPI 495/62/20/25-28; “Central circular no.9. Commemoration of October revolution by means of the general solidarity strike,” 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/40-44.

¹¹¹² “What the workers should stand for?” 7 November 1930. RGASPI 495/62/5/9-20.

there were organizations of Malayan and Indian masses (*you ma yin minzu qunzhong zuzhi de difang*), the party had to publish textual propaganda materials in these languages and pay attention to popularization (*tongsuhua*). As Malayan society was culturally backward (*malai shi ge Wenhua luohou de shehui, zhengzhi shuiping yu zhishi cheng du jiaodi*), party propaganda materials had to be popular (*tongsuhuade*).¹¹¹³

The change in discourses of modernity can be seen as a manifestation of the movement for political unity within the party—the MCP’s transformation into a Bolshevik party through its use of language. In 1940, the MCP set a goal of becoming a “politically unified (*zhengzhi tongyi*) Bolshevized mass party of one million members.”¹¹¹⁴ The MCP criticized its own propaganda as being formalist and backward (*luohou*).¹¹¹⁵ Comrades’ understanding of Marxism-Leninism was more thorough, and they could express the everyday practical problems with revolutionary content.¹¹¹⁶ The language of the MCP became more theoretically elaborate, and each condition was given a theoretical explanatory label. Language unification was an essential condition of political unity (*zhengzhi tongyi*), Bolshevization, and consolidation in the long run. The political problem was that in attitude and in politics there was no unity (*sixiang shang zhengzhi shang bu tongyi*). During times of success, they were enthusiastic, but in times of difficulties, they did not work, blaming their failures on the circumstances. This is not a

¹¹¹³ “Malaiya qingshi de fenxi yu dang de renwu (jieshou zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan ri laixin de jueyi) [Analysis of the situation in Malaya and party’s tasks. Adopting the resolution in the CC CCP letter of 23 May] 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

¹¹¹⁴ “Maijin,” p. 26.

¹¹¹⁵ “New CC new resolutions.”

¹¹¹⁶ “Maijin,” pp. 66 - 69

Bolshevik attitude (*taidu*).” The MCP launched the three-month-long Stakhanovite movement to achieve Bolshevization and political unity, and to get rid of deviations (*zuofeng*).¹¹¹⁷

On the opposite end of modernity were the backward Malays, who were to be liberated by those whose cultural levels were high—namely, the Chinese communists. The Chinese communist Zhang Xia, in his reminiscence, also described Malays as lazy and as having low cultural levels (*landuo, wenhua shuiping you di*), in contrast to the industrious, intelligent and patient (*qinglao naiku congying*) Chinese.¹¹¹⁸ *Week Herald (Xingqidaobao)*, in a 1935 article about the British colonization of Malaya, reported that the British and the Malays had different cultural levels (*wenhua chengdu bu yi*), and that the Malayan national movement (*minzuyundong*) was comprised of Chinese. This cartoon of drunken and stupefied colonial people illustrates Nanking’s outlook on the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang, an outlook that was shared by the MCP.¹¹¹⁹ There was, however, another reason for the MCP’s condescending attitudes toward the Malays. One of the party’s goals in 1930 was to counter the British intention of “displacing the Chinese with the aborigenes.” “The Chinese residents in this land have to wake up,” the party argued.¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁸ Zhang Xia, “Chinese immigrants from Xianyou.”

¹¹¹⁹ “Guoji Lunping du xuan: 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), *Week’s Herald (Xingqi daobao)* 1935, No.7 p. 5.

¹¹²⁰ “Report from Malay,” 2 January 1931, RGASPI 495/62/11/27-29, esp. 28.

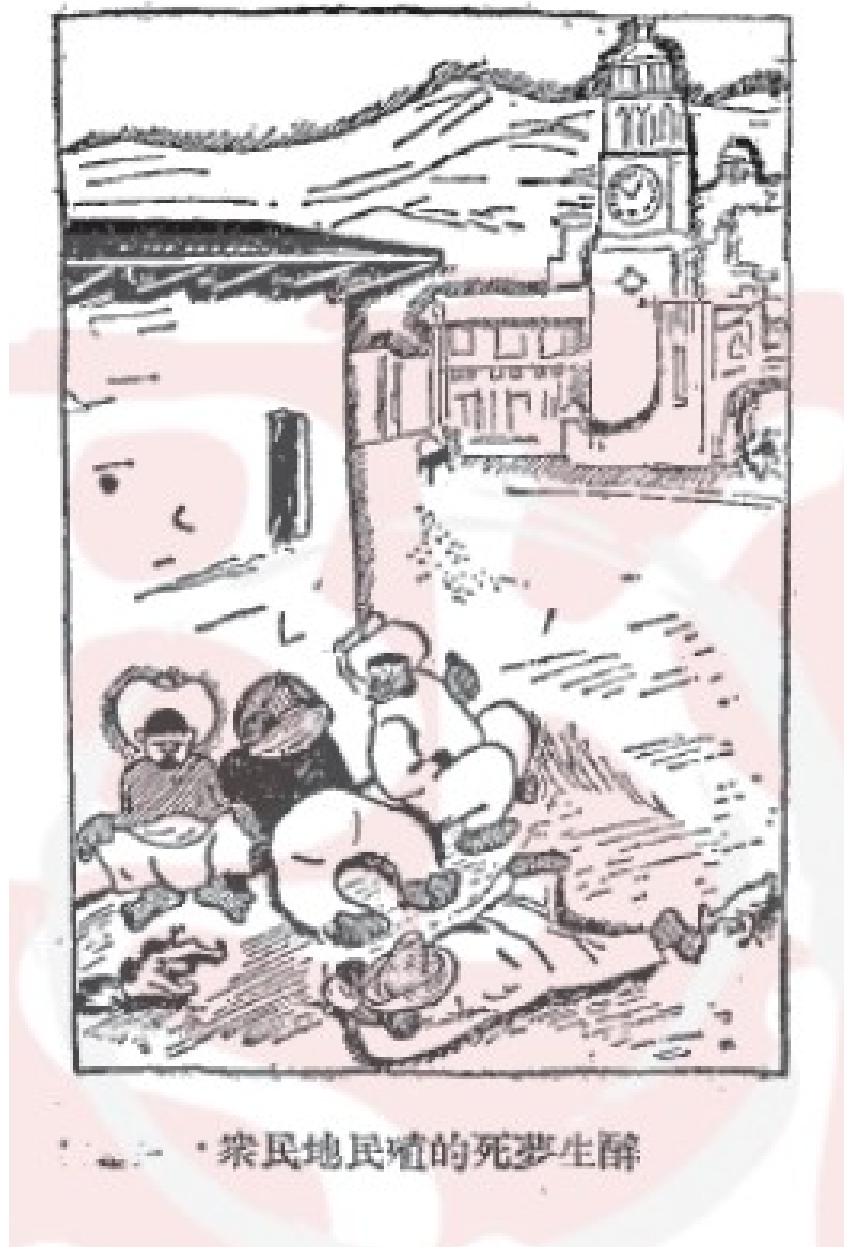


Figure 10. "The population of the colonies: living in dreams and drunkenness." *Week's Herald*, 1935.
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In 1935, and also in 1939, *wenhua* was still used to denote a lack of education. Yet *zhengzhi shuiping* was retained as a term to denote political awareness. By 1939, *wenhua* was

¹¹²¹ "Selected International Review"

used in the sense of “culture,” as in the German and Soviet discourses, and as “arts,” while *minzu* was also used as an attribute, as “national” (*minzu de*). Traitors of *minzu* were juxtaposed against “honourable fighters of culture” who had been arrested (*youxiu de wenhua zhanshi*). These were the agents of the CCP-GMD United Front;¹¹²² cultural movements of the Anti-Enemy Backing-Up Society, allegedly led by the MCP, included literary and drama movements.¹¹²³ *Wenhua* was also used to denote the literacy level in order “to raise the cultural level of the working class (*tigao gongren jieji de wenhuashuiping*) through literacy classes.”¹¹²⁴ In 1940, the MCP, citing Stalin’s statement that “cadres decide everything,” criticized the lack of cadres them in the MCP’s cultural movement (*wenyun*), and among women workers and the student movement.¹¹²⁵ Already, in 1932, *wenhua* started to be used as it was in the Soviet discourse of nationalities (*minzu de wenhua*): “Developed nations put pressure on backward nations (*luohou minzu*) and exert cultural pressure on them (*wenhua fangmian de yapo*) because they do not understand that the goals of the movement (*minzuyundong*) and their methods are also wrong.”¹¹²⁶ In the same way, *wenhua* was used in 1934 MCP documents to mean “national culture” and national language (*minzu de*).¹¹²⁷ *Minzu* is used in the Soviet meaning of

¹¹²²“Maijin,” p. 68.

¹¹²³ Yong, *The Origins*, pp.264-266

¹¹²⁴ “Decision of the CC of the Malayan Party in the intensification of the labour movement passed on March 20, 1934. RGASPI 495/62/23/57-59ob.

¹¹²⁵ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p.46.

¹¹²⁶ “Zhongyang tonggao di yihao. Dangtuan zhongyang Guanyu waiqiao dengjililie yu women de gongzuo de jueyi” [Circular no.1. Resolution of the CC of MCP and CYL regarding the Alien Registration Ordinance and our work] 12 October 1932. RGASPI 495/62/20/1-6.

¹¹²⁷ “Magong zhongyang guanyujinnian guoji zhiyejie yu jinhou dui shiye yundong de jueyi,” [CC MCP resolution regarding the commemoration of the international labour day and the movement of unemployed] 30 January 1934, RGASPI 495/62/23/1-5.

“nationality.” Between September 1939 and January 1940 new adopted ten-point program set out, among other points, to develop national culture (*minzu wenhua*).¹¹²⁸

Thus, in 1939, *zhengzhi* supplanted *wenhua* as the signifier of the level of proficiency (*zhengzhi shuiping gao or di*). In Chinese communist language, politics became the new *adat*, or new tradition, like in its contemporary Malay world.¹¹²⁹ This transformation of language had parallels in both Malayan- and Chinese-language public spheres and shows that it is necessary to approach them both as one public sphere. The idea about backward and lazy Malays was not held only by the GMD and MCP, but was also circulating within the Malayan press (discussed in Chapter 3). According to Fitzgerald, the semantics of “politics” (*zhengzhi*), were related to nation-ness: “The particular and historical contingent community for the awakened self was to be decided in the realm of politics.”¹¹³⁰ Now, the meaning of one’s backwardness or modernity was to be measured against political experience.

Starting with Sun Yat-sen, revolution was a matter of politics—and politics were a matter of governing. Yet it is only with the inclusion of Chinese networks in the Comintern’s public sphere, through the CCP, that the MCP started to speak the Bolshevik language and talk confidently about armed force. Sun defined revolution as follows: it is a “joint effort by everybody to reform public (*gonggong*) affairs. So I say that revolution is a political affair.” Hence, *zhengzhi shuiping* referred to the level of public awareness, specifically, the awareness of the affairs affecting the public. According to Fitzgerald, “to manage the affairs of a crowd of

¹¹²⁸ “Second Plenum Resolutions,” p. 28.

¹¹²⁹ Milner, *The invention of politics*, p. 2.

¹¹³⁰ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 84.

people is managing the affairs of state.”¹¹³¹ By attempting to manage the masses (*qunzhong*), the MCP aspired to become the state.

For the MCP, the political level (*zhengzhi shuiping*) meant the awareness level of the affairs of the public and governance. Culture (*wenhua*) was also used in the political sense in 1939 in regard to collaboration. For example, the MCP reported to the Comintern that “Japanese spies and Chinese [traitors apparently] promoted the purchase of Japanese goods for the Wang Jinwei government. Their leader’s ear was cut off. The Japanese bought Malay newspapers and opened shops to do anti-Chinese, anti-British, and “Asia for Asians” propaganda. They were mostly active in the east coast of Malaya, where the communication is not developed and culture is backward, so they operate more easily there.”¹¹³² These were also the areas where communist organization was not developed. Thus, if culture level was low, it was easier to spread Japanese propaganda, and communist organizations were not present there.

Moreover, the quality (*zhiliang*) of the party was measured by comrades’ political familiarity and political awakening:¹¹³³ The awakening was not deep (*zhengzhi renshi*) and did not increase (*zhengzhi juewu*).¹¹³⁴ For the first time, the comrades’ low political level was blamed for the party’s shortcomings—it was not the fault of the branch, but of the comrades’

¹¹³¹ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 17.

¹¹³² “Malaya today,” p.83.

¹¹³³ Also, “political” meant “anti-imperialist”. For the MCP members to be awakened meant to have a rigorous political understanding. “Most of the struggles are illegal and only few did not have anti-imperialist political essence.” “Maijin,” p.59.

¹¹³⁴ “New CC Resolutions,” p. 46.

low level.¹¹³⁵ The standards for MCP discourse were the discourse of the Comintern and the CCP.¹¹³⁶

Most significantly, in 1940, the MCP started to talk about the importance of propaganda in the army and about building its own armed forces. This was based on the expansion of Correction and Investigation Troops (*jiucha dui*), which was “the only armed force of the workers and [should have stopped] being the tool in the struggle against the Three Star Party (*sanxingdang*).” The party was also to learn the peasants’ psychology (*xinli*) and their demands in order to organize peasant self-defence committees.¹¹³⁷ The party criticized those members who thought that because the party was antiwar, it should not participate in the army. Citing Togliatti’s speech at the seventh Comintern congress,¹¹³⁸ the CC advocated penetration into the army, to “learn how to use arms and turn the rifle onto the enemies of the nation (*minzudiren*), and how to organize the unemployed and other masses into the army.” The enemies of the nation in this sentence were clearly the Japanese, and *minzu* referred to both Malaya and China. Like a millenarian group, the MCP was awaiting an imperialist war, and when it broke out, they called for taking up arms. This finding is in line with Van de Ven’s idea that the CCP became a Leninist party when it realized the need for military power. As early as 1930, the MCP was contemplating the preparation of armed forces to fight against the British.¹¹³⁹ However, in 1940,

¹¹³⁵ “New CC Resolutions,” p. 47.

¹¹³⁶ “We must pay attention to peasant and women movement. In the women’s movement, we need to treat the ECCI resolution adopted on 3 July 1937 as a guide to the women’s movement. We need to fulfill the tasks that the Comintern gave us.” “Malaya today,” p. 84.

¹¹³⁷ Malaiya qingshi de fenxi yu dang de renwu (jieshou zhonggong zhongyang wu yue gansan ri laixin de jueyi) [Analysis of the situation in Malaya and party’s tasks. Adopting the resolution in the CC CCP letter of 23 May] 5 September 1933 RGASPI 495/62/21/31-40.

¹¹³⁸ “New CC Resolutions,” p. 48.

¹¹³⁹ “As the British imperialists are confused because of the rise of revolutions in China and India, we should call upon all the oppressed peoples of Malay to fight against the imperialists’ interference in

this was amplified. The MCP was determined to get ready to fight against the enemies of the nation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated that Bolshevik discourse both constrained and empowered the MCP. The concept of *minzu* allowed the MCP to participate in two national projects -- that of Malaya, and that of China - and reflected the MCP's uncertainty as to where it belonged. The conflation of the emancipations of China and Malaya in the MCP discourse of *minzu* sheds light on the CCP's post-war motivation to become involved in a regional communist movement.

In 1939-1940, the MCP focused on the Chinese community as a part of the CCP-GMD United Front. The MCP attempted to attract members of Chinese associations into the MCP at the same time as it attempted to co-opt the protest movement.

However, the Bolshevik concept of a proletarian nation and the anti-British rhetoric also hindered the MCP it was not able to attract the following among the members of other Chinese associations, and it lost the support of bourgeoisie who had been among the party's supporters throughout the 1930s. The MCP nation, according to the Comintern discourse, was proletarian, and it excluded the most tangible segment of the MCP supporters -- the "bourgeoisie," who, moreover, became party's rival for the allegiance of the masses during the protest wave of 1939. Party membership did not change much over the decade, something that supports Yong's findings. My findings contradict Yong's findings that the period of the China Salvation Movement was beneficial to the MCP's support base.¹¹⁴⁰ The Comintern granted language that helped to create the Malayan nation for the MCP in 1930, but took this language away in 1940.

China and India and we should prepare for our own revolutionary armed force to oppose the imperialist war. This is our unforgettable task!" "Central circular no 4" 8 August 1930, RGASPI 495/62/13/27-30. There were also calls for terrorist actions, which the MCP attributed to the "masses". See chapter 4.

¹¹⁴⁰ Yong, *The Origins*, p.267.

The party was confused and disappointed. In the party's eyes, the "masses" remained backward and were blamed for the party's failure.

The discourse of the new CCP explicit internationalism showed that sometimes internationalism contradicted the MCP's China "patriotism." This new internationalism encompassed a larger territory; the border of *Guoji* expanded beyond the Nanyang. The Nanyang became irrelevant to the MCP, which became preoccupied with the war in China and the war looming over Malaya, as well as with the world war. The war further altered the concept of the space the Chinese found themselves in; it was the "Pacific." War in Europe and the Soviet's supposed "help" to the oppressed of Europe through the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact expanded the borders of the "international." The MCP's world expanded, the idea of the "international" expanded, and the ambitions for the world revolution became even more justified. However, the MCP failed to ride the wave of popular protests. Implicit internationalism- that is, the point of intersection between nationalism and internationalism in the past, and the discourse of liberation of the oppressed peoples - continued to be effective on the rhetorical level, but the MCP was much more preoccupied with its failure to attract a Chinese constituency. In 1931-1940, the nation came before internationalism for the MCP. Its work among non-Chinese was not successful. It used the rhetoric of internationalism in its campaign for political unity and a Malayan multiethnic United Front. The MCP's multiethnic United Front was the solution to its main goal—Malaya's national independence and the discursive foundation of the Malayan multinational nation-state. Indeed, as Chin Peng noted, the MCP's success was Malayan Independence.¹¹⁴¹ The MCP's all-*minzu* United Front, promoted by the CCP-GMD United Front for the benefit of the China Salvation Movement,

¹¹⁴¹ Chin and Hack, *Dialogues with Chin Peng*, p. 234-235.

was the continuation of the indigenization of a Chinese association, or its double-rootedness in the host and the sending society. At the same time, organizational indigenization was an aspect of Bolshevization. However, there was no significant presence of non-Chinese in the MCP despite the rhetoric of a multiethnic united front and the inseparability of the liberation from colonial oppression of overseas Chinese and locals. The MCP was a “national” party that had no “nation” to lead. The MCP gained internationalism, but lost its support base.

However Bolshevik discourse also empowered the MCP to and reflected the MCP ambitions to govern and to become the state. It was reflected in the changed MCP discourse of progressiveness and amplified discourse of sacrifice for the party and the need for armed power. By 1939, progressiveness, which previously was denoted as *wenhua shuiping*, was referred to as *zhengzhi shuiping*. A parallel between the appearance of *zhengzhi* in the everyday vocabulary of the MCP, and what Milner calls “the invention of politics” around 1926, and subsequently, the emergence of the language of “politics” in Malayan-language intellectual discourse, was the sign of both indigenization and of the Bolshevization efforts intended by the Comintern.¹¹⁴² By 1939, as the MCP realized the need for more radical measures, a change had occurred. Today’s *sushi* (personal character or quality), or *taidu* (attitude), and the 1930’s *wenhua shuiping*, was measured by *zhengzhi shuiping* in 1939. Politics were becoming as important as governance, the meaning that *zhengzhi* had taken on since the time of Sun Yat-sen. One’s ability to speak the Bolshevik language (the theoretical level, *lilun shuiping*), was measured by *zhengzhi*, not by one’s *wenhua* in education. That was the result of the Bolshevization of the MCP’s language. It also reflected the MCP’s ambitions to rule and to become a state. This process did not start in the 1920s, either. In 1907, Hu Ma from the Shanghai newspaper *Shibao*, wrote that government

¹¹⁴² Milner, *Invention of politics*, pp. 265, 272.

officials who were “erudite in terms of traditional culture and learning (*guogu*) but ignorant when it came to modern politics” posed an obstacle to the process of political edification.¹¹⁴³ Thus, modern politics was juxtaposed against traditional culture. By the late 1930s, the MCP was required to speak the language of modern politics and not of culture. To have one’s political or theoretical level considered high meant to know the texts and Marxism-Leninism figures in the textual quotations profusely in 1939-1940. Finally, the party’s ambitions to become a state, and the change in their commitment, are represented in the amplified discourse of sacrifice for the party: it was sacrifice for the nation that was expressed in the discourse of sacrifice for the party.¹¹⁴⁴ The change from *wenhua* to *zhengzhi* marked the MCP’s ambition to govern and acquire the characteristics of statecraft; the MCP became externally focused (heteronomous).

As in China—where the terms “imperialism” and “feudalism” offered a new way of comprehending and dealing with the world when liberal and Confucian language failed to offer a satisfactory explanation of China’s failure and made selection of a new conceptual language more urgent”¹¹⁴⁵—*wenhua shuiping* failed to denote the new reality of professionalization (bureaucratization) of the party. Bolshevization included unification of the language and management of party bureaucracy, the questions of promoting, preparing, and appointing (*rastanovki*) cadres to work on increasing the leaders’ theoretical level, and the ideological political level of the organizations.¹¹⁴⁶ The meanings of *minzu* and *wenhua* were altered by Comintern discourse just as the anti-imperialist slogan was adopted by the CCP at Moscow’s

¹¹⁴³ Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 151.

¹¹⁴⁴ “Maijin,” pp. 39, 65, 66.

¹¹⁴⁵ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 54

¹¹⁴⁶ “Spravka,” pp. 48-49.

initiative in 1922.¹¹⁴⁷ In this case, *minzu* changed from denoting “peoples,” in the social Darwinian discourse of anthropology of the time, to denoting the “nation-state” and the “national” (*minzu de*), which marked the completion of the process of establishing the discursive foundation of the Malayan nation. *Wenhua* changed from signifying educational level to referring to the anthropological meaning of culture. The MCP was one of the many intellectual groups, both Chinese and non-Chinese, that, among other things, were concerned with its place in the emerging Malayan nation.

The MCP complained of the lack of clarity in its external political understanding, which resulted from “the fact that the party was in essence coming from the position of the interests of Chinese immigrants, but in theory (*po forme*) was taking care of the interests of all of the country’s oppressed”¹¹⁴⁸ This document, the *Report on the Work among Chinese Immigrants in Malaya*,¹¹⁴⁹ was the last document the MCP produced in Moscow, and was found in RGASPI. It was compiled on 7 February 1942 on the eve of the start of the battle for Singapore. For the Comintern, the MCP was obviously important, judging from the approximately one hundred pages of analytical reports compiled on the basis of MCP materials.

¹¹⁴⁷ Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 168.

¹¹⁴⁸ “Spravka,” p. 50.

¹¹⁴⁹ “Spravka”. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to explain the structural, contextual, and contingent factors that led to the improbable survival of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the interwar years and to explore the significance of the MCP and of the forces shaping it.

The Chinese communist organisation in Malaya started as the Nanyang (“South Seas”) branch of the CCP in 1926. The MCP was established because of the intersection of the indigenisation interests of the Comintern and the CCP, and local intellectual trends. The Comintern provided the discursive foundation of the MCP Malayan nation, led by the Chinese Communist Party, through granting the Nanyang chapter of the CCP the discourse of a “national” Malayan communist party. The Comintern promoted international support for the Chinese Revolution among the Chinese in Malaya for the benefit of this Malayan revolution and thus provided new justifications for the discourse on *huaqiao* leadership in colonial emancipation of the oppressed nations, a discourse that had actually originated in the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD) of Sun Yatsen’s day. Through this discourse of a “national” party, the MCP became both nationalist and internationalist at the same time. Moreover, MCP nationalism was double, Malayan and Chinese, and these identities were not in contradiction with one another, because the MCP was a hybrid of a communist party and a Chinese association, and as such, it was rooted in both China and Malaya.

The establishment of the MCP can be viewed as an attempt to transform the Chinese communist organisation—the main goal of which had been to protect the interests of the Chinese in Malaya vis-à-vis the British state and to obtain democratic rights—into a communist party that sought to lead a Malayan proletarian multi-ethnic nation to emancipation. The MCP was a hybrid of a communist party and a Chinese association. This is obvious from its discourse,

organisational structure, and activities. It attempted to embrace both the movement for Chinese political participation, and protection of Chinese interests in the British colonial state, and the overthrow of British rule. The majority of its membership was first-generation Communists from mainland China (mostly Guangdong, Fujian, and Hainan). The Hainanese, however, dominated the MCP. The majority of Party members were not from the industrial proletariat but were shop and restaurant employees, servants in the houses of foreigners, rubber-tappers, and handicraftsmen.

The MCP did not have a mass following because it did not speak the necessary languages and was condescending to its potential constituency, the “masses,” both Chinese and non-Chinese. The “masses” were afraid to join the party as it was illegal and suppressed by the colonial government and spoke a language that alienated the business-minded Chinese community, who, regardless of its level of affluence, had supported the MCP by occasional subsidies. The MCP was also ineffective in leading a labour movement for the same reasons. At first, MCP members enjoyed the communist language of the cult of the proletariat, which came, as well, with the global prestige of the Comintern and the prospect of cash support. By 1934, they got a sense of reality and abandoned their metaphorical /symbolical language of excluding the bourgeoisie as a potential “revolutionary force,” and they practiced what might be called united-front tactics without calling their organisation a united front. This was dictated by the logic of survival as a Chinese association, like the CCP in the same time period, the early 1930s, in Shanghai. British wartime economic policies in late 1939 worsened the economic condition of the *huaqiao* and caused widespread protests, but the MCP was unable to capitalise on that. At its best times, the MCP had two thousand members. There was no significant non-Chinese

membership. The MCP leaders were CCP members, who were deported constantly back to China. The Party always lacked cadres.

The qualities of a Chinese association and of a communist party that shaped the MCP were in tension with each other and both empowered and hindered the MCP in different ways. Over the course of the 1930s, the MCP was supported by some affluent members of the Chinese community, that is, the Chinese bourgeoisie whom the MCP came to exclude as potential members of their communist party, which had a proletarian nation. The Comintern gave the MCP its “nation” but then took it away in 1939–1940 with radical language that alienated the MCP support base. The MCP became a national party without a nation. That happened, ironically, when the MCP as a Chinese overseas association redirected its attention back towards the *huaqiao* as part of the United Front tactics of working among Chinese associations in the Nanyang. It also failed as a communist party to capitalise on the popular protests of 1939–1940. As the result, the MCP was close to collapse by 1940, and, but for the consequences of the war (with Japanese attacks on the Chinese in Malaya), that would have been the end of it. The MCP regained its following after the Malaya-born Chinese, educated in GMD Chinese schools with nationalist ideas and identification with China, joined the MCP guerilla force, the MPAJ, which was the only available organisation of anti-Japanese resistance. Thus, one unintended consequence of the GMD policy of countering Japanese southward expansion in the Nanyang was the rise of Malayan communism.

Other aspects of the Bolshevik discourse empowered the MCP to become a state that could be legitimately rooted in both Malaya and China. This was reflected in the MCP discourses of *minzu* (nation/people), *wenhua* (culture), and *zhengzhi* (politics). The Comintern created the discourse of the Malayan nation (*malaiya minzu*) for the MCP by creating a national

party. The Comintern altered the meaning of the word *minzu* for the MCP from “peoples” to “nation” by adding the meaning of the Malayan “nation-state,” which did not exist at the time. *Minzu* was a keyword in MCP rhetoric. It was the signifier of MCP members’ national allegiance, which was split between China and Malaya. After the creation of the MCP in 1930, *minzu* invariably referred to Malaya. Then, after the MCP campaign against the Alien Registration Ordinance, which stressed the divide between those born and not born in Malaya, *minzu* more often signified China than Malaya. By the start of the war, the MCP’s *minzu* was China again. *Minzu* was truly a “sojourning” concept in these years, and this dissertation maps this movement over time and through the documents. This happened because the MCP had always had the mandate to protect the interests of the Chinese and was responding to the negative impact of British wartime policies on *huaqiao* bourgeoisie. Two other keywords, *wenhua* (culture and education) and *zhengzhi* (politics and the political) in MCP discourse denoted awareness of domestic and international politics and anti-imperialism. *Wenhua* also meant education and was the signifier that Party members used to create their own status divisions and to distinguish between the Party and the masses. From 1929 to 1939, we see a change in discourse of political awareness. Starting from 1930, cultural level was referred to as *wenhua shuiping*, and by 1934, both cultural and political level were indicated interchangeably by this term. In 1939, political awareness became solely *zhengzhi shuiping*, political level. This change signified the emergence of MCP ambitions for statehood, which paralleled the start of MCP calls for active propaganda in the army.

As in the case of the CCP, cross-class alliances helped the MCP survive until it had to exclude the bourgeoisie in 1939. The United Front strategy was born locally, not imposed by the Comintern or by the CCP—it was a call for leadership against the national enemy, and in

the context of Malaya, this was a logical policy. The same was true for the changes in policy towards the British.

Another unintended consequence of the Comintern activity of fostering connections between the communists in Southeast Asia was the strengthening of the Chinese network there. This network became the groundwork for MCP postwar connections and strengthened the CCP base in Southeast Asia. As for the MCP, its indigenisation happened not among the local population but among the locally born Chinese, and it thus linked the indigenisation of the Comintern and of the organisation of the Chinese communists, the MCP. Thus, interwar globalisation through the Comintern strengthened the Chinese maritime network both in Southeast Asia and globally. This confirms Kuhn's point that internationalisation strengthened the native place ties of the Chinese association, the CCP.¹¹⁵⁰

Thus, the MCP case contributes to our understanding of the interwar global world. *Minzu Guoji*, the network of Chinese communists and nationalists, was one of international nationalist organisations that were established or aspired to in the interwar world on the global level, such as the Black International or the Vietnamese communist organisation in the Indochinese peninsula. The connections between the Nanyang revolutionary activities, the CCP, the GMD, and the Comintern help us see the Chinese Revolution, the Comintern's indigenising discourse of the Chinese and world revolution, and indeed all four organisations in a fresh light—the light of internationalisation and the indigenisation trends of the 1930s, which are reminiscent of the globalisation that we see today. Indeed, interwar internationalism can be seen as a form of globalisation, though it may be more helpful to think of it as a precursor to today's version, with some contributions to the history from which today's globalisation has emerged.

¹¹⁵⁰ Kuhn, "Why China Historians."

It also offers some comparative insights on today's globalisation from an earlier, different globalisation.

This global perspective allows us to see the MCP as a case study of the structure, operation, and fate of interwar globalisation through the interaction of the Comintern, the MCP, the GMD, and the CCP. The MCP was one node of the international network of the 1920s and 1930s, throughout which we can see the operation of the global networks of the interwar world. The MCP connects the Chinese Revolution to world history through world revolutionary activity, particularly as aided and abetted by the Comintern, not only in Southeast Asia but in the Americas, as well. It was the Chinese overseas revolutionary experience created by Soviet internationalism operating in a local area, in the world of the *huaqiao* in Southeast Asia, San Francisco, or Havana.

This indigenisation, and parallel internationalisation, is an example of interwar globalisation that manifested itself in internationalisation and indigenisation of other ideology-based movements, such as those of the Baptists or Buddhists. During these same interwar years, international protestant and Buddhist associations were struggling to strengthen their respective missionary efforts by putting down local roots through indigenisation of their local churches. The MCP took up an organisational form that was explicitly revolutionary, shaped by interwar globalisation, and was a part of the civic world of international communism, and yet at the same time, it was deeply local. The civic world of international communism was a public sphere where policies were designed based on local conditions and sometimes implemented in a third country. Buddhists, Baptists, and Bolsheviks were all members of global networks in this interwar world. Each of these was reminiscent of a Braudelian world, with coherent and comprehensive domains of exchange. The interwar world was a global one of overlapping

networks of regional, local, and international levels that shared characteristics that defined the era: these networks were salvatory, they internationalised an idea and indigenised their organisations, they felt like they were in the *avant-garde* of modernity and culture, and they were cosmopolitan, as they used local and nonlocal cultural resources in their localisation efforts.

In relation to four historiographical fields, China, Southeast Asia, the Comintern, and the overseas Chinese, that informed this dissertation, the following are my findings: 1) Histories of China and the overseas Chinese are parts of the same socio-historical process and cannot be understood on their own. 2) Comintern internationalism helped create nations and strengthened China's position in Southeast Asia. 3) The Chinese Revolution was not simply divided into hostile GMD and CCP forces and is better understood as nation-building rather than as revolution. 4) Political participation of Malayan Chinese can be explained by the indigenisation of an overseas Chinese organisation's ideology and organisation, which worked through internationalism and was a feature of interwar globalisation.

I will raise preliminary questions which helped me to articulate, shape, and interpret my findings in reference to these fields, as well as in reference to the larger questions of nationalism, migration, the historical study of language, and globalisation. The findings suggest questions I would like to further pursue in my ongoing research.

For the field of modern Chinese history, the MCP story shows that the split of the Chinese Revolution into two parts was not as clear as the official historiographies of the CCP and GMD present it to be. The overlap and movement between the CCP and the GMD was considerable in Malaya, as it was in China. The history of the MCP contributes to an

understanding of China's modern transition, which was the search for an alternative to empire in the first half of the twentieth century and which became Chinese nationalism, experienced predominantly through revolution.

The MCP story is another confirmation that local communists were not puppets of Moscow. Moreover, the MCP story shows that despite its colonial intentions, the Comintern actually did not gain anything from its activities in Malaya but helped Chinese to build their networks. The MCP borrowed the Comintern's empire, in Kuhn's image. As for the field of Comintern studies, it is far too early to comment, but this study has raised questions for future research.

In the history of overseas Chinese in the global context, there are a number of questions that I hope to pursue in my future research. Was the MCP the only hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist organisation in Southeast Asia whose political participation worked through the same model of indigenisation and internationalism? Where there other Chinese associations in Malayan history that embraced the same model of political participation as did the MCP? Did some other Chinese associations make a similar hybrid with a Christian missionary effort or a Buddhist one?

This dissertation contributes to the study of transnational networks and flows, globalisation and the role of indigenisation (or localisation), and internationalisation of ideas and organisations in the field of world history. The finding that the MCP was a hybrid of a Chinese association and a communist party, which aspired to Malayan nationhood, illustrates the Chinese role in Malayan nationalism. The model of political participation in the MCP suggests a parallel between the MCP and the Malayan Chinese association that successfully led negotiations with the British for independence on behalf of the multinational organisation. This

model of Chinese leadership in a multiethnic community on the national level illustrates the Chinese role in nationalism in Southeast Asia. The origin of this model is the nature of Chinese migration, which prompts the overseas Chinese to be embedded in both sending and receiving environments.

The MCP is a window into the transformation of a hybrid Chinese association and a communist party between 1929 and 1939, in the interwar internationalist moment of globalisation, from the society to the state structure. The United Front incorporated the MCP into the overseas Chinese transnational nationalist network, which conducted China Salvation activities. On the other hand, as in the case of Christianity, where missionaries incorporated the local church into a global network,¹¹⁵¹ the Comintern incorporated Chinese networks into global networks of international communism.

On a larger historical scale, this was the moment of consolidation of Southeast Asia, to borrow from Liebermann, through yet another text-based ideology¹¹⁵²—communism. As during previous cycles of consolidation, and as in other instances of internationalisation of Christian and Buddhist ideologies and organisations in the 1930s, the consolidation—the goal of building a *Minzu Guoji*—based on the discourse of communist internationalism (and its verbalisation and semantics) was accompanied by indigenisation and further promotion of a discourse that conflated the emancipation of China and of the oppressed peoples of the Nanyang. As in previous cycles of consolidation, it resulted in flourishing vernacular literatures, the growth of

¹¹⁵¹ Carol Lee Hamrin, *Salt and Light, Vol. 3: More Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), p. 15. Hamrin cites John Barwick, "Chinese Protestant Elites and the Quest for Modernity in Republican China" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, Canada, 2011), ch. 1, 57–58; ch. 3, 144–146.

Malayan radical associations and *huaqiao* cultural movements. The unintended result of this consolidation attempt based on Communist internationalist indigenisation—due to the Nanking efforts, which had worked for the second-generation Chinese during the Japanese invasion—was the emergence of nation-states.

The Comintern's discourse, grafted onto the Chinese nationalist discourse, produced a more powerful discourse of the Malayan nation and Malayan identity than did the idea of *bangsa* or of a Muslim community. The MCP Malayan nationalism created by the Chinese organisation and grafted with the Comintern internationalist discourse proved productive over the 1930s and beyond. This model of Malayan leadership of a Chinese association manifested in the MCP's leadership in the anti-Japanese resistance and the successful Malayan Chinese association's negotiations with the British for independence. Once Malaya was preparing for independence, the MCA established an alliance with the leading Malayan party, the United Malays National Organisation, to contest the first elections. It was joined subsequently by the Malayan Indian congress, and the three parties forged a multiracial coalition called the Alliance Party, which eventually led the country successfully to independence.¹¹⁵³

This model bears striking similarity to the initial initiative of the Nanyang party to establish independent parties based on ethnic principles and then to unite them. What stayed with the MCP after the Comintern's demise was the firm discursive foundation of the MCP's Malayan nation, which was rooted in both Malaya and China and which was the foundation of MCP Malayan nationalism and interregional connections, a sort of *Minzu Guoji*. The MCP justification for Malayan nationalism was internationalism, to create a united front between

¹¹⁵³ Heng Pek Koon, "The Social and Ideological Origins of the Malayan Chinese Association," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (1983), 14, pp. 290-311; Lim, "Between Tradition and Modernity," p. 35.

Malayan ethnic groups for the sake of a Malayan nation. This Malayan nation was to emerge under the communist leadership of a Chinese association, the governance potential of which was boosted by interwar globalisation.

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