

# 1 Prologue

## A Durian for Sun Yatsen

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The world of Chinese migrant communists in Malaya is a window into interwar Chinese communist networks, which formed as Chinese communists in the Nanyang (南洋), the historical region of Chinese migration, the South Seas, spanning from Vietnam and the Philippines down to Indonesia and across the Malay Peninsula to Siam, founded communist cells and brought their compatriots to their adopted homes for employment. These networks were often built onto existing Chinese networks, and, in addition to being empowered by the Comintern, they were used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Guomindang (GMD), during the second united front period in the 1930s and 1940s, including for the recruitment of Eighth Route Army fighters in communist guerrilla areas in mainland China.<sup>1</sup> These networks also became launching pads for anti-Japanese guerrilla forces during the war in Malaya. Many members of these networks maintained connections with both the GMD and the communists in the Nanyang, as both parties continued to make a Chinese Revolution there, that is, a struggle for the political rights of the Chinese overseas, which had started in the time of Sun Yatsen. These Chinese intellectuals, mostly school teachers and journalists and editors, set for themselves the task of civilizing 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 and political rights were jeopardized by British policies.

In that world, the torn relationship between Chinese overseas, China, and their adopted motherland, as well as the longing to become local while preserving a unique form of Chineseness, is represented by the metaphor of the durian, a Southeast Asian fruit with a strong smell. In Chinese, the word for “durian” (榴蓮, *liulian*) is a homophone of the word for “to linger” (流連). A taste for durian foretold that a Chinese

<sup>1</sup> Lai, H. Mark, *Chinese American Transnational Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 104.

person who had come to the Nanyang was destined to stay. In 1928, Chinese writer Xu Jie (许杰), dispatched by the Central Committee of the GMD to work for the GMD newspaper *A Paper for the Benefit of the Public* (*Yiqunbao*) in Kuala Lumpur, imagined the smelly durian as a symbol of the stink of the Nanyang's capitalist society and the money-oriented mentality of Chinese hawkers.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the story of Zheng He, a Chinese Muslim explorer of Southeast Asia, the durian tree was said to have grown from a latrine. Publication of Xu Jie's essay ridiculing Chinese migrants' attachment to the durian was not allowed, and since Xu was not willing to sell out his ideals, as he explained, after struggling for one year, he decided to leave the stinky world of the Nanyang. But where, he asked, would he go to leave the world of capitalism?<sup>3</sup> Around the same time, in 1932 the Singapore-born founder of Sun Yatsen's Revolutionary Alliance, Zhang Yongfu, moved to China. In his recollection, Sun could not stand the durian either.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of Sun's taste for the durian in reality, Zhang's reminiscence was intended to demonstrate Sun's loyalty to China at a time when the GMD promoted the identification of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* 华侨) with China. It was during this epoch that the Malayan Communist Party (Malaya gongchandang) (MCP), consisting of former GMD and CCP members aiming to promote the Chinese Revolution, also attempted to mediate between the Chinese community and the local environments, and to indigenize by using the communist language of anticolonial liberation and by recruiting non-Chinese members into Chinese organizations. Amid the confusion of sojourning between China and the Nanyang, Chinese communists in Malaya organized themselves in ways both familiar, as Chinese organizations among sojourners had for centuries, and novel, as Bolshevik revolutionary parties. The result was a hybrid product of the interwar global moment, a mix of old and new, shaped by misunderstandings, miscommunications, and contingencies.

<sup>2</sup> Ching Fatt Yong, *Origins of Malayan Communism* (Singapore: South Sea Society, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Xu Jie, "Liulian [Durian]," in Xu Jie, *Yezi yu liulian: Zhongguo xiandai xiaopin jingdian* [*Coconut and Durian: Little Souvenirs of Contemporary China*] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), pp. 39–46.

<sup>4</sup> During the war, Zhang held high positions in Wang Jingwei's government and was imprisoned by the GMD for two years. He was not forgiven by old friends when he returned to Singapore in 1949 and so he moved to Hong Kong, where he lived in seclusion until his death in 1957. Liu Changping and Li Ke, *Fengyu Wanqingyuan: Buying wangque de Xinhai geming xunchen Zhang Yongfu* [*Trials and Hardships of Wangqing Garden: Meritorious Official of the Xinhai Revolution Zhang Yongfu Should Not Be Forgotten*] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2011), pp. 239–240; Zhang Yongfu, *Nanyang yu chuangli Minguo* [*Nanyang and the Establishment of the Republic*] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1933), p. 99.

Although the MCP was a predominantly Chinese overseas organization, it was rooted in the regional historical experience of Southeast Asian forms of organization in response to a shared set of challenges that came with colonialism. Similar to 1920s' Java, we can see in Malaya that a new sense of agency was expressed in languages and forms that were novel at the time, "but at the same time based on the old ones," such as newspapers, rallies, strikes, parties, and ideologies.<sup>5</sup> Similar to leftist Chinese immigrant intellectuals in Malaya, journalists in Java assumed new roles aside from being editors, writers, and commentators on readers' letters: they talked at rallies and negotiated between the authorities and members of the political parties.<sup>6</sup> Similar to the MCP's translation of national categories, a transformation of the national consciousness, *pergerakan*, was a process of translation and appropriation that "allowed people to say in new forms and languages what they had been unable to say."<sup>7</sup> Similar to *pergerakan*, which involved the rise of Indonesian nationalism and the imagery of a free world in pan-Islamic and pan-communist terms, the MCP imagined its nation as part of a world liberated from colonialism.

In response to imperialism, across maritime Southeast Asia new ideas of nationalism and radicalism were grafted onto existing concepts and organizational forms, which shaped the hybridization of anti-imperialist and labor organizations. Independence ideas were translated through the religious appeal and social relevance of a Christian narrative among Philippine peasants into the early 1900s; the historical relationship between the middle-class leadership, landownership, the Catholic Church, and the revolutionary societies such as Katipunan, secret societies akin to Freemasonry, and early labor organizations<sup>8</sup> resulted in the active participation of secret society members in the communist party. Javanese Muslims joined forces with the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) because communism offered the best way of practicing Islam.<sup>9</sup> The worlds of Christianity, Islam, communism, and nationalism intersected. It was the Comintern's Bolshevization that was to remedy such hybridity and, common to the communist parties of the 1930s, the divide between elite communists and labor movements and the party and "the masses." Bolshevization also involved the adaptation of policies to local conditions, that is, indigenization.

<sup>5</sup> Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. xiii–xiv.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 339–340.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Fuller, *Forcing the Pace: The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas: From the Founding to the Armed Struggle* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2007), pp. 10–11; Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, *Pasyon and revolution: Popular movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*, pp. 244, 249.

The MCP's history and the discourse of its Malayan nation were an illustration of the global connections of the interwar period and the products of the prevailing global trends of internationalization and indigenization, comparable with those of other international organizations such as Protestant missions and Buddhist organizations.<sup>10</sup> In this ideological moment, to borrow from Cheek,<sup>11</sup> all three movements, although offering conflicting visions of modernity, had structural similarities and embraced nationalism. Thus, nationalism did not contradict internationalism. In the MCP and in the Philippines and Indonesia, the movement for independence was intertwined with globalist thinking in the form of Comintern internationalism, the pan-Asianism of Sun Yatsen, Christianity, Islam, and anarchism.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of the interwar internationalist moment,<sup>13</sup> while the 1917 Revolution transformed the Russian empire into what Terry Martin has called the "affirmative empire" of Soviet nationalities,<sup>14</sup> the internationalist Comintern acted through the only recognized "national" communist parties in the colonies to support and create nationalism. As the Comintern sought to break the world imperialist system through its "weakest link" in pursuit of a world proletarian revolution, in the context of societies with significant immigrant populations, the Comintern's variant of internationalism created or built on existing discourses of multiethnic nations, similar to the Soviet republics.<sup>15</sup>

While the roles that the Comintern and Chinese communist organizations in Malaya played in indigenous nationalism were unique among Chinese communist organizations overseas, similarly, in the Dutch East Indies the first to use the marker "Indonesia" were communists.<sup>16</sup> Also,

<sup>10</sup> Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Dana L. Robert, "First Globalization? The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars," in Ogbu Kalu and Alaine Low, eds., *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), pp. 93–130.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> For the role of transnational anarchism, see Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London; New York, NY: Verso, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Érez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Norman G. Owen, ed., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 298.

Austrian communists were key in the shaping of nationalist discourses in a previously nonexistent nation.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, in the interwar global moment and internationalist zeitgeist,<sup>18</sup> the lack of contradiction between nationalism and internationalism in the MCP, as expressed in the Comintern's promotion both of nations through the establishment of national parties and of a world revolution, fit the GMD and CCP's aspiration for a world of equal nations. Through this discourse and the organization of a "national" party through an internationalist alliance of various ethnic groups, the MCP became both nationalist and internationalist. Thus, Malaya, similar to cosmopolitan China, in the words of Hung-Yok Ip, became an "internationalist nation."<sup>19</sup> Comintern internationalism helped to ground the "ungrounded empire" of Chinese networks in Malaya.<sup>20</sup>

The MCP was one node in the international network of the 1920s and 1930s, throughout which we can see the operation of the global interwar networks of Chinese communists, of the Comintern, and of transnational anti-imperialism. Similarly, according to Michele Louro, when Nehru participated in the League Against Imperialism (1927), he viewed nationalism and internationalism as not mutually exclusive, and his distinction between nationalism and internationalism, India and the world, was blurred.<sup>21</sup> Through the workings of this interwar globalization and the conjuncture of nationalism and internationalism in Chinese networks due to the nature of Chinese migration, which prompted overseas Chinese to be embedded in both sending and receiving environments and nationalism, the MCP's nation under Chinese leadership in a multiethnic community illustrates the Chinese role in nationalism in Southeast Asia.

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To explain the relationships among Southeast Asia, China, and the goals of a communist revolution in the 1930s, apart from a consideration of

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Felix Wemheuer for this point and for the reference. Robert Menasse, *Das war Österreich: Gesammelte Essays zum Land ohne Eigenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 60–61.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Hung-Yok Ip, "Cosmopolitanism and the Ideal Image of Nation in Communist Revolutionary Culture," in Kai-wing Chow, Kevin M. Doak, and Poshek Fu, eds., *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), pp. 215–246.

<sup>20</sup> To borrow from Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Michele Louro, "India and the League Against Imperialism: A Special 'Blend' of Nationalism and Internationalism," in Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah, eds., *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2014), pp. 22–55, esp. p. 43.

indigenous communist movements in Southeast Asia, we must consider the connections among three sides: the overseas Chinese, the *huaqiao*, shaped by the policies of their host governments; the Third Communist International or Comintern, run out of Moscow, with the Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) regional office in Shanghai; and China itself, including Sun Yatsen, GMD revolutionaries, and Chinese communists. Comintern networks were merely an added layer of a global network of Chinese sojourning communities in which Soviet ideology and, above all, nationalist Chinese communism were secondary to the survival behavior of the *huaqiao* community. This community was larger than families and smaller than the state, although it was trying to become the state in and of itself, and it promoted the anticolonial revolution in the region of the Nanyang. We see in what follows, as well, how these communities operated over long distances, and we gain insights into their organizational and justificatory structures.

Yet the earliest communist envoys in British Malaya were Sneevliet, Darsono, Semaun, and Baars, a group of Dutch and Indonesians from the Dutch East Indies who passed through Singapore in 1921–1922 on their way to and from Shanghai, Moscow, or Holland,<sup>22</sup> as well as Bao Huiseng, a founding member of the CCP who worked in Malaya in 1922. Tan Malaka's activity in 1924 in Singapore cooperating with Chinese and supported by the Comintern notwithstanding, after the defeat of the uprising in Java in 1926–1927, many PKI refugees, such as Alimin, Musso, Winanta, Subakat, and Jamaluddin Tamin, among others, fled through Singapore.<sup>23</sup> The paths of Indonesian and Chinese communists thus ran parallel in Malaya. Despite a small number of Malays in the MCP during the 1930s, the MCP was unable to solve what has usually been seen as its main problem, that is, its Chinese orientation. The party was unable to attract any significant non-Chinese membership, yet the party genuinely identified with Malaya.

Philip Kuhn's conception of Chinese overseas as having a need to be doubly rooted in China and in their local environments helps make sense of the MCP's dual nationalism.<sup>24</sup> In MCP texts, this is expressed in the multiple meanings of the word *minzu* as "nation," "nationality," "people," and "national." The concept of *minzu* moved between different meanings

<sup>22</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924–1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party. Selected Documents and Discussion* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, "Why China Historians Should Study the Chinese Diaspora, and Vice-versa," Liu Kuang-ching Lecture, 2004, University of California, Davis, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 2(2) (2006), pp. 163–172.

for different audiences at different times, and even between different meanings for the same audience at different times. However, this process of slippage in meaning is not the same as a misunderstanding. I show that the variant meanings of *minzu* were consistent and coherent within specific discursive domains. Similarly, Comintern ideas of “national” parties helped Chinese communists in Malaya secure their place in the Malayan nation, which the British government promoted at the time despite not granting Chinese immigrants political rights. The British government rather promoted one “Malayan” identity, which would be based on the common language, Malay or English, and a “love for the land.”<sup>25</sup>

These circumstances were channeled through a translation slippage of the word *minzu*. In the following decade, in the ranges of different meanings employed by different actors in the revolution in the Nanyang, this notion of “nation” literally sojourned between Malaya and China in MCP discourse. As “sojourning” better describes this process, it does not imply the negative connotation that was associated with Chinese immigrants at the time, as sojourners who were not really present in a new place and were always outsiders in some fashion. However, scholarship on overseas Chinese has shown that “sojourning Chinese” contradicted 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. This book maps this movement over time and through contemporary documents and demonstrates the actual mechanics and ways in which Chinese immigrant communists imagined the “nation.”<sup>26</sup> The enduring meaning and flexibility of the concept of *minzu*, which can be found only in the details, did not only reflect the historical change but also played a role that shaped history. Those details are a key part of my story.

The MCP’s story is a history of the conjuncture of words, concepts, and changed social experiences. Chinese in Shanghai and Singapore used Russian directives in English based on their often global experience in the late 1920s. Perched in their different environments, they assigned significantly different meanings to these borrowed words and concepts. The mechanism for this was twofold, conceptual and social. When speakers of different languages interpreted authoritative texts or generated their own

<sup>25</sup> “United Malaya,” *Malaya Tribune*, December 26, 1933, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> For the MCP’s “national” outlook, see Sze-Chieh Ng, “Silenced Revolutionaries: Challenging the Received View of Malaya’s Revolutionary Past” (MA Thesis, Arizona State University, 2011), p. 21; C. C. Chin, “The Revolutionary Programmes and Their Effect on the Struggle of the Malayan Communist Party,” in Karl Hack and C. C. Chin, eds., *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2004), pp. 260–278.

texts using the conceptual training available to them, a key word's pragmatic definition (the change in the meaning of a key word reflected in its actual use) conjoined with the changed social experience of text writers and text readers to produce different meanings for the same words. I build on Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts) to map the social history of these meanings in the language.<sup>27</sup>

Malayan Chinese communists' adoption of the ideas of Comintern internationalism and of a national party was similar to the Hakka ethno-cultural group's adoption of Christianity in Guangxi Province in the mid-nineteenth century, as they too had to assert their interests vis-à-vis the local population. In both cases, novel concepts and language effectively represented a change in the social experience of the local population. At the same time, as Kuhn has stressed, imported concepts and language (which, by the twentieth century, often came in the form of an integrated ideology) are not simply adapted to a new locality but also bring their own internal logic to the new environment. Thus, the novelty of an imported ideology (if it finds social efficacy) is twofold: it offers new ways to perceive and address the changed social reality, and it injects some new intentions and reasoning into a locality.<sup>28</sup> The case of the MCP's Malayan nationalism offers a concrete look at the workings of ideological borrowing.

*Minzu* was a key word, one of the "significant, indicative words" that conveyed "strong feelings or important ideas" at the time, and despite nominal continuity in its general meaning, changes in its definition across cultural contexts were "radically different or radically variable, yet sometimes hardly noticed." Raymond Williams tells us that these meanings are not confined to language but extend to "the users of language and to the objects and relationships" about which language speaks, and those "exist, indeed primarily, in material and historical ways."<sup>29</sup>

Language, central to the MCP story, defined how a nation was imagined and what a nation was to become. Slippages in meaning thus underlined the role of language in forming the basis for historical change and national consciousness. Yet language divisions impeded the MCP in

<sup>27</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 73–91. I also draw on the methodology from Timothy Cheek, "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.

<sup>28</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, "Origins of the Taiping Vision: Cross-Cultural Dimensions of a Chinese Rebellion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19(3) (July 1977), pp. 350–366. I thank Timothy Cheek for this point.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 9, 13, 15, 20.

its goal to become the (multi)national party of Malaya even while facilitating communication in transnational networks. The MCP's "nation" is yet another example of the strategic use of Bolshevik language by various actors in the 1920–1930s and an example of how language formulations effected policies in the world of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>30</sup> As *minzu* was translated between different languages and semantic fields, as in the case of comparable strategic adoption, where political power (real or symbolic) underpins the choice of meaning in "translingual practices,"<sup>31</sup> ultimately, the consequences of the "semantic hybridity" of translated concepts across cultures and intersecting ideological and political fields<sup>32</sup> were unintended. Marshall Sahlins's concept of the structure of conjuncture, that is, meanings, accidents, and causal forces that shape conditions whose interactions in particular times and spaces seal the fates of whole societies,<sup>33</sup> is instructive to explain the case of the MCP's Malayan nation, as during the same time period comparable ambiguities and fluidity in the meaning of the terms "country," "ethnicity," and "people" can be found in the contexts of Indonesia,<sup>34</sup> Japan,<sup>35</sup> and the Harlem Renaissance movement.<sup>36</sup>

The MCP's Malayan nation was one among other concepts of national belonging, as the Malayan community 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. For Malay-speaking Muslims, Indians who spoke South Asian languages, and those speaking the dialects of South China but writing in Mandarin, English, as the official language of the British government was the

<sup>30</sup> Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity: China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Kai-wing Chow, "Narrating Nation, Race, and National Culture: Imagining the Hanzu Identity in Modern China," in Chow, Doak, and Fu, eds., *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 47–84, esp. p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1981). My thanks to James Wilkerson for introducing me to Sahlins's work.

<sup>34</sup> Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, 1917–42* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981). See more in Chapter 4.

<sup>35</sup> Kevin M. Doak, "Narrating China, Ordering East Asia: The Discourse on Nation and Ethnicity in Imperial Japan," in Chow, Doak, and Fu, eds., *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia*, pp. 85–116.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature between the Wars: A New Pandora's Box* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), p. 62.

medium of communication. How does one imagine a community if the community speaks three or more languages?

Thus, it should not surprise us that the residents of British Malaya sought ways of imagining an inclusive community other than the single-language print capitalism described by Benedict Anderson, which, however, the British government successfully employed to imbue the idea of a Malayan nation in Chinese immigrants as well as a sense of common identity through Malay-language newspapers among Malays in the early 1930s.<sup>37</sup> Malay concepts of national belonging, such as *bangsa*, excluded immigrants, who in 1921 comprised half the population of British Malaya. Thus, these concepts could not appeal to the Chinese, who themselves comprised more than one-third of the population. Other imaginations that were comparable to national belonging and collective living in the Malay Peninsula, such as an Islamic community (*umat*) excluding non-Muslims, as a sultan-centered loyalty (*kerajaan*), and as a British Malayan nation, did not accommodate the political rights of a large immigrant population.<sup>38</sup> The MCP's Malayan nation was to awaken as a proletarian multiethnic nation, similar to China as imagined by the Chinese communists,<sup>39</sup> run by an alliance of three communist parties representing the three largest communities of British Malaya, Chinese, Malay, and Indian, as the "national" Malayan Communist Party. However, the MCP is best understood as a "hybrid organization" with roots in older forms of Chinese associational life as well as in more novel forms and idioms of Bolshevization rather than as a mere pawn of the Comintern.<sup>40</sup>

The heterogeneous origins of the Malayan national concept highlight the ambiguities of nationalism and help us to understand why this concept is still being debated today. After World War II, a form of territory-based civic nationalism among Chinese immigrants, which was invented

<sup>37</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. (London; New York, NY: Verso, 1991), p. 43; Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community, 1945–1950* (Kuala Lumpur; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 282–283.

<sup>39</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> For other parties' agency in their relations with the Comintern, see Matthew Worley, ed., *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996); Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

by the intelligentsia (similar to the nationalism in Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, China, India, and even North America) in the 1930s and incorporated immigrant bourgeoisie into the nation, prevailed over the primordial ethnic (or perennial)<sup>41</sup> Malay concept of national belonging based on language, rights to land, or loyalty to a sultan, and over the concepts of the larger communities of Islam and Greater Indonesia. More continuities and similarities exist between MCP attitudes, those of the GMD, and those of the postwar Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) with the incorporation of Chinese into the independent body politic of Malaya.

As in the majority of modern nation-states, several forms of nationalism, as defined by Anthony D. Smith, can be distinguished in the MCP's Malayan nation as can elements of all three types of nationhood: as a bureaucratic incorporation, as a vernacular mobilization by the intelligentsia, and as plural nations built by settlers in North America and Australia.<sup>42</sup> Malaya is thus an example of a constructed Southeast Asian nation where, as in other places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, colonialism was a primary source of nationalism.<sup>43</sup> Similar to other nationalist movements, the MCP sought political power.<sup>44</sup> An imported concept, the MCP's Malayan nation was an exemplary "derivative discourse" based on colonial borders and concepts.<sup>45</sup>

As to the central question in studies of nationalism, which is, according to Hobsbawm, the criteria for nationhood, the MCP's Malayan nation offers a complex answer.<sup>46</sup> It was invented, not as a tradition,<sup>47</sup> but rather as part of a novel national vision embedded in the interwar internationalist zeitgeist and in the British colonial discourse of the Malayan nation and Malayanization (a preferential policy, protection, and promotion of the Malay language) – that is, through state-sponsored top-down nationalism, as described by Ernest Gellner.<sup>48</sup> It

<sup>41</sup> For the categorization of nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 55–56, 223–226, 194. For the Southeast Asian context, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1973).

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, pp. 212, 193–194.

<sup>43</sup> See Nicholas Tarling, *Nationalism in Southeast Asia: If the People Are with Us* (London: Routledge, 2004); Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), introduction, pp. 11–14.

<sup>48</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

was imagined by the Chinese émigré intellectuals for the Chinese community, similar to Anderson's Latin American creoles, the contested pioneers of nationalism,<sup>49</sup> and indigenous Malays considered themselves to be excluded from the category of "Malayans."<sup>50</sup> Chinese communists borrowed concepts and models from the Comintern, specifically concerning national parties and the principle of separate ethnic organizations among communists in the labor and communist movements in the United States. Those two models fit the local context because they allowed communists to imagine the nation promoted by the British government in a different way, one in which Chinese would have equal rights. Ultimately, the MCP's Malayan nation was the beginning of the postwar phase of nationalism in Southeast Asia, described by Anderson as a response to global imperialism, led by bilingual intelligentsia and based on the distilled experience of European and American models.<sup>51</sup>

The MCP was shaped by unintended consequences and by the historical contingencies of anti-imperialism in Southeast Asia, Chinese long-term migration trends, network connections, identity and localization, organizational behavior originating in South China, Soviet and GMD geostrategic visions, and the organizational practices of the Comintern and the international communist movement. The efforts by the GMD, the CCP, and the Comintern in the making of a world revolution overlapped in Southeast Asia, and an independent "national" Malayan communist organization was established as the Chinese communists in Malaya sought the Comintern's international legitimacy and finances (Chapter 2). Combined with a growing need for Chinese immigrants to adopt a Malayan identity and to create a distinct Nanyang Chineseness, this resulted in the MCP's adoption of the discourse of an independent Malayan nation led by communists and including Chinese immigrants (Chapter 3). The MCP's discourse and activities show its hybrid – and torn – nature. The MCP tried to act in the traditional role of Chinese associations as a broker between the Chinese and the British government and, at the same time, it campaigned for the overthrow of governments in Malaya and China (Chapter 4). A comparison with the Chinese immigrant organizations' relation to local nationalism in the American Philippines and the Dutch East Indies demonstrates that the policies of the colonial governments toward the Chinese immigrants and the nuances of their identity shaped the involvement of the Chinese immigrants in the indigenous

<sup>49</sup> For a survey of the critique of Anderson's idea, see, for instance, Nicola Miller, "Latin America: State-Building and Nationalism," in John Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 388–391.

<sup>50</sup> Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 7.

national project. Another unintended result of the MCP's interaction with the Comintern and of their overlapping interests in the mobilization of locally born Chinese was the strengthening of Chinese communist networks in Southeast Asia (Chapter 5). The GMD's nationalist education policies in overseas Chinese schools were responsible for the rising popularity of communist ideas in Malaya (Chapter 6). Chinese communists in Malaya succeeded because of their dual Chinese and Malayan nationalism and in spite of, not because of, their propaganda. Xu Jie's durian story captures the main problem in the relationship between the MCP and the Chinese community, that is, the tensions between the business orientation of the community and the MCP's radicalism, which was disastrous for its following by the beginning of the war (Chapter 7). Yet the experience of the Japanese occupation was crucial in shaping the Chinese community's identification with the territory of sovereign Malaya.

This book is based on a collection of materials produced by the MCP and collected by the Comintern, now archived in Moscow at the Roskiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Sociopolitical History) (RGASPI) and covering 1928–1935 and 1939–1941; MCP members' memoirs from local literary and historical materials (*wenshi ziliao*), Chinese- and English-language periodicals from China and British Malaya, British Colonial and Foreign Office records that contain analytical reports and translations of MCP documents (which scholars sometimes regard as a “state perspective” and not as genuine MCP sources<sup>52</sup>) as well as translations of press clippings from China; the materials of the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP), including those at the National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC), as well as the GMD collection at the Hoover Archives. Because reports in Comintern correspondence are mostly signed by the Central Committee of the MCP, and only a few letters are signed by individuals, it is impossible, with rare exceptions, to attribute ideas and policies to certain individuals. This shortcoming thus migrated to this book, in which I have to refer to the Central Committee of the MCP (CC MCP) or, even worse, to the MCP or the Communist Youth League (CYL) as monolithic actors. Moreover, due to the inconsistent Romanization of different Chinese dialects as well as the large number of aliases that communists used, in many cases the Chinese characters for the names of people in Comintern sources cannot be determined.

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<sup>52</sup> Personal communication with C. C. Chin in Singapore in December 2010. A similar view of police sources on the MCP is taken by Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern*, pp. 5–6.

In admission of my own commitments, I must state that I was born and raised in the Soviet Union. I had to join the Oktiabriata (Little Octobrist) and Young Pioneer organizations, but by the time I reached the age at which I would have joined the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), it was no longer mandatory. In school, we had to memorize the resolutions of party meetings in history classes. In university, my textbooks on the history of the “Ancient East” had quotes from Marx, Engels, and Lenin. When the Comintern was preparing to give 50,000 gold dollars for work in Malaya, my late grandmother, Anna Fedorovna Remizova, lived through famine in the Volga region in 1930–1932 and recalled how, as a child, she would go to the fields to look for edible plants. When I see requests for money in the letters from the Malayan communists to the Comintern, I think of my grandmother and of her father, who was arrested by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del) (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 aspects of the relationship between the Comintern and the MCP is not unreasonable. As I show in this book, the MCP consciously manipulated rhetorical and organizational tools designed for mobilization while its members asked the Comintern for money. The members of the MCP were practical, even if they dreamed of a soviet federation of Malayan states in which they would form 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 a historian is first to understand and explain how things came to pass. Judgment must await future research.