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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Networks, Parties, and the “Oppressed Nations”: The Comintern and Chinese Communists Overseas, 1926–1935

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Abstract

In the late 1920s, the overseas chapters of the Chinese Communist Party allied with the Third Communist International (Comintern)’s pursuit of world revolution and made efforts to take part in anti-colonial movements around the world. As Chinese migrant revolutionaries dealt with discrimination in their adopted countries, they promoted local, Chinese, and world revolutions, borrowing ideas from various actors while they built their organizations and contributed to the project of China’s revival. This article offers a window into the formation of globally connected Chinese revolutionary networks and explores their engagement with Comintern internationalism in its key enclaves in Berlin, San Francisco, Havana, Singapore, and Manila. These engagements built on existing ideas about China’s revival and channeled localization needs of the Chinese migrant Communists. The article draws on sources deposited in the Comintern archive in Moscow (RGASPI), as well as on personal reminiscences published as literary and historical materials (*wenshi ziliao*).

Keywords: Chinese Communist Party overseas, Guomindang, Comintern, League against Imperialism, anti-colonialism, San Francisco Chinese, Berlin Chinese, Manila Chinese, Chinese in Singapore, Chinese in Philippines, internationalism, interwar period, institutional borrowing

This article offers a snapshot of how Chinese Communist networks took shape in the late 1920s to early 1930s as Chinese revolutionaries moved across the globe between Berlin, Brussels, San Francisco, Havana, Moscow, Manila, and Singapore. Long-distance connections facilitated organizational borrowings, which amalgamated international revolutionary networks and local movements against imperialism. This transnational perspective and the focus on Chinese overseas networks contribute to the recent scholarship on international influences on the Chinese Communist movement beyond Moscow (one influence being American Communism), and further complicate the picture of the Comintern (1919–1943), or Third Communist International, invariably undermining the revolution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Ishikawa 2013).



Figure 1. The Third International by Ivan Ivanovich Golikov (1886–1937), portraying the Comintern’s internationalism. Painted on a lacquered plate in the style of Palekh miniatures, which draw on the tradition of Russian Orthodox religious icons, 1927. *Source*: Wikimedia Commons.

The League against Imperialism (LAI) had originated in the United States in 1898. LAI was reestablished as a worldwide organization in 1927 by German Communists with Comintern funding. The Guomindang (GMD), or Chinese Nationalist Party, took an active part in the LAI and appropriated the league’s organizational model for its organizations of Asian revolutionaries in China. Moreover, the GMD also aspired to usurp the Comintern’s leading position in the international anti-colonial movement. After the breakdown of GMD–Comintern cooperation in 1927, the CCP in turn adopted the LAI model to build party organizations in the Americas. Comintern networks also facilitated the influence of the multiethnic model of the American party on the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in Southeast Asia in 1929. As the Comintern relied on the Chinese Communist network for communication between the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), the Philippine Communist Party, and the CCP, Comintern networks had become the CCP’s vehicle of communication by the 1930s and helped consolidate CCP networks.

Building on the existing scholarship (Benton 2007; Fowler 2007), this article argues that nationalism and internationalism channeled each other in Chinese transnational revolutionary networks and were not contradictory. Chinese overseas Communists funneled their need for connection to their host societies (Kuhn 2006) through participation in local revolutionary struggles, a strategy the Comintern endorsed as internationalist. The organizational synergy of CCP and Comintern networks was possible because the Comintern's internationalism and rhetoric of support for the Chinese Revolution fit the internationalist ideology of the GMD and of the second stage of Chinese nationalism (Fitzgerald 1998). The GMD and the CCP overlapped with the Comintern in that all three organizations aimed to liberate the colonies as part of a world revolution that would benefit China and Chinese communities overseas.

Introduction

In the post-Versailles world, after the League of Nations had failed to solve the colonial question, transnational nationalist organizations searched for an alternative world order, embracing various forms of internationalism and promoting a world of sovereign and equal nations (Manela 2007). Nationalism was thus inseparable from internationalism, and Chinese revolutionaries were no exception to this pattern. In 1924, Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the GMD, postulated in one of his lectures on nationalism that only if China returned to its historical policy of helping the weak—that is, the weak and small (*ruoxiao*) nations in the former Chinese sphere of influence—and opposing the strong (*jiruo fuqing*) would it be able to become powerful again and stand up to European colonialism. To accomplish this, China would have to form a confederation similar to the United States—a “Great State of the East” (*dongfang daguo*)—together with Japan and oppressed (*beiyapo*) nations such as Mongolia, India, Afghanistan, Persia, Burma, and Annam (Duan 2009, 168; Sun 1986a, 193, 200, 253, 304).

For Sun, “oppressed nations” included not only those considered weak colonies in the Darwinian hierarchy of nations but also those defeated in the war, such as Germany, as well as the Soviet Union. Throughout the period from 1923 to 1927, Sun's Canton government maintained an agreement with the Soviet Union regarding aid to build a military force in exchange for a united front with the CCP, which paved the way for Soviet influence in China. CCP members acted as GMD envoys in Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and in North and South America. Many Chinese there had sympathized with Sun's revolutionary cause prior

to the overthrow of the imperial Chinese government in 1911, which had failed to protect Chinese overseas from discrimination by the governments of their new home countries.¹ Among Chinese communities, the popularity of the CCP grew, especially after the May Thirtieth movement, a series of worldwide protests against the suppression of the Chinese student demonstration by foreign Shanghai Municipal Police in 1925 (Gao Z. 1928a). After the 1927 GMD purge and the break with the Comintern, many Communists had to flee overseas to Southeast Asia, known in Chinese as the Nanyang, which was the historical area of Chinese migration. By that time, diasporic networks around the world maintained a lively transnational press, communicated and organized around local conditions at sites of settlement, supported multilocational social and political organizations, and coordinated transnational boycotts over race and immigration issues (Kuhn 2008, 229–232, 257–265).

New radical ideas and organizational modes traveled across the world through Chinese networks. Chinese workers returning from the United States brought with them the methods of unionizing and striking, which they then used in Hong Kong and China in Sun Yat-sen's organization (Lai 2010, 54–57). The GMD vied for the support of the overseas Chinese, and when Sun's "Three People's Principles" became official GMD ideology in 1927, the GMD promoted the unity of the populations of the "oppressed" colonies and the overseas Chinese who were "oppressed" by the governments of those colonies (MRCA 1931; Wang G. 1992a, 33). Communists continued to ally with the Comintern, which focused on the revolution in Asia after 1927, establishing national Communist parties there and often relying on Chinese Communists in places of historical Chinese migration. These overseas Chinese Communists were keen to promote anti-colonial liberation in an alliance with local "oppressed nations."

The World "International of Nations"

Established in 1921, the European general branch (*liuou zongzhibu*) of the CCP included cells in France, Belgium, and Germany (Benton 2007, 31). The German branch (*liude zhi bu*), established one year later, went on to become the Chinese-language fraction of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) (*degong zhongguo yuyan zu*) after 1927 (Liao 1980). At first, Chinese in Germany were nearly all students. By 1935, the German Chinese community comprised about one thousand students and several hundred seafarers and entrepreneurs (Benton 2007, 6, 30). Earlier, France had been perceived as the most Chinese-

friendly European nation due to its revolutionary tradition (Guomindang [1929] 2000, 9). However, in the postwar years, many students moved from France to Germany, in order to escape poverty (Tretyakov 1962, 7, 252–253).² Because of postwar inflation, Germany was a more affordable place to live (Liao 1980).

German Communists treated Chinese students as speakers for the Chinese nation, and the Chinese Communist connection to the KPD resulted in good organization and a steady supply of resources (Benton 2007, 36). German Communist support for Chinese solidarity rallies during the May Thirtieth movement should be considered in the context of Sun Yat-sen's ideas. Sun and Chiang Kai-Shek envisioned a three-country socialist confederation wherein the Soviet Union would provide ideas and Germany would provide military technology to China to restore its position as a powerful nation, which would in turn help Germany restore its position, which had been undermined by the Treaty of Versailles. However, by 1923, German financial and governmental circles were not willing to invest in revolutionary China, and the Rapallo period of the German–Soviet alliance was over (Felber 1997). Despite this, the leftist GMD in Berlin referred to Sun Yat-sen as “the greatest human being of the twentieth century” (Liang 1978, 35).

In response to the protest letter written by the German branch of the CCP regarding Reuters's report that the May Thirtieth movement in China was yet another expression of Chinese xenophobia, newspapers quickly published a retraction the following day. Although Chinese students participating in KPD-organized rallies against British imperialism and in support of China were arrested, after Berlin, newspapers protested the intention to deport them, and upon receiving due apologies from the police, they were let go. The future leader of the People's Liberation Army, Zhu De, and Liao Huanxing, a Comintern cadre, together spent two days in a jail at Alexanderplatz in Berlin (Liu L. 1988).

In Berlin, pro-Chinese moods and Comintern funding paved the way for the foundation of the League against Imperialism, which was based on the Hands-Off China Society created by Workers International Relief and Willi Münzenberg, a prominent German communist who was also active in the Comintern. At the inaugural congress of the LAI in Brussels in 1927, which was in fact the world congress of anti-colonial organizations, one-fifth of all representatives came from the GMD (Piazza 2002). Meanwhile, the GMD established leagues against imperialism in Shanghai and Canton to wrest leadership of Asian Communists from the Comintern (Quinn-Judge 2003, 83–84, 167).

Hu Hanmin, chosen by Sun Yat-sen as the successor to GMD leadership, hoped to convert the Comintern into the global *minzu guoji* (international of nations) first imagined by Sun Yat-sen, with the GMD playing a leading role in the “international national revolutionary movement” (*lingdao guojide minzu geming yundong*). Hu suggested this while he was in Russia in 1926 to lobby for the Guomindang’s membership in the Comintern (Hu H. 1980, 1400–1401). This goal was pragmatic, as it aimed to realize the GMD’s vision of a world revolution (Li Y. 2013). From this angle, the League against Imperialism was similar in organization to a *minzu guoji*, uniting the anti-colonialists of the world, with explicit references to Sun Yat-sen and with strong participation by the Chinese GMD. Upon Hu Hanmin’s return from Moscow in April 1926, the GMD central committee dispatched him as its representative at the first congress of the LAI and appointed Hu’s assistant, Liao Huanxing, as a backup. The British GMD had originally dispatched Liao to establish a branch in Berlin, where Liao also became a referent at the information office of the Comintern (Liu L. 1996). Unaware of Liao’s secret mission, his Communist comrades accused him of being the self-appointed representative of Chinese workers’ parties (Liao 1929, 32, 34). At the Brussels congress, Liao quoted Sun Yat-sen’s plea for the GMD to unite with the “oppressed” classes of the West and with the “oppressed” nations of the world to oppose oppressors and imperialists (Liao 1995, 142–145). Liao later became the secretary of the LAI’s international secretariat.

It was no accident that the LAI’s organizational origins were in Germany. In 1929, a GMD cadre reported the following to the GMD Central Committee about the situation in Germany:

After the Great War, Germany was repressed by the Versailles Treaty and dared not offend other nations. Thus, their foreign policy is very prudent. Furthermore, the Sino–German unequal treaties were abolished long ago. Recently, attempting to gain our country’s markets in order to compete with other countries, they have mostly expressed sympathy with our nationalist movements (the Germans call themselves an oppressed nation, so they want very much to ally with weak and small nations in order to rise again)... The KPD previously had positive feelings toward us and were enthusiastic in aiding us. (Guomindang [1929] 2000, 149–150)

Although the author of this letter had reservations about the motivations of the KPD for aiding the Chinese Revolution, saying that those were colonialist impulses that had been planted by last German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm’s ambitions in Asia, and though working-class supporters of the KPD were averse to foreigners, KPD leaders extended a warm welcome to arriving Chinese

Communists and students. In this period, China was the prime international focus of the KPD, which used the Chinese issue in its domestic political struggle (Krüger 2007; Benton 2007, 36), as did the Comintern. Even if Chinese revolutionaries saw an ulterior motive behind German support for the Chinese revolution—and Liao even left the LAI and his Berlin post and was recalled to Moscow after a conflict with Münzenberg in 1928 (Krüger 2002; Petersson 2013, 199)³—in 1930s Germany there was an intellectual fascination with China as a model of a nation that had changed dramatically and rapidly through revolution (Li W. 2014). Chinese Communists continued to cooperate with German Communists protesting the transport of German military supplies to China in 1931 (Benton 2007, 34). These developments echoed Sun Yat-sen’s ideas about a Sino–German alliance.

In this period, students traveling to Moscow for studies from the United States, England, Germany, and France stopped in Berlin and met with Liao Huanxing (Liu L. 1996). The activities of the LAI were thus closely intertwined with the activities of Chinese revolutionary networks. The LAI network became the communication channel and the model for Chinese Communist organizations in the Americas.

The Global World of Chinese Communists and Localization: From Europe to the United States to Malaya

The first Chinese Communist organization in the United States, the Chinese-language fraction (*meigongdang zhongyang fushuzhongguojie*), was established after contact with the LAI network in 1927 under the guidance of the anti-imperialist committee of the American Communist Party (Chinese Fraction 1928) by Shi Huang, Xu Yongyin, and a member of the American party, Ji Chaoding, alias C. T. Chi.⁴ Ji came up with this idea after returning from his role as a representative of the Students’ Society for the Advancement of Sun Yat-senism in America and the American Anti-imperialist League at the LAI congress in Brussels (Wang M. n.d.; Liao 1980; Lai 2010, 65).

The Chinese community in the continental United States, which numbered 77,504 in 1940 (Lai 2010, 162n55), had a different makeup than the Chinese community in Germany. Chinese Communists applied the category of the “oppressed” not to local Americans but to Chinese immigrants. American exclusion laws (1882) limited the presence of Chinese in the country and denied them American citizenship. Members of the Chinese community were

confined to jobs in laundries, domestic service, restaurants, and Chinatown stores, and many turned to China to start families and make political engagements (Hsu 2010, 2–3).

Typical of early CCP organizations overseas, the Chinese fraction in San Francisco, consisting of seven students, did not have much contact with the “masses.” Except for two individuals, the students did not speak Cantonese, the language of the majority of Chinese migrants in the United States (WPA n.d.; Comintern 1927). The Chinese Communists in San Francisco promoted anti-Japanese boycotts and competed with the GMD as well as with other Chinese organizations, such as the Chinese Freemasons (*zhigongdang*) and the Royalists (*baohuanghui*), for the allegiance of “the masses” (Memorandum n.d.). Chinese Communists were eager to contribute to the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Movement and wanted information about the party’s activity to be publicized in Chinese newspapers (Memorandum n.d.).

Chinese communists also aspired to form a revolutionary alliance with the “oppressed nations” in the Americas, especially in the de facto American protectorate of Cuba, and established multiple regional organizations modeled after the LAI (Fowler 2007, 145–147). In 1925, the Comintern authorized the Workers Party of America to reestablish the All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL), the initial goal of which was to protest the annexation of Cuba (1898–1920). By 1927, the AAAIL existed only on paper (Petersson 2013, 70, 175), and Chinese Communists would thus help staff this regional Comintern organization by establishing connections between the Chinese fraction and the CCP chapters in Cuba, the Philippines, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru (Comintern 1933a). After breaking with the GMD in 1927, the Chinese fraction planned to take over the anti-imperialist activities of leftist GMD organizations in the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico through branches of the Alliance for the Support of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolution in America (ASCWPRA) (*Xianfeng Bao* 1933). In 1929, the ASCWPRA participated in the second Anti-Imperialist World Congress in Frankfurt and joined the LAI (Lai 2010, 73). Wang Ming, the Moscow liaison for the Chinese section of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA),⁵ suggested that the Chinese fraction organize Chinese overseas in Mexico and Canada by recruiting avant-garde members of the AAAIL into the party and establishing local CCP cells (Comintern 1933b).

The world of the Chinese Communists was quite global. After 1929, Berlin had become the hub connecting Comintern pan-Pacific operations with Moscow (Fowler 2007, 89). Chinese

Communists in Europe sent Comintern publications to Chinese Communists in the United States, who in turn sent copies of *Xianfeng bao* (Chinese vanguard), produced by Chinese Communists in the United States, to Europe. They also sent LAI and party propaganda to Malaya, where Chinese students translated them into Chinese (Zhang 1982; Belogurova 2014). Possibly, they also translated CCP documents from Chinese into English for the Comintern. Stanford student Shi Huang, who wrote Sun Yat-sen's biography as his master's thesis (Shih 1928), went to Cuba and Canada in 1929 to establish connections with local parties on behalf of the Chinese fraction of the American party and to build the Oriental Branch of the American Anti-Imperialist League of the Pacific Coast. After studying in Moscow, Shi returned to China in 1930 to work as a translator for the Central Committee of the CCP (Fowler 2007, 145–146; Hu X. 2010). Someone like Shi, lacking knowledge of Southeast Asia, mistranslated *Guawa* (Java) as “Cuba” and *Senmeilan* (Sembilan) as “Ceylon” in a CCP letter to the “Nanyang communists” in 1929 (CCP CC 1929).

Via CCP networks, this letter, translated for the Comintern into English, brought the American party model to Southeast Asia. The CCP suggested that the Comintern should help establish an independent Nanyang party on the basis of a CCP branch, which had had headquarters in Singapore since 1926 and had cells in Malaya, and that the trade union movement should first be organized separately among ethnic communities and then united into one organization. The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat could help the Nanyang Communists “in building a stable foundation,” the letter suggested (CCP CC 1929). Since the head of the secretariat was American Communist Earl Browder, whose organizational ideas had originated in the multiethnic American context, this vision of the Communist Party as an alliance of ethnic parties was influenced by the American Communist organizational structure. In 1930, the Malayan Communist Party was established on the basis of the Singapore committee of the Nanyang party. This multiethnic model made sense locally, as Malaya had an immigrant population of 45 percent, of whom 39 percent in 1931 were Chinese migrants; the Communist movement in mainland Southeast Asia generally consisted of migrants; and British policies compartmentalized Malayan industry by ethnicity (Roff 1967, 208; Goscha 1999, 76–113; N. A. K. 1930).

However, the Comintern insisted that one national organization be established in which members of all ethnic groups, as internationalists, would join together because of the Comintern

principle of one “national” Communist Party per country. Building on Comintern internationalism and on Sun Yat-sen’s and the GMD’s idea of uniting with the “oppressed nations,” the one thousand to fifteen hundred Chinese Communists in Malaya, lacking language skills and often condescending to the locals, unsuccessfully attempted to build a “national” Malayan party that would unite the members of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic communities (Belogurova 2014).

The Comintern promoted the same policy of indigenization—that is, of involvement of non-Chinese “oppressed” locals in the party, in Malaya as in the United States, where Americanization was a response to pressures by American Communists, since the immigrant sections in the CPUSA were the largest (Zumoff 2014). Much as the CCP had appealed to the Nanyang Communists, Wang Ming reminded Chinese Communists in the United States that they had to pay attention to local conditions in those countries where they established chapters of the AAAIL (Comintern 1933b).⁶ Similarly, the *Chinese Vanguard* advocated for Chinese participation in the Cuban revolution and Communist Party.⁷ The *Chinese Vanguard*, similar to Nanjing-era publications targeting Chinese overseas in the Nanyang, promoted campaigns for the rights of Chinese laborers and the idea of Chinese leadership in the world revolution, including Cuban liberation. In Cuba, laws against foreign laborers adopted in the early 1930s, similar to Malaya’s discriminative laws, ignited the concerns of the Chinese (*Xianfeng Bao* 1934, 2). The anti-imperialism and organizational structures of the LAI and the Comintern made sense in immigrant societies such as the United States, Malaya, and Cuba. Chinese revolutionaries thus translated Comintern internationalism into the movement for Chinese immigrant rights both in Southeast Asia and in the Americas. Chinese Communists embraced the regional imagination of the American empire and were ready to embrace the national liberation struggle there.

In Southeast Asia, a sphere of Chinese migration and interest, Chinese Communists had a vision of the “oppressed” local peoples, including Chinese migrants, led to liberation by a Chinese Communist Party. This was reminiscent of the GMD’s policy in Southeast Asia to ward off Japanese expansion much as the United States’ Monroe Doctrine had in the Americas. The GMD cultivated Chinese nationalism among Chinese communities through education in Chinese schools, which promoted the narrative of historical peaceful Chinese colonization of the Nanyang (Wang G. 1992b; Sai 2013; Liu and Shu 1935). Contemporary GMD policy and Comintern internationalism merged in the MCP’s regional imagination. The Comintern endorsed

this vision, as it fit the Comintern's interest in the MCP becoming a connecting hub in Southeast Asia. While the Comintern's leverage in Malaya was limited to sporadic contact and promises of funds and international recognition, the MCP established regional Chinese Communist connections in mainland Southeast Asia, which fitted the Chinese Communist organizational interests (Belogurova 2014). Similarly, the Comintern's need to connect the Philippine and U.S. Communist networks encouraged the establishment of a connection between Philippine and American Chinese Communists.

Communist Networks: From the Philippines to the United States

The Philippine labor movement had been a part of American Communist networks since the early 1920s (Comintern 1924), but the first Communist organization established in the Philippines was a CCP chapter. Lin Xingqiu (林星秋) founded the Special Philippine Branch (*feilubing tebie zhibu*) in Manila in 1927. It consisted of five Communist cells of three people each: one student cell was at the University of the Philippines, which intended to recruit Filipinos; one was at the Philippine Chinese middle school (*feiqiao zhongxue*); one was at a night school; and two, consisting of workers and shop employees, were in the GMD. Shop employees made up the majority of the thirty party members, and there was also a cell of three people in Suzugun in Japan and two cells in Cebu. In 1928, the CCP sent Philippine Communist Gao Zinong, alias Meditsinskii ("Medical"), a Fujianese member of the Chinese Communist Youth League, to study in Moscow (Gao Z. 1928a, 1928b; Taiwan zongdu fu 1989; Demar 1928).

Like the Chinese Communists in the United States, Malaya, and Cuba, Gao promoted political rights for Chinese immigrants in the Philippines. However, cooperation between Chinese Communists and locals was difficult. Chinese laborers were reluctant to become involved in local politics or with non-Chinese (*yizu*). They were beyond the reach of Communist propaganda, as they were illiterate. They participated in brotherhoods and friendship associations (*xiongdihui* and *youyishe*) and were afraid to protest against their Chinese bosses. Chinese Communists were on a mission to liberate "the masses" of low political and cultural levels (*zhengzhi sixiang [wenhua] di*) who had been shaped by a colonial education. Gao reported that students at Philippine University, formerly "the most backward in the East," had progressed (Gao Z. 1928a). The Philippine party was a chapter of the Chinese transnational Communist

network. Despite a different local context, the party shared characteristics with Malaya, Cuba, and the United States. Those included the popularity of anarchist ideas (Lai 2010, 53), study societies and night schools as hotbeds of Marxist ideas, student and shop employee membership, and a connection gap between student leaders and workers. Above all, Chinese workers preferred traditional ways of self-organizing over radical Communist-led unions, as the Chinese community in all contexts aspired for wealth, not revolution (Gao Z.1928a; *Xianfeng Bao* 1934, 2; Memorandum n.d.; WPA n.d.; Comintern 1927).

The Philippine Communist Party (*feilubing gongchan dang*), established in 1928, also consisted of Chinese migrants, two of whom—Gao Chenglie (高承烈) and Lin Qifeng (林啟鋒)—had studied in Moscow. However, there was no connection with the CCP after the establishment of the Comintern-endorsed Communist Party of the Philippine Islands (CPPI) in 1930 (Gao Z. 1928a; Profintern n.d.⁸). There were only twenty-five Chinese members and sixty-two Filipinos in the CPPI, including three members of the Central Committee, which included one Chinese member of the Politburo (Hau 2014, 176). At the party’s founding conference, there was one Chinese delegate. Yet Chinese trade unions were the most active in the Philippines (Anonymous 1931, 48–49, 53).⁹

Similarly to its approach in Malaya, the Comintern promoted a united front of the Philippine population under the leadership of the Communist Party, which was to bring together “the proletariat, the peasantry, the urban poor, and the revolutionary students—the Moros, mountain tribes, and Chinese toilers, as well as the Christian Filipinos” (ECCI 1931a). The Comintern also promoted unity between Chinese immigrants and Filipino labor movements. The Comintern campaigned against the deportation of Chinese workers from the Philippines and for internationalist support for the Chinese Revolution, which was the policy of the Comintern at the time (ECCI 1931b; ECCI 1931c, 67). As in Malaya, the Comintern promoted solidarity with the Chinese and Indian revolutions and the expansion of connections with the revolutionary movements in China, Indonesia, Malaya, and the United States (Ryan 1931).

Despite American Communist Harrison George’s 1927 recommendation to use the pan-Malay movement as an anti-imperialist base in the Philippines, the Comintern relied on the Chinese network. In 1931, the Comintern communicated with the Philippine party through the Chinese section of the CPUSA, sending publications and “directives” to the CPPI (Comintern

1931). These provided a space for the expansion of CCP influence, too, as Chinese comrades from the Philippines sent suggestions to the Chinese fraction of the CPUSA for its work among Chinese immigrants (Philippine Communists 1932). In accordance with Comintern rules, party members moving to another country through membership in the party of the host country transmitted CCP policies to the Chinese bureau of the CPUSA (Lai 2010, 76, 124). The Chinese fraction of the CPUSA acted as a liaison between the Comintern and the CCP, and the Chinese fraction forwarded CCP materials to Moscow and Paris (Comintern 1933b). In 1935, the Comintern sent a CCP delegation to Paris to coordinate Chinese radical movements worldwide and dispatched an influential Communist leader, Rao Shushi, to reorganize the Chinese bureau of the CPUSA (Benton 2007, 34; Lai 2010, 112). Now globally connected, Comintern and CCP networks merged.

Sun Yat-sen and the Comintern: “Internationalist Nationalism”

The synergy between Chinese Communist and the Comintern networks was manifested in the multiple anti-imperialist leagues that proclaimed a united front of local “oppressed nations” with the Chinese Communists for the good of anti-colonial liberation and the world revolution. While the Comintern subordinated the German Communist movement and the LAI at the Frankfurt congress in 1929 (Petersson 2013, 336–338; Benton 2007, 36), local anti-imperialist leagues under CCP leadership functioned in Shanghai, Malaya, and Singapore after 1929. Moreover, the CCP promoted the creation of the Far Eastern LAI in 1930, a plan that did not materialize because of the collapse of the Shanghai bureau of the Comintern in 1931 (Wang Z. 1985, 300–320; Petersson 2013, 414–415; Belogurova 2014). The concept of anti-imperialist leagues built on Sun Yat-sen’s and the GMD’s internationalism and channeled the need of the Chinese community to blend in with local populations and to protect itself from discrimination.

Comintern nationalism matched the different needs of local sites. Sun Yat-sen’s idea of an alliance with the oppressed fit into Comintern worldwide internationalist support of the Chinese Revolution, which would bring about China’s revival. Philippine Chinese Communist Gao Zinong argued in 1928 that Chinese Communists could help the revolutions of local residents (*juliu di de minzu geming*) along with the revolution in China. The CCP provided the same rationale for promoting Chinese participation in the Cuban revolution (Xu 1933). Moreover,

in 1934, in the pages of *Chinese Vanguard*, Comintern agent Han Han, possibly Chen Hanxing, explaining the meaning of the resolutions of the eleventh plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, wrote that a world revolution and the national liberation of the colonies would benefit China's national interests and revolution (Han 1934, 3). In Berlin, the internationalist Red Aid Organization and Anti-Imperialist League both campaigned for the defense of China and the Chinese Revolution from Western imperialism.

As in China, Chinese Communism overseas is best understood as the second phase of nationalism as it converged with Leninism (Fitzgerald 1998, 347–348). Because of this, the internationalist nationalism of Chinese networks, which had been rooted in Sun Yat-sen's notion of a beneficial Chinese alliance with “oppressed nations,” took on a new layer of Comintern internationalism through the Comintern's promotion of international support for the Chinese Revolution and an alliance with local anti-colonial revolutions. New ideas of Asian unity in juxtaposition with the West and traditional ideas of China's role as a benevolent patron in the region—which Sun Yat-sen called in 1924 the kingly way (*wangdao*), as opposed to the hegemonic ways of Western powers (*badao*) (Sun 1986b)—translated into anti-colonial liberation ideologies and were institutionalized in Communist networks. In this vision, Sun Yat-sen's alliance with the Soviet Union in 1923 and his ideas of anti-British pan-Asian unity matched Soviet plans for an alliance in the Far East (Nicolaevsky 1949). As Chinese revolutionary networks merged and overlapped with Comintern networks, and nationalism characterized by a GMD-led revolution became the official rhetoric of the Chinese state, the CCP “rebranded”—to borrow a term from David Ownby's article in this special issue—Sun's internationalist nationalism as Communist internationalism.

In the meantime, the nationalism of Chinese diaspora networks continued to operate along the same routes under a variety of brands as a part of the China Salvation movement, which included the GMD, religious organizations, brotherhoods, clan and native place networks, patriotic chambers of commerce, and provincial lodges. Even after Hitler came to power, Chinese leftists from Germany participated in a Europe-wide Anti-Japanese Congress of Overseas Chinese and Chinese Entrepreneurs in Germany in 1936 (Benton 2007, 33–34). Not all leftists in the China Salvation movement were connected with the Comintern or the CCP. Student associations in San Francisco and New York, for instance, operated independently. However, so-called Chinese Freemasons provided networks for the CCP's China Salvation

activities in the Philippines and connected European and American China Salvation associations (Lai 2010, 96–99, 105, 111). With the beginning of full-fledged Japanese invasion in China in 1937, the internationalist support for the National Salvation Movement acquired new urgency.

Conclusion

To move from space to space via existing Chinese networks, Ji Chaoding, Gao Zinong, Liao Huanxing, and Shi Huang needed resources, which the Comintern provided. As Chinese migrant intellectuals crossed borders, they hit a glass ceiling and translated the experience of discrimination through the ideology of the GMD into Comintern internationalism and anti-imperialism. Ideas of national liberation manifested in national Communist parties and leagues against imperialism and provided institutional models to deal with these experiences. Institutional innovations involving existing organizations and networks among overseas Chinese highlight organizational hybridity in the interwar period. Because of the Comintern policy of endorsing only one Communist party per country, Chinese Communists joined as Chinese-language fractions in Germany and the United States. In Malaya and the Philippines, the historical areas of Chinese immigration in Southeast Asia, where Chinese Communists were the earliest Communists, they established national parties. In all four contexts, internationalism as the organizing principle of a national party provided a channel for immigrant Chinese Communists to localize.

As CCP networks merged with Comintern networks, organizational forms traveled between China, Europe, the Americas, and Southeast Asia. The kind of organizational innovation—whether that of a national Communist Party, a Chinese-language fraction, or a long-distance organization—depended on the circulation of people and ideas in Chinese revolutionary networks and in the contexts of different Chinese communities, as well as on synergetic (San Francisco, Singapore, and Manila) or subjugated (Berlin) relations, with the Comintern reflecting Comintern prioritization of the revolution in mainland Europe (Benton 2007, 36).

The global nature of these connections inspired a global vision. In their imagination of relating to local populations, the Chinese Communist organizations embraced existing regional geopolitical visions in the three spaces of Germany (an alliance between China and Germany), the Americas (a vision based on the United States's Monroe Doctrine as well as the Comintern's

organization there), and Southeast Asia (a vision centered on China). Unintended consequences, such as the establishment of regional Chinese Communist organizations, and links between the American and Malay models of multiethnic party organization, were also the result of the various local contexts in which Chinese migrant Communists found themselves. Between the enclaves of the Chinese maritime network in Singapore, Berlin, San Francisco, and Manila—in the context of contingent events and experiences in those spaces—the workings of the Chinese Revolution were pragmatic, as the laws of institutional isomorphism would have it (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Revolutionaries adopted organizational forms that had already been proven to work in other places to put into practice their vision of a world liberated from oppression. In this regard, the fit between Sun Yat-sen’s ideas and Comintern internationalism shed light onto the long-term vision shared by GMD and CCP leaders (Cook 2010) regarding China’s role in Asia and in the larger international environment of the twentieth century.

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Notes

- 1 Bao Huiseng, one of the founders of the CCP, was in Malaya in 1922 and the Philippines in 1925 together with early CCP member Dong Chuping (董锄平), who also visited Cuba (Gao Z. 1928a; Bai 2002; Peng 2006; Yong 1991, 43).
- 2 Sergey Tretyakov was a professor at Beijing University, where he wrote the life story of Chinese student Deng Shihua based on their conversations.
- 3 Liao’s story during these years comprised several layers, chief among which were party intrigues. His comrades, the Chinese student members of the Chinese-language fraction of the KPD, reported on him to the Comintern and accused him of claiming to be the representative of the CCP in Germany, of maintaining connections with the rival Third

- Party leader Deng Yanda and with Sun Yat-sen's widow Song Qinglin, and of not participating in street demonstrations in Berlin. He was thereafter recalled by the CCP delegation to Moscow. In 1930, the Comintern Executive Committee decided to "send Liao to do mass work in the USSR as punishment for his liaisons with renegades." Liao had also allegedly absconded with the LAI's money. As he said, he took the amount that had been donated to the LAI to cover its debts against its salary debt to himself (Appeal Commission 1930; Anonymous 1928; Liao H. 1930).
- 4 In the United States in 1927, the Chinese Communists wanted to call themselves the Chinese Party, but the executive secretary of the CPUSA, Ruthenberg, did not permit them to do so, suggesting they should be called the Chinese fraction of the American party (Fowler 2007, 125).
- 5 The letter is not signed. Wang Ming's authorship is established based on the fact that he was the liaison (Gao 2011, 101).
- 6 This was likely written sometime after July 10, 1933, as the letter mentions the Extraordinary National Conference, which was held in New York on July 7–10, 1933 (CPA n.d.).
- 7 They also referred to the history of Chinese participation in local national independence struggles since the Cuban War of Independence, during which Cuban local leader Jose Marti had included the Chinese in internationalist solidarity and in the pan-American vision (Benton 2007, 37–47; *Xianfeng Bao* 1933).
- 8 This document is undated, but since the previous document in the file is dated 1931, this document is possibly from 1931 as well.
- 9 In the Philippines, American exclusion laws had barred the immigration of Chinese laborers, so the Communist Party lacked the potential constituency of immigrant Chinese who needed to become local to improve their lot. There were an insufficient number of new Chinese immigrants whose rights the party would promote, as the MCP had done in Malaya. In absolute numbers in 1903–1939, the Chinese immigrant population in the Philippines grew from 41,035 to 117,487, which was incomparable to the 39 percent of Chinese immigrants in Malaya in 1931. Moreover, from 1935 on, a Chinese person born in China could—albeit with many conditions that included property ownership—naturalize as Filipino, unlike in Malaya (Chu 2010, 288–298, 316, 327–328; Gao Z. 1928a, Roff 1967, 208).

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