

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Culturing Revolution:
The Local Communists of China's Hainan Island

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

History

by

Jeremy Andrew Murray

Committee in charge:

Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair

Professor Paul G. Pickowicz, Co-Chair

Professor Roberto Alvarez

Professor Weijing Lu

Professor Richard Madsen

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

DEDICATION

For our parents
Voor onze ouders
Za naše roditelje

Els and Stuart Murray
Patricia and George Jakovich

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Maps.....	vi
Acknowledgments.....	vii
Vita.....	viii
Abstract.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Deserted Treasure Island.....	13
Chapter Two: From Globetrotters to Guerrillas.....	72
Chapter Three: New Enemies and New Allies.....	133
Chapter Four: Holding Aloft Hainan’s Red Flag.....	192
Chapter Five: Sharing Victory.....	240
Chapter Six: Bringing Hainan to Heel.....	287
Epilogue.....	331
Bibliography.....	337

MAPS



Map of China within Asia, Hainan indicated
Source: CIA World Factbook
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>



Map of South China Sea, Hainan indicated
Source: China Digital News
<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/asean/>

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VITA

- 2001 Bachelor of Arts, East Asian Studies, State University of New York, Albany
- 2004 Master of Arts, East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University
- 2011 Doctor of Philosophy, History, University of California, San Diego
- 2011 Assistant Professor, History, California State University, San Bernardino

PUBLICATIONS

- “‘A Dream Deferred’: Obstacles to Legal Reform and Rights Reclamation in Early Republican China,” in Sherman Cochran and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds. *China on the Margins* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).
- “Contesting Twentieth-Century China: A Simulation,” *Education About Asia*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 2010), coauthored with Joseph W. Esherick.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Modern Chinese History

Professors Joseph W. Esherick and Paul G. Pickowicz

Minor Field: Premodern Chinese History

Professors Suzanne Cahill, Weijing Lu, and Sarah Schneewind

Minor Field: Modern Japanese History

Professors Takashi Fujitani and Stefan Tanaka

Minor Field: Global History

Professors Roberto Alvarez, Jeremy Prestholdt, and David Ringrose

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Jeremy Andrew Murray

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Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair
Professor Paul G. Pickowicz, Co-Chair

Hainan is the smallest province, largest island, and southernmost territory administered by the People's Republic of China (PRC). In May of 1950, seven months after the founding of the PRC, a military conquest brought Hainan under the control of the new regime. The campaign was successful as a result of coordination between mainland forces crossing the narrow strait in a flotilla of fishing boats, and a local Communist guerrilla force that had been fighting for over two decades to help bring about this victory. In the months and years that followed this campaign, conflict developed between the local Communist leaders and their new mainland masters. This study aims to explain the foundation of the local Hainan Communist movement, its precedents, its early development, and its survival on the island.

Introduction

Historians sometimes outrun history. Some have tried to cast aside the fetters of the modern nation-state as the exclusive unit of analysis, while it seems to show little sign of political weakening. Perhaps because we historians have access to knowledge of other world cultures that do not always have access to others, or perhaps due to wishful ideology, we underestimate the staying power of the nation-state, especially in its fiercely reactive force to any global flow other than capital and commodities. Many of us have abandoned analysis of the theoretically beleaguered “imagined community” of nation-states, and run into the arms of an imagined future of a global world.¹

The premise is a sound one that the nation-state is usually too rigid as an exclusive unit of analysis for a rich understanding of any chapter of history. But while the construct of the nation-state may crumble easily under the fierce keystrokes of the cultural critic, the nation-state’s police lines, drones, and genocidal regimes offer more resistance. This harsh reality notwithstanding, should we rush from a national to a transnational analysis? Is the “primordialism” of the nation fated to give way to a future of “global ethnoscapescapes”?² In the physics of academia, the old adage about nature abhorring a vacuum applies, and as soon as one “meta-” is abandoned, another one must take its place, with novelty taking priority.

This is evident in Lewis and Wigen’s deconstruction and reconstruction of global

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

² Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

delineations, or Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems.³ Much of this work is valid, especially in terms of the economics of Wallerstein's analysis of global cores and peripheries. Racing into the global future is easy with the propulsion of global capital, especially when that capital is what propels most of the work of these studies from within those wealthy global cores, and this study is no exception.

Armed with these theories of a shrinking world inhabited by a community of global citizens connected by an ethereal and shared web, I began my research on Hainan's revolutionary history. My work turned naturally and immediately to the local dynamic of the movement, with the example of Chinese historians who had turned to local analysis as a way of understanding history in the twentieth century. There was a regional aspect to Hainan's maritime community that transcended national boundaries, but my understanding of this was inspired by the work of Braudel on the Mediterranean rather than the more recent transnational and global histories.⁴ Understanding this small chapter of Chinese history in the twentieth century demanded a local and regional analysis, rather than a national or global perspective.

Hainan has long been China's Hainan, claimed and administered by consecutive mainland dynasties for nearly two millennia.⁵ Due to the island's proximity to the mainland, resistance to mainland regimes has taken the form of loyalism to previous or

³ Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴ Ferdinand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* (3 volumes, Paris: Colin, 1949).

⁵ Edward H. Schafer, *Shore of Pearls: Hainan Island in Early Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

alternative Chinese rulers rather than separatism, as has become the most recent chapter in Taiwan's history, or that of island cultures like Sri Lanka or Ireland. Rather than jettisoning the nation-state as a unit of analysis, I must take it as an assumed framework for this analysis, since those Communist revolutionaries I study also saw it in this way. Hence, I refer to "China's Hainan island." The revolutionary goals and methods of Hainan developed in a way that also sometimes set them apart from the mainland Communist movement, and this departure is central to my analysis. Several causes account for this divergence, including the simple reason of Hainan's isolation, both geographical and political from the revolution's base in northwestern China. In this study I track the local revolutionary movement, including the predecessors to Hainan's Communists, and past the 1950 Communist victory on Hainan.

In May of 1950, the new Beijing regime of the People's Republic of China (PRC) defeated the Nationalist forces on Hainan and incorporated the island into the administration of the Communist government. On the island, an insurgent Communist force had fought the Japanese occupation (1939-1945) as well as the Nationalist forces on the island (1927-1950). With the victory, the war-weary and triumphant Hainan Column of local Communist fighters proclaimed that for "twenty-three years, the Red flag never fell." Their history, their collective memory, and the revolutionary identity of Hainan was founded in this idea that they had struggled for over two decades, often with very little support or communication with the mainland Communist command. Fiercely patriotic and ever eager to be given a provincial seat at the national table (a seat that would not be granted until 1988), the Hainan Communists like their 1911 revolutionary

predecessors, were proud of their local identity, forged in a local struggle with local characteristics.

From the perspective of the mainland Communist landing forces of the spring 1950 campaign, Hainan's revolutionary success was anything but hard-fought or long awaited. The mainland Communist Fourth Field Army had reached the southern provinces far more quickly than even the most optimistic plans of the Communist leadership. With some valuable experience gained in previous failed amphibious attacks, they had crossed the narrow Qiongzhou Strait and liberated Hainan in a mere two weeks. Two weeks of fighting, from the mainland forces' and the PRC leadership's perspective, brought Hainan under Communist control. Half of Nationalist territory was won and lost, and Chiang Kai-shek and his forces hunkered down on the other half – Taiwan – which was soon to be a Cold War bulwark thanks to the outbreak of the Korean War a month later and the resulting aid of Chiang's disappointed but supportive American allies.

The Hainan Communists were dedicated to the national revolution, and through their struggle, they had also sunk roots deep into the island's soil. The mainland Communists had been able to supply little or no support through much of that struggle, and the Hainan Column had turned to the island's indigenous Li population in an alliance that allowed them to survive in Hainan's mountainous southern interior. When the mainland Communist leadership had ordered the Hainan Column to abandon the island in 1946, and withdraw their forces north to Shandong, or southeast to Vietnam, the Hainan command responded that this was impossible, and that they respectfully refused to obey the orders.

The successful military campaign that came in 1950 was due to the cooperation between a massive “people’s navy” composed largely of commandeered or volunteered fishing craft launched from the mainland, and the local Hainan Column. Shortly after the victory, as in other newly acquired territories, the regional and national administration implemented accelerated, jolting land reform. The territory held by the Hainan Communists prior to May of 1950 had been insufficient to allow the completion of land reform on the entire island, and further, the reform and redistribution that had been carried out in the limited Communist territories was judged to be incomplete and too moderate to satisfy national standards.

By 1951, a flood of “southbound cadres” arrived on Hainan to replace local cadres, whose local connections allegedly made them too soft on the island’s landlords and big capitalists. Mutual resentment grew between the old revolutionaries of the Hainan Column and the newly arrived southbound cadres. Many of the new cadres were young urban intellectuals or even students, sent into towns and villages to overturn the local order. With the Korean War underway and the implementation of a series of national campaigns, regional and national administrators were suspicious of any local leadership that might obstruct the project of building a unified nation-state. The urgency of rapid industrialization and centralized command overruled the popularity, moderation, and revolutionary credentials of local leaders, like Feng Baiju on Hainan, the man who most embodied the spirit of the Hainan Column.

Through the early 1950s, local leaders were systematically removed from positions of power in the “anti-localism campaigns.” The culmination of the centralization of political and economic control in Beijing came with the Anti-Rightist

Movement (the larger umbrella that encompassed the “Anti-Localism Campaigns”) and the Great Leap Forward. These two catastrophic events removed from power the moderate and critical voices within the political structure and then implemented perhaps the most devastating economic campaign in human history, leading to the starvation of tens of millions by 1961. A generation of local leaders had been silenced after they had helped bring about the military and political success of the Communist Party in China. Years later, vindication would come with the loosening of state economic controls and the granting of provincial status and greatly increased autonomy on Hainan.

Finding the place where Hainan’s Communist movement fits into the greater revolutions and wars of resistance of the first half of the twentieth century requires focusing on the military history of the Hainan Column. Military history is no longer confined to the biographies of eminent generals and their tactical successes and blunders. The works of Benton, Van de Ven, McCord and others have expanded the discipline to include the cultural dimensions of modern Chinese military history.⁶ While the biography of Feng Baiju and other leaders of the Communist Hainan Independent Column are important, my examination of the Hainan Communist movement is not limited to a telling of their lives alone. And while the specific operations and fortifications of the Hainan guerrilla forces are relevant to the narrative of the movement,

⁶ Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army’s Three-Year War in War in South China, 1934-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance Along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Hans J. Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003); Edward A. McCord *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

I do not restrict the aim of this study to a military atlas of maneuvers throughout the Communist fight against the Japanese and the Nationalists.

In the early period of academic study of the Chinese revolution, in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, a lack of archival access to the Chinese mainland led to an excessive focus on ideology in the form of political and intellectual history. Western political and social scientists were locked out of the People's Republic of China, and Chinese Communist historians were likewise politically constrained in the telling of their own recent history. The jingoistic narratives of the Cold War dominated the histories about the first half of the twentieth century throughout the world, and for the most part, they still do in popular culture. In the PRC, analysis of the military history of the Communists' rise to power was restricted following the persecution of the artists and intellectuals in the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957, and through the Cultural Revolution, which imposed an intellectual and artistic straightjacket on Chinese society.

Since the late 1970s, many of the nearly forgotten histories of the Chinese civil war, and the War of Resistance against Japan were collected and compiled through projects like the *Wenshi ziliao*, which exploded with other projects in the 1980s, into millions of pages of individual recollections of the wars. Today, oral historians continue their work in China, and they now have access to localities like Hainan: as one example, Sato Shojin of Japan's Osaka Sangyo University has spent years working on Hainan, seeking an accurate and complete account of the atrocities of the Japanese occupation of Hainan (1939-1945).

Based on personal accounts and increased access to official archival sources, both Chinese and foreign historians have begun to construct a richer historical account of the

years that had once been nothing more than a source for Cold War propaganda of historians in the West and in China. Naturally, these and other new histories continue to be driven by the ideology and political concerns of the present, and of the historian. But the increased freedom in recounting the military history of China in the first half of the twentieth century has allowed for new voices to be added to what was once only the orthodox Western or Chinese account of the rise of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party.

The new voices have brought new actors onto the stage of the Civil War and the War of Resistance. They have served to effectively de-center the Maoist narrative of the war and revolution. While still in the middle of the Cold War, Chalmers Johnson showed the Chinese nationalist origins of resistance and revolutionary energy to be the source of the Communist success.⁷ In doing this, he broke down the myth of a monolithic, international Communist entity, connected through a tiered system with Moscow at the top, and the tiniest Chinese village at the bottom. (In some powerful currents of political thought, a monolithic Communist history still prevails, owing to myopic scholarship and the institutional inertia of academic and governmental institutions.⁸)

The deconstruction of international monolithic Communist history is being pushed further, past Johnson's national level. Again, abandoning the nation-state here does not mean that we should move immediately to the global or international. Stephen Averill and others have begun to move us toward an understanding of the local origins of

⁷ Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

⁸ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

the Chinese Communist movement.⁹ It was not simply a national Chinese resistance to the Japanese threat that allowed the Communists to harness this energy and drive them to victory. Our increased access to official and non-official sources from wartime China demand that we do not simplify the experience of the Chinese revolution from one region to another. Understanding Hainan, like any other locality, requires us to focus on the local actors who have been celebrated and criticized in the national history. In this way, we discover another history, another patriotism.

In Chapter One, I introduce Hainan's perennial relationship with the mainland, characterized by unrealized hopes for development. Centuries of history saw the formation of a distinct Hainanese culture, which connected its population to Southeast Asia. In Chapter Two, the cosmopolitan revolutionaries who helped overthrow the last dynasty in 1911 gradually shifted their political plans from international ambitions, to national service, and finally, to local survival. In Chapter Three, the early Communist movement on Hainan founded in the 1920s became increasingly isolated from its mainland leadership. The Nationalist rulers nearly annihilated the group, and the Japanese occupation beginning in 1939 also kept the small group of Communists on the run. An alliance with the indigenous Li people of the island's interior allowed for both groups' survival. In Chapter Four, with the end of the Japanese occupation, the mainland leadership reestablished contact with the Hainanese Communists, and, in an effort to consolidate its national forces, ordered the Hainan Column to abandon its position on the island. By this time, the Hainan Communist movement was so deeply rooted in the

⁹ Stephen C. Averill, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

island that its leadership refused to attempt this fortification, and in 1946, they communicated their inability and unwillingness to carry out the order. In Chapter Five, the successful military conquest of Hainan was completed through a combined effort of the local Communists and mainland landing forces. The views of the campaign diverged radically between Hainan and the mainland, and veterans of the campaign continue to hold irreconcilable views of the same events. In Chapter Six, the mainland consolidation of power led to the souring of relations between the Hainanese and mainland Communists leaderships. Anti-Localism Campaigns uprooted the Hainanese leadership, based on accusations of nepotism and overly moderate policies. While limited development of Hainan's tropical agriculture moved forward in the years that followed, the trauma of this rupture between the two Communist leaderships lasted for over three decades.

In Haikou Park, Feng Baiju's memorial pavilion and mausoleum are meticulously groomed with blooming gardens all year round. This leader of the Hainan Communist revolutionary movement stands above all other sons and daughters of the island as the symbol of the island's struggles in the twentieth century. I was conducting research for this project when the traditional "Tomb-Sweeping Holiday" was officially reinstated in April 2008, and I strolled to the park to see how the holiday would be observed at Feng's tomb. Government and military personnel stood in solemn lines and presented Feng with huge wreaths as offerings. Brief speeches recounted Feng's life, and his contribution to

the Hainanese people and the Communist Party. Less official delegations of young parents and toddlers placed fruit and flowers along the pedestal of Feng's monument.

By the afternoon, the pavilion was quiet and nearly deserted. I struck up a conversation with two young police officers, since their duty prevented them from retiring with the rest of the crowd for the usual afternoon nap to escape the heat. I had brought a pocket full of joss money, and I told them that I hoped to burn it for Feng, to ensure that he had what he needed, wherever he was. One of the officers told me sharply that it was strictly not allowed in the park. But apparently, there was some room for debate on the point. The other officer switched from Mandarin to Hainanese as they discussed the matter amongst themselves.

“Ah, you're Hainanese,” I said, with some relief, since their People's Armed Police uniforms meant that they might not be locals. They turned back to me, and maintained stern expressions. I quickly realized that my interjection could just as easily be interpreted as a challenge. The officer who had initially forbade the offering turned on his heel and walked briskly to his police booth. He returned with his thermos of tea water and said with some officiousness, “Fine, you can burn it. Here.” The spot he seemed to choose casually was centered perfectly in front of Feng's recessed tomb in the back of the pavilion. I had brought no matches, and so I imposed further on them to break the law using the officer's cigarette lighter. We took a quarter hour to burn two bundles of money, and as the fire dwindled, the bossier of the two officers looked to me and the other officer: “Ok?” We both nodded, and his overbearing demeanor disappeared as he knelt and delicately scooped one, two, three handfuls of water onto the tiny blaze.

I am doing my best to tell a chapter in the history of Hainan, where local identities and loyalties persist, and where a regional patriotism still prevails. As in any large country, regional and provincial loyalties develop and can be a source of both pride and conflict with the national government. In framing the narrative of the Hainanese revolutionary movement, the Chinese nation and the mainland Chinese Communist movement must play an important part. The perspectives of both the Hainanese and mainland leadership are both important, and examining them reveals that not only the power relations, but the perceptions were asymmetrical in much of this time, and they continue to be. Actions are misinterpreted from both sides, and actors sometimes move easily from one side to the other.

Taiwan is an obvious comparison in any study of Hainan. The island's history is hotly disputed, and its relationship with the mainland is of course still a major source of tension and volatility. From the perspective of mainland regimes, Taiwan and Tibet are examples of why regionalism and local identities must always be subservient to the larger national project. Hainanese regional identity is strong, but it is not separatist, nor has it ever been. The problem of excessive local autonomy is seen from the mainland within the context of separatist realities elsewhere, and so while there is no independence movement on Hainan, movements toward increased autonomy are closely monitored, especially based on the island's history, and the honored heroes of Hainan's Communist revolution.

Chapter One

Deserted Treasure Island:

The Social Ecology and Economy of Hainan in Early Republican China

Isolated Island/Treasure Island – Gudao 孤島 / Baodao 宝島

Social and political change was gradual on Hainan island in the decade after the 1911 collapse of the Qing Dynasty. On the mainland, regional military strongmen fought for territory and wealth, and revolutionaries and reformers worked for a new China. This fighting and political activity took place very close to Hainan, and it occasionally reached the shores of the island. But for both the revolutionaries and the militarists on the mainland, Hainan was not a coveted territory. It had long been acknowledged by mainland Chinese and international observers that the island had great potential both in terms of international strategy – as the national gateway to the southern seas – and also in natural resources. In the 1910s, however, neither militarists nor revolutionaries could afford to invest in the development that would make Hainan a useful naval port or a tropical breadbasket. From mainland China, there was little incentive to spend wealth or manpower on the marginal island while the country was being torn apart by revolution and civil war.

From the perspective of the Hainanese, prominent local politicians and activists hoped to take Hainan's development and modernization into their own hands. They called for the establishment of Hainan as a province immediately after the fall of the Qing. The island had remained merely an administrative district of the mainland

province of Guangdong throughout the Qing, and this status carried over into the early days of the republic. (It is noteworthy that neighboring Taiwan had been a prefecture under the Qing until it gained provincial status in 1885, only a decade before the Japanese colonization of the island.) Chen Fatan (陈发檀) from Qiongzhou county on Hainan, had served on the island as an official of the Qing empire. While studying in Japan in the dynasty's waning years, he had secretly joined the revolutionary Tongmenghui society under Sun Yat-sen's leadership. In 1912, following the revolution, Chen served as a member of the National Assembly, and he outlined the many reasons to establish Hainan as a province.

His rationale for provincial status was based on the idea that local management under a provincial Hainanese government would allow for more efficient handling of local challenges. The benefits of Hainan's provincial status, in Chen's view, would include: first, shoring up southern national defenses; second, managing and developing Hainan's rich resources; third, dealing with the complex question of ethnic tension between the island's indigenous Li people and the island's coastal Han; fourth, implementing a correct policy on the high volume of emigration leaving Hainan; and fifth, a generally more efficient and beneficial administration for both the Hainanese and the Beijing government. He listed examples of wise governments that had granted Hainan the contemporary equivalent of provincial status, emphasizing the Tang Dynasty's seventh-century decision to grant Hainan such status. Chen also anticipated attempts to challenge his campaign, such as a complaint that if Hainan were to be granted provincial status, what would stop other regions such as Jiangnan and Jiangbei from breaking into separate provinces. His response was that unlike Jiangbei, Hainan was an island, and

thus a naturally defined geo-political unit. Further, it is the size of some European countries (slightly larger than Belgium) and thus deserving of the requested increased autonomy.¹⁰

Lin Wenying (林文英 1873-1914), also a Hainanese member of the National Assembly, worked for the same cause of increasing Hainan's autonomy so that local interests could drive policy on the island.¹¹ Like Chen, Lin's broad plan was to bring about modern development and democratic reform in such a way that it would benefit the people of Hainan and free them of arbitrary and militaristic rule from the mainland. Guangdong native, Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan 孙中山 1866-1925) was sympathetic to this cause, but his short-lived presidency gave way to the rule of the "father of the warlords," Yuan Shikai, who forcibly and systematically curbed various movements for increased autonomy throughout the country.¹²

¹⁰ Chen Fatan 陈发檀, "Qiongzhou gaisheng liyou shu" 琼州改省理由书 [Reasons for making Hainan a province] (1912), reprinted in Fan Yunxi 范运晰, *Qionggi minguo renwu zhuan* 琼籍民国人物传 [Biographies of Hainanese in Republican China] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 1999), 197-200. Also see Liang Kun 梁昆, 1912 海南改省风云 "Hainan gaisheng fengyun" [1912, The controversy over making Hainan a province], in *Hainan zhoukan* (November 18, 2008).

¹¹ Zhonggong wenchang xianwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds., 中共文昌县委党史研究室编 [Chinese Communist Party Committee of Wenchang county historical research office], *Wenchang yinghun* 文昌英魂 [The spirit of Wenchang heroes] (Wenchang: Wenchang Communist Party historical materials, 1993), 1-7.

¹² Philip A. Kuhn, "Local Self-Government Under the Republic: Problems of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization," in Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Carolyn Grant, eds., *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 279.

The early advocates of Hainan's provincial status remained allied to Sun and his southern revolutionary efforts. While they were allied to a revolutionary movement and they worked to further their cause of increased local autonomy, still they were far from separatists in relation to the Chinese nation and the republic that they envisioned. Lin, Chen, and those who followed them hoped to reform and modernize the political and economic institutions of Hainan while also making the island a proud, modern, and loyal province of a new Chinese nation-state.

Before them, the loyal Qing reformer, Zhang Zhidong, had also supported a campaign for Hainan's provincial status, pointing foremost to the need for bolstering the island's local defenses as the gateway to the south.¹³ After all, the late Qing had revealed regional military forces to be more effective than the decrepit national armies. And with attempts at modernization and self-strengthening, Hainan's potential as a source of natural resources meant to Zhang and others that increased investment and local autonomy would make the island thrive. But for the Qing court, as for Yuan Shikai, with crushing indemnities from foreign wars and internal revolutionary troubles, Hainan's development and autonomy was not a priority, and it was ignored.

In the chaotic militarism and factionalism of the 1910s, the weakness and fluctuations of the national government prevented any lasting changes to Hainan's administrative status. By the end of that decade, Chen Fatan and others had failed to advance the island's cause as a provincial entity deserving increased autonomy. Instead,

¹³ Chen Keqin 陈克勤, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Hainan becomes a province] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 32.

by 1920, the island remained much as it had been under the Qing – a neglected island territory and administrative district of Guangdong Province.

In 1920, an official from Beijing, Peng Chengwan (彭程萬 1880-1978), visited Hainan on a survey tour. His task was to assess the conditions of the island, with a focus on the Hainan's potential for development. At the time of his survey, Hainan's comparable island neighbor, Taiwan, had been under Japanese rule for a quarter century. Flourishing as a Japanese colony, Taiwan's success reinforced a national discourse on Hainan's unrealized potential as another "treasure island" (*baodao*), and Hainan became a symbolic reminder of the Chinese government's ineffectiveness. Peng, in his thorough report, began by reiterating this mainlander lamentation, praising Hainan's neglected potential:

With its riches in lumber, mining, salt, rubber, coconuts, coffee...if Hainan's natural resources are developed, the island's wealth could very well surpass that of Singapore or Taiwan... It could soon become a tropical breadbasket of China, and it is a pity that it remains an undeveloped stone field... It could become a land of plenty. In my humble opinion, in order to develop the natural wealth and benefit of Hainan, we must improve transportation and communications there, and make of Hainan a regional hub; further, we must guide the indigenous Li people, and teach them to be the pioneers and trailblazers of Hainan.¹⁴

Comparisons between Hainan and Taiwan were both obvious and painful. Other imperial jewels in the region, like Singapore and Hong Kong, also were constant

¹⁴ Peng Chengwan 彭程萬, *Diaocha Qiongya shiye baogao shu* 调查琼崖实业报告书 [A report on the investigation of the industry and commerce of Hainan] (Haikou: Hainan shuju, 1920), Peng Preface. (Hereafter cited as *Diaocha Qiongya*. There are several Prefaces and Forewords in the frontmatter of this report, each by a different author and each with its own page numbering, so I will refer to each by the name of its author. In this case, the author of the Peng preface is the author of the entire report, Peng Chengwan. Other references to this report will be listed by the subject or chapter and page number, as page numbers begin anew in each chapter.)

reminders to Peng Chengwan of China's negligence on Hainan. Peng's report is notable in its focus on bringing Hainan closer to the national government through improved communications and the "sinification" of the Li people. His plan for successful development is thus a direct contradiction to the calls for increased autonomy from Hainan's Chen Fatan, Lin Wenying, and others. This struggle between those who advocated for increased local control and those who wanted to bring Hainan under tighter national control was already ongoing in 1920, and it would continue throughout the twentieth century, even to the present day.

The debate over the push and pull of local autonomy and centralized national control is common to political theorists throughout the world, and it is central to this study of the foundation and development of the Communist revolution on Hainan in the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter will introduce relevant aspects of Hainan's economy and polity as the environment from which the local Communist movement emerged in the 1920s.

Besides Peng Chengwan, there is another visitor to Hainan who is also worth noting here, since she arrived on the island in 1915 and lived there until 1942, writing extensively. Hainan was initially foreign to this American Presbyterian missionary and schoolteacher, Margaret M. Moninger, just as it was to Peng Chengwan. But unlike the Beijing official, Moninger made the island her home for much of her life, studying the

local Hainanese dialect, directing mission work, and educating the young women of the island.¹⁵

After a few years of living on Hainan, she was already a seasoned resident, and she welcomed other Presbyterian missionaries who considered the calling of mission work on Hainan. Like Peng, her writings, along with the work of missionary historian, Kathleen Lodwick, provide us with depictions of Hainan from an outsider's perspective. Their works provide us with a vivid image of Hainan in the early twentieth century. Four years after arriving on the island, Moninger wrote in 1919:

For the new missionary coming to the island there are the usual pitfalls – the despair at the beginning of language study, the dirty streets of the Chinese town, the strange climate and the longing for home and home friends. But the language is a fascinating study with all its interests and ramifications, the dirty streets are full of human interests, one attack of malarial fever dispels our fear of it, letters and papers link us to the homeland, and the new friends, both among the members of the mission and among the Chinese, prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the promise in Matthew 19:29: “And everyone that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold.” So we bid you a hearty welcome, you who we hope will hear the call and come to labor in this far corner of the Master's vineyard, and promise you a hearty greeting as you too enter into our goodly heritage.¹⁶

Peng Chengwan and Margaret Moninger published their impressions of Hainan within a year of each other. Their backgrounds and interests in Hainan diverged greatly, but they observed many of the same places and activities. They shared the view that Hainan was a remote and largely neglected place especially in its relationship with the

¹⁵ Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan: The Career of Margaret Moninger in China, 1915-1942* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 2.

¹⁶ Margaret M. Moninger, *Isle of Palms* (The American Presbyterian Mission, Printed at the Commercial Press, Ltd: Shanghai, 1919), 104.

Chinese republican government. While Hainan was Moninger's home for almost thirty years, Peng stopped there on a hasty two-month tour of the island's infrastructure. Peng had been sent to Hainan by the National Assembly of a fragile Chinese republic in Beijing. His mission was to assess the economic potential of the southern Chinese island, and return to Beijing with a plan for development. Moninger was sent by the American Presbyterian Missionary Society. Her mission was to teach the children of the island arithmetic and standard spoken Chinese and English, and in so doing also attempt to convert them to Christianity.

Peng's account is a sober analysis of the obstacles to modern development, as well as an appraisal of the island's strengths. Both obstacles and potential strengths are found in the people of the island, and especially in the indigenous Li people living in the island's interior. Moninger's text is generally free of the zealous rhetoric of some of her Christian colleagues, and portrays a quiet island, peopled by farmers and fishers who led slow, rural lives when they were free from the violence between natives and newcomers, bandit raids, or the activities of mainland armies temporarily garrisoned there.

Her account of Hainan in the early twentieth century actually dovetails well with the official Chinese Communist history of Hainan society – one of bucolic self-sufficiency that was preyed upon by exploitative capitalist and imperialist forces.¹⁷

Peng's account of Hainan is mainly concerned with the benefit Hainan could have for all China. Moninger's observations provide a more intimate portrait of Hainan from the

¹⁷ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi 中共海南省委党史研究室, [Historical research office of the Chinese Communist Party provincial committee of Hainan], eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* 中国共产党海南历史 [Chinese Communist Party history of Hainan] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007), 5.

perspective of an outsider to China who was now at home on the island. And so, amidst the paradoxes of Hainan in this period, it was possible in 1919 for an American schoolteacher to take the role of host on the island, and a Beijing official to be the outsider.

From Beijing, and most of mainland China, Hainan island has always been portrayed as a remote place. Compared with Taiwan to the northeast, Guangdong to the north, or Singapore to the south, Hainan has been a relatively poor, undeveloped, and often dangerous place. Once a malarial destination for banished officials of Chinese dynasties, Hainan is today a province and China's largest Special Economic Zone.¹⁸

Long-range and sustainable economic development seems to have taken hold in the early twenty-first century.¹⁹ In the epilogue of this study of Hainan, the island's most recent developments will be examined, which include a January 2010 announcement by the People's Republic of China (PRC) that by 2020, Hainan will be a "top international tourist destination."²⁰ For over a century, representatives of China and several foreign

¹⁸ Political and economic developments of the past half-century will be dealt with briefly in the epilogue to this study. Special Economic Zones (SEZ) were established in the PRC during the economic reform and opening period beginning in the 1980s, and they were designed to encourage export-driven production. While the example of Hainan was not nearly as successful as, say, Shenzhen, it is worth noting that the entire island was established as an SEZ. Only in 2010 did the official stance on Hainan shift in the direction of a tourism-driven economy, considering the export-driven industrial and agricultural sectors failed to develop at the speed of other SEZs.

¹⁹ Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, *Hainan: State, Society, and Business in a Chinese Province* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰ "Hainan to Clean Up Tourism to Become Global Attraction," *Xinhua* (January 6, 2010). This call was reiterated a year later when President Hu Jintao visited Hainan for

powers had encouraged an interest in Hainan's ports and resources. Hainan island's natural beauty and agricultural potential speak for themselves, as does its central location within the macroregion of Southeast Asia. But until the early twentieth century, little attention was paid to this island that lies near the center of the Asian map.

In the first half of the twentieth century, several visitors like Peng and Moninger wrote about Hainan. With political, economic, and religious motives, most of these observers thought of Hainan and the Hainanese people as a resource to be exploited by the powers that they each represented. The voices of the people of Hainan are not directly heard in these accounts by European, Japanese, American, and Chinese observers.²¹ But even when the voices of the Hainanese people do come through, it is apparent that the island did not speak with a single voice.

The ethnic, social, geographic, and political diversity of the island's population of two to three million prevented a facile portrait of the Hainanese people. To most outside observers, Hainan was remote and backwards. Not all of these observers were Chinese,

the Bo'ao and BRICS summits of April 2011 (see "Hu: Build Hainan into International Tourism Hub," *People's Daily* [April 17, 2011]).

²¹ In Chinese, Peng Chengwan 彭程萬, *Diaocha Qiongya shiye baogao shu* 调查琼崖实业报告书 [A report on the investigation of the industry and commerce of Hainan] (Haikou: Hainan shuju, 1920). My great thanks go to Ye Wa in helping me read this and other documents. Any mistakes in translation are mine. From the Japanese perspective, Odaka Kunio, *Economic Organization Of The Li Tribes Of Hainan Island*, translated into English by Mikiso Hane (New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1950). In German, Hans Stübel, *Die Li-stämme der insel Hainan: ein beitrage zur volkskunde südchinas* [The Li of Hainan Island: A Contribution to the Folk Studies of Southern China] (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1937). In French, M. Savina, *Monographie de Hainan: Conference faite de 10 décembre 1928 a la Société Géographique de Hanoi*, M. Savina (Missionnaire apostolique), Hanoi: Cahiers de la Société de Géographie de Hanoi (17), 1929. In English, Margaret Moninger, *Isle of Palms* (Shanghai: The American Presbyterian Mission, Printed at the Commercial Press, Ltd., 1919).

but the traditional mainland bias toward Hainan often pervades most of the writings that I was able to find from the early twentieth century. While in the Beijing perspective, Hainan was an island poorly incorporated into the regimes that ruled the mainland, the island's southern, eastern, and western neighbors testified to a complex network of migration and trade that connected Hainan beyond its otherwise unsatisfactory connection with Beijing. Thus we should mute the prevalent Beijing-centric concepts of remoteness or backwardness that dominate these narratives.

Besides its agricultural and mineral resources, Hainan's regional centrality made it the focus of some global attention. Its potential as a merchant or military harbor, an agricultural breadbasket, a fueling station, a pool of converts, or a colony brought international and mainland Chinese visitors. From an international perspective, Hainan's distance from Beijing might mean the island was less tightly controlled by the already weak northern regimes of the early twentieth century. French designs on the island, and later the reality of the Japanese occupation of Hainan, made the loss of Chinese sovereignty on Hainan very real. From the perspective of mainland Chinese officials and observers on Hainan, this was an ongoing concern that informed their reluctance to grant requests from the likes of Chen Fatan and Lin Wenying for increased autonomy.

Surrounded as the island was in the early twentieth century by imperial forces in Indochina to the west, the Philippines to the east, and Malaya to the south, Hainan was seen by Beijing to be dangling by a thread from the southern coast of China.²² It might be snatched at any moment by a foreign power, and indeed that is what the Japanese

²² Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Peng Preface.

empire did in February 1939.²³ In the decades prior to the Japanese occupation of Hainan in 1939, the fragility of the republican government prompted opportunistic foreign powers to venture into Hainan's world, as well as nationalistic cries from Chinese observers to shore up the republic's outer margins.

Geography and Ecology

Hainan's neglect is evident in the inaccurate mapping of its territory as late as the twentieth century. Its harbors were never properly measured so that only in the past half century have the best natural ports in the south been developed into modern naval docks, beginning with the Japanese occupation (1939-1945). Until that time, visitors to the island generally approaching from the north always ran the risk of running aground on the hazardous shoals of Haikou and Qiongzhou.²⁴ Studies of Hainan's geography in the first half of the twentieth century reflect a relative dearth of knowledge both in mainland China and among foreign observers. From extant survey statistics between 1927 and 1987, measurements of the island's area have fluctuated by tens of thousands of

²³ In 1876 when a second wave of treaty ports was forced opened by foreign powers, Hainan's northern Qiongzhou was among them. Still earlier Hainan's coast also witnessed the drug traffic that led to the first Opium War over three decades earlier. (See Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958], 81, 88.) From this early period then, foreign powers realized the potential of developing Hainan's ports, but the turn of the century brought a dramatically increased level of interest in the island.

²⁴ R.P. Mouly, *Hai-nan: L'Île aux Cent Visages* [Hainan: The island of a hundred faces] (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1944), 11.

kilometers, with the largest and most inaccurate measurements coming in a Chinese survey in 1927.²⁵

In 1928, a French observer with access to Chinese records, noted Hainan's area to be between 37,000 and 38,000 square kilometers (about 14,300 to about 14,700 square miles).²⁶ Ten years later, the *National Geographic Magazine* also overestimated Hainan's size at about 14,000 square miles (over 36,200 square kilometers), almost a thousand square miles off the mark, a significant oversight considering the inescapable irony in the name of the publication.²⁷ Hainan's area is 13,100 square miles, or 33,920 square kilometers. These estimates of Hainan's size incorrectly suggested that Hainan was larger than Taiwan, and they reflected the significant lack of knowledge of Hainan's most basic geographical attribute. By the middle of the twentieth century, no thorough survey of the island had been correctly conducted in such a way as to provide an accurate depiction of the physical geography of the island.²⁸

²⁵ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Tudizhi* 海南省志：土地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Land gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007), 123-124.

²⁶ M. Savina, *Monographie de Hainan: Conference faite de 10 décembre 1928 a la Société Géographique de Hanoi*, M. Savina (Missionnaire apostolique), (Hanoi: Cahiers de la Société de Géographie de Hanoi [17], 1929), 3.

²⁷ Leonard Clark, "Among the Big Knot Loos of Hainan," *National Geographic Magazine* Vol. 74, No. 3 (September 1938), 391. Clark begins his article a rather apt rhetorical question, considering this inaccuracy: "So, there is nothing left in the world to explore?" Margaret Moninger also uses the figure of 14,000 square miles in *Isle of Palms* (1919).

²⁸ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Tudizhi* 海南省志：土地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Land gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007), 123-124. By 1956, survey figures finally began to stabilize and hone in on a figure close to the island's geographical reality.

The inaccessibility of the island's interior and the hostility of the Li people who lived there had once been the reason for this ignorance. But trade routes gradually increased the contact between the southern highlands and the coastal settlements so that the Chinese surveyor, Peng Chengwan, could declare in 1919 that Hainan's interior was not, in fact, as remote as the residual prejudices of the mainland might suggest.²⁹ Accurately mapping the island was simply not a priority of the Chinese regimes.

Hainan lies just over ten miles off of Guangdong's coast at the shortest crossing of the Qiongzhou Strait. The island's location has historically meant that migration patterns and networks have tied its people close to the countries and cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania. Hainanese identity, like that of southern Fujian and Guangdong, has traditionally stretched beyond the physical reaches of its territory. Today, the PRC province of Hainan extends beyond the island itself to include extensive maritime claims and several contested islands in the South China Sea, nearly reaching the shores of neighboring countries. Farther still beyond the coasts of Hainan island and these maritime claims, communities of Hainanese throughout Southeast Asia have played an important role in connecting the island and its population to foreign lands. These communities in Singapore, Manila, mainland Southeast Asia, and today, throughout the world, complicate the simple geographic understanding of Hainan and Hainanese identity.

Six rivers flow from the island's highest mountain, Wuzhishan, or "Five-Finger Mountain," named for its five prominent and narrow peaks. The rivers water the lush

²⁹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Peng Preface.

forests that cover the southern mountains, and the main branches run to the western coast, flowing into the Gulf of Tonkin. Wuzhishan is in the south-central mountainous region of the island. The northern portion of the island is relatively flat, with extremely fertile soil. More streams flow to the island's eastern central region and water these plains, with the help of the seasonal rains that sweep over the island through most of the late summer, autumn, and early winter. Coming from the northwest, these rains make the north of Hainan rich farmland. In 1920, this was mainly for rice, but the island also exported lumber, sugar, rubber, coconuts, and coffee.³⁰

The southern mountain forests produced the lumber, but a lack of modern or efficient transportation prevented this industry from developing into a major part of the Hainanese economy. In his survey, Peng Chengwan hoped that the mining potential of the island could also be realized, but the same infrastructure problems prevented that until the Japanese occupation of 1939 brought a light-rail connecting the Shilu iron mines of western Hainan with southern ports. In 1920, only the northern city of Haikou saw any significant maritime traffic, but the dangerous sand bars prevented the city from developing into a major regional harbor.³¹

Much of the original forest that covered the northern part of the island was already cleared by 1920. Over many centuries, Han settlers from the mainland, mostly from Fujian and Guangdong, established small farms throughout northern Hainan. According to Zhou Weimin, an expert of early Hainanese history, tenancy in Hainan was

³⁰ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Peng Preface, Li situation.

³¹ R.T. Phillips, "The Japanese Occupation of Hainan," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1 (1980).

generally less harshly exploited than its counterpart in central and northern China. The Chinese tradition of *qiushou dongcang* (harvest in the fall, store in the winter) is unknown in Hainanese agriculture, where the growing season does not begin or end with the same regularity as the northern four-season climate. The typhoons sweeping in over the northeastern coast can make some parts of northern Hainan a difficult place to live, but the rains that they bring across the fertile soil, and the precipitation that continues throughout the year combine to make agriculture a far more democratic phenomenon than in a four-season climate. With a relatively small population of approximately two million, and plenty of extremely fertile land, a farmer who is unsatisfied with work conditions or the exploitation of a landlord was far more mobile than his counterpart in central or northern China.³² This has also made the island more difficult to govern throughout the dynasties, and the agricultural practices on Hainan, especially for the inland dwelling Li, was a central concern of the observers and surveyors of Hainan in the early twentieth century, as will be examined further below.³³

In the Maoist narrative of modern Chinese history, the final years of the Qing and the early republic saw a concentration of wealth and land in a small portion of the population, as in the rest of China. According to a provincial gazetteer, which cites the standard Maoist figures of landholding, 10 percent of the population held 80 percent of

³² Interview conducted by the author, Zhou Weimin, Hainan University professor of history, September 30, 2008.

³³ Odaka Kunio, *Economic Organization Of The Li Tribes Of Hainan Island*, translated into English by Mikiso Hane (New Haven, Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1950); Hans Stübel *Die Li-stämme der insel Hainan; ein beitrag zur volkskunde südchinas* [The Li of Hainan Island: A Contribution to the Folk Studies of Southern China] (Berlin, Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1937).

the land in the first decade of the twentieth century, and in most subsistence farmer households, 50 percent of the harvest went to land rent, with the percentage sometimes as high as seventy or eighty.³⁴ Considering the agricultural traditions of readily available and extensive arable land, these numbers are suspect, and should be treated with skepticism even though they are prevalent in the historical record. These convenient figures would be the basis of radicalizing land reform years later.

Judging from Peng Chengwan's 1919 survey of Hainan and his negative assessment of the transportation and communication infrastructure, it seems unlikely that an accurate survey was possible of Li agriculture in this time. Less than two decades later, American, German, and Japanese observers took a closer look at Li society in the island's interior, including their agricultural practices, and this suggests that the sketchy statistics of the Hainan gazetteer may have been skewed as a depiction of all Hainan by not incorporating the Li of the highlands.

Agriculture in Hainan continued, as of 2010, to make up nearly 50 percent of the island's economy, more than any other province, and in the early republic, agriculture doubtless encompassed an even larger portion of the economy. According to a 2006 study, Hainan was the only province in the PRC that owed over a third of its gross domestic product to agricultural production.³⁵ Margaret Moninger noted in 1919, "Agriculture is preeminently the industry of this tropical island. Nearly all other

³⁴ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Tudizhi* 海南省志: 土地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Land gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007), 56-57.

³⁵ Robert Benewick and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *State of China Atlas: Mapping the World's Fastest Growing Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 43.

industries are side issues, to be worked in the leisure periods.” She wrote of the various other sideline industries of the island: “The factory whistle is not heard in Hainan... The industries of the people are the simplest kind, requiring no complex machinery, and no power other than that supplied by man and beast...”³⁶

Moninger goes on to imaginatively list the vocations of the Hainanese using every letter of the alphabet (including Q for “Quacking” to describe the work of shady medical practitioners, and V for “vermicelli” to describe Hainan noodle shops).³⁷ The production of dyes, incense, fans, glue, rope, and salt were other significant occupations in Hainan in 1919. In Moninger’s view, the island was a sleepy place, seemingly forgotten not only by God, as she notes, but also the Chinese government.

Like the Hainanese activists who clambered for increased autonomy and provincial status, none of the early twentieth century observers questioned that Hainan was a part of the Chinese republic. This is perhaps noteworthy considering how fragile the Beijing regime was. Hainan had been incorporated with each dynasty that ruled China from the Han two thousand years earlier. The island’s proximity to the mainland made it less of an administrative hassle compared with Taiwan to the northeast, which lies almost ten times as far off of the Chinese coast. So as visitors, Chinese and foreign, toured around Hainan observing its geography, they did not question that it belonged to China, and its history belonged within the national history of China.

³⁶ Moninger (1919), 39.

³⁷ Moninger (1919), 44,45.

But Hainan's uniqueness was also obvious to all visitors, Chinese and international. The coastal settlements, including the island's northern administrative center of Haikou, were filled with the majority Han Chinese. And by the early twentieth century, European and American missionaries, traders, and customs officials had left their mark on Haikou. The crumbling façades of the European-style residences and offices still line the streets of the older parts of the city – two- and three-story rows of houses, many with the ornate plaster and woodwork of reflecting French and English imperial comforts. This was the “new city” according to one French observer in 1944, and the tall and modern buildings stood in contrast to the lower ones of the old city. In the new city, there was even a Catholic seminary educating Hainanese to staff the Catholic chapels of the island. As of 2010, some of the buildings of the “new city” still stand. The roofs have long collapsed and in their place, lush trees grow thick, bursting through the second floor, shading the workers who siesta in the abandoned structures.

Island Hainan

Describing the Hispanic Caribbean, and islands in general, Dara E. Goldman wrote, “Islands constitute the most overt physical incarnation of...delimiting of discernible terrain” and understanding social space. “[I]slands circumscribe identity and produce difference; groups are defined by their location within insular boundaries and the land-sea juxtaposition simultaneously distinguishes and separates them from others.”³⁸

³⁸ Dara E. Goldman, *Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 10. In this characterization of islands, Goldman is also drawing on Gilles Deleuze's *Desert Islands*

The passive phrasing of Goldman's passive grammar ("...groups are defined...") is appropriate, because like much of the pre-twentieth century Caribbean, Hainan's place in much of written history has been one that was made for it by outside administrators. Hainan (in Chinese, literally "south of the sea") was named and in many ways shaped by external depictions. Outside forces, mostly mainland China regimes, shaped Hainan in many ways, and they continue to influence some of the ways Hainanese think of themselves. But before we return to the mainland's Hainan, Goldman also provides insight to some ways in which we can think about an island's identity from the perspective of the islanders themselves.

In addition to purportedly shaping identity, the explicit demarcation of the island as a geographic entity suggests autonomy – even when this autonomy is not readily apparent in social or political terms... [The] existence of Puerto Rico and Cuba's terrain as free-standing land masses symbolically enacts their own sovereignty... [In Caribbean literature] the topos of the island that Deleuze identifies becomes not only the foundational site of subjectivity and civilization, but also the principal trait that defines local identity and specificity.³⁹

While these observations on island culture and identity are based in the author's reading of Caribbean literature and history, Hainan's island status is also an important and formative part of the region's history. Simple geographical determinism is naturally a foil of historians who aim for a sophisticated understanding of the many cross-sections of factors that shape a culture. But that determinism is where I wish to begin with Hainan. While there are trends in political and economic factors in the relations between

and Other Texts, 1953-1974 (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e) [Distributed by MIT Press], 2004).

³⁹ Goldman (2008), 14-16.

Hainan and the mainland, their specific contingencies are constantly in flux. Hainan's island geography is one constant in the island's human history. Of course technologies and migration have changed the way the people of Hainan interact with their geography, but the island geography has been a constant in the consciousness of Hainan. And so geography is the reasonable place to begin in characterizing Hainan's culture in the early twentieth century.

In a preliminary "anthropology of the island," German cultural anthropologist, Ina-Maria Greverus suggested that one "must first of all take the sea into consideration. And when one includes the sea, it becomes both a carrier of a name and a constructed unity – in an ecological as well as conceptual sense." The coast provides an unambiguous line, for the island-dweller, between civilization and wilderness. For Greverus, an anthropology of the island must "focus on the specific character of insularity." The sea, writes Greverus, can threaten the islanders, but perhaps can also protect them.

Though Greverus is examining two small German islands, extremely different from Hainan in size and history, she lists several useful characteristics from which to begin thinking about an anthropology of the island. They are pertinent to Hainan in varying degrees, and I will list them in brief here. First the island is generally a periphery. Though this is the perspective of a dominant mainland, the self-perception can be adopted by the island dwellers. Second, the island is a "cultural island," by which Greverus means that the island dwellers construct a culture of self-seclusion. Third, it is often a dominated area, with some outside force imposing its political will on the islanders. This idea is again politically centered on the mainland, but it must be accepted

by both islander and mainlander, or there will be conflict. Fourth, again initially from the mainland perspective, the outlying island is a development region, in terms of economic modernization. This makes it a potential site for experimental political and economic policies, which was precisely the fate of Hainan under the PRC regime. Fifth, and related to the previous point, the island is a political and strategic outpost. Hainan's importance as a pivotal military region made the island a target of French and Japanese designs in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sixth, and finally, the island is naturally "a realm of encounter and exchange in transcultural processes."⁴⁰ This last characteristic seems to contradict the second characteristic in the list – the island as a site of cultural self-seclusion. But there is room on the large island of Hainan for both of these traits, and in the island's two-thousand-year interaction with mainland China, there have been periods marked variously by seclusion and integration.

Hainan's Diaspora

These are all relevant categories and lenses through which to understand Hainan. One other that is not relevant to Greverus's study is that of diasporic island identity. This is related to the clearly defined boundaries of a regional culture. Islanders away from their home have a clear geographic motherland that does not usually fluctuate with political shifts or regimes, and the redrawing of land borders. Remembering her childhood growing up in Chicago, literary scholar, Dolores Dooley wrote, "I grew up

⁴⁰ Ina-Maria Greverus, "Islands as Borderland: Such as Rügen and Usedom," in Michael Röslor and Tobias Wendl, eds., *Frontiers and Borderlands: Anthropological Perspectives* (Frankfurt: Peter Land Publishers, 1999), 60-62.

with one certain conviction: I was Irish.”⁴¹ Dooley later settled in Ireland, and her understanding of being Irish naturally changed, but she notes the profound impact of a starkly clear island identity in her life, even though she was born thousands of miles from her point of reference for that identity.⁴²

As with the Irish, the Hainanese diaspora maintains a clear and strong identification with its home island as Hainanese move throughout the world. Most importantly in Southeast Asia, Hainanese abroad have been connected through migration, family, and professional networks. Hainan is today a province of the PRC, and for two millennia, it has been a subset of a long parade of mainland regimes. In this sense, Hainan is contained within the Chinese imperial or national order. But the diasporic Hainanese community, especially throughout Southeast Asia, forces an expansion of how we understand Hainanese identity, broadening our scope beyond the island’s coasts. Tight-knit communities of Hainanese existed under the French, British, and Japanese colonial regimes, as well as the homegrown administrations, in Southeast Asia. Singapore to the south was one of the most important destinations for Hainanese who left the island.

The coherence of the Hainan community abroad has been manifested in various ways. Professional preference, political activity, dialect, and cultural practices were all important in distinguishing the Hainanese abroad as Hainanese – economics, politics, and

⁴¹ Dolores Dooley, “Expanding and Island Ethic,” in Joseph Lee, ed., *Ireland: Towards a Sense of Place* (Cork University Press: Cork, 1985), 47.

⁴² Dooley is interested in the preservation of an island identity. She does not assert that this impulse to preserve an identity is simply a positive or progressive force, but she does note that with island origins, it is relatively easy to preserve such an identity.

culture all played a part in preserving Hainanese identity beyond the island's shores. In their studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Victor Purcell and Wilfred Blythe, veterans of the British foreign service in that region, pointed out the importance of the Hainanese as a coherent organizing force. Relative to later chapters in my study of the development of the Communist movement on Hainan, it was the Hainanese in Singapore who were observed to be the most active among the Chinese in the early organization of the Malayan Communist Party. In 1926, sixteen Hainanese night schools were targeted for suspicious political work, leading to dozens of arrests. Overseas Hainanese also organized politically active labor unions in Malaya, which led to riots that culminated in a 1927 assault on a police station that left six of the rioters dead.⁴³ The solidarity and cohesiveness of the overseas Hainanese diaspora continued throughout the Japanese occupation of most of Southeast Asia and eastern China during World War II.

In this period, the professional specialization of the Hainan community focused on automobiles, and especially the vocations of mechanics and chauffeurs. This was a useful expertise in wartime China, and these overseas Hainanese often returned to Hainan or mainland China to lend their skills to the resistance, whether with the Nationalists or the Communists.⁴⁴ In my travels through Hainan, I was told many times that even Mao

⁴³ Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: A Historical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 282, 306. See also Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, [1951] 1980).

⁴⁴ Chen Daya 陈达娅, *Zaihui ba Nanyang: Hainan Nanyang huaqiao jigong huiguo kangzhan huiyi* 再会吧南洋：海南南洋华侨机工回国抗战回忆 [See you again, South Pacific: Recollections of the Southern Pacific overseas Hainanese Chinese mechanics and chauffeurs returning to China to resist the Japanese] (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao chubanshe, 2007).

Zedong's driver in the northwestern Communist base of Yan'an was Hainanese, though I have not been able to confirm this.

Also anecdotally, one prominent interviewee convinced me that the coherence of the overseas Hainan community persists to this day, even in American cities. The daughter of Feng Baiju, the most famous and popular of Hainan's Communist revolutionaries, traveled to visit friends in Los Angeles in the late 1980s. She was surprised to be greeted at the airport by a Hainanese welcoming committee, bearing a grand red sign that welcomed the daughter of Hainan's favorite son.⁴⁵

In the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, there was a surge of Hainanese migration and movement between the island and mainland southeast Asia, as well as to the Philippines and Malaya. Junks full of Hainanese immigrants sailed on the strong but dangerous late summer and autumn monsoon winds. Those junks that successfully navigated the rough seas would land on the shores of Malaya. The men would sometimes find their way to their Hainan contacts waiting in Malaya, but, according to Purcell, the Malay Immigration Department functioned "very satisfactorily." Many of these Hainan immigrants were apprehended by the Malay authorities, and promptly shipped back to Hainan.⁴⁶

Hainanese coherence abroad remained strong in native place associations and clustering of Hainanese within certain occupations such as domestic servants and mechanics. Margaret Moninger noticed the significance of the ties of Hainan to

⁴⁵ Author's interview with Feng Erchao, daughter of Feng Baiju (March 10, 2008).

⁴⁶ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 204.

Southeast Asia during her time on the island. “Many of the men develop the wanderlust and go by junk to Siam, the Straits Settlements, or Burma, where they become house servants or ships’ boys, work on rubber plantations or in mines, or possibly go into business in shops.” Moninger noted that it was common to meet Hainanese who spoke perfect English, acquired during long stays in British territories. She also remarked on the death rituals that connected Hainan island to the communities of Hainanese who traveled abroad: “...many of the men die in the south, and down country here one will sometimes see a row of eight or ten graves, in such regular order as to excite curiosity. On inquiry, these are found to be the graves to which the souls of the deceased have been called, and in which a frog or some other small animal has been buried with all the usual ceremonies.” Moninger also wrote that some of these men who traveled to British colonies returned to visit Hainan after having converted to Christianity. Some of these men, having gone abroad for their work without their wives, and being about to set out alone again, implored Moninger and other missionaries to accept their wives into their mission schools.⁴⁷

Several factors affected the gender component of Hainanese migration and diasporic communities, especially in Southeast Asia. According to a 2009 publication, the gender imbalance of Hainan continued to be an extreme example of China’s male-dominated demography, with only eighty females born for every 100 males.⁴⁸ In the early twentieth century, Hainan officials went so far as to prohibit female emigration

⁴⁷ Moninger (1919), 24-25.

⁴⁸ Benewick and Donald (2009), 28-29.

from the island.⁴⁹ This prohibition had several causes beyond concerns over the gender imbalance. Trafficking women and girls as domestic servants, concubines, and prostitutes was a social issue that attracted official action from both China and Malaya. Concerns about the sex traffic influenced prohibitions on female emigration. These actions in turn indirectly exacerbated the problem by leading to large communities of overseas Chinese men who chose between celibacy, marriage with local women, and patronizing prostitutes.⁵⁰

But the ban on female emigration from Hainan was in keeping with existing trends in Hainanese migration through Southeast Asia. The cost of the voyage for an entire family from Hainan to Singapore, for example, was prohibitive, and if a Hainanese man secured work there, he generally left his wife and children in Hainan.⁵¹ The ban on female emigration, however, was particular to Hainan, and it further distinguished the community of the islanders who emigrated to Southeast Asia. The ban remained in place until the 1920s, when the number of Chinese women to men in overseas communities in the Malay States began to increase.⁵²

One of the most common images of recent Hainanese history within the Chinese discourse is the mythologized “Red Detachment of Women,” of 1930-31, celebrated in a

⁴⁹ Purcell (1948), 86.

⁵⁰ Purcell (1948), 174-176.

⁵¹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Transportation.

⁵² According to Purcell, the ratios of Chinese women to men in the Federated Malay States were as follows: (1901) 100:1000; (1911) 247:1000; (1921) 384: 1000; (1931) 436: 1000 (Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* [1948], 174).

Cultural Revolution Beijing opera. The women, in reality a troop of 103 female spies, scouts, and guards, also serve to establish the mainland perspective on Hainanese gender. A northern stereotype of relatively independent women in Hainan has emerged from this mythology, and it is not groundless. These simple clichés were often based on ancient legends of bewitching maidens of the Chinese borders, but there were certain social practices that did indeed give women higher status in Hainanese society than in other parts of China. Uxorilocal marriages, in which the groom moved to the village and family of the bride, were common among both the Han and Li of Hainan. This meant that women maintained their own positions within their clan, and the practice at least potentially gave Hainanese women higher status within the family compared with their northern mainland counterparts. This practice was considered shameful in the patriarchal and filial traditions of traditional Chinese society, and in some cases even the women involved shared in this shame.⁵³

In most narratives of the women who fought for the Communist guerrillas, they are described as the children of farmers across the island. Though current demography statistics show a male-dominated population on Hainan, it seems likely that the relatively high female participation in the Communist guerrilla movement (beyond the anecdotal “Red Detachment”), was possibly linked to the mass migration of young men to the more lucrative work to be found in Southeast Asia and Singapore. This pattern of emigration combined with the traditional Li and Han practice of uxorilocal marriage to create a distinct gender dynamic on Hainan.

⁵³ Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 192-193.

In the early republican period, Hainan's island geography and its distinct local culture began to shape a political movement that would grow into a new revolution. To the mainland, the island was only viewed in terms of its exploitable potential. During the military clashes of the 1910s and 1920s, Hainan became a temporary garrison for unwelcome soldiers. Even the extractive development that mainlanders like Peng Chengwan had envisioned was impossible in these unstable times, and Hainan remained largely a forgotten corner of the country.

Politics and Potential

The revolution of 1911 brought an end to Qing rule (1644-1911) on Hainan, but initially, this changed little in the island's government or in society at the village level. New schools had been springing up since the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905, and this continued in the republican period (1912-1949). The maritime customs of the island remained under foreign control for another three decades, as the new republican government inherited the same international weakness of the decaying Qing empire. Peng Chengwan noted the island's vulnerability in the face of foreign imperial outposts that surrounded the island. British Malaya and Singapore lay to the south of the island. The French held what is today Vietnam to the west. The Philippines lay to the west, another contested outpost of empire, first of the Spanish and more recently the Americans. Hainan was in a "courtyard of empire," surrounded by great

powers that eyed the green island as a potential source of raw materials, and potentially as an excellent military and commercial port.⁵⁴

Margaret Moninger wrote primarily in a descriptive manner about Hainan. When she wrote persuasively, she emphasized Hainan's "potentialities as a part of the Kingdom of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ." But even with her focus on descriptive and evangelical writing, she also noted that, "[i]mproved methods of mining would doubtless disclose considerable mineral wealth."⁵⁵ Moninger's references to Hainan's potential for development are minimal, but two decades later, on the eve of the Japanese occupation of Hainan, another American, Leonard Clark noted in the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine* that Hainan "lies like some luscious tropical fruit, waiting to be enjoyed – or stands like a sentry guarding the door to both South China and French Indo-China."⁵⁶ Clark and Moninger were far from predatory in their description or agenda, but their remarks show both Hainan's vulnerability and its potential for development, which were plain for even the casual observer of the island.

While the fall of the Qing empire ostensibly brought a more democratic form of governance to China with the transition from monarchy to republic, it actually led to a further disintegration of the country's political coherence. Regional military leaders of the late Qing wrestled power from local civilian leaders, as Yuan Shikai took the power of the new republic from Sun Yat-sen. China was divided between the various satrapies

⁵⁴ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Peng Preface.

⁵⁵ Moninger (1919), 1, 5.

⁵⁶ Clark (1938), 391.

of these leaders, and by the late 1910s, the north and south were also divided between the Beijing regime and the southern Nationalists. This simple divide between north and south was complicated by individuals who worked in Beijing and maintained ties to the Sun Yat-sen's Nationalists in the south. As noted above, both Lin Wenying and Chen Fatan served briefly in Beijing in the National Assembly, and continued to play a role on the national stage through Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary activities in the south.

The continuities in southern China from the late Qing and into the early republic were evident in the high officials who wrestled for political power through the 1910s. Among the most prominent were Long Jiguang, Cen Chunxuan, Lu Rongting, and Lin Genyuan. All of these men served the Qing government as well as holding posts in the republic. Long Jiguang (龙济光 1868-1921) was exceptional in this group due to his unswerving loyalty to Yuan Shikai.⁵⁷ He was Yuan's man in the south, and even when surrounded by revolutionary forces, and still more remarkably, even after Yuan's death, Long never softened to the southern revolutionaries. Long Jiguang was especially relevant to ushering Hainan into the republican era since he garrisoned his own forces on the island for some time, and sought refuge there himself from the revolutionary onslaught.⁵⁸

Long Jiguang began his career in the service of the Qing, putting down the southern uprisings of the early 1900s. In her study of Guangxi factional politics in this period, Diana Lary wrote that Long had been a bandit leader, but one of the regions "less

⁵⁷ Zhang Kaiyuan 章开沅, ed., *Xinhai geming cidian* 辛亥革命辞典 [Dictionary of the 1911 revolution] (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1991), 93.

⁵⁸ Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan* (1995), 48.

objectionable bandits,” and therefore worthy of being incorporated into the government’s regular fighting forces. “The distinction between bandits and regular soldiers was irrevocably blurred.”⁵⁹ After the 1911 revolution, Yuan saw an ally in Long, and quickly appointed him deputy military commissioner of Guangdong, along with an ample sum of money to keep his soldiers personally loyal to him. When Chen Jiongming and other southern revolutionaries led Guangdong to break away from the central government following the “second revolution” of 1913, Yuan ordered Long and his forces to bring the territory back into the fold by marching to the capital, Guangzhou. But old alliances were falling apart around Long as he persisted in his loyalty to Yuan.

Even old bandit comrades like Lu Rongting and Qing commanders like Cen Chunxuan had cut ties to Yuan Shikai after Yuan’s acceptance of the ignominious “21 Demands” from Japan and then his attempt to crown himself emperor. His former comrades tried to lure Long away from his duty to Yuan, but Long resisted actively and violently.⁶⁰ After Yuan’s death, his northern successors hoped to use Long in the same way, but the south was now almost completely beyond Beijing’s grasp. Long was removed to Hainan with some of his forces, and as a result, the island saw nearly constant fighting. From the perspective of Margaret Moninger and the Presbyterian mission, there was little difference between Long’s forces and the revolutionaries. As Lary noted, the distinction between bandits and regular forces was unclear, but for Moninger, and

⁵⁹ Diana Lary, *The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 24.

⁶⁰ Howard Boorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967-1979), Vol. 2, 455-457.

perhaps for any Hainanese who did not have a clear stake in the fighting, the destruction was not worth the cost, especially if there was no promise that Hainan would be granted any further rights under a new regime. In 1918 Moninger wrote:

...all we want is for them to hurry up and settle the trouble and get out so Hainan can be let alone in peace...We are on perfectly good terms with both sides and have soldiers of both sides as patients in the hospital, yet we are perfectly neutral and both sides know it an respect our neutrality.⁶¹

While one might argue that the American, Moninger, had less of a stake in the fighting than a native Hainanese, the missionaries of Hainan were not uninvolved in the conflict. Not only did they welcome soldiers into their hospitals, they also worked to negotiate cease-fires, and carried on schooling of Hainanese children. This is noteworthy in that the mission schools taught standard Mandarin, or northern Chinese to the students who for the most part only spoke the Hainanese dialect when they enrolled. This became part of a movement in the 1910s and 1920s to create a more cohesive and uniform national body. This movement culminated in the patriotic May Fourth Movement that began with protests on that day in 1919 in Beijing, and spread throughout the country, also affecting Hainan. The mission staff directly participated in events surrounding the movement, and Moninger used the opportunity to emphasize female education as a pillar of the movement's cultural modernization efforts.⁶²

⁶¹ Quoting a 1918 letter home from Moninger, in Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan* (1995), 48-49.

⁶² Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan* (1995), 53.

Patriotism was touted by both the southern revolutionaries and the Beijing regime that hoped to prevent further secessions in the south. Peng Chengwan's southern survey on behalf of Beijing was probably prompted in part by a concern over the drift of southern alliances, as well as foreign designs on Hainan. There was a need to establish Chinese activity on the island, and clear connections between the Hainan and the mainland. Peng's loyalties were to Beijing. While he noted the dangers of foreign aggression on Hainan, the southern revolutionaries and their own warlord factions in Guangdong and Guangxi were also a concern for Beijing.

In 1920, the same year that Peng published his survey of Hainan's economy, conflicts between militarists in southern China brought Yunnan, Guangdong, and Guangxi provincial interests to Hainan's shores. Militarists like Long Jiguang and others sometimes retreated to Hainan in self-imposed exile before attempting to reclaim their mainland territories when they believed the time was right.⁶³ Farther from the official reach of either the northern or southern authorities, Hainan was a safe place for these militarists to hide out until their chance for regional or national power came around. This exile was usually taken secretly and individually by these generals. Hainan was also connected to the warlord conflicts on the southern mainland when leaders were posted to the island with detachments of their mainland forces. Also in 1920, a Yunnan general was posted to Hainan with 5,000 of his Yunnan troops in a claim to the defensive

⁶³ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, "China: Political Affairs," (1918), 103.

authorities of the island.⁶⁴ This reflected the volatile politics of southern China in this period, with military and governmental claims and counter-claims to various territories. These temporary garrisons seem to have had little permanent effect on Hainan, though they doubtless disrupted daily life there and reinforced Hainanese resentment of mainland aggression.

As a kind of economic missionary from Beijing, Peng Chengwan's hoped to reverse this negative view. He believed that steady investment and development of Hainan would win the favor of the islanders. Though various claims to the island overlapped through the first half of the twentieth century, Peng believed that responsible government and adequate investment would win Hainan for Beijing. When Peng praised Hainan's potential as a *tianfu*, a breadbasket – a term usually reserved for fertile Sichuan province – he was urging official attention to the development of the island. His blunt assessment of the Li problems and the undeveloped land transportation led to his recommendation for tax relief and central government investment in Hainan. This was not forthcoming, however. Through the first half of the 1920s, Hainan was controlled by Deng Benyi, a warlord much maligned in the island's Communist history. Indeed there seem to be few redeeming qualities in Deng, and little has been written of his rule on Hainan. In the Communist narrative of the 1920s, Deng carried on the exploitative governance of the island that had characterized Qing rule, and the foreign imperial Powers that controlled Hainan's imports and exports. Hainan's economy had been

⁶⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, "The Consul General at Canton (Bergholz) to the Secretary of State (No. 51)," Vol. 1, April 20, 1920, 418.

relatively self-contained (*zigei zizu*), and this regional economy had been disrupted by the “cruel economic invasion” of the late nineteenth century.⁶⁵

But it was this same “invasion” of Hainan’s “natural economy” that Peng hoped for in 1920, only on Beijing’s terms this time, instead of at the orders and for the benefit of foreign Powers or the Qing court. This type of work would require more sensitive development policies than violently subduing or enslaving the Hainanese population (as the Japanese would later do with portions of the Li population). But Peng’s sympathy for the plight of the Hainanese people did not extend so far as treating them as citizens of the new republic entitled to a voice in deciding their fate. In fact, he came something short of acknowledging their humanity in using a word commonly used for training horses, when he wrote that the people of Hainan would have to be “broken” (*xun*) to accept Beijing policies.

In the spring of 1919, China was in political and cultural turmoil. Students protested the Versailles Treaty resolution to turn over German concessions in China to the rising Japanese empire in the east. The Beijing government was unstable and weak, and provincial conflicts threatened to tear apart the young republic. It was in this political context that Peng Chengwan visited Hainan. Peng’s survey report urges that the new republican Chinese regime consider the potential benefit and wealth of Hainan island, but his enthusiasm is only a thin veil over the reality of the lingering apathy or disgust that many mainlanders felt for Hainan. A French observer in 1928 remarked on

⁶⁵ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi 中共海南省委党史研究室, [Historical research office of the Chinese Communist Party provincial committee of Hainan] eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* 中国共产党海南历史 [Chinese Communist Party history of Hainan] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007), 4-8.

the reputed plans of Sun Yat-sen, president of the southern Cantonese government at the time of his death in 1925, to surrender Hainan to a foreign power for the price of \$14 million.⁶⁶ The proximity of Sun's Canton government to Hainan makes this alleged proposition especially alarming, as does the fact that Hainan's Wenchang was the ancestral home of Sun's wife, Song Qingling. While Peng's survey predates the rise of Sun's southern Nationalist regime to power, Peng focuses the energy of the survey on dismissing and breaking down the mainland prejudices of the island as a tropical and unwelcoming wasteland that was useless to the building of a modern Chinese nation-state. Peng's account is not simply a rosy portrayal of the positive attributes of the island that would make it an ideal location for investment and development, for indeed he found Hainan to be a difficult place to live, even for the short duration of his survey mission.

At this time, 1919, the transportation infrastructure on Hainan was extremely limited compared to most of eastern China, and the island was not well connected with mainland trade routes. This would make operations such as mining and large-scale agriculture difficult to develop from the perspective of the mainland investors. The second major hurdle was what Peng and the other surveyors considered the backwardness of the island's aboriginal population, the Li people of Hainan's interior. The Li made up approximately 15 percent of Hainan's population, and they hunted and practiced slash-and-burn agriculture in the island's southern mountains and jungles.⁶⁷ These two

⁶⁶ M. Savina (1929), 7. This event was also noted by the British Foreign Service and is explained further in the following chapter.

⁶⁷ Odaka and Stubel disagreed somewhat on the farming techniques of the Li people. Odaka notes this in the introduction to his survey, and he criticizes the haste with which Stubel paints all Li people as being quite primitive in their agricultural practices. There

problems – the primitive transportation infrastructure and the obstruction to development presented by the backwards Li – were the main concern of the Chinese surveyors in 1919. These two factors were related, and I will begin with the surveyors’ assessment of the Li situation on Hainan. The title of this longest portion of the survey is “The Li Situation” (*Li qing*).

The Li of Hainan

Edward Schafer’s study of Hainan’s early history, *Shore of Pearls*, gave full range to the contradictory perceptions of an island from a mainland perspective. Was it Heaven or Hell, he asks. To mainlanders, an island can often be both, even simultaneously representing paradise and the inferno.⁶⁸ Schafer’s focus was on Hainan from its earliest history until 1100, which was the year one of China’s most beloved scholar-officials, Su Dongpo, perished on a return journey from his exile on Hainan. Hainan was the most remote destination of banished Chinese officials, and Schafer clearly conveyed the shame and mortal fear associated with banishment to the island. But Su Dongpo’s wit and genius made his exile seem less miserable than an official’s banishment might have been, as is apparent from this preface and poem written during his exile in 1098.

Having drunk some wine, I went out alone for a walk and visited the house of four Li families, Tzu-yün, Wei, Hui, and Hsien-chüeh.

was in fact, according to Odaka, at least at the time of his 1942 survey, considerable variation in the sophistication of Li farming techniques, depending on the region and historical interaction with the Han population.

⁶⁸ This bipolar perception is also analyzed in Gary Y. Okihiro’s study of Hawaii, *Island World: A History of Hawaii and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Half-sober, half-drunk, I call on the Lis;
 Bamboo spikes, rattan creepers tangle every step.
 Following the cow turds I find my way back –
 Home beyond the cattle pen, west and west again.⁶⁹

Su Dongpo, and many like him, were sent to Hainan in exile, and they were charged with governing the wild Li and the Han settlers of the island. In the preface to this poem, Su wrote that he was stumbling home after a night of drinking with four different Li households. Su is remembered on Hainan as a great official and an adopted son of the island. His playful poems reflect his good spirits during his exile and his good rapport with the local people, but for the Hainanese, he also worked tirelessly to establish academies and teach countless skills from efficient farming methods to geomancy and water management.

The issues of Li conflict and transportation were also central to the Ming official, Hai Rui, who suppressed several Li uprisings, and aimed to open better roads and more military outposts on the island, according to a Chinese writer in 1937.⁷⁰ But unlike Su or Hai Rui, most tenderfoot officials were not equipped for a life in the wilds of Hainan. A special term was used for such environments – *zhangqi*, best translated as “miasma” but

⁶⁹ Burton Watson, tr., *Su Tung-p'o: Selections from a Sung Dynasty Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 130.

⁷⁰ Wu Lien-teh, “Hainan: The Paradise of China,” *China Quarterly* Vol. 2 (1937), 233-234.

conveying also a sense of natural dangers more terrible than the malaria that it usually denoted – and Hainan was described in this way even through the twentieth century.⁷¹

It was Chinese official convention to think of Hainan in such savage terms, but the island's current label as a luxuriant and heavenly "Hawaii of Asia" is also not without precedent. Even in the early days of the Japanese full-scale invasion of China, and two years before the occupation of Hainan, the island was being heralded as the "Paradise of China."⁷² Still, even under such a title, in 1937 the aboriginal population was still bizarre, barbaric, and sometimes terrifying to the Han or mainland population.

They have the piercing eyes of the eagle, the cunning of the fox, and also at certain times a feline bestiality. They feel they are disliked by the Chinese, and consider themselves as hunted beasts, which, if they come out of their dens, run the risk of being ill-treated. Born free, high in the hills, they have got into the habit of running over mountains and valleys. They know every single path or secluded spot of the forest where they wander about with a gun, ready to shoot a bird, as much as to rob a traveler. Poor, they have nothing to lose on their expeditions but often on the contrary, everything to gain.⁷³

The Li people, lacking an accurate census of their population, were estimated to constitute about 15 percent of the island's population, which meant they numbered around half a million in the early twentieth century. Hainan's population in 1950, at the time of the Communist takeover was approximately 2.3 million, and today is about 8.2 million. The rest of the island's non-Li population was a mixture of mostly Fujian and

⁷¹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920). In the forwards to this survey, Beijing and Guangdong officials praise the courage of the surveyors who braved the scorching sun and the *zhangqi* (miasma) of Hainan to conduct their work.

⁷² Bonnie Tsui, "The Surf's Always Up in the Chinese Hawaii," *New York Times*, March 15, 2009. Wu Lien-teh, "Hainan: The Paradise of China," *China Quarterly* 2 (1937).

⁷³ Wu Lien-teh (1937), 241.

Guangdong Han Chinese, with less than 1 percent of the population made up of Miao (Hmong) and Hui people.⁷⁴

In assessing Han-Li relations on Hainan, Peng Chengwan shamed previous and current mainland administrations of the island. He outlined the history of Han-Li relations, and his narration of historical trends and the state of affairs in 1919 was pessimistic. “Past officials would bend all their mental efforts to the task of achieving internal peace [on Hainan] but all of their work was not sufficient to solve the problem.”⁷⁵ Officials complained of the difficulty of pacifying Hainan’s interior. Simply put, Li uprisings or disturbances on Hainan constituted *the* perennial issue for the island’s officials. “Since the Han Dynasty [over two millennia earlier, when Han settlement of coastal Hainan began] there has not been a single dynasty that has not had trouble in their dealings with the Li.”⁷⁶

The Li were and are not simply a single tribe of ethnically distinct people inhabiting Hainan’s interior from prehistoric times. They were granted official status as

⁷⁴ I refer to the Muslim population of Hainan as Hui because that is the expeditious official classification of this ethnic group on the island, dating from the ethnic minority work of the central government in the 1950s and 1960s. It is noteworthy, however, that most in this group of the Hainan population do not refer to themselves as the same as the Hui Muslims of mainland China, and their origins are probably in southeast Asia. They are, more correctly, the Utsat, and they number about 6,000 on Hainan. On the strained relations between Hainanese Han and the island’s Muslim minority, see Keng-Fong Pang, “Unforgiven and Remembered: The Impact of Ethnic Conflicts in Everyday Muslim-Han Social Relations on Hainan Island,” in William Safran, ed., *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 142-162.

⁷⁵ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Situation of the Li, 3.

⁷⁶ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Situation of the Li, 3.

an ethnic minority of the People's Republic of China when these fifty-five groups were established in the early years of the PRC. The Li, led by Wang Guoxing, played an important role in preserving and aiding the Communist revolution on Hainan. And as a result, they were one of the earliest groups granted this status as an official national minority group, which allowed them certain privileges, and in their case, an "autonomous" territory in southern-central Hainan. But the PRC's broad categorization of the Li is not adequate to understand the complexity of these people of Hainan who are thought of as the indigenous Hainanese.

Indeed the origins of the Li on Hainan predate any written history, and the lack of a written Li language prevent accurate speculation on the earliest dates of their settlement on the island. Similarities in costumes, crafts, rituals, and a simple subsistence lifestyle characterize the people I will continue to refer to here as the Li. Early Han settlers on the island encountered the Li people, who were already living in the island's "belly," the southern mountainous jungle region of Hainan. The Han newcomers found the flatter and more fertile plains of northern Hainan more suitable to the lifestyle they had known on the mainland. Interaction between the Han and Li peoples was sporadic and often violent for most of the two thousand years between the earliest Han settlement, and Peng's survey.

For the Han, the rugged mountains and jungles of the south were not suited to their agrarian tradition or their walled villages; and in turn, the Li people needed little from these settlers. But the newly arrived Han did bring the availability of some things that would make the lives of the Li easier, and the Han wished to trade for some luxury items that the Li could bring them from the jungles. Plentiful rice, salt, and fish would

relieve some of the burden on Li hunters, and would ease the environmental strain of their slash-and-burn growing techniques. Incense was the main commodity available to the Li that was sought by Han merchants. The divine smell of Hainan's "sinking wood" incense filled the ceremonial halls of Beijing and all those throughout China who could afford it.⁷⁷ The incense itself was actually a stage in the rotting of an aloeswood or agarwood tree, and its nickname of "sinking wood" was apt, as its density was greater than water. The early interactions between Li and Han were based mainly in this trade. Besides this limited trade, from the perspective of Qing officialdom, the Li of the island's interior were better off left alone.⁷⁸

Han migration to Hainan also was a factor in contributing to the complexity of the Li people. Coming mainly from Guangdong to the north, and Fujian to the northeast, most Han settlers remained on the coasts and the northern plains of Hainan, but for various reasons, some of the newcomers ventured farther inland, and sometimes settled in Li villages. From earliest times, Li villages and Li families welcomed some Han guests as participants in their community. And reciprocally, some Li changed their dress – and under Qing rule, their hairstyle – and joined the coastal community. These were known in imperial Chinese vocabulary as "cooked" (*shu*) Li, while those Li who maintained their own culture separate from the coastal settlements were known as the "raw" (*sheng*) Li. Li uprisings were common, and especially so in the troubled last century of Qing

⁷⁷ Anne Csete, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and the State in the Early to Mid-Qing: The Hainan Highlands, 1644-1800," in Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 239.

⁷⁸ Csete (2006), 247.

rule. These will be treated more thoroughly in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting that most of these uprisings were related to unaddressed Li complaints pertaining to exploitative, violent, and rapacious behavior on the part of Han merchants in their territory.⁷⁹

In his survey, Peng lists some of these newcomers who had joined the Li, based on his interviews with Li villagers throughout the island. Chinese from what is today Yunnan, as well as natives of Southeast Asia traveled to Hainan and sometimes settled in Li villages. Criminals evaded punishment by fleeing to Hainan, and they sometimes began their lives anew as part of a Li village and family. Soldiers garrisoned on Hainan also deserted to the villages and tribes that they had been sent to pacify.⁸⁰ Japanese sailors and merchants also occasionally joined the Li community, as did some Chinese traders whose conduct was considered upright and respectful by Li chiefs. A small number of descendants of exiled officials, and even some Ming loyalists who fled to Hainan to escape the Manchu rule of the Qing dynasty, also joined the Li people in Hainan's interior.

But even with this complex make-up of Hainan's Li people, most imperial efforts to pacify Hainan put the Li into a single group, just as the PRC has done. And it was the suppression of this homogenized group that most frustrated peaceful Chinese rule of the island. Peng researched the long and troubled history of Li-Han conflict on Hainan, and

⁷⁹ Wang Xueping 王学萍, *Zhongguo Lizu* 中国黎族 [The Li of China] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2004), 81. One example of such an uprising came as a result of duplicitous behavior by salt merchants in 1829.

⁸⁰ Moninger also notes this practice of deserting soldiers joining Li communities in *Isle of Palms* (1919), 28.

he drew many conclusions that placed the blame clearly with the Han newcomers to the island, of which he himself was naturally another.

Peng Chengwan's observations are based both on extensive interviews across the island, from top officials to the supplications of the poorest villagers, including inhabitants of most regions of the island, and most cultural groups. He also used the compiled resources of centuries of official records to compose this survey. His resulting observations provide a broad impression of the general trends in political, social, and economic conditions on the island. His survey is meant for advisement and policy recommendations, and not for historical richness or anecdotal entertainment. So his tendency is to sketch trends rather than provide statistical and anecdotal substantiation of his case.

The poor quality of the civil officials posted to Hainan was a crucial problem, in Peng's view. This view was shared by the Minister of Transportation, Zhao Fan, who also wrote a preface to Peng's survey. Zhao noted that improving the quality of the local officials was central to further developments on Hainan. Peng and Zhao were clearly descendants of their Qing predecessors, for they blamed the middle officials, the magistrates who were sent to Hainan to govern the Li and Han there. It was their clumsiness, according to Zhao, that accounted for the Li uprisings, and certainly not perennial exploitation of the Li people nor encroaching settlement by newly arrived Han mainlanders.⁸¹

⁸¹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Zhao Fan preface.

This problem of poor quality officials had not been solved, according to Peng, and the recent officials posted to Hainan were no improvement on the long line of inadequate administrators sent to govern Hainan. Their laziness and corruption prevented a deft handling of the ethnic conflict on the island. According to the commonly invoked Chinese attack on mid-level bureaucrats, these officials, sweating in the tropical heat, were always slow to address the minor appeals of the Li, and they brushed off the concerns of these tribal people. As a result, the minor conflicts gained momentum. Villages were linked through counsels among Li leaders. Arrow heads were passed through the villages as a signal for a counsel, and the chiefs of villages and tribes convened to share their complaints. This led in turn to significant uprisings, that might have been settled by some earlier action taken by the official, who had likely hoped to kick the problem along to his successor, after his three-year term.⁸²

The grievances of the Li people were longstanding issues mainly stemming from neglect of their political concerns and exploitation at the hands of avaricious merchants. At the top of Peng's list were the greedy merchants who exploited the innocence and naïveté of the Li people. This is a common problem according to trends in studies of Chinese relations with peoples of the borderlands as well as other minority groups. The prevalence of such a trope – the greedy and cunning merchant – does not necessarily mean that Peng's study is relying on old patterns to formulate his survey. Other sources confirm that the Li-Han troubles were often related to the merchants who traveled into Li territory to sell and trade. These merchants, however, did not constitute a uniform group,

⁸² Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Situation of the Li.

and were often made up of criminals escaping the law on the mainland, agents of the Chinese military or civilian government, or members of the Li community who had been integrated into the coastal or northern Hainan Han villages. Some of the merchants, then, were trusted by the Li communities, and some divided the communities and exploited them.⁸³

During the Qing, and in earlier dynasties, in response to duplicity, exploitation, or violence from the coastal Han community, the Li launched raids. In 1919, though, Moninger wrote, “Of late years, no great [Li] raids have taken place, but in earlier times whole ruined villages were witness to their enmity with the Chinese.”⁸⁴ The 1910s and 1920s saw a shift in Li-Han relations, as Moninger observed. During the temporary garrisoning of Long Jiguang’s soldiers on Hainan, the Li took part in uprisings led by Hainanese Han fighters against the mainlanders. In these sporadic and poorly documented uprising, a precedent was established for cooperation between the Li and Han of Hainan in a common cause.⁸⁵

While these political alliances between the Li and the Han developed, economic habits were slow to change. Among other products, the merchants brought alcohol and cigarettes into the Li villages in the late Qing and then through the early republican period. The drugs were sold to the Li people on credit at first. The prices were inflated, but the unfamiliar idea of credit, according to Peng, made the Li eager to accept the novel

⁸³ Clark (1938).

⁸⁴ Moninger (1919), 16.

⁸⁵ Wang Xueping (2004), 83-84.

drugs for what seemed like a minimal price. These debts accumulated, and once a year, the merchants would settle these accounts, and collect on the debts. For those Li who could not pay the debts, according to Peng's study, the merchants took several course of action. The precious few animals that the Li possessed were sometimes taken in place of the monetary debts accumulated by the liquor and cigarette debts. The livestock that the Li possessed had for the most part been brought into the jungles by the same merchants who would then claim them as compensation for these debts.⁸⁶

This type of exploitative trading is immediately reminiscent of the triangle trade set up by the American and British trading houses that flooded the Chinese markets with opium in the middle of the nineteenth century, and reversed the flow of silver into China and began taking back the silver that they had used decades earlier to buy Chinese tea.⁸⁷ The opium grown in Britain's India was used to shift the balance of trade, and rapidly shift the silver flow. In the Li context, cattle were far more precious to the Li people of Hainan than the Mexican silver dollars that had begun to flow out of China in the nineteenth century. Further, according to Peng's survey, cattle were not the only precious collateral claimed by exploitative merchants in exchange for the debts that the merchants had encouraged the Li to pile up throughout the year. If the Li debtor in question had an attractive daughter, she might be taken by the merchant in exchange for the debt. If the debtor had no daughter, his son might be taken, and if he was childless, he could be taken himself.

⁸⁶ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Situation of the Li.

⁸⁷ Parallels might also be drawn between the Li treatment by the Han, and the American Indians' treatment by early European settlers.

In summary, Peng wrote that there was a huge gap, or *honggou*, between the Han and the Li populations. In the language of the recent revolution and the social upheaval that was taking place throughout Chinese cities even as Peng conducted the survey, he wrote that the most recent Li movement (*yundong*) could be described as the Li people's anti-Han revolution (*geming*).⁸⁸ And here, Peng finally broke with the paternal language of his Qing predecessors. Like Han or Manchu observers of the Li who came before him, and the Communists who would come later in the 1950s and 1960s, Peng criticized the administration of the island by the local officials who could not resist the temptations of graft and corruption, being so far from the punishing hand of Beijing. But in describing the Li movement as something more than violent and unruly bandits who were reacting to oppressive and extractive officials, Peng was taking a longer and more sensible view. The Li were a force to be reckoned with as the original hosts of Hainan, and in the next three decades, the Japanese and the Nationalists would learn this first-hand.

Peng Chengwan was not the only outside observer who took a keen interest in the Li people as a key to the development of Hainan. Ten years after Peng's survey, the German anthropologist, Hans Stübel made two trips to Hainan to observe the Li people, out of which came his encyclopedic volume, *Die Li-stämme der insel Hainan* (The Li tribe of Hainan Island). Stübel traveled to Hainan in 1931 and 1932, and published his lavishly illustrated tome on Li ethnography in 1937. Ten years later, when Hainan was under Japanese occupation, Tokyo University's Kunio Odaka published *Economic Organization of the Li Tribes*. With maps made by the Japanese Nitrogen and Electric

⁸⁸ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Li situation, 2, 4.

Company, and enjoying the hospitality of the Ledong Japanese Marine base, Odaka published his study on a smaller group of Li villages with an emphasis on their usefulness to the Japanese governance and economic development of the island.

These three surveys – Peng’s in 1920, Stübel’s in 1937, and Odaka’s in 1942 – all point to the Li as a crucial factor in the development of Hainan. Clearly separable from the Han majority of the island, the three observers saw the Li as a great potential resource. Of course the three men did not plan to completely circumvent any interaction with the coastal-dwelling 85 percent of Hainan’s inhabitants and relate only to the Li people. But the latest of the three observers, Odaka, hoped to separate the Li from the Han, and to think of the Li as a buffer between the Japanese and those Chinese of the island who were hostile to Japanese rule and economic development.

While Peng’s view of the Li people was more accurate than his predecessors, his plans for dealing with them was not. He pointed them out as an obstacle to development and also noted the strengths and potentials of exploiting the Li in making Hainan a new breadbasket for China. And for Peng, the “training” or “breaking” of the wild Li people was an essential ingredient to this formula of development. Stübel’s aim in his survey of the Li people was less explicit in its plans for the development of the island. This is to be expected considering that the German interest in the region was minimal at this time, especially compared with the Beijing officials of the 1920s and the Japanese occupiers of the early 1940s. Stübel’s sought to establish the racial lineage of the Li people as traced through their material culture. While this goal, especially as published in Nazi Germany, can be seen as laden with theoretical and political import, I cannot assume Stübel’s

political goals from the text. His study is exhaustive and his illustrations and observations are invaluable to the study of the Li.

Odaka, on the other hand, is perfectly explicit in the preface to his study when he outlines his goals for this study of the Li:

“This survey of the condition of the social and economic organizations of the Li of Hainan has been undertaken in the hope that the information obtained will be useful to the administration in governing them... As part of the policy to maintain order, it is necessary to use the Li section of the island as a buffer region against the Chinese, especially against the guerillas, in order to provide a stable background for our military bases. As to the problem of developing the island, it is not necessary to utilize its natural resources, but the Li themselves must be utilized as a source of labor.”⁸⁹

Odaka believed that the Li people were potential allies for the Japanese against the coastal Han Chinese of Hainan.⁹⁰ Both the Japanese occupation and the Li conditions under that occupation will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three. In the 1910s and 1920s, the Li situation was only one of a two-part problem preventing the successful development of Hainan. The other was the poor infrastructure, which was in a sense, the other side of the same coin. “Sinification” of the Li would be difficult without adequate communication and transportation networks on the island.

Transportation and Communication

Peng Chengwan’s assessment of the transportation infrastructure on Hainan was mixed. Some aspects of the transportation system were predictably primitive compared

⁸⁹ Odaka (1942), 3.

⁹⁰ Phillips (1980), 93-109.

to the mainland, like the complete lack of railroads and paved roads. But in other areas, like water transport and access to the island's interior, Peng sought to dislodge stubborn northern opinions about Hainan as hopelessly backward and in need of massive investment. He did not suggest Hainan was not in need of great attention and funding, but he urged a more pragmatic and informed approach to the specificities of Hainan's strengths and weaknesses in its transportation infrastructure.

This type of pragmatism in early republican China was typical of a growing class of professionals. Peng and the technocrats of this era had come of age in the generation after the 1905 abolition of the imperial examination system, which had favored archaic literary fluency over practical talent. But the Leninist parties – the Nationalists and the Communists – who would be the heirs of republican China, would reverse these advances in apolitical and non-ideological reform in favor of partisan loyalty. So Peng's work in Hainan was sober and sobering, and it would not be seen in Hainan again until the rise of the Communist technocrats and reformers of the 1980s, when Hainan would finally be granted provincial status and the partisan handicaps removed from the saddle of its government and economy.

In 1919, Peng Changwan found three automobiles on Hainan island. They had been recently brought to Hainan by a businessman who purchased the aging vehicles in Hong Kong. In December of 1918, the cars arrived in Haikou to local excitement, according to Peng. They sat six passengers, and they were in constant need of repair. This was still the dawn of automobiling throughout the world, but the three vehicles still appear pathetic in Peng's description. They jostled their passengers along the ten-kilometer road between Haikou and Fucheng in the north.

At the time of their purchase, the company, headed by one Li Jinlong, had boasted that they would be able to run the cars from Haikou to Ding'an, dozens of kilometers away, and then onto the relatively cosmopolitan town of Wenchang on the northeastern coast of the island. Wenchang was the ancestral home of the famous Song family and many prominent generals, as well as being the traditional "Jiangnan" of Hainan, supplying the island's government with most of its low-level officials and educated workers. Significant remittances from overseas Wenchangers constituted much of the town's wealth, and this continues to be the case today.

But the plan to connect Wenchang and Haikou by automobile was abandoned when it became apparent that the cars simply could not sustain the pounding that the bumpy roads would inflict on them; nor could they escape the muddy ruts and washouts that resulted from any significant rainfall. So the planners adjusted their goals. The ten kilometer trip from Haikou to Fucheng was much more modest, but it still was not easy. The huge puddles were too deep for the cars to cross in wet weather, and the automobiles were already out of date anyway, and would have needed constant repair even without the hazards of tropical weather and poor quality roads.

Still, Peng wrote about the three cars with optimistic if amused language. Of course, he noted, these cars were merely a novelty to wealthy Haikou dwellers who could pay 40 *jiao* for a ride to Fucheng and another 40 for the ride back. Li Jinlong's initial investment in buying the cars was 20,000 *yuan*, according to Peng, and the investment seemed at first blush to be symbolic considering that one fully loaded car brought only 4.8 *yuan* for a roundtrip from Haikou to Fucheng. But Peng praised Li's initiative with this little business, noting that the three cars made sixty roundtrips each every day,

bringing in a maximum potential net income of 864 *yuan* for the small company. Of course, this was considering all conditions were perfect, the cars did not break down en route, and every car was fully loaded with passengers. In reality, Li Jinlong's business still managed to turn a tidy profit in several months between the arrival of the automobiles in December of 1918, and the time of Peng's survey visit in the spring of 1919. On average, Li's company turned 100 *yuan* in profits every day, significantly less than Peng's ambitious ideal numbers for the venture, but still, a brisk business. Peng was impressed with the industriousness of this businessman, and the cleverness of the Hainan people more generally. He concluded that it was not merely a symbolic venture.⁹¹

What Peng Chengwan could not have known in 1919, or when the survey was published a year later, was that this little enterprise was in fact a harbinger of a later trend of Hainanese professionalization in auto repair and motoring. Especially in the southeast Asia Hainanese communities, auto mechanics and chauffeurs became vocations in which the Hainan community was most prolific.⁹² The number of cars on Hainan island was not significant through the early and mid-twentieth century, but in 1920, Peng Changwan saw potential in the development of Hainan's infrastructure through efforts like Li Jinlong's enterprise. Today, new, well-maintained roads connect all of the island's major ports and inland cities.⁹³

⁹¹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Transportation, 20.

⁹² Chen Daya, et. al. (2007).

⁹³ During the early 1980s this changed with the economic reforms and opening under Deng Xiaoping. Lei Yu, a high-ranking administrator in Hainan during the early 1980s, imported 90,000 Japanese made automobiles, an astonishing figure considering the island had only imported about 10,000 vehicles from 1950 until 1983. Having used Hainan

But even in praising the industrious Li Jinlong, Peng Chengwan did not avoid the blunt conclusion that Hainan's roads would need extensive investment and labor in order to be able to sustain anything more than this modest motoring route between two northern towns. Horse and ox carts were more suited to the transportation realities of Hainan, and these, especially ox carts, were not in short supply. Horses were not as common. At the end of Qing Dynasty, a unit of the Hunan Army's cavalry that was stationed in Hainan was suddenly demobilized. The abrupt demobilization left the cavalymen with no vocational opportunities, except for the 30 or 40 steeds of their unit. Again, Peng takes this chance to make an example of the industriousness and the business potential on Hainan. Several of the cavalymen joined together and formed a company that provided the use of their horses and carts for the transportation of people and goods. Peng notes wryly that the steeds were generally more reliable than Li Jinlong's automobiles, and they usually got their passengers to their nearby destinations in about the same amount of time.⁹⁴

Less than a decade later, according to M. Savina, a French observer who visited Hainan in 1928, the northern Hainanese towns of Haikou and Qionghshan were the

government funds to buy the vehicles, Lei then turned around and sold the vehicles at a huge profit. The misuse of government funds was eventually found out, and for five years, appeals for making Hainan a province and Special Economic Zone were delayed by the scandal. The huge transaction was impossible to hide simply because Hainan's transportation infrastructure was still relatively under-developed into the 1980s.

⁹⁴ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Transportation, 20-21. In 1919, Margaret Moninger also remarked on the short road and novelty of a couple of automobiles connecting Fucheng and Haikou. (Moninger, *Isle of Palms*, 30) By 1938, however, the development of passable Hainan roads had extended deep into the island's interior, allowing Leonard Clark and his National Geographic team to ride sixty miles by automobile to Nada, in northwestern Hainan.

island's "pride" and that they offered access by automobile and even plane. Savina noted that on his visit, wireless telegraph, telephones, and electricity were common in Haikou, and that the city featured large boulevards, lined with modern buildings and stores. The city walls that one observer noted in 1919, had been destroyed by 1928, and the city was moving towards a more modern design that allowed migrant workers to move in and out of the city more freely during the day and week. For Savina, this prevented an accurate estimate the northern cities' population of about 60,000, but it also was a sign of a move away from the strict distinction between rural and urban workers that, in the eyes of some modernist economists, had prevented the healthy development of the Chinese economy in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵

Besides the anecdotal examples of the Hunan cavalry horses and Li Jinlong's three-car automobile company, Peng Chengwan was eager to note that Hainan's transportation infrastructure had significant potential, and in fact was already well-developed in several ways. Access to the island's interior, according to Peng, was not as impossible as mainland assumptions. During the Qing Guangxu emperor's reign (1871-1908), several conflicts erupted between imperial troops and the local Li people of the southern interior of Hainan. A general in the imperial army, Feng Zicai, led the forces in defeating the Li resistance, and at the conflict's resolution, he reported to the emperor that he would take this opportunity to improve access to the island's interior by building new roads. The new roads, according to Feng Zicai, would connect important southern ports to the Li villages, where luxury goods like incense, teak, and sandalwood could be

⁹⁵ M. Savina (1929).

traded for and bought from the Li. Feng claimed that these interior villages had never been connected to the coastal villages and cities, and that his work would bring these Li people and their products into the imperial fold for the first time in the history of the Chinese empire.

Peng Chengwan read Feng Zicai's reports, and went to these Li villages along some of the routes that Feng claimed to have opened only a few decades earlier. He visited with the Li people in these villages, and talked with them about their conflicts with the imperial armies, and their contacts with traders. He was surprised to find that Feng's claims to have been the one to open these routes for the first time were hugely exaggerated. The old Li people he spoke with chuckled when Peng asked them about having been newly connected to the coast and the traders and officials of the empire and the coastal Han. Indeed, they had heard Feng making such claims, puffing himself up as a kind of frontiersman who was bringing the bright civilization of the empire to the Li villages. Feng had ordered teams of Li villagers to come with him and "build" the roads. In reality, according to Peng's findings in the survey, young men of the Li villages went along with Feng with their tools. But they were walking along the roads that existed for centuries, and paths that connected one village to the next, and eventually connected to the coastal towns. Feng still ordered, in a grand and ceremonious way, that these roads were to be opened. The confused Li men trimmed a few branches that hung in the road, pulled some errant weeds and plants that had sprouted in the paths, and Feng claimed victory in his endeavor.

In his survey, Peng Chengwan mocks Feng Zicai's "so-called 'opening of the roads'" (*suowei kailu*), and urges the reader to realize that even the most remote Li

villages had been connected to the coast and the Han people for centuries. This meant that the Li had chosen not to model their villages, their agricultural practices, and their civilization generally, on the Han traders and imperial representatives who had been visiting their villages for as long as there was an imperial presence on Hainan. Though the story was not always one of hostility, as the above description of Li-Han conflict may suggest, the lives of the interior Li villages were led in voluntary seclusion. Peng could not avoid this conclusion in his survey. He had to acknowledge that the lack of sinification of the Li was not due to a lack of trying, or a lack of access. This would make the task of incorporating the Li into a modern republic more difficult than simply opening roads to the Li and allowing the irresistible civilizing forces of Chinese culture to wash over the Li people.⁹⁶

In Peng Chengwan's survey of Hainan, the two most important obstacles to developing Hainan were the poor transportation infrastructure and the perennial conflicts with island's Li aborigines. Like the Japanese who came after Peng, and the many Chinese empires that came before him, these problems were ultimately insurmountable in their efforts to effectively govern and develop the island's economy, and by the end of republican Chinese rule of Hainan, significant development of Hainan's economic potential had barely begun. The Japanese efforts from 1939 to 1945 proved slightly more efficient in creating harbors and developing the iron mines of western Hainan, but the brutality of Japanese rule was simply unsustainable, and Hainanese resistance had begun to slow the colonial process long before Japan's surrender. As will be seen in the

⁹⁶ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Transportation, 18-19.

following chapters, with a shift of perspective and goals, another group would take these obstacles to development of Peng's survey and use them to propel themselves into power over large territories on the island, and finally military victory in 1950.

When the Hainanese Communist movement took root as a militia and guerrilla military struggle, the poor infrastructure of the island served as a boon to their efforts, for it prevented an organized counter-insurgency by either the Nationalists or the Japanese. And making common cause with much of the Li population in fighting the Japanese and the Nationalists, the Hainan Communists were allowed to operate in the island's mountainous interior, which had once been terra incognita for international and mainland Chinese geographers and surveyors.

Chapter Two

From Globetrotters to Guerrillas:

The Local Turn of Hainan's Early Revolutionaries, 1912-1937

Hainan in a Disintegrating National Polity

From the fall of the Qing in 1911 until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Hainan island became increasingly isolated from Chinese national politics. In the early republic, this Hainanese shift away from central, national priorities reflected the broader political atmosphere in which provincial leaders throughout China gained strength in relation to the weak central government in Beijing. By the late 1910s, advocates of a more federalized national polity put forth their ideas in the capital, and gained support among members of the National Assembly as well as prominent citizens in their home provinces. This impetus for increased regional power, however, came from the divergent perspectives of both liberal intellectuals and conservative warlords, which prevented the federalist issue from becoming a clear and strong political platform, and weakened it in the face of the eventual rise of the Nationalist Party in the mid-1920s.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Jean Chesneaux, "The Federalist Movement in China, 1920-1923" in Jack Gray, ed., *Modern China's Search for a Political Form* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), translation of "Le Mouvement Fédéraliste en China, 1920-1923," in *Revue Historique* (Octobre-Décembre 1966), 347-384.

This abortive move toward federalism, had it been successful, might have provided legitimacy to the provincial militarism that had already given several provinces *de facto* autonomy in the 1910s and 1920s. The various revolutionary credos that had brought about the end of imperial China in fact shared few specific attributes other than opposition to the minority Manchu imperial rule. The project to construct a national consciousness therefore often produced something weaker than the residual local and provincial identities. According to John Fitzgerald in his assessment of the *longue durée* of Chinese provinces in history, “Attempts to balance the age-old demands of center and province in the twentieth century were compounded by an additional problem common to revolutionary states: the need to build new state structures on unorthodox ideological, social and economic foundations.”⁹⁸

One natural response to this new and daunting challenge was for regional leaders to simply oppose the project of cohesive, modern nation-building, and instead to strengthen regional bases rather than throwing in their lot with the national government. In another of John Fitzgerald’s works, this one on Guangdong separatism, he notes that the Guangdong ruler, Chen Jitang, effectively declared the independence of his province (which included Hainan) when he withdrew his support for the Nationalists’ Nanjing government in the early 1930s. He had been continuing the Guangdong resistance to governance from Nanjing that had begun with his predecessors under the Nationalist regime. It is noteworthy that this southern birthplace of China’s republican revolution became one of the most intransigent opponents of the national government that it helped

⁹⁸ John Fitzgerald, “The Province in History,” in John Fitzgerald, ed., *Rethinking China’s Provinces* (London: Routledge, 2002), 20.

to create. From 1931 until the Japanese invasion of Hainan in 1939, the island was under the administration of Guangdong during a time of resistance to, and effective autonomy from, the national project as dictated from Nanjing.⁹⁹

Throughout the country in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, historians have found certain events to be the watersheds in the nationalist history of China, such as Japan's imposition of the notorious Twenty-One Demands, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925, and of course the anti-Japanese resistance struggle beginning in the early 1930s. In such a vast country as China, it seems obvious, when bluntly stated, that these events could not have simply and immediately galvanized a population and transformed the disintegrated nation into a modern national polity. Doubtless events as traumatic as the Japanese invasion served to create a strong negative sense of national identity – a culture of resistance that is as coherent as any foundation for modern nationalism. And yet even the Japanese invasion (let alone the urban-based and intellectual-driven May Fourth and May Thirtieth movements) certainly had varied impacts throughout the country that cannot be painted in one retroactive hue of countrywide experienced nationalism. In Hainan, the period from the fall of the Qing through the Japanese invasion saw the development of a revolutionary movement that was distinct in the quality of being shaped by local events. And when influenced by distant or nearby events of national import, those events were interpreted and incorporated so as to fit the revolutionary itinerary and perspective of Hainan.

⁹⁹ John Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity: The Politics and Finance of Guangdong Separatism, 1926-1936," in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 24, No. 4 (October 1990), 745-775.

Hainan was distinct from the central national projects in Beijing or Nanjing, but the importance of the local movement did not make Hainan unique in this period. Just as Guangdong withdrew its support for the Nationalist government in the late 1920s, the urban context of Guangzhou (Canton) presented identities and loyalties of class and profession that further complicated the rift between provincial and national political culture. As Michael Tsin explained in his study of that city, the profound frustrations that the Nationalist government experienced in this important modernizing merchant city became important in shaping the later Communist regime. The failures of the Nationalists to mobilize the nationalism of the Cantonese provided one lesson, and the crushing of the Communist movement there in 1927 provided another.¹⁰⁰ First, any future southern revolutionary movement would have to be purged of regionalism and local loyalties, and second, the military force that sustained it would have to be far more expansive.

Beyond Guangdong, there were many other examples of regional loyalties trumping nationalism, at the expense of the Nationalists and their republican predecessors. Donald A. Jordan pointed out Zhejiang's place among the many provincial leaders who opposed the centralizing efforts of Nanjing. (Perhaps most famous among those who resisted the Nationalists were the powerful militarists of the north, Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan.) As in Guangdong, Jordan found in Zhejiang that the "failure of the [Nationalists] to subordinate provincial autonomists was a lesson learned by the Chinese Communist Party. Owing to their weakness of commitment to a national

¹⁰⁰ Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

government, the defected militarists who had seemingly contributed to China's reunification in 1926-1927 actually kept the nation in a state of disintegration. The need remained for new ideological forces and organizational strength to pull the diverse Chinese people together."¹⁰¹

Both Tsin and Jordan found that these failures of Nationalist rule would become lessons for the Communists. And yet, through the late 1920s, and even through the 1930s and into the early 1940s, conflict between central and regional Communist leadership persisted.¹⁰² The problems associated with the perceived zero-sum equation of regional and national loyalty and identity continued to frustrate both the Communists and the Nationalists through the coming decades. Jordan and Tsin noted important lessons learned by the Communists, but in Hainan, the Communist movement would be born of this period of disunity, and its disconnection from the later centralizing forces in the Party's development would keep it operating on this local foundation. Only with the final Communist takeover of Hainan in 1950 would the local character of the Hainan Communist movement finally begin to be separated from a new administration there.

¹⁰¹ Donald A. Jordan, "Provincialism within the Chinese National Revolution: The Case of Chekiang, 1926-1927," in F. Gilbert Chan and Thomas H. Etzold, eds., *China in the 1920s: Nationalism and Revolution* (New York: New Viewpoints/Franklin Watts, 1976), 146.

¹⁰² Tsin (1999) notes this, especially in the aftermath of the crushing of the Canton uprising in December 1927 (page 174). For another example of this conflict, see the letter from the central command to the Guangdong Provincial Committee of September 1927, in which the urban leaders who were on the verge of massacre were accused of being "timorous and fearful of sacrifice" since they avoided urban and conventional warfare. (Reprinted in Hyobom Pak, ed., *Documents of the Chinese Communist Party: 1927-1930* [Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1971], 123-126. As late as January of 1941, with the famous New Fourth Army Incident (Wannan *shibian*), regional and central conflicts continued.

It was in this context of disunity that, as a district under the administration of Guangdong, the Communist movement on Hainan took shape in the mid-1920s. Separation from the national polity ran counter to the intentions of early prominent revolutionaries of the republic, prior to and immediately following the collapse of the Qing. As noted in Chapter One, Lin Wenying, Chen Fatan and others did not hope to construct an independent satrapy on Hainan, but rather a provincial administration that was increasingly tied to the national government. Local conflicts and persistent militarism frustrated their efforts to incorporate the island into the national polity.

By the mid-1920s and the beginning of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) organizational work on Hainan, the island's isolation had begun to shape the revolutionary movement there. Many of these Communist organizers continued the work of earlier revolutionaries in trying to connect the island to the Party headquarters on the mainland, and they were sometimes successful. In some ways, the Communist movement on Hainan paralleled the Party on the mainland, and this meant that it arrived in Hainan as a subset or "bloc within" of the Nationalist Party, began its work under these auspices, and then, following a purge in 1927, by the early 1930s, it had been smashed to pieces by the Nationalist Party based in Nanjing and local authorities, and it was struggling for survival.

On the mainland, by January 1935, and the famous Zunyi Conference of the Long March, the CCP openly criticized its international Comintern advisers and shifted toward a military and political strategy that seemed better suited to their needs. There was no Long March on Hainan, but several years before Zunyi, the Hainan Communists reached

similar conclusions about localizing their revolution, and found their leaders and their strengths in local guerrilla struggle with the long-term goal of winning the island for the national Communist movement. While many of the Hainanese military and political officials who joined the Nationalist Party left the island and served on the mainland, the Communist organization on Hainan shifted its focus away from the mainland, and began growing a local island movement. On Hainan, the distinction between the elite of the Communist and Nationalist command was much more clearly drawn. Those who could afford leave the island did, many of them attending the Whampoa (Huangpu) Military Academy in Guangzhou. On the mainland, many of the Communist leaders had also attended Whampoa, as well as military schools in Moscow or Japan.¹⁰³ On Hainan, Communist leaders were rarely accomplished students or cadets, and only the exceptional college graduate graced their ranks. The Hainan Communist officer, Ma Baishan, for example, was nicknamed “Blueblood” because he came from a family of some modest means (his father supplemented the family farming income selling wares in the market).¹⁰⁴ More typical was the movement’s most prominent leader, Feng Baiju, whose university studies in Shanghai at the crucial time of the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 were cut short because his family could no longer support him and needed his labor at

¹⁰³ Guo Wenyong 郭仁勇, *Wenchang jiangjun zhuan* 文昌将军传 [Biographies of Wenchang generals] (Tianma tushu youxian gongsi: Hong Kong, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi 中共海南省委党史研究室 [Hainan Provincial CCP History Committee Office], eds., *Hainan jiangling zhuan* 海南将领传 [Biographies of Hainan’s military leaders] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1991), 311.

home.¹⁰⁵ Some Hainanese did attend Whampoa and go on to serve the Communist cause, but they, like Zhang Yunyi, Zhuang Tian, and others, spent their revolutionary careers on the mainland, with the Communist New Fourth Army and the Eighth Route Army.¹⁰⁶

The causes of the inward turn on Hainan were many, including factors such as the island's obvious geographical isolation; souring relations between Hainan islanders and the once-supportive "bourgeois" overseas Hainanese community; a perennial perception, on the part of some Hainanese, of mainland political envoys (including Communists) as officious and exploitative; a stubbornly provincial and perhaps simplistic Hainanese perception of anti-imperialism and class struggle.

From the outside, Hainan's inward turn was reciprocated in the low estimation of the island's importance even to the point of Sun Yat-sen's willingness to sell off Hainan's economic sovereignty to the Japanese in exchange for guns and cash. As the early Communists of Hainan struggled to survive in the late 1920s and early 1930s, mainland cadres sent to lead the movement were quickly discovered and summarily executed by the Nationalist authorities. Thereafter, only Hainanese would occupy positions of leadership until the final Communist victory in 1950.

¹⁰⁵ Wu Zhi, He Lang 吴之, 贺郎, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯白驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 19.

¹⁰⁶ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi 中共海南省委党史研究室 [Hainan Provincial CCP History Committee Office], eds., *Hainan jiangling zhuan* 海南将领传 [Biographies of Hainan's military leaders] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1991).

In concluding her study of the early years (1921-1936) of Chinese Communism in British Hong Kong, Chan Lau Kit-ching wrote, “Communist history in Guangdong and Hong Kong did not form a significant deviation from the main history of the Chinese Communist Movement as a whole as it is generally known up to the present time.”¹⁰⁷ Chan’s study makes a “microcosm” of this southern Communist movement, noting that the Communists and partisans in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province faced similar challenges and dangers to those within the “main history.”

The scope of Chan’s study is mainly the British colony of Hong Kong. She counters the assumptions that student of Chinese history might have about a different strain of Communist revolution brewing under such a radically different administration as British colonial rule. Chan shows that through cooperation between the British administration of Hong Kong and the Chinese Guangdong administration, the two governments presented a similarly infertile environment for early Communists. While the idea of a uniform “main history” of Chinese Communism has already been dislodged, Chan’s study asserts that the development of Chinese Communism in this region was tightly connected to the Party Center, and it did not deviate significantly from the early central narrative. This is a significant claim, since one aspect of the received wisdom in the development of the CCP and earlier revolutionary movements is that revolutionaries

¹⁰⁷ Chan Lau Kit-ching, *From Nothing to Nothing: The Chinese Communist Movement and Hong Kong, 1921-1936* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 201.

benefited from the relative political freedom of foreign concession areas and independently governed territories like Hong Kong, and, of course, foreign countries.¹⁰⁸

Hainan was a geographically substantial part of Guangdong Province until 1988, when the island was granted provincial status. Still the island does not figure prominently in Chan's study. Chan's theory of essential uniformity of experience for the Chinese Communist movement breaks down in the Hainan context, although Hainan was indeed connected to Hong Kong through communication lines and personnel exchanges. Chan occasionally mentions Hainan in her study, but she does not give the island and its Communist movement sufficient attention to recognize that it presented a locally distinct evolution in the foundational period of Communist history. I do not intend to single out Chan's neglect of Hainan, since overlooking the particulars of the Hainan experience – Communist or otherwise – is nearly universal within the field of English-language studies of modern China, with the exceptions of the handful of works noted in the previous chapter. But her study of Hong Kong is intended to include much of Guangdong, and

¹⁰⁸ From the revolutionaries who overthrew the Qing to human rights advocates today, dissidents who opposed Chinese governments have commonly sought refuge in neighboring countries and foreign concessions. This observation was made by contemporaries in the late Qing as well in the Republic. In one example, a British foreign service officer noted in 1906 that anti-Qing revolutionary publications often were printed in areas of foreign jurisdiction, so that the writers might avoid Qing punishment. See Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part I, Series E, Asia, Volume 14, Annual Reports on China, 1906-1913* (University Publications of America, An imprint of CIS, 1994), 35-36.

like other studies of Guangdong, Hainan figures only peripherally in spite of its substantial territorial claim within that province.¹⁰⁹

In this chapter, I will explain why the Communist movement of Hainan, from its pre-Communist revolutionaries and reformers through the local Communist guerrillas of the 1930s, presents a distinct narrative that cannot be conflated with the Communist narrative of mainland China. In Hainan Communist history, the “high-tides” and “low-tides” of the movement sometimes seemed to ebb and flow with the same external influences as the grand narrative of the mainland movement. The cohesion and dissolution of the Hainan movement internally also seemed to parallel the internal dynamics of the mainland Party center in many historical moments. Some of the apparent similarities and parallels between the Hainan Communist movement will be illustrated here, and in many ways this will seem consistent with Chan’s observation of the Communist development in the south having run parallel with the main history of the Party center in the northern mainland.

¹⁰⁹ In his work, *China’s Republican Revolution: The Case of Kuangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), Edward J.M. Rhoads finds very few occasions to incorporate Hainan. He refers to “West Kuangtung” as including “the coastal lowland and Hainan island,” and writes that the region’s lack of development is due to “infertile soils and its isolation from the rest of the province.” Of course only the latter factor applies to Hainan, though even the idea of Hainan’s isolation was challenged in Peng Chengwan’s (1919) survey of Hainan. Certainly the northern plains of Hainan are exceptionally fertile, and if Peng’s survey is to be trusted, the island was not as isolated as the mainland stereotypes would have us believe. Rhoads’s concerns in Hainan seem to align with the limited interests in Hainan on the part of the colonial foreigners at the turn of the century, which were certainly very few. Michael Tsing’s (1999) study of Canton does not set out to examine all of Guangdong, and its focus is mainly limited to that major city. In these and other studies, the very narrow channel of water that separates the massive, sleepy Hainan from the lively Guangdong mainland seems indeed an unbridgeable gulf.

It is too simple, however, to say that Hainan's Communists either adhered or diverted from the mainland Party center's political dictates. When similar directives, impulses, catalysts, and actions occur in different environments, they yield different results. It was the context of Hainan island's distinct local culture and geography that make the comparisons break down between these parallel trajectories in early Communist history. An urban revolutionary in Haikou, for example, could not be expected to find similar allies as the Communist labor organizer in Shanghai or Hankou, even though they both were trying to adhere to the late 1920s Communist directive to seize China's industrial centers.

Hainan's revolutionaries were eager to play their part in the national Chinese revolution, whether it was the 1911 revolution, the Nationalist conquest, or the Communist revolution. This would bring the island of Hainan into a position of newfound importance in national politics, or at least this was the expressed hope of many political activists whose roots and priorities were in Hainan in the twentieth century.¹¹⁰ After the fall of the Qing in 1911, Hainanese progressives and revolutionaries in the early republic were tied especially close to the mainland. One similarity in the republican movement of the early twentieth century on Hainan was the international orientation of these early revolutionaries.

Between the fall of the Qing and the Nationalists' ascension to power, Hainan's revolution would change radically. It began as a cosmopolitan movement led by patriotic intellectuals and merchants, but it became a violent and localized conflict that

¹¹⁰ Chen Keqin 陈克勤, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Hainan becomes a province], (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 11-12.

effectively shed the national, let alone international, ideology and spirit. By the time the Hainan Communist movement had taken hold and built lasting support throughout the island – that is in the mid-1940s – the movement was characterized by pragmatic military leadership, alliances of convenience, and a fiercely local commitment that could not be bothered with direct orders from the Communist central command to abandon the island and move their forces to the northern mainland.

But the line from globetrotting merchants and newspapermen like Lin Wenying (林文英 1873-1914) to guerrilla leaders like Feng Baiju (冯白驹 1903-1973) is a clear one, at least in Communist historiography, and both ends of the trajectory represent an important side of the island's cultural and revolutionary character. The path from one to the other was not a smooth or consistent one. The echoes and reverberations of mainland political and ideological conflict did not translate directly into the Hainan context. Domestic and external factors, from anti-imperialist protests, to the Nationalist purge of the Communists and leftists in its ranks in 1927, to the Japanese invasion of Hainan, which came over a year and a half after the invasion of the mainland, were all manifested differently on Hainan.

Rather than simply proving Hainan's uniqueness in the Chinese context, these examples follow in a trend toward a more regionally and provincially distinct treatment of all Chinese history in the twentieth century. As the Hainan Communist movement began to develop in the early 1920s, circumstance and contingency led them to chart a revolutionary course that was often disconnected from the mainland Communist movement. This local turn, which took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s, will

conclude this chapter, showing how local conditions forced a more deliberate decision by the local leadership to strike out in a specifically Hainanese direction. In this period, the Hainanese Communists turned their attention away from the distant goals of the national revolution, and focused on winning support in their province. Their goal was to win Hainan on behalf of Chinese Communism, but they recognized that the methods to achieve this goal would sometimes mean straying from the political priorities of the mainland movement.

Hainan's revolutionaries certainly did not have any hopes or illusions about Hainan independence from China. But as they gained experience in the deadly political and military struggles of the civil war with the Nationalist Party in power after 1927, it became clear that the foundation of local conditions and strengths were more appropriate than revolutionary directives from the mainland Party center as a foundation for building their revolution. This also would mean supporting local leadership over the cadres who were sent from the mainland to dictate policy in Hainan, and this was a potentially deadly decision. Disobedience of short-term directives and leadership appointments would ultimately lead to the victory that both local guerrillas and the national leadership dreamed of.

Through the darkest periods of the movement, the Hainan Communists made every effort to maintain their communications with the mainland. This was done or attempted at the cost of Hainanese lives, and when that communication was ever cut, it was considered a tragic alienation from the Party center. Not only was material support cut off when communications were cut, but the guerrillas and cadres thought of this as a severed lifeline of political morale and in the extreme, it could lead to a loss of meaning

in their struggle. The precarious condition of the mainland Communist movement in the 1930s and early 1940s meant that it was a real possibility that the Party center could be snuffed out by the Nationalists or Japanese, without the news reaching the Hainanese revolutionaries.¹¹¹ From 1931 through 1937, in the darkest period of the Hainan Communist movement, its leader, Feng Baiju, had no regular communication with the mainland Party center. He sent dispatches and risked invaluable personnel when he sent messengers to the north, even when the Communist contingent on Hainan numbered fewer than fifty individuals.¹¹² One important point that Chan emphasizes in her study of early Communism in Hong Kong and Guangdong was the “Red Underground Communication Line.” This was a crucial lifeline for the Hainan Communist movement, and throughout the Hainan Party’s early years, it kept the leadership acutely aware of the shifting fortunes of the mainland Party.¹¹³

On Hainan, this awareness of and connection to the mainland Communist movement did not always translate into exact imitation or obedience. Divergences of the

¹¹¹ Huang Yunming 黄运明, as told to Zhou Longxiao 周龙蛟, “Wo tong Qiongya diantai de qingyuan” 我同琼崖电台的情缘 [My relationship with Hainan radio], in Hainan geming shi yanjiu hui 海南革命史研究会 [Hainan revolutionary history research society], eds., *Qiongya fengyun* 琼崖风云 [Stormy Hainan] (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2006), 227-234.

¹¹² Feng Baiju 冯白驹, “Guanyu wo canjia geming guocheng de lishi qingkuang” 关于我参加革命过程的历史情况 [Regarding the history of my participation in the revolutionary process] (June 25, 1968), in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi 中共海南区党委党史办公室 [The Party history office of the Chinese Communist Party of Hainan district committee], eds., *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 冯白驹研究史料 [Research materials on Feng Baiju] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 428-429.

¹¹³ Chan (1999), 189-190.

Hainan Communist movement in this early period set the stage for later improvisational strategies that the Party's central mainland leadership interpreted as flouting orders and local opportunism. In 1951, immediately following the Communist victory on Hainan, the local leader, Feng Baiju explained why the Communist movement on Hainan had taken on a unique shape. He laid out three main reasons: first, Hainan's geography as an island, isolated and blockaded from the mainland; second, the Hainan Communist movement had suffered such devastating setbacks that its very existence had been in doubt and it had to start largely from scratch when its leadership was wiped out in 1927 and 1929, when the Red Army on Hainan was nearly annihilated in 1932, and through the Japanese massacres especially in 1942, along with other challenges; and third, Hainan's isolation had been most challenging to the Hainan leadership's attempt to keep up with the theoretical sophistication in the teaching and application of Marxism and Maoism.¹¹⁴

For Feng, Hainan's unique geopolitical situation explained how it had come so far from the cosmopolitanism of the early Hainan revolutionaries. From the early 1930s, Feng Baiju was the preeminent leader of the Communist movement on Hainan, and the dominance of his localized pragmatism had developed out of the two decades of revolutionary activities on Hainan that preceded him.

Lin Wenying and Hainan in the Early Republic

¹¹⁴ Feng Baiju 冯白驹, *Zhongguo gongchandang de guanghui zhaoyao zai Hainandao shang* 中国共产党的光辉照耀在海南岛上 [The glorious light of the Chinese Communist Party on Hainan Island] (Guangzhou: Huanan renmin chubanshe, 1951), 5-7.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Hainan was not isolated in its own local environment. Song Yaoru (Charlie Soong), a native of Wenchang, Hainan, was the patriarch of the most powerful family in twentieth-century China, with daughters married to Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, and a son in charge of Nanjing's economy. Hainan's merchants and politicians like Song were well aware of, and deeply involved in, the revolutionary movements throughout the region. The island's central location in eastern Asia was apparent in the cosmopolitan outlook of the progressive leaders in the late Qing and in the early years of post-Qing republican rule. In the first decade of the twentieth century, as the Qing monarchy attempted to reform itself, revolutionary activists traveled throughout the world raising money to fund their plots to overthrow the ruling Manchus.

Southern China and Southeast Asia were relatively far from the northern power base of Beijing, and provinces like Guangxi and Guangdong (which then included Hainan) presented administrative complications throughout the nineteenth century of Qing rule, whether in organized rebellious movements, localized criminal activity, or an overlap of the two. In a study of Canton in the first two decades of Communist rule, Ezra Vogel noted that certain "Cantonese traits" were pervasive not only in that city, but throughout Guangdong Province, the southern region, and even among the overseas communities that traced their ancestry to that area.¹¹⁵ Hainan, then still a part of Guangdong province, certainly could claim its own distinctive character, if one were to

¹¹⁵ Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971 [originally published by Harvard University Press, 1969]), Prologue, 21.

paint with a broad ethnographic brush. But as Vogel's characterization suggests, it is worth noting that the northern ruling Manchus of the Qing, like most regimes that based their administrations in the "northern capital," considered the southern region a constant potential hotbed of subversion. In his study of Guangdong during the revolution that ended the Qing, Edward Rhoads found the merchant classes had begun to challenge the traditional gentry in that region.¹¹⁶ The important role of the merchants in the revolutionary movement reflected the outward orientation of the coastal Guangdong population, and also that of Hainan, where regional domestic and international trade flourished. In the final years of the Qing, the merchant class had begun to expand its local power and influence, especially following the abolition of the Confucian examination system that had once been the only channel to political power. New chambers of commerce and educational institutions formalized and reinforced the power of prominent local merchants, and strengthened this aspect of the distinctly southern coastal elites.¹¹⁷

Ming loyalists had retreated to the south for their last stand in the early years of Qing rule in the mid-seventeenth century. Moreover, the southern coast was a source of anxiety for those shipping through the South China Sea, for seasonal piracy was a constant lure for young men who could not sustain themselves on terra firma, whether due to drought or warfare, flood or famine. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the southern provinces produced what was perhaps the most violent upheaval in human

¹¹⁶ Rhoads (1975), 222-223.

¹¹⁷ Rhoads (1975), 80-81.

history in the Taiping Rebellion. Its millenarian and anti-Manchu reason for being dovetailed with the anti-Manchu secret societies of the south, some of which still professed allegiance to the Ming loyalists of centuries earlier.

On Hainan, some village leaders organized chapters of the Triads or the “Three Dots Society” (*Sandianhui*), which was one name of a wide array of anti-Qing societies in the final years of the dynasty.¹¹⁸ The “three dots” of their name, according to some interpretations, reveal how the many anti-governmental and anti-northern movements flowed together among bandits, triads, pirates, and revolutionaries – the dots were traced to the three strokes written to the left of the Chinese character for the family name of the Taiping leader, Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全).¹¹⁹ During the final years of the Qing’s effective governance, in the late eighteenth century, many of the secret society organizations were smashed and scattered, many of them finding refuge in surrounding areas including Southeast Asia, where they doubtless had connections to Hainanese communities.¹²⁰ As

¹¹⁸ Feng Baiju’s father, Feng Yunxi (冯运熙), was a leader in his hometown of Changtai in Qiongzhan County in northern Hainan, and a member of the Three Dots Society. Feng Yunxi’s position of leadership would help his son’s later efforts to organize a revolutionary movement in his hometown and county. Xing Yikong, Peng Changlin, Qian Yue 邢诒孔, 彭长霖, 钱跃, *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* 冯白驹将军传 [Biography of General Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1998), 3-4.

¹¹⁹ A slightly broader interpretation of the name does not include the character of Hong Xiuquan’s family name, but ascribes the “three dot” or “three drop” name to the ways in which members of the society wrote secret signs with the three dot water sign in front of them as part of a code. (See Mary Somers Heidhues, “Chinese Organizations in West Borneo and Bangka: Kongsis and *Hui*,” in David Ownby and Mary Somers Heidhues, eds., “*Secret Societies*” *Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia* [Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993], page 86, footnote 7.)

¹²⁰ David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China: The Formation of a Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 5.

the Qing state became less efficient in dealing with domestic and foreign challenges, the secret societies were allowed to gain strength, and in the view of one scholar of the organizations, they began to take over those duties of governance that the Qing was no longer able to fulfill. As they gained strength, the secret societies also took on some of the duties once the domain of native-place societies and mutual aid societies, such as organizing overseas communities and coordinating and facilitating migration and settlement by providing housing and what became essentially legitimate organizations.¹²¹

This combination of anti-governmental, anti-northern, and anti-Manchu sentiment strengthened the potential foundation of support for the revolutionaries of the south. The slick cosmopolitan merchants and newspapermen who were the brains behind the early revolutionary movement in the last decade of Qing rule were a far cry from the pirates and peasants who supported the Taipings. But the through-line of anti-Manchuism was notable, and anti-northern enmity ran deep even among the most enlightened of the southern revolutionaries. The sentiments of southern revolutionaries was based on long-standing mutual enmity and rivalry with the north; but in more concrete terms, the outward, international orientation of many southerners and their migration networks were also significant in shaping the generation that would overthrow the Qing.

During the tumultuous nineteenth century, emigration from southern China increased dramatically to meet the labor needs of imperial and domestic infrastructure projects of the Western powers throughout their realms. From South Africa, to Cuba, to Peru, to Southeast Asia, and the American West, Chinese laborers were important in

¹²¹ David Ownby (1996), 13-14, 182-183.

building and working the cities of the world.¹²² While many of these overseas Chinese (*Huaqiao*) became part of a permanent community in their new respective homes, many also continued to travel back and forth between their adopted homes and their native China. But even those who did not return to China maintained their strong cultural identity as Chinese, often resisting the hyphenated designation of Chinese-Americans, Chinese-Africans, etc.¹²³ This group of overseas Chinese had a distinct character and place in Chinese society when and if they did return. In some instances, the Chinese government deemed parts of the Chinese population as overseas Chinese even though they had moved permanently back to their native province. Under the Communist regime beginning in 1949, for example, 20 percent of Guangdong's population living within that province (then including Hainan) was considered to be *Huaqiao*, or overseas Chinese, simply because of their connections or their personal experience in foreign countries.¹²⁴ In Hainan, the “*Huaqiao* General,” Chen Qingshan played an important part in the military success of the Communist revolution on the island, and this nickname followed him through his entire career.

Hainan, like the rest of Guangdong province, had very strong and extensive overseas connections throughout the world. Strongest were those in Southeast Asia,

¹²² See the works of Adam McKeown, including “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842-1949,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 58, Number 2 (May 1999), 306-337; *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹²³ See also Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

¹²⁴ Vogel (1971 [1969]), 20.

much of which, like Hong Kong, Macao, and Chinese concession areas, was under the imperial rule of Western powers. The leaders of Hainan's early revolutionary movement viewed it as their duty to reach beyond the limits of their sub-provincial island, and return to make Hainan part of the larger national revolution, and even a greater world revolution. Their revolutionary activities, which often consisted of soliciting monetary and moral support throughout the international community, made their task truly global. The southern revolutionaries had traveled throughout the world, earning support through their broad appeal, and they had come to view the northern rulers as more backward than ever because of their inability to represent a growing global Chinese community, and a modern path forward. One Hainanese historian, writing in 1991 of the 2 million Hainanese overseas in fifty-three countries and territories, credited overseas Chinese with much of the intrepid spirit that fueled the revolutionary movements, the social and economic progress of Hainan in the twentieth century.¹²⁵

Most Chinese Communist historiography claims the mantle of these worldly idealists of the revolutionary generation, and in the case of Hainan, the history of the revolution stretches back to include them even though many of them died before the Chinese Communist Party was founded in the summer of 1921. In Hainan's Communist history, Lin Wenying is one of the most prominent in this group, and serves as a case study. Lin was killed in 1914, but his work, and especially his connections with the

¹²⁵ Xing Yilin, Han Qiyuan, Huang Liangjun 邢益森, 韩启元, 黄良俊, *Qionggiao cangsang* 琼侨沧桑 [The ups and downs of overseas Hainanese] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 1991), 1-3.

“father of the republic,” Sun Yat-sen, earned him a place in the history of Hainan’s early revolutionaries.

In the waning years of the Qing, globetrotting revolutionaries like Lin Wenying organized anti-Manchu propaganda everywhere they could.¹²⁶ Lin, like Song Yaoru, traced his ancestral roots to Wenchang, the northeastern city that produced many of Hainan’s most prominent scholars and wealthiest merchants. He was born in Bangkok, Siam (Thailand) to a wealthy family, the son of a Wenchang merchant and a Thai mother. According to Philip Kuhn’s study of Chinese emigration in this period, the marriage of Chinese merchants, craftsmen, and political refugees to Thai women was quite common. “Siam afforded flexibility to the [Chinese] immigrant,” and “Siamese tolerance” prevailed until the early twentieth century.¹²⁷ Throughout most of the Qing dynasty there seems to have been an easy flow of Chinese into and out of Siam, without a local effort to assimilate or expel the Chinese immigrants. The twentieth century saw the increasing importance of rigid racial definitions, a discourse probably accelerated by the increasing dominance of Western powers in the region. Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, and other labels became racial denotations, and became powerful tools in division, exclusion, and persecution.

¹²⁶ Biographical material here on Lin Wenying comes from the following materials: Fan Yunxi 范运晰, *Qiongji minguo renwuzhuan* 琼籍民国人物传 [Biographies of Hainanese in the republic], Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1999 (293-300); Zhonggong wenchang xianwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds., 中共文昌县委党史研究室编 [Chinese Communist Party Committee of Wenchang county historical research office], *Wenchang yinghun* 文昌英魂 [The spirit of Wenchang heroes] (Wenchang: Wenchang Communist Party historical materials, 1993), 1-7.

¹²⁷ Kuhn (2008), 80.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Chinese in Siam became a scapegoat for the young King Rama VI, who translated the “fashionable European anti-Semitic clichés” into anti-Chinese denouncements in his native country.¹²⁸ It is not clear whether Lin Wenying or his family were personally affected by Rama VI’s anti-Sinitism, and whether that attitude prevailed in Thailand. Lin spent much of his adult life traveling between Japan, China, and back to Siam, studying and organizing revolutionary forces. By the time of the Rama VI’s reign of Siamese/Thai nationalism, beginning in 1910, Lin had begun to focus his efforts away from Siam and toward China and his ancestral home in Hainan.

In 1903, at the age of thirty, Lin Wenying traveled to Tokyo to study politics at Tokyo University of Law and Government. Two years later, in August of 1905, he was moved to join the Tongmenghui (Revolutionary Alliance) after hearing a speech by Sun Yat-sen, who would later become the first president and civilian leader of the Chinese republican government. After graduating in 1907, Lin returned to Siam, where he became a professional revolutionary, occasionally working closely with Sun when the latter was in Siam. According to one biography of Lin, the closeness of their purpose and their fraternal bond was reflected in the fact that the two “brothers” even shared a bed during their work together when it was necessary for Sun to keep a low profile while in Siam.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Kuhn (2008) reproduced a 1914 document titled, “The Jews of the Orient,” in which Rama VI denounced the Chinese living in Siam, noting the “racial loyalty which presents their absorption into other nations” (Kuhn, 298).

¹²⁹ Fan Yunxi (1999), 294. This account also notes that the bed that the “pair of brothers” shared is currently housed in a Bangkok Museum. Sun’s time spent raising funds and

Lin represented the earliest generation of Hainan revolutionaries, and he is claimed as such in the Communist pantheon although his death predates the founding of the Chinese Communist Party by seven years.¹³⁰ In the final decades of the Qing and into the early republic Hainan produced rebels and secret societies that challenged both the dynasty and the new militarist rulers, but rather than claiming the mantle of these leaders, Hainan's Communist movement traces its origins abroad to men like Lin Wenying. Lin would not meet a peaceful end, but he was not a man of violence. He was most importantly a revolutionary propagandist and fundraiser, and a newspaperman, like some of the other early Hainanese revolutionary leaders.

Following the successful overthrow of the Qing government, Lin and others like him returned from their self-imposed exile, their international fundraising tours, and rediscovered their homes in China proper. Though Lin had been born in Siam, his Wenchang father had raised him to call China his home country, and it was to Hainan that he returned. But the continuity of leadership that straddled the 1911 divide was not as revolutionary a change as men like Lin had hoped and worked for. Still, some of those allied with the more radical elements of the revolution did return to Hainan, and tried to continue their work of realizing an open and democratic government and society. Like Sun Yat-sen at the national level, Lin was given a post as a leader of the provisional

revolutionary fervor is especially remembered in Bangkok's Chinatown, where the Thai government immortalized him by renaming a street "Soi Sun Yat-sen."

¹³⁰ Zhonggong wenchang xianwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds., 中共文昌县委党史研究室编 [Chinese Communist Party Committee of Wenchang county historical research office], *Wenchang yinghun* 文昌英魂 [The spirit of Wenchang heroes] (Wenchang: Wenchang Communist Party historical materials, 1993). In this volume, Lin Wenying has pride of place as the first biographical entry.

Hainan revolutionary government, but also like Sun, the civilian Lin was installed and removed by a more powerful military man and holdover from the collapsed Qing government. While on the national level, this was Yuan Shikai, on Hainan, it was the Qing military official, Liu Yongdian.¹³¹

Lin, however, proved less adept in local politics than he had been in revolutionary fund-raising. The details of the handover of power between Liu Yongdian and Lin had not been clearly established before Lin returned to Hainan. When Lin arrived in Haikou to take up his promised position in the new government, he found Liu reluctant to allow Lin and the Revolutionary Party to move into the seat of power in Hainan. It seems Lin's local connections in Haikou were not sufficient for him to wait comfortably for the orders from the new republican government that would put him in the position of leadership on Hainan. Instead of returning to Wenchang to wait for Liu's cooperation, Lin decided to set up what seems to have been a theatrical temporary headquarters in the market center of Haikou, the district's capital, possibly to make a conspicuous claim to his right to rule.

Then, in a clumsy attempt to assert the Revolutionary Party's new authority on Hainan, Lin ordered the eviction of fruit and vegetable peddlers from the marketplace that was now his political headquarters. In swift response to Lin's clearing of the market, the fruit and vegetable sellers rallied together and raided Lin's "headquarters," finding Lin himself, and beating him so that he sustained serious injury. Lin's rival, Liu Yongdian, came to Lin's aid with an armed guard, but not before Lin's suspicions had

¹³¹ Fu Heji 符和积, "Shixi Xinhai nian Qiongya zhengju de shanbian" 试析辛亥年琼崖政局的嬗变 [Analysis of the evolution of the political situation on Hainan in 1911], in *Hainan daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban* 海南大学学报社会科学版 [Social Science Journal of Hainan University] Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1998), 1-6.

grown about Liu's involvement in the peddlers' rioting. The wounded and astounded Lin left Hainan, and as he left, he flung accusation at Liu for having riled up the rioters in the market.¹³² Lin then went on to serve for a short time in the National Assembly, but with the assassination of Song Jiaoren and the failure of the second revolution by the southern provinces in the summer of 1913, his open criticism of Yuan Shikai put him in danger.¹³³

In 1913, when Sun Yat-sen and many of his supporters had fled to Japan and out of Yuan Shikai's reach, Lin returned to Hainan. He turned away from direct participation in political life, and established Hainan's first locally published revolutionary newspaper, the *Qiongdào ribào* (*Hainan Daily*). He used it to continue to spread revolutionary thought, and he maintained his ties to Sun Yat-sen. It was through Sun's introduction that Lin connected with a progressive businessman, the powerful Hainanese merchant, Chen Jiafu, who agreed to fund Lin's new paper.¹³⁴ It is worth noting that Lin Wenying, who is considered to be Hainan's first revolutionary, needed the introduction of Sun, a Cantonese, to fund a newspaper on his ancestral home island.

This seems to be a neat parallel to Sun Yat-sen's own distance from the local conditions of China as a whole. But the implications of such an apparent parallel on Hainan were different – most importantly, the political environment of Hainan was more

¹³² Fu Heji (1998), 2.

¹³³ Zhonggong Wenchang xianwei dangshi yanjiushi 中共文昌县委党史研究室 [Party history research office for the Wenchang County Committee of the Chinese Communist Party], eds., *Wenchang Yinggui: Wenchang dangshi ziliao* 文昌英魂：文昌党史资料 [Spirits of Wenchang's martyrs: Wenchang Party history materials] (Haikou: Hainansheng chubān [internal], 1993), 5-7.

¹³⁴ Xing Yilin, et al. (1991), 43-44.

dangerously confined and its leaders even more provincial in their mindset than those of the mainland. There was no refuge on Hainan, no safe house in Shanghai or Hong Kong, for those who fomented political dissent. Lin had personally felt this in the recent market square incident, when he had been punished by the peddlers for misunderstanding local conditions, and drubbed out of the city and off of the island.

But journalism allowed Lin to target a more supportive audience for his message of democracy and progressive reform. With his newspaper, *Hainan Daily*, Lin built up an avid readership among Hainan's students and city-dwellers. At its height, the paper had a circulation of 2,000, and in its pages, its readers could learn of the developments in the world socialist movements and the latest in national politics. Even more provocatively, Lin began the deadly work of criticizing Hainan's local leaders.¹³⁵

By late 1913, Long Jiguang and Chen Shihua, had replaced Liu Yongdian in the Hainan and Guangdong leadership. Their involvement in the opium trade was one way that they filled their coffers throughout the region. In late 1913, following an opium purchase in Lin Wenying's home county of Wenchang, he published an account of the drug traffic in his own paper. The article in the *Hainan Daily* was specific in pointing out the culpability of high Hainan officials in the drug trade. Opium had been responsible for so much of the Qing's weakness, and two years after that dynasty's fall, Lin pointed out that the new leadership was continuing to take part in the trade that had brought the once-great dynasty to its collapse. This would be the final blow that Lin could strike. The

¹³⁵ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Baoyezhi, Di shiyi juan* 海南省志: 报业志, 第十一卷 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Newspaper gazetteer, Vol. 11] (Haikou: Nanhai chubun gongsi, 1997), 257.

location of his paper's headquarters was turned over to the authorities. By early spring of 1914, on direct orders from Beijing and Yuan Shikai, Lin Wenying was imprisoned. Perhaps as a result of concerns over the repercussions of executing such a popular figure, Lin was secretly murdered in prison on the night of April 2, 1914.¹³⁶

But the power of journalism to challenge the new republican government did not die with Lin. If anything, Lin's death was a rallying cry to build support through an informed readership. Others followed Lin in writing about the excesses and harsh rule of the Hainan regime, as well as their provincial and national masters in Guangzhou and Beijing, and even writing of socialist developments in Europe and throughout the world. On the mainland, the New Culture movement of the late 1910s fostered a generation of thinkers and politicians who were driven by nationalism and anti-imperialism, and who worked to eradicate the remnants of traditional China, whether it was the paternalism of Confucius or the absolute power of an emperor. Following Yuan Shikai's death in 1916, national power was greatly weakened, and regions like Guangdong were largely out of the central government's power. Sun Yat-sen returned from Japan and focused on growing a support base that was first southern, with the goal of national unification pushed into the future. For his friend, Lin Wenying, Sun arranged for a mausoleum to be

¹³⁶ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi 中共海南省委党史研究室, [Historical research office of the Chinese Communist Party provincial committee of Hainan] eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* 中国共产党海南历史 [Chinese Communist Party history of Hainan] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007), 14-15.

built in Wenchang, and he personally inscribed the characters on the placard: “Tomb of Lin Wenying, Revolutionary Martyr.”¹³⁷

Hainan’s Anti-Imperialism and Increasing Isolation

Throughout the decade following the collapse of the Qing, Hainan’s progressive journalists, merchants, and aspiring politicians saw Hainan as geographically central to the East Asian world, and they imagined the island taking on a major role as a linchpin of strategy and commerce. As shown in the previous chapter, this was a continuation of the policies of some Qing reformers like Zhang Zhidong. They saw the establishment of Hainan as a province and increasing investment in the island as an opportunity to create another Taiwan – that is, an economic success story parallel to the neighboring island that was under Japanese colonial control from 1895.¹³⁸ Still, anti-imperialism, as an early engine of the Communist revolution, looked very different in Hainan than on the mainland. Whereas the student and worker protests of the May Fourth and May Thirtieth Movements set the tone for anti-imperialism in the late 1910s and 1920s, on Hainan, local activities against unwelcome foreigners took a different form.

After the fall of the Qing, the heady rhetoric of cultural iconoclasm, nascent socialism, and international democracy imbued these writers with energy, and they worked to bring Hainan into that world. Provincial status for the island was one step that

¹³⁷ Fan Yunxi (1999), 299-300. Lin was also celebrated in the Hainanese community in Thailand, and he continues to be a hero there as well as in his home province. In 1984, during a revival of local history and in a time of exoneration of local heroes, Lin’s hometown was renamed Gelan village, for Lin’s courtesy or style name (Gelan 格兰).

¹³⁸ Chen Keqin (2008), 26.

would improve Hainan's stature in the national government, but it seemed that Guangdong Province would hold onto control of the island. Not only would Hainan remain under Guangdong's control, but the infrastructural investments were never made, and even among many of the southern revolutionaries, the island's importance was only as a bargaining chip in negotiations with foreign powers that might invest in the Chinese separatist warlords and revolutionary governments in Guangzhou. As explained in the previous chapter, plans for developing Hainan's economic and strategic potential were constantly published, mainly coming from mainland inspectors and only rarely with any realistic assessment of the social obstacles to effective development. These plans had been evident in late Qing attempts to make Hainan a new Taiwan, and the republican governments (1912-1950) continued to publish such ambitions until the Communist victory in 1949-50.¹³⁹

As the decade of the 1910s neared a close, more and more of the continuities of the failure and humiliation of the nineteenth century became apparent to the once hopeful generation of Hainanese reformers and revolutionaries. Beijing was too chaotic to pay attention to the provincial appeals of Hainan, and the national government was now

¹³⁹ This trend continued throughout the Republican era, and carry through the Communist occupation. The single common aspect to all of these development plans, was that the initiative, the capital, and the plans all did not originate on the island, and did not realistically take into account local obstacles to development. For an account of such plans in the late Republican period, see S.Y. Goh, "Hainan Development Plans Laid: Governor T.V. Soong's program for South China includes country's second largest island. Various Nanking Ministries and Chinese navy to participate," in *China Economist*, Vol. 1 (April 26, 1948) 110-111. According to this article, Soong made a specific appeal to the overseas Hainanese, the *Huaqiao* community especially in Southeast Asia, to return to Hainan and invest in the island's development plans. There is no evidence that he met with any success in this fund-raising appeal.

changing hands too quickly for a consistent and sustained conversation on the issue of Hainan's provincial status. The provincial leadership in Guangdong was not without allies for Hainan's cause, but it was not enough of a priority for anything to be done beyond some favorable noises coming from the mainland.

The foreign presence on Hainan, in both the missionary presence and the foreign domination of local customs and trade, was an occasional cause of Hainanese frustration. Haikou housed several consulates and had been opened as a treaty port with the Treaty of Tianjin in 1860.¹⁴⁰ The implications of this foreign presence on Hainan were widely known – extraterritoriality, missionary activity, and tariff control. Protestors sometimes expressed this anti-imperial feeling in an organized way, but more often, it erupted in seemingly random acts of violence, labeled outrages of “Boxerism” by the foreign press, and always leading to an increased gunboat presence around Haikou, executions, and heavy indemnities.¹⁴¹

The French presence in Haikou was especially obvious, since Catholic missionaries had been on the island for decades and the strong French role in neighboring Indochina also allowed for easy travel for French merchants and officials. Besides proselytizing and tariff control, the French on Hainan were also the most effective foreigners in the coolie trade. In the center of Haikou, French traders had set up an old-

¹⁴⁰ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Minzhengzhi, waishizhi* 海南省志: 民政志, 外事志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Civil Administration gazetteer, Foreign affairs gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1996), 194-200.

¹⁴¹ Kathleen L. Lodwick, *The Widow's Quest: The Byers Extraterritorial Case in Hainan, China, 1924-1925* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2003).

fashioned barracoon, or holding pen for their human wares. In 1913, their business was disrupted by a group led by a Revolutionary Party member. In what was later called the “Pigsty Smashing Incident,” the barracoon was destroyed and one of its minders killed. Although there are few sources on the incident, it is remembered as a blow struck for anti-imperialism on Hainan, since thirty of the coolies were freed from their forced servitude instead of being shipped off by their French masters.¹⁴² Such isolated and localized incidents of anti-imperialism on Hainan through the 1910s and 1920s represented an island community that was not closely connected to the mainland’s urban student and labor struggles.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, jurists and other legal professionals at the local and national level worked tirelessly to establish regional courts and install judges and lawyers. This was a national effort to show foreign observers that China’s legal infrastructure was modern and sound, and that there was no longer a need for the national shame of extraterritorial jurisdiction for nearly all foreigners on Chinese soil.¹⁴³ Hainan was no exception, and the arbitrary and usually unjust rulings of formal foreign courts and informal diplomatic negotiations that followed any outrage involving Chinese and foreign individuals, spurred on the efforts. By 1921, every county on Hainan had its own

¹⁴² Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi 琼崖武装斗争史办公室 [Office of the history of Hainan’s military struggle], eds. *Qiongya zongdui shi* 琼崖纵队史 [History of the Hainan Column], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 2. Hainan baikequanshu bianzuan weiyuanhui 海南百科全书编纂委员会 [Committee of compilers of the Hainan encyclopedia], eds., *Hainan baikequanshu* 海南百科全书 [Hainan encyclopedia] (Beijing: Zhongguo da baikequanshu chubanshe, 1999), 45.

¹⁴³ Jeremy Murray, “‘A Dream Deferred’: Obstacles to Legal Reform and Rights Reclamation in Early Republican China,” in Sherman Cochran and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *China on the Margins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

fully staffed courthouse.¹⁴⁴ This work was consistent with the efforts on Hainan to localize the island's authority and increase autonomy. Judicial reformers of the time also favored a federalized government, and in this, their aims dovetailed with the consistent hopes of Hainan's political activists. Reformers within the government, then, were also working to connect Hainan to the mainland and move toward a stronger, sovereign, unified China.

Hainan's significant ports and customs remained under foreign control, through the Imperial Maritime Customs, representing another continuation of the Qing status quo after 1911.¹⁴⁵ The relationship with the Western powers and Japan that allowed foreign control of customs naturally originated in the northern capital, Beijing, and even the rising southern revolutionaries were not able to take control of their own trade relations and tariffs in connection with foreign governments and businesses. In December of 1923, the revolutionary southern regime under Sun Yat-sen tried to take control of customs passing through the south, and collect the tariffs rather than having them sent to the Beijing regime with which they were in open conflict. This was unsuccessful, and

¹⁴⁴ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Shenpanzhi* 海南省志: 审判志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Judicial gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2006) 443.

¹⁴⁵ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Kouanzhi, haiguanzhi, shangjianzhi, di jiu juan* 海南省志: 口岸志, 海关志, 商检志, 第九卷 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Ports, customs, inspection, Vol. 9] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1996).

while it established the anti-imperialist motives of the southern regime, it also betrayed their national and international weakness.¹⁴⁶

On Hainan, the focus of political activists was becoming progressively more localized, and more isolated from the national and international dimensions of the revolution. For their part, many merchants protested local leadership when they refused to pay taxes to Hainan's local warlord, Deng Benyin, who had been a military force in the region since early 1921, connected to the southern political and military leader, Chen Jiongming. Deng had been ensconced on Hainan since early 1923. His relations with both Beijing and Guangzhou fluctuated between open hostility and cooperation, amidst the chaotic shifting of the southern warlords and revolutionaries.¹⁴⁷ His connections with Chen Jiongming, kept him in power until Chen was defeated by Nationalist revolutionary forces.¹⁴⁸ Deng's politics do not seem to have been as nuanced as Chen Jiongming, whose relationship with the Nationalist and Communist Parties shifted between accommodation and hostility. Deng's rule frustrated most attempts at local political organization, and while growth for the Communist Party began on the mainland in the

¹⁴⁶ C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ John Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity: The Policy and Finance of Guangdong Separatism, 1926-1936," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (October 1990), 250-254.

¹⁴⁸ John Fitzgerald, "The Misconceived Revolution: State and Society in China's Nationalist Revolution, 1923-26," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (May 1990), 333.

early 1920s, on Hainan the CCP was only able to gain a foothold after Deng's removal in 1925.¹⁴⁹

Under the rule of warlords through the 1910s and early 1920s, revolutionary political organization on Hainan that was connected with mainland or national groups was effectively oppressed. Rather than aiming for provincial status, and incorporating Hainan into the national and international world, revolutionaries and reformers on Hainan shifted their focus increasingly to the local political scene. Carrying on Lin Wenying's legacy of targeting misrule on Hainan through journalism, Xu Chengzhang (徐成章 1892-1928) attacked the Hainanese and outsiders who governed on behalf of the early republic.

Unlike Lin, Xu was born in Hainan, in Qiongzhan County. Both of the men were members of the Tongmenghui (Revolutionary Alliance), and worked to bring about the end of the Qing dynasty. Both Lin and Xu also opposed the national government of Yuan Shikai and those who ruled on his behalf on Hainan. Xu was more connected with the national dimension of Hainan's revolution, rather than the internationalism that connected Lin to Southeast Asia. In 1917, Xu enrolled in the Yunnan Military Academy in Kunming, in south-central China. Whereas Lin raised funds in Siam, the home country of his mother, and his birthplace, Xu brought ties to Yunnan, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou to his early organizational work on Hainan. As part of Guangdong Province,

¹⁴⁹ Gordon Y.M. Chan, "The Communists in Rural Guangdong, 1928-1936," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 18, No. 1 (April 2003), 86.

Hainan's provincial affairs were based in Guangzhou, and Xu first organized newspaper offices there.¹⁵⁰

The New Culture and May Fourth Movements of the late 1910s swept Xu and thousands of others into patriotic activity that opposed foreign imperialism, domestic disunity, and cultural conservatism. Notably, the spread of May Fourth ideology on Hainan reflected Hainan's local character. One Guo Qinguang (郭钦光 1895-1919), a student at Beijing University, was killed following the famous patriotic May Fourth demonstrations in Beijing, dying of his wounds after having been beaten by police. According to the official Communist Party history of Hainan, it was Guo's death, and not news of the massive protests, that was the most important factor in leading over 1000 Hainanese students to take to the streets in protest.¹⁵¹ A Hainanese brother had been killed while studying in Beijing, and this roused the Hainanese students to protest, seemingly with more zeal than the cession of the German Shandong territories could.

Meanwhile, in the realm of international politics that preoccupied the revolutionary discourse of China, British and French interests in Southeast Asia included the strategically central island of Hainan. British intelligence reports of the early republican period reveal that they were concerned about Japanese development plans for the island. Though the British did not control the island directly in any period, they were the main power behind the Imperial Customs, which administered the trade in key

¹⁵⁰ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Baoyezhi, Di shiyi juan* 海南省志: 报业志, 第十一卷 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Newspaper gazetteer, Vol. 11] (Haikou: Nanhai chubun gongsi, 1997), 259-261.

¹⁵¹ *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* (2007), 23.

Chinese ports, including Haikou. By June of 1922, a British naval intelligence officer filed a confidential report to the British Foreign Office, noting that, “it is undesirable that Japan should annex a group of islands on the route between Hong Kong and Singapore and extend her influence to the southwards under the guise of commerce.”¹⁵²

British interest in Hainan was mainly based on concerns over Japanese development of the island, rather than on Chinese activity on the island. This reflected concerns over Japanese increasing strength, which was also evident in the Washington Conference, in which the Western Powers tried to hamstring Japanese development, especially in terms of naval strength. This was an ongoing concern for both British and French interests in the region, and both Powers continued to voice concern over apparent Japanese designs on Hainan until the Japanese occupation actually began in February 1939.¹⁵³

In the May Fourth era and after, while most of China’s intellectuals were engaging foreign forces either to study Western culture or to challenge Western and Japanese imperialism, on Hainan it was a period of increased isolation. The early 1920s saw a shift away from the international aspect of organization and fundraising. On

¹⁵² “Japanese Activities in South China: Naval Intelligence Officer’s Reports, June 1922,” reprinted in Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II* (From the First to the Second World War), Series E, Asia, 1914-1939, Editor Ann Trotter, Vol. 27, China, March 1922-May 1923 (University Publications of America, An imprint of CIS, 1994), 249.

¹⁵³ N. D. H., “Growing Interest in Hainan Mainly Strategic,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 17 (August 24, 1938), 203-204; Etienne Dennery, “A French View of the Situation in the Far East,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (July-August 1938), 528-540; Norman D. Hanwell, “France Takes Inventory in China,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 19 (September 28, 1938), 217-225.

Hainan, this shift is reflected in the transition in revolutionary leadership from Lin Wenying to Xu Chengzhang. Xu's aim was to focus on criticizing the corrupt local leadership, and to link the larger national revolution to Hainan. By 1923, he had joined the Chinese Communist Party and begun to recruit adherents and to propagate its philosophy of class struggle in his writings.

Under Xu's nationally driven leadership and advocacy, there were contributors and priorities that continued to add an international dimension to Hainan's revolutionary work in this period, just as there were important local aspects to the early movement of Lin Wenying and others. But with the weakness of the republican government, a crucial development was that revolutionary organizers were relatively free to organize, recruit, and propagandize, especially in southern provinces like Yunnan and Guangdong. They did not have to flee to Japan, Southeast Asia, or Europe to organize, since much of southern China was often outside of Beijing's effective control.

After his military training in Yunnan, Xu returned to Hainan in 1920, and began plans for a newspaper that would publish progressive and revolutionary articles. The content of the articles included the latest in communist and socialist theories, news of revolutionary movements throughout the world, and also, critiques that were specific to Hainan's political scene. In this way, the three tiers of international, national, and local politics continued to occupy the revolutionaries of Hainan. The internationalism of Xu's generation had changed though. From Lin Wenying's incorporation of overseas Chinese through the direct funds and cooperation of Southeast Asian Chinese, Xu Chengzhang focused on the international ideas of revolution, but local action. His propaganda work in spreading the ideas of Marxism among Hainanese students and intellectuals, and his later

membership in the Chinese Communist Party make his work the beginning of the official Chinese Communist history on Hainan.¹⁵⁴

The inward turn that continued with Xu's leadership was a pragmatic one, resulting from both local unrest and official attempts to limit contact between radical elements on Hainan and communities abroad; but the revolutionaries also had their own reasons for limiting contact with communities of Hainanese in Southeast Asia and focusing their efforts on their home island. Xu and others had reason to be suspicious of the participation in their movement of their Hainanese comrades in Southeast Asia, many of whom were wealthy merchants and prominent, legitimate members of society in their adopted home countries, and not the natural allies of a Communist revolution.

In April of 1922, Xu Chengzhang reflected on a year of publishing *Qiongya Xunbao*, and he remembered the early struggles of the newspaper's organizers. (*Xunbao*, which has no English equivalent, is a term for a paper published every ten days. *Qiongya* and *Qiongdao* are both alternate names for Hainan.) In the summer of 1920, there was an attempt to transition the staff of one newspaper – *Qiongdao Ribao (Hainan Daily)*– into the staff of the planned *Xunbao*. Some of the staff and contributors were abroad at the time. The funds that they had raised to make this transition and establish the new paper were stolen, possibly by an investor who suddenly withdrew his support and also absconded with the rest of the staff's funds.¹⁵⁵ The theft of these funds represented the

¹⁵⁴ Li Yisheng 李毅生, *Fenzhan ershisan nian de Hainan dao* 奋战二十三年的海南岛 [Twenty-three years of fighting on Hainan island] (Hankou: Renmin chubanshe, 1951), 3.

¹⁵⁵ Xu Chengzhang 徐成章, “‘Qiongya Xunbao’ chuanban zhi Jingguo” “琼崖旬报”创办之经过 [Since the founding of the Hainan Xunbao], (April 1922), reprinted in Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan Provincial

weakening of the once strong ties between the Southeast Asian Hainanese and the struggle of the Hainan islanders.

The rhetoric of race might have soured relations between Siamese (now Thai) hosts of Chinese communities there, but it was economic concerns that seem to have caused the erosion of support for Chinese revolutionaries abroad among their fellow overseas Chinese. Many of the prominent Chinese living throughout Southeast Asia were businessmen and merchants, and they might have perceived radical revolutionary politics of organizers like Lin Wenying and Xu Chengzhang as a threat to the stability of the trade networks that supported their businesses. Fund-raising for newspapers, guns, and other tools of revolution continued even after the success of the 1911 revolution, as in the case of Xu's *Qiongya Xunbao*. Eventually, after more than two decades of giving funds to the cause of revolution in China, it is understandable that Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia would grow skeptical and withdraw their support for revolutionaries “whose behavior barely distinguished them from the Qing officials from whom so many emigrant merchants had been glad to escape.”¹⁵⁶ The theft of the funds for Xu's paper was a setback, but only a temporary one, and it moved Xu and others in the Hainan political scene still farther toward the localization of the Hainanese movement.

In his April 1922 article, Xu does not write that this theft of his newspaper's funds led directly to the decision to establish *Qiongya Xunbao* in Haikou, as opposed to in

Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Baoyezhi, Di shiyi juan* 海南省志: 报业志, 第十一卷 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Newspaper gazetteer, Vol. 11] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 1997), 316.

¹⁵⁶ Kuhn (2008), 269-270.

Hong Kong, Guangzhou, or somewhere in Southeast Asia. But the decision to establish the paper's office in Haikou reflected the shift in making Hainan island more than a symbolic homeland and revolutionary rallying cry.¹⁵⁷ Over the next decade, Hainan would become a revolutionary base in its own right, first for the revolutionary forces of the united Nationalist and Communist Parties, and then of the Hainan Communist movement.

Xu acknowledged that most Hainanese were pessimistic about their ability to control their own fate and win the fight for a fair and representative government – one that listened to and responded to the needs of the people who lived on the island. He noted that he had seen the darkest of times, with his newspapers forced to shut; the death of his predecessor, Lin Wenying, murdered in prison without trial; the Hainanese student, Guo Qinguang, killed during the May Fourth protests in Beijing.¹⁵⁸ But Xu gave his readers cause for optimism. Many of Hainan's most promising revolutionary leaders were returning to the island and helping to organize the workers in Haikou and the farmers across the island. Like Xu they were publishing their beliefs and distributing them across the island.

Xu quietly celebrated the victory of having continuously published *Qiongya Xunbao* for a year. He wrote that the ruler of Hainan, Chen Shihua, had attempted to

¹⁵⁷ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi [Chinese Communist Party History Research Office for the Provincial Committee of Hainan], eds., *Zhonggong Qiongya difang zuzhi de guanghui licheng* 中共琼崖地方组织的光辉历程 [The glorious history of the local organization of the Chinese Communist Party on Hainan], for internal Provincial Government circulation (Document YK060), June 2001, 6-7 (pages not numbered).

¹⁵⁸ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi (2001), 6 (pages not numbered).

keep the four million Hainanese cut off from the outside world (here, in his population figure, it seems Xu is including both Hainanese abroad and those living on the island, since the island's population at the time was below three million). In this effort to close down free presses, Chen Shihua had bloodied his hands by ordering the murder of Lin Wenying. In shutting down Lin's *Hainan Daily*, Chen had deprived the people of Hainan of a "representative organ of public opinion."¹⁵⁹ Xu acknowledged that this was a dark time in the isolation of Hainan at the national and international level, but he urged optimism and local action.

Only a few months after the April 1922 publication of Xu's article, however, another incident seems to reflect an even greater degree of Hainan's isolation, even from the southern revolutionary regime under Sun Yat-sen that was gaining strength in the early 1920s. In a 2005 study of China's maritime frontiers in the early republic, Ulises Granados points to Japanese newspapers as well as British and Japanese government documents to claim that southern islands including Hainan were used as bargaining chips in securing monetary and military aid for the floundering southern revolutionary government.¹⁶⁰ The revolutionaries on Hainan in the 1910s and 1920s were clearly connected to Sun Yat-sen and the southern revolutionaries through the early shared work of Sun and Lin Wenying. Xu Chengzhang and others carried on this work. As the southern regime gained strength and support in the early 1920s, these revolutionaries continued to work as Hainanese representatives of Sun's Nationalist Party, and later as

¹⁵⁹ Xu Chengzhang (1922), 316-320.

¹⁶⁰ Ulises Granados, "As China Meets the Southern Sea Frontier: Ocean Identity in the Making, 1920-1937," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 78, No. 3 (Fall 2005), 454-457.

early members of the Chinese Communist Party. They were dedicated to the anticipated national revolution that would be launched from the south to reunite China.

It seems, however, that this dedication was not reciprocal, according to the findings of contemporary official British observers. In June of 1922, while Sun and Chen Jiongming battled for supremacy in the south, Sun fled his offices in Guangzhou (Canton), leaving documents later collected by British intelligence officers. Among these documents was an agreement between Sun's southern government and the Japan-China Forestry, Mining, and Industrial Society. In a communication from the British consul in Guangzhou to the British embassy in Beijing, the document is fully reproduced. Among the details:

...The President of the Southern Government, Dr. Sun Yat-sen signed this agreement with the representatives of the Japan-China Forestry, Mining and Industrial Society, to help the Southern Government to extend: –

1. The said company agreed to supply the Southern Government with 20,000 latest model rifles, 5,000,000 rounds of ammunition, 72 field guns, 15,000 shells, 120 machine guns and ammunition.
2. The said company agreed to assist the Southern Government with 5,000,000 gold yen.
3. The said company are prepared to enter into another contract as regards further requirements of funds and arms with the Southern Government.
4. The Southern Government agreed to hand over the development of Hainan Island, all islands on the [Guangdong] coasts to the said company, and also the fishing rights from south of Amoy to Hainan.
5. The Southern Government agreed to give the first call for forestry and mining rights of the province of [Guangxi] to the said company.
6. The said company have the right to develop Hainan and all islands of [Guangdong], but no military or naval constructions

may be constructed. The Southern Government have the right to stop any such works and pull them down...¹⁶¹

There are thirteen more related conditions listed in the document. The British consul who was responsible for sending this information on to his superior does not qualify his report with the possibility that it is false propaganda of Chen Jiongming's supporters intended to discredit Sun Yat-sen's patriotism. While this would be a shrewd ploy, and it is indeed possible, it is worth noting that the cession of development rights of Hainan to the Japanese was at least a credible move by the revolutionary southern government. If the document was indeed genuine, it represented Sun's willingness to completely amputate Hainan's economic sovereignty in exchange for the weapons and cash that might win him some more territory on the mainland. Although this document seems to have remained a secret, kept by both Sun and his would-be Japanese partners, and there is no evidence that any of Hainan's leaders were aware of its existence or Sun's eagerness to sacrifice Chinese rights and territory, it seems that revolutionary efforts on Hainan were more isolated than ever in the early 1920s, and that their dedication to the southern revolutionaries was not a reciprocal relationship.

Hainan's Early Communists

¹⁶¹ "Consul-General Jamieson to Sir B. Alston, Document number 42, Secret, Canton, July 11, 1922," reprinted in Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II* (From the First to the Second World War), Series E, Asia, 1914-1939, Editor Ann Trotter, Vol. 27, China, March 1922-May 1923 (University Publications of America, An imprint of CIS, 1994), 238-240.

The early development of the Chinese Communist Party on Hainan was closely connected with that of the mainland. Some Hainanese had been studying and working on the mainland and they returned to Hainan to begin the Party's development at the time of its first representative meeting in June 1926. Other major figures in the early years of the CCP on Hainan were not Hainanese, but had been sent in by the provincial or central leadership of the Party to begin organization on the island. Xu Chengzhang was the bridge between the new Communist presence on Hainan and the generation of merchants, newspapermen, and aspiring politicians who had tried to plug Hainan into the national and international realm of progressive democracy and revolution. Hainan's political concerns were seen to be the same as the national concerns of the CCP prior to the Party's split with the Nationalists in April 1927.

There are few primary sources that lay out the early development of the CCP on Hainan, prior to the Communist split with the Nationalists in the spring of 1927. Following this split, however, a steady stream of reports began to flow between the Hainan and mainland Communists. These reports are sometimes directed to the Guangzhou leadership, and sometimes to the central leadership, as it moved from Shanghai to Jiangxi and then following the Long March, to Yan'an in the distant northwest. The early days of the united front between the Communists and the Nationalists had allowed CCP influence to stretch across the island, connected to the military and political force of the Nationalists in the "bloc within."

Most importantly, the Hainan Communists had built support among farmers' associations. After April 1927, the Hainanese leaders of the Communist Party evacuated the cities and withdrew to their rural support base. In the main history of the CCP, April

12, 1927 is remembered as the day that started the “White Terror,” which led to summary imprisonment and execution of Communists and leftists, beginning in Shanghai. In Haikou, April 22 (Four-Two-Two) is the day remembered as the betrayal of the Communists by their erstwhile Nationalist allies. Hours before the Nationalists raided the headquarters and homes of Communists and their sympathizers, the Party’s local secretary, Wang Wenming (王文明 1894-1930), received a message that warned all Communist operatives to leave the cities.¹⁶² The weeks that followed were obviously chaotic. Less than one year earlier, the founding Party Representative Assembly (党代会) in June of 1926 had established the CCP’s official presence on Hainan, representing 240 Hainanese members.¹⁶³ Though the Party had grown in that year, its members that were not captured or killed were scattered throughout the countryside.

On the mainland, there were still enough leftists and Communists to give the Party a coherent platform and leadership. More importantly, once the dust of the White Terror had settled, the Communist leadership on the mainland courted and won important allies, especially in the military. By August 1, they had launched a civil war on their own terms with the Nanchang Uprising. On Hainan, and in other provincial CCP branches, the way forward was not as clear. Consolidation of the Hainan Communist Party was one option, for the wide-reaching activities of the Party that had developed under the

¹⁶² Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi (1986), 6.

¹⁶³ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Gongchandang* 海南省志：共产党 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Communist Party gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005), 311.

umbrella of the Nationalist Party seemed to no longer be sustainable. But the question of what losses should be cut remained unclear. For several months after the April 1927 purge and executions, the Communist Party leadership remained on the run and hidden among their rural supporters.

Again, Hainan's island geography influenced the nature of the choices for the Communist movement there. The limits of the surrounding seas prevented the Party leaders from moving into the neighboring province, or the provincial borderlands, and rallying their forces there. A leadership meeting was arranged in June in Lehui, near the central eastern coast, and the Hainanese Party members Wang Wenming and Yang Shanji were elected to lead. Their decision was to move immediately in counterattack, and to expand the Party, to seek new recruits and supporters across the island, rather than consolidating their loyal adherents and taking stock of their losses. In the case of the Communist leader, Feng Baiju, it was his family's local prominence, their education, and their capacity to lead that won them support. Feng returned to Changtai village and established contact with his friend and comrade, Wang Wenming. Both of them had narrowly escaped capture and certain execution in Haikou.¹⁶⁴

The results were surprisingly quite successful, and in six months, Party membership has swelled to 15,000 on Hainan.¹⁶⁵ Military forces had sprung up in the

¹⁶⁴ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wo canjia geming guocheng de lishi qingkuang" (1968), 412-413.

¹⁶⁵ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Gongchandang* 海南省志: 共产党 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Communist Party gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005), 57.

form of local militias and armed farmers. Hainan's local Communist leaders had returned to their hometowns where they were able to rally forces. By August 1927, at the same time as the mainland Communists had launched their Nanchang Uprising, the separate Communist forces across Hainan, along with their partisan supporters, were sufficiently strong to launch pitched battles with the Nationalists and their own adherent militias.

One noted battle in September revealed both the strength and the inexperience of the Communist forces on Hainan. The battle of the Coconut Stockades (*Yezi sai*), south of Jiaji on the island's central eastern coast involved hundreds of Communist forces, and some of the notable leaders, including Wang Wenming and Yang Shanji.¹⁶⁶ On September 23, the Communist forces stormed the stockades and routed the Nationalists, sending them into retreat. Following this speedy victory, the main part of the Communist forces withdrew, leaving a small force to mop up the stragglers. Among those who stayed was Yang Shanji, and when the Nationalists regrouped and counterattacked, he was killed along with the small force that was left to hold the stockade.¹⁶⁷ To many, this was a cautionary lesson against positional warfare waged by inexperienced forces. The coming year, however, would see the catastrophic results of the Communists attempt to take Hainan's urban centers and wage positional warfare across the island. But before this destructive strategy was fully implemented, the end of

¹⁶⁶ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi (2007), 95-96.

¹⁶⁷ Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi 琼崖武装斗争史办公室 [Office of the history of Hainan's military struggle], eds. *Qiongya zongdui shi* 琼崖纵队史 [History of the Hainan Column], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 13-14.

1927 and the beginning of 1928 saw a period of explosive growth for the Hainan Communists and their support base.

By January of 1928, the leadership of the Hainan Communist Party filed six reports to the CCP Provincial Committee of Guangdong, explaining their current situation. The sixth is extant, and it explains that they had recently sent one Feng Zenghua with the fifth report several days earlier, hoping that it had arrived safely. The sixth report reflects uneven stability across the Hainanese Communist movement.¹⁶⁸ The report cites Communist strength around the cities of Fucheng, Haikou, and Jiaji, and generally in the north of the island. The Communist strength in these cities resulted from the support of workers' movements there.

Lingshui, in the far south, was an early soviet base of the Communist movement on Hainan, and the report notes that things had settled enough for the soviet government there to begin combing through its ranks and counter-purging reactionary elements. Yaxian, neighboring Lingshui, was also strongly consolidated, and the report confidently relates that they could be on the verge of overthrowing the Nationalist authorities there, as they had in the Lingshui region. In most other regions, the report lists a series of military struggles that are either in progress, or on the verge of breaking out. But this unrest is not strictly credited to the Hainan Communist leadership and those who are writing this report. Further, it is likely that reports of progress were exaggerated for

¹⁶⁸ Zhonggong Guangdongsheng Qiongya teweī 中共广东省琼崖特委 [Special Committee for Hainan of the Chinese Communist Party of Guangdong Province], *Qiongya teweī yiyufen zongbaogao, di liu ci* 琼崖特委一月分总报告, 第六次 [The sixth January summary report from the Hainan special committee], January 25, 1928, reprinted in the Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central archives), 755, Guangdong Provincial Archives.

propaganda purposes, and while the documents reflect early ambitions, they must be read with skepticism.

As in the reference to the workers' unrest in the northern cities and the peasants' unrest in the south, the report does not claim that these are regular Communist fighters who might respond to the leadership of those who are writing the report. The tone of the report is both optimistic and chaotic, almost giddy. The unrest was positive as long as it was directed at the Nationalist regime, who no longer shared the burden of power with the Communists they had just purged. The violence of the purge had further alienated the Nationalist leadership from the workers and peasants of Hainan, although it may have temporarily strengthened their position as rulers of Hainan and China.¹⁶⁹

By June of 1928, however, the optimism of the January report had faded. Another report was filed from the northern city of Haikou in June, the island's governmental center and the founding site of the Hainan Communist movement.¹⁷⁰ This report begins with a complaint that the writers, who call themselves the Haikou Military Committee, have not received a response from their Guangdong provincial leadership, their "elder brothers," in over a month. They diligently sent weekly reports on their progress, but have received no instructions in response, and it is not clear if this is a result of difficult or dangerous communication channels, or apathy on the part of the

¹⁶⁹ *Qiongya tewei yiyufen zongbaogao, di liu ci* (January 25, 1928).

¹⁷⁰ Haikoushi bingwei 海口市兵委 [Haikou municipal military committee], *Haikou xingshi ji gongzuo qingkuang* 海口形势及工作情况 [Haikou circumstances and work situation], June 6, 1928, reprinted in the *Zhongyang dang'anguan* (Central Archives), reprint number 1069, Guangdong Provincial Archives, folio 18.

Guangdong leadership. The implicit criticism of the Guangdong leadership may have been a swipe at the newest leader of the Hainan Communist movement, Huang Xuezheng (黄学增 1900-1929), a mainlander fresh from the Guangdong Provincial Committee headquarters of the CCP who was on his way to Haikou.

According to the June 1928 report, the Haikou Military Committee had ordered Party members underground, and to temporarily cease any expression of revolutionary views. This was meant to protect those of their supporters who were prominent members of the overseas Hainanese community or schoolteachers, but it was possibly a countermeasure in anticipation of the brash urban strategy orders that Huang was bringing from the mainland. Still, the committee reported that it was making progress with an increasingly disaffected workforce, among which was a wave of unemployed laborers migrating to Hainan from the mainland. In the Committee's report on the activities of the enemy, they note that the Nationalist authorities had established wireless radio contact with Nanjing, the new national capital and center of the Nationalist republican government. The only bright spot in the Committee's report on the Nationalist activities was that they were possibly moving a military division off the island and to the north, and thus loosening what seemed to be a stranglehold on the Communist activities on Hainan.

In the Committee's self-appraisal, they were blunt in relating their own recent difficulties. "At the moment, the Military Committee is responsible for five persons. In the previous meeting we decided to leave three members operating in Haikou, assigning others to work as appropriate. (Due to financial constraints, we are unable to

communicate with [and report the progress of] all other cities and counties.)”¹⁷¹ The reports of fighting in southern Lingshui had made their way north to Haikou, and the Military Committee reported this, in sketchy detail: a hundred or so of the Communist organized peasant soldiers had routed four hundred or so government troops, but with no information on casualties or territory held. There was also fighting in Qiongdong, and the report refers to another account of that, without providing detail here. In Wenchang and Qiongshan, however, the report cites the terrible impact on the Communist organization in these regions following the “White Terror” of the previous year, concluding that little information was available from these regions and any kind of organizational work there was not feasible at this time.

The weakness and scattered nature of the Communist organizational structure on Hainan is also evident to the Military Committee in the recent upsurge in reactionary militias within various townships across the island. (The report notes the arrival of a few [*xuduo*] weapons from Guangdong as the only bright spot in military developments.) It is not clear whether the reactionary militias the report is referring to are militias that are supportive of the Nationalists against the Communists, or if they are essentially loosely organized bandits who were not cooperating with the Communists. But in either case, they presented a turn for the worse in the Hainan Communists’ fortunes after the relatively positive developments of the previous years in growing Communist support in militias and peasant organizations across the island. Compared to the report of only six months earlier, this June 1928 account of Communist activity on Hainan is much less

¹⁷¹ *Haikou xingshi ji gongzuo qingkuang* (June 6, 1928).

optimistic. The report even gives vent to some of the frustrations of the Haikou Military Committee when it doggedly explains the failures, referring to other reports that should have been answered by the Guangdong Provincial Committee but apparently were not, and finally ends with an exasperated exclamation to the Provincial Committee to please reply with instructions for moving forward.¹⁷²

If this report conveyed any coherent message about the Communist movement on Hainan, it was that any attempt to hold the island's cities and towns was impossible under the current conditions. Still, with Huang Xuezheng's arrival, a renewed urban strategy was attempted, and the Guangdong native urged coalescence of the Communist forces on the island and general assaults on the cities, beginning with the capital of Haikou. Huang reported these plans to the Guangdong Provincial Committee immediately after his arrival in Hainan in July of 1928, most likely as a demonstration that he was attempting to implement the marching orders he had been given for the island.¹⁷³ These orders came, in turn, from the Shanghai Party center that was also reluctant to fully embrace a rural strategy.

Almost exactly a year after Huang Xuezheng's arrival on Hainan, he was dead, captured and executed by the Nationalists in Haikou in July of 1929. The official Party history declares that Huang was betrayed to the Nationalist authorities, and his death led

¹⁷² *Haikou xingshi ji gongzuo qingkuang* (June 6, 1928).

¹⁷³ “Huang Xuezheng gei shengwei de baogao” 黄学增给省委的报告 [Huang Xuezheng's report to the Provincial Committee], July 16, 1928, cited in *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* (2007), 134-135.

to the demolition of the urban workers' movement on Hainan.¹⁷⁴ Judging by the July 1928 report from the Haikou Military Commission, it seems the urban movement had already crumbled at least a year before Huang's death, and that the twenty-nine-year-old Guangdong native's life had been lost in a lost cause.

In September of 1929, another report was written and submitted to the Central Party leadership by Luo Wenyan (罗文淹 1904-1961), a Wenchang native and early member of the CCP.¹⁷⁵ Luo had joined the CCP in 1924, and he was a leader in the Hainan Party since its founding in June of 1926.¹⁷⁶ Luo's report notes similar problems to the 1928 report, and also the new problem of infighting within the Hainan Communist leadership. The violence of 1927 led to a scrambling chaos among the Hainan Communist leadership, according to Luo, with some seeking refuge in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Southeast Asia. Among those who remained, all of the leaders thought of themselves as "great men," and entitled to lead the Party.¹⁷⁷

Luo's bitterness reflected the conflict and struggles for power that were underway among the mainland as well as the Hainan Communist leadership. In this dark period, frustrations within the Party were manifested both on Hainan and on the mainland. Betrayal became a political tactic amongst rivals within the Communist Party, with

¹⁷⁴ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi (2007), 150-151.

¹⁷⁵ Luo Wenyan zhi Zhongyang xin 罗文淹致中央信 [Luo Wenyan's letter to Party Central], September 6, 1929, Shanghai.

¹⁷⁶ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi (2007), 103.

¹⁷⁷ Luo Wenyan zhi Zhongyang xin 罗文淹致中央信 [Luo Wenyan's letter to Party Central], September 6, 1929, Shanghai.

Nationalist executioners ever ready to oblige and clean up the mess. This is not a fondly remembered chapter in national history, but as in any underground movement or civil war, it was a constant danger.

The early 1930s were trying years for the Communists of Hainan, as they were for the Communists on the mainland. The Communist movement was all but snuffed out by the arrests, executions, and battles with the Nationalists. On the mainland, the Communists were able to find some degree of safety and civilian support in the border regions between provinces, the traditional refuge of bandits. And finally when the Nationalist military offensives threatened to completely wipe out the Communists on the mainland, they were able to escape the encirclement and make their way through the western frontier and beyond the reach of Chiang Kai-shek. There was no chance for a Long March on Hainan, of course, bounded as they were by the ocean. Instead of borderlands and frontiers, there was the ocean and emigration on a junk or raft, or retreat into the island's unknown mountainous forests and jungles.

The Long March brought the Communists of the mainland to the fabled caves of Yan'an, and those who had made the trek were now fiercely loyal to the cause, though nearly nine in ten marchers did not reach this destination. On Hainan, according to most accounts, the through-line of Communism in the early 1930s is only the finest of threads. There were times when the main force of the Communists of Hainan could gather around a single fire in the wilderness, listening to Feng Baiju tell stories and his wife sing arias from Hainan operas.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wo canjia geming guocheng de lishi qingkuang" (1968), 359. Feng remembered there being twenty-six in his mountain gang in Muruishan in 1932-33.

Following on the work of Lin Wenying and Xu Chengzhang, the Hainan Communists increasingly took on the local priorities of the island. For the guerrillas, the first priority was survival. From the cosmopolitan newspapermen and Tongmenghui members, through the united front with the Nationalists, the Hainan Communists had been an urban group that moved easily between the mainland cities of Guangzhou and Hong Kong. On Hainan, the split with the Nationalists left the Communist leadership with almost nowhere to run. No foreign concessions, no far flung frontiers, no bandit lairs. The result, for the Hainan Communists, was devastating. Of the eleven main founders of the Communist movement on Hainan in 1926, seven were dead at the end of 1929, and four more were dead by 1932, all but one of them killed in battle or executed. One of them lived past the age of forty.¹⁷⁹

Following the death of Huang Xuezheng, there was nothing holding the Hainan Communists in the cities, and Wang Wenming shifted the political center to the rural, mountainous Muruishan soviet. This period saw continued growth of the Party, and relative calm. In October of 1929, the Hainan Special Committee (Qiongya teweī 琼崖特委) filed a report on their recent conference in Neidongshan, near the site of their inaugural battle at the Coconut Stockades.¹⁸⁰ This was the taking of stock that the Hainan

¹⁷⁹ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Gongchandang* 海南省志：共产党 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Communist Party gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005), 58-59.

¹⁸⁰ “Qiongya teweī baogao” 琼崖特委报告 [Hainan special committee report] (October 27, 1929), cited in Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi ban’gongshi (1986), 44-45.

Communists had delayed two years earlier in favor of an immediate offensive after the White Terror. By May of 1930, the consolidation was complete and the Hainan Communists were back on the attack, launching the “Red May” offensive across the eastern coast. At the end of the year, military and political success had rebuilt the Red Army on the island, and its ranks swelled to 1,300 fighting men and women.¹⁸¹ This growth gained the attention of Nationalists on the mainland, who sent Chen Hanguang to lead the encirclement and annihilation campaigns on the island. Chen was far more efficient than his mainland counterparts in Jiangxi, and by 1932, the Hainan Communist movement was again battered and reduced to only a handful of adherents.¹⁸² While Chen Hanguang became infamous for his systematic and brutal destruction of the Communist movement on Hainan, internal conflicts continued to plague the Hainan Communists.

Localism

Li Shuoxun (李硕勋 1903-1931) was born in Sichuan, joined the Socialist Youth League in 1921, and attended Shanghai University before joining the CCP in 1924. Li was an active student leader in the May 30th Movement in Shanghai in 1925, which connected the anti-imperialist struggles of students and Shanghai factory workers. Li

¹⁸¹ Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi (1986), 53.

¹⁸² Feng Baiju 冯白驹, “Gei Zhongyang de baogao: teweiyu shangji shiqu lianxi de qingxing” 给中央的报告: 特委与上级失去联系的情形 [Report to Party Central: The situation of the loss of communications between the Special Committee and its superiors] (December 12, 1934), reprinted in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi 中共海南区党委党史办公室 [The Party history office of the Chinese Communist Party of Hainan district committee], eds., *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 冯白驹研究史料 [Research materials on Feng Baiju] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 3-4.

then took part in the Nanchang Uprising of August 1927, the first trial of the Chinese Red Army. In the few years that followed, young Li held a series of high posts in the CCP leadership of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong Provinces. In the summer of 1931 the Party's leadership sent him to Hainan to help organize the Communists there who seemed to be in disarray and on the run. Li arrived in Hainan in July of 1931, and in September he was suddenly captured by the Nationalist authorities, and quickly executed.¹⁸³ Today, Li Shuoxun is known best as the father of Li Peng, who was less than three years old at the time of his father's death. Li Peng was to be raised in part by Zhou Enlai, and like his adoptive father, to become premier of the People's Republic of China. But at the time of his death, besides being a father, Li Shuoxun was a rising star in the CCP, and his career was abruptly cut short after he took up his post on Hainan and prepared to lead the Communist movement there. Li is remembered with a mighty tomb near Haikou, and discussions of his death cut to the bone of the Hainan-mainland relationship.

Like other regions under imperial Chinese governance, the rule of avoidance had at least theoretically prevented local leaders from ruling Hainan. But on Hainan, the tradition of opposing outside rule has been especially strong, in part due to obvious geographical circumstances, and also due to its status as a destination for banished officials. Perhaps the most hallowed ground on the island is the Five Ministers' Temple, which honors five banished imperial officials who were embraced by the people of Hainan. The early republic saw the possibility of a shift away from Hainan's provincial and isolated culture and its resistance to outsiders. Lin Wenyong, Xu Chengzhang, and

¹⁸³ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi (2007), 180.

others worked to pull Hainan into the international world and make it a national priority due to its strategic and economic potential. This early twentieth-century attempt to make Hainan a cosmopolitan and revolutionary center off the southeast coast of the Asian continent was largely unsuccessful. Today such efforts continue to be unsuccessful, and some contemporary observers from Hainan and the mainland point to the backwards attitude of Hainanese spendthrifts, their laziness, and their *paiwai* (排外 xenophobic) mentality. The polar opposite of this view is also prevalent, though, especially among working class Hainanese, who are always ready to bend an ear about the carpet-bagging mainlanders who want to rob the Hainanese blind, and the career Party politicians who use Hainan's development as a springboard into the national political scene.

In most current accounts of Li Shuoxun's death, it is noted that he was betrayed by one of his comrades on Hainan. It seems impossible that there is any documentary evidence of this, but today, the plaque on his mausoleum near the city center of Hainan also implies that a fellow Communist betrayed him to the Nationalist authorities. The genesis of this accusation is not clear, though the swift capture and death of Li following his arrival on Hainan suggests at least that he and his hosts did not take appropriate precautions in bringing him to a safe headquarters on the island. Especially considering the recent lesson of Huang Xuezheng's death, it seems unlikely that Li was simply careless. From the perspective of mainland Communists, Li's death perhaps seemed to be the result of resentful local Communist leaders who had heard enough instruction from the mainland and decided to take their fate into their own hands. Certainly, the trend was in this direction.

And if this was the case, and Li Shuoxun was indeed betrayed by local Communist leaders who were jealous and resentful of his presence on the island, what then? Was it a victory for small-minded bumpkins who would wind up with a few dozen members sitting around a campfire somewhere off the map in the island's hostile interior? Or was it the natural result of a shift in local priorities that had moved away from protecting stubborn mainland urbanists and Party loyalists like Huang and Li? Perhaps there is a middle ground.

Following the deaths of Huang Xuezheng then Li Shuoxun, and the rise of Wang Wenyong followed by Feng Baiju, the local turn of the Hainan Communist movement was perhaps irreversible. Though the goal of national victory in the Chinese Communist revolution was shared by the Hainan Communists, Hainan's path would be a lonely one, with little communication and less assistance from the mainland. After the deaths of Huang and Li, Party Central only sent Long March veterans like Zhuang Tian and Li Zhenya, native sons of Hainan, to propagate mainland policy and take part in the island's Communist movement. As for the international dimension of the Hainan Communist movement, that too would take on a new form in which Hainanese abroad returned to the island to join the Communist movement, but fewer and fewer islanders looked outward to flee or seek assistance in Southeast Asia. Following the Japanese invasion of Hainan in 1939, the next phase in the continuing localization of the Communist movement would be to seek the help of the indigenous Li people of Hainan's interior forested mountains.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Hainansheng difang zhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan Provincial Office of Local Gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Gongchandang* 海南省志: 共产党 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Communist Party gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2005) 383, 385.

Chapter Three

New Enemies and New Allies: The Japanese Invasion of Hainan and the Communist-Li Alliance

The rule of Chen Jitang in Guangdong (1931-1936) saw an increase the province's autonomy from the Nanjing government. With the help of General Chen Hanguang, Chen Jitang tried to completely wipe out the Communist presence on Hainan. The ties between the mainland Communist movement and the Hainan Communists were tenuously maintained through much of this period, but the Hainan movement was learning to function without the material assistance of the mainlanders. Rather than broadening their channels of support and communication from the mainland, the Hainan Communists turned inward once more to an alliance with indigenous Li people of the island's interior. More precisely, the Li and the Communist leadership found a shared cause of resisting the Japanese, and even more immediately, fighting the Nationalists.

Of course on the mainland, the Nanjing government was also attempting to eradicate the Communists, and by the end of 1934, they were nearly successful. After a series of annihilation campaigns, the Nationalists succeeded in driving the main Communist force out of central and southern China, and on the Long March that would lead them to the fabled caves of Yan'an in the northwest. These efforts at domestic repression of the Communists – both by Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists on the mainland and by Chen Jitang in Guangdong and on Hainan – eventually sapped the leaders' popularity among the country's patriotic students, merchants, and increasingly

larger portions of the population. Another greater threat was looming. In 1931 the Japanese military had begun to seize portions of northeastern China, and a stream of Japanese colonists followed. In early 1932 a battle fought in Shanghai exposed Chiang Kai-shek's reluctance to fight the Japanese. By 1935, an anti-Japanese movement had spread and perhaps by default, the Communists earned windfall support as the Nationalists continued to focus on fighting the Communists instead of confronting the Japanese threat. In late 1936, amid an international scandal, Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped and forced to stop campaigns against the Communists by one of his most loyal generals. Amid a tense alliance, the Communists and Nationalists faced the full-scale Japanese invasion in the following year.

It was in this context that the Nationalists, as represented on Hainan by Chen Jitang, continued to fight the Communists on Hainan. Two years after the Japanese 1937 invasion of the mainland, their forces landed on Hainan, in February of 1939, and quickly took control of the coastal cities. The conquest was swift, and the Nationalist forces were pushed from their coastal bases to the island's interior. There they continued a brutal policy of repression toward the Li people, with an increased urgency. Now they were fighting for Li territory, since had nowhere else to make their bases. In response to the Nationalist incursions, massacres, and fortifications on Li land, several prominent Li leaders united with the diffuse Communist forces on the island.

For their part, the Communists were at a low point in their Hainan activities, and the Li alliance allowed its survival and expansion. The shared enemies of their alliance were both the Nationalists and the Japanese, but it is significant that the Nationalists and not the Japanese were the main force that brought the Communists and the Li together.

In this alliance, the Li allowed the Communists to survive both the Japanese occupation and the Nationalists' attempts to crush the Communists and bend the Li to their political will. The Li continue to have an important place in the history of Hainan's Communist movement. The value of the Li to the Communists' victory on Hainan was recognized immediately after the successful conquest of the island in 1950.

In the spring of 1950, the Fourth Field Army of the Communist People's Liberation Army crossed the Qiongzhou Strait from the mainland onto Hainan Island. One journalist who accompanied the army wrote about the conquest and the inhabitants of the island, and particularly the ethnically distinct Li people who numbered about 300,000 at that time, and made up 15 percent of the island's population. As on the mainland, most of Hainan's population was the Chinese ethnic majority, Han. The Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) was about half a year old by the spring of 1950, and one of the first concerns of the new government was to assess the national ethnic composition of the country. The establishment of an orthodox narrative of ethnicity under the new PRC was a high priority of educational and political import.¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, the PRC officially sanctioned fifty-five minority peoples (*shaoshu minzu*) within Chinese borders, including the Li of Hainan.

This writer who came to Hainan in the spring of 1950, You Qi, interviewed the highest command of the Hainan Communist military, and he met with their leader, Feng

¹⁸⁵ For an example, see "The Impact of Urban Ethnic Education on Modern Mongolian Ethnicity, 1949-1966" in Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 279-280.

Baiju. Feng told You that he would have full access to any resources related to the story of the Li people. You was most interested in their contribution to the Hainan Communist movement. Since the winter of 1943-44, the Li of Hainan's southern highlands had been working closely with the Hainan Communist movement against both the Nationalists and the Japanese. You began studying Hainan as he waited for Feng's instructions on how he would proceed into Li territory—the island's mountainous interior surrounding Wuzhishan (“Five-finger Mountain”)—to record their experience of participating in the Communist revolution. After a few weeks, Feng suddenly summoned You to depart. The reason was that the Li leader, Wang Guoxing had returned from a trip to Beijing, and Wang would chaperone You into Li territory.¹⁸⁶

You had arrived on Hainan knowing little about the Li people. All southern Chinese knew that they were the primitive aboriginal inhabitants of Hainan, but beyond that, little else. Cosmopolitan Chinese of Hainan's coast and southern mainland cities took the Li as the butt of jokes. To them, the Li were wild and naked, hopping through the trees, engaging in animalistic rituals and sexual acts. One prominent Hong Kong banker told the author of his wartime youth in southern China, when he and his schoolmates would mock each other's mistakes in class, saying, “If you don't watch it, the monkeys from Wuzhishan will come and take you away!”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ You Qi 尤淇, *Qiongya Limin shanqu fangwen sanji* [Notes and Interviews on the Li people of Hainan's mountain region] 琼崖黎民山区访问散记 (Guangzhou: Huanan chubanshe, 1950), 1-4.

¹⁸⁷ Author's interview, subject anonymous, March 5, 2010.

Some of the mainland racism and prejudices were based on cultural differences and ignorance between the Han Chinese and the Hainan Li. Some of the prejudices were based on centuries-old Han supremacy. So it might have been a surprise when You Qi learned that this tribal leader he was preparing to interview, Wang Guoxing, had been in Beijing discussing the future of Hainan with the highest brass of the Chinese Communist leadership. On October 1, 1949 Wang had personally observed the official founding of the PRC together with Party Chairman Mao Zedong atop Tiananmen.¹⁸⁸

This chapter will begin by introducing the Li and their relationship with Chinese mainland regimes in the transitional republican period, which followed the Qing and preceded the PRC. The main purpose of the chapter is to explain the history and context of the largest Li uprising in recent history. The Baisha Uprising of 1943 led by the Li headmen, Wang Guoxing and Wang Yujin, targeted the Nationalist forces that had retreated into Li territory following the Japanese coastal occupation of Hainan that had begun four years earlier. The uprising was named for Hainan's southern central Baisha County in which it originated.

But the Li uprising is an important watershed in the entire island's history. The Japanese occupation of Hainan was one of enslavement, brutalization, and mass death. The impact of the Japanese presence on Hainan was felt severely by the Li, and yet the famous Baisha Uprising was aimed at the Nationalists, and not the Japanese. And so, an examination of this uprising informs our understanding of the Li, the Communists, the Nationalists, and the Japanese on Hainan in this time. The Nationalist occupation of Li

¹⁸⁸ Wang Xueping, 王学萍, *Zhongguo Lizu* 中国黎族 [Li ethnic group in China (original English title)] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2004), 465.

territory was unprecedented among mainlanders' political and military activity in the island's interior. The organization and scale of the violent Li response also had no precedent in their own history, though their ancestors had left a long legacy of violent uprisings against mainland regimes. Following the 1943 uprising, the Li sought out an alliance with the Hainan Communists that endured through the Communist takeover in 1950. Following the Japanese defeat two years after the 1943 uprising, the Nationalists abandoned the Li territory, and the newly allied forces of Li and Communists made that inland refuge their new central base area for the next five years of civil war. The survival of the Communist movement on Hainan (and hence the ease of the 1950 takeover) is thus indebted to the Li-Communist alliance that followed the Baisha Uprising.

The Li in China's Transitional Period

The surveyor from Beijing, Peng Chengwan, who came to Hainan in 1919, believed that establishing a solid, working relationship with the Li people was essential to any lasting development of the island. Like mainland emissaries to Hainan for centuries past, Peng assumed that the Li would happily "Sinify" if given the chance, and this sinification was a precondition for a working relationship with the republican regime.¹⁸⁹ For centuries, only a thin coastal ring and the northern plains of Hainan had been successfully settled and haltingly developed by Han from the mainland, and the island's interior and southern highlands remained completely unsettled by Han and undeveloped

¹⁸⁹ Peng Chengwan 彭程萬, *Diaocha Qiongya shiye baogao shu* 调查琼崖实业报告书 [A report on the investigation of the industry and commerce of Hainan] (Haikou: Hainan shuju, 1920).

on mainland terms. Many of the Li people there continued to practice swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture well into the twentieth century. They used bows and arrows, spears, and flintlock rifles for hunting and inter-village warfare.¹⁹⁰ They also used these weapons in perennial uprisings that were sparked by the abuses of Han settlers, merchants, and officials.

But this anti-Han violence was not restricted to post-imperial China. For over two thousand years, mainland regimes had claimed all of Hainan as their own. In fact, only the Mongols of the thirteenth-century Yuan dynasty had ever successfully ridden roughshod across the entire island and legitimately claimed a successful conquest. The Mongols instituted a policy called the “Li military 10,000 household government,” in which a vertical command system incorporated the Li in the government of the Mongol regime on Hainan. This was successful in preventing significant Li uprisings for much of the dynasty, but the precedent of combining central flexibility and the granting of autonomy was not followed by subsequent dynasties. Eventually the Li reemerged as the hosts of the island’s interior. Government outposts in their territory were largely untenable and they served little economic benefit that could not be attained through enterprising Han merchants who visited the territory and sometimes married into Li villages.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Wu Lien-teh (1937); Clark (1938), 391-418.

¹⁹¹ Li Bo 李勃, *Hainan dao: Lidai jianzhu yange kao* 海南岛: 历代建置沿革考 [Hainan island: A study of the establishment and evolution of previous dynasties] (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2005), 287.

The Mongol empire also saw the national capital moved to what is today Beijing. This “Northern Capital” has always been too far from Hainan for nimble control of the island from the governmental center, especially when it came to the “Li situation,” as Peng Chengwan called it in his 1920 survey.¹⁹² Regional officials in temporary posts rarely made Li relations a priority, unless by Li relations they meant Li suppression. This perception on the part of many Hainanese, of exploitative northern officials coming to the island for their temporary enrichment persists strongly through the present day.

The Qing empire (1644-1911), according to Anne Csete, a scholar of the Li in imperial times, offered a qualified change in the mainland regimes’ legacy of clumsy and brutal rule of Hainan and the Li.¹⁹³ This was especially true in the eighteenth century, known by historian as the high Qing, and a period of lasting domestic peace and prosperity. While the Manchus were not ideal enlightened despots toward the Li, it is notable that their rule, like that of the other major dynasty ruled by an ethnic minority—the Mongols—presents an exception to the rule of mainland regimes in their relationship with the Li of Hainan. It is not accurate, however, to suggest that Li uprisings and Li animosity was only directed toward the Han occupiers of the island’s northern plains and coast. There is no evidence that the Li favored the ethnic rule of any group over the Han Chinese simply based on their regional or cultural extraction. On the contrary, in the

¹⁹² Peng Chengwan, *Diaoch Qiongya* (1920), Li situation.

¹⁹³ Anne Alice Csete, *A Frontier Minority in the Chinese World: The Li People of Hainan Island from the Han through the High Qing* (State University of New York, Buffalo: Doctoral Dissertation, April 1995).

early Qing, violent Li outbursts were sometimes initiated by forces that were allied with the Han loyalists of the Ming dynasty against the new Manchu Qing rulers.¹⁹⁴

A Qing official of the mid-eighteenth century left a record of what he experienced and learned as an official on Hainan, charged with maintaining order and good relations with the Qing. He wrote with a tone of regret, after the suppression of one of the more violent uprisings of the Li during his tenure. The Li once lived in peace, he wrote, and it was only the provocations of dishonest merchants, settlers, and officials that brought about the cycle of uprisings and suppressions, and resulted in a constant state of uneasy relations.¹⁹⁵

This was an ongoing lament of the officials who tried to maintain smooth relations with the Li. The exploitation and dishonest dealings at the hands of predatory merchants supposedly caused the suspicion and volatility among the Li that caused them to rise up in violence. Even after the fall of the Qing, Peng Chengwan agreed with this general assessment during his 1919 tour of the island. He added an element, however, that could not have been relevant to his Qing predecessor on the island. Peng wrote that there was an “anti-Han revolutionary movement” (*pai-Han geming yundong*) afoot on the island, and that it was not simply an issue of economic or political exploitation, or of

¹⁹⁴ Anne Csete, “Ethnicity, Conflict, and the State in the Early to Mid-Qing: The Hainan Highlands, 1644-1800,” in Pamela Kyle Crossely, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 231.

¹⁹⁵ Csete (1995), 171.

brutal suppression. It was a hatred based in race and culture that drove the Li to violent resistance.¹⁹⁶

This ethnic or racial distinction that Peng made, and his attribution of the violence to it, simplified what was in fact a very complex set of problems. He did not fail to see the complexity of the situation, citing similar problems to what had been noted by the eighteenth-century Qing official—exploitation by merchants and brutality at the hands of glory-seeking generals.¹⁹⁷ But in lumping all Li violence into an island-wide anti-Han revolution, Peng's anxieties may have been more a reflection of the Chinese political climate during which he visited Hainan and wrote the survey, than an accurate account of the motivations for Li violence and resistance. With an unstable central government in Beijing, the rise of provincial warlords, and the threat of China being partitioned by foreign governments, the second decade of the twentieth century had been a bleak one for Chinese national identity. Peng's perception of Han identity being under attack in every corner of the country may have led to his characterization of the Li violence in the way that he did.

Han chauvinism had helped to topple the Qing dynasty in the end of 1911, with the Manchu rulers depicted as alien invaders in revolutionary tracts, even though by that time their ethnic distinctiveness had largely eroded under the influences of Chinese elite culture. Histories filled with scenes of rapine and massacres of Han Chinese at the hands of the alien Manchus resurfaced in the revolution to overthrow the Qing, even though the

¹⁹⁶ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Li section, page 4.

¹⁹⁷ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Li section, page 3.

Manchu conquest had come nearly 300 years earlier. Chinese patriotism had also helped to fuel later cultural and political movements at the time of Peng's writing. The line between Chinese patriotism and Han chauvinism was a thin one from Hainan's perspective. It differed little, for that matter, from the centuries of attempts to civilize the Li people.

From the perspective of the mainland or of coastal Hainanese Chinese, and also in the view of many foreign observers, the Li were divided into two distinct groups. In Chinese these groups were rather dramatically labeled as "raw" and "cooked" (*sheng* and *shu*, respectively). The former were the wild Li who lived in the island's interior with little or no contact between themselves and Han Chinese or foreigners. The latter, the "cooked" Li, engaged in trade and sometimes intermarriage with the Han Chinese, learned the Chinese language, and even served the mainland regimes as leaders of their village or of a network of villages.

By the fall of the Qing, the system of giving Li village leaders official posts was at least 150 years old.¹⁹⁸ Earlier, in the Ming dynasty, it seems that the Li were given a relatively free hand to govern their own affairs. The policy of allowing the Li more autonomy in the Ming and to more or less govern themselves does not seem to have connected the Li to the Ming government with a credible command structure, as it had in the Mongol Yuan dynasty. This official stance of more autonomy seems to have been a question of the Ming military and bureaucracy being unable to hold and govern

¹⁹⁸ Zhang Qingchang, *Liqi jiwen* [A record of the Li people], preface dated 1756, in Yu Quan, ed., *Linghai wenlu* [A record of unusual reports from Linghai], as noted in Csete (1995), 176.

significant portions of Li territory with any consistency or efficiency. The Qing was more successful than the Ming in successfully implementing a system of appointing Li to lead their villages. Under the Qing system, these leaders also took responsibility for the village or villages that they led.¹⁹⁹

A British consul posted to Ningbo circled Hainan and delivered an official report in March of 1872. This was twelve years after Haikou had officially been opened (but little used) as a treaty port following the Second Opium (or Arrow) War. Robert Swinhoe's report, "The Aborigines of Hainan," contains the repugnance of a racial supremacist, referring to the Li people as "very deformed" and to some as being "more docile" than others.²⁰⁰ But it is worth noting the cultural cross-sections that Swinhoe draws in his observations of the Li, especially in reference to the distinction between the *shu* and *sheng*.

At Nychow the natives were often referred to as the shuh Le [*shu* Li], but they differed in no respect from the wild tribes of their neighborhood except that their headmen acknowledged a kind of responsibility to the Chinese authorities which enabled the people of their tribe to seek labor in the Chinese towns.²⁰¹

The distinction between the *shu* and *sheng* is usually one of culture in most orthodox Chinese accounts of nationalities within its borders. Those minorities who are

¹⁹⁹ Su Ke 肃克, ed., *Zhonghua wenhua Tongzhi: Minzu wenhua* 中华文化通志: 民族文化 [Annals of Chinese culture: People's culture] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1998), 418-419. The policy of the Ming was called *tu she*, *tu guan* (local house, local official) and that of most of the Qing era was simply called *zongguan zhidu*. This meant a steward system, roughly translated, though literally it simply meant, "to be in charge of."

²⁰⁰ Robert Swinhoe, "The Aborigines of Hainan" (Article 2), read before the Society on 25th March 1872, 26.

²⁰¹ Swinhoe (1872), 28-29.

said to “have culture” (*you wenhua*), traditionally meaning a Confucian culture, are the *shu* or “cooked” savages. The civilizing projects of the Chinese were directed at the marginal and cultural minorities as a primarily a cultural endeavor.²⁰² But it seems that the distinctions between the two groups as observed by an outsider who did not share the mainland Chinese cultural bias (though Swinhoe had his own unfortunate biases), seem to be more political than cultural. This is revealing about both the leadership structure and the political organization of the Li people in their relationship with mainland regimes. The cultural categorization of the Li, as these groups were defined by the Han Chinese narrative (and in large part continue to be defined) through the lens of mainland Chinese official and cultural biases, seems to have been less important than is supposed. It was not necessarily sinification, or the adoption of Chinese (Confucian or modern, depending on the time) ways that distinguished Li leadership and participation. While there was a wide variation of Li costume, custom, and political participation, there was also a clear identity of being a Li person that straddled the artificially imposed *shu/sheng* divide.

The apparent difference in degrees of assimilation, or sinification, did not affect their political alliances. That is to say, the Li who had adopted Chinese dress – the ones who had abandoned the loincloth and bow-and-arrow for trousers, tunic, and a porter’s pole – were not ultimately more sympathetic to the Han Chinese regime. On the contrary, it was precisely this type of Li individual who would lead his comrades in the Baisha Uprising of 1943.

²⁰² Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 7.

I have already begun using – and attempting to problematize – the label of “Li” to describe a group of people who continue to be labeled in this way by the current Chinese government. They live almost exclusively in the interior of Hainan island, and at the time of writing, number well over a million.²⁰³ Ethnic labels have been challenged by historians and social scientists for decades, and it is important to establish the criterion by which I am using the label. The word “Li” is a Chinese language word, after all, and the origins of its application to the people who are now thus labeled is murky.²⁰⁴ Even more problematic than ethnic labels are racial ones. Intermarriage between the Li and the Han have complicated any clear distinction between the two on the basis of physical characteristics if there ever were any.

²⁰³ Hainan sheng difangzhi ban’gongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [The office of Hainan provincial gazetteers], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* 海南省志:民族志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Nationalities gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 2006), 32-38. A brief account of their population figures through a few sample years is as follows. In 1412 there were 296,093 Han Chinese on Hainan, and 41,386 (12 percent of the total population). By 1935 the Li were almost 9 percent (almost 200,000 total) of the total Hainan population of over 2 million. By 1953, the Li numbered about 358,000, and by 1990 they were over one million. The dramatic increase from 1953 to 1990 (almost a trebling) is accounted for by health improvements, a more flexible child-bearing policy for ethnic minorities, and due to the custom of an intermarried couple counting itself and its descendants as fully and officially Li.

²⁰⁴ The most common etymology of the Chinese character for this particular *Li* (黎) is ironically an ancient reference of Han Chinese to themselves as the “black-haired people.” Most Li call themselves “*Sai*,” (赛), which in their language is simply a word for the first-person plural.

Most scholars agree, based on linguistics and ritual practices, that the Li originally came to Hainan thousands of years ago from what is today Southeast Asia.²⁰⁵ The Li language was one of the most interesting aspects of the culture of these indigenous people of Hainan island to early twentieth-century scholars. These ethnologists and anthropologists focused a disproportionate amount of their studies on Li language, establishing a Romanized system of writing the language that was most likely quickly relegated to library shelves and left for only a handful of later scholars of Hainan to ponder. It is not clear that any military or political missions to Hainan ever brought with them a scholar of the Li language, and the compilation of Li linguistic information seems rather to have been an effort to establish their Southeast Asian origins, rather than to preserve the language and culture.²⁰⁶

The Li language, like the regional Chinese dialects of Hainan, all fall into the Tai-Kadai or Kra-dai language group (in Chinese this is the Zhuang-Dong group).²⁰⁷ This

²⁰⁵ One American linguist working in Taiwan has presented the possibility of a connection between the origins of the aborigines of Taiwan and Hainan. Since Taiwan's aborigines have definitively traced their ancestral tracks to Indonesia, this would shift the received knowledge on the Li origins. It seems likely, however, that linguistic cross-pollination throughout the region caused any similarities between the aborigines of the two islands, since all other indicators point the Li ancestral tracks to mainland Southeast Asia. (Csete [1995], 13)

²⁰⁶ Walter Strzoda, *Die Li auf Hainan und ihre Beziehungen zum asiatischen Kontinent* [The Li on Hainan and their relations with the Asian continent] (Berlin: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 1911), 196. Nearly every page of Strzoda's text is dedicated Li linguistics, and it includes an extensive explanation of the sounds and meanings of many words in the Li language. The preeminent Hainan scholar of the Li, Wang Xueping, also dedicates a chapter of his most recent study of the Li to their language, but it is not the primary focus of his study (Wang Xueping [2004], 43-74). The Li language still does not have an official script.

²⁰⁷ Wang Xueping (2004), 72.

group has its roots in the Sino-Tibetan family, but it has since been accorded its own category by linguists. Kra-dai languages are restricted for the most part to the Southeast Asian and southern Chinese mainland, with Hainan as the one notable island exception. Grouping the Li language and most of Hainan's Chinese dialects in this language groups orients the island toward the Asian continent rather than toward the surrounding island chains. This linguistic connection, and other characteristics of the Li people suggest that their ancestral roots are in Southeast Asia, and not in what is today Malaysia or the Philippines.²⁰⁸ This sets Hainan apart from its Chinese island neighbor, Taiwan, which hosts an aboriginal culture that is much more strongly tied to Oceania and other islands of the South Pacific.

The emphasis of this chapter is not on ethnic distinctiveness of the Li in the conventional sense of dress, diet, and ritual. I believe that ethnicity is more usefully thought of as a social and political strategy that can be shifted and recast every day, rather than just a set of beliefs or customs that are inherited. Still, certain distinguishing factors do set the Li apart at a superficial or cosmetic level. Ethnologists and anthropologists have made much of Li hair-styling, jewelry, clothing, and tattooing. Different hair knots set apart the different groups of the Li across the island.

Until the past few decades, Li women had their faces tattooed when they reached early adulthood, usually before taking a husband. This practice prepared them for recognition by their ancestors in the afterlife. The bare breasts of some Li women

²⁰⁸ Ouyang Jueya, *The Cun Language* (Shanghai: Far East Publishers, 1998). Graham Thurgood, *From Ancient Cham to Modern Dialects: Two Thousand Years of Language Contact and Change* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

scandalized the Han Chinese visitors to Li territory. Li women wore many hoops of brass from their ears, often so large and heavy that they pulled down the earlobe, and they had to be tied over the head while they worked.²⁰⁹ These and other cosmetic characteristics of the Li woman, such as their short skirts (which were later banned as pornographic in the puritanism of the Cultural Revolution), were the focus of the cameras of foreign visitors.²¹⁰ The convention of depicting a foreign culture or race as different through the appearance of the group's female attire and appearance is nearly universal, and so this is not worth theoretical exploration here.

More substantially, early observations reveal the source of a mainland stereotype of gender relations on Hainan that is often heard today, in which the women work much harder than their male counterparts, who are reputed to lounge in hammocks through the long, hot afternoons. Among the Li, and the rest of the Hainanese population, it was common for men and women to work equally hard in farming duties, which may be the source of this racist stereotype. Early foreign observers were struck by the equal sharing

²⁰⁹ *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu* (2006), frontmatter.

²¹⁰ Leonard Clark, while researching his article for *National Geographic Magazine* cited above, shot some footage that was later made into the short documentary film, *Beyond the Mountains of the Red Mist in Hainan*, (1938). The author is grateful to the staff of the American Museum of Natural History for digitizing this film and making it available for Interlibrary Loan (American Museum of Natural History, 1985). This film is purportedly the first moving images of the Li people. Hans Stübel recorded the intricate distinctions in the dress of both Li men and women across the island in his exhaustive 1937 ethnographic study. His photographs are reprinted in this chapter. (Hans Stübel, *Die Li-Stämme der Insel Hainan: Ein Beitrag zur Volkskunde Südchinas* [The Li tribes of Hainan island: A contribution to the ethnography of South China] (Berlin: Klinkhardt and Bierman, Verlag, 1937).

of labor on Hainan, and one French visitor noted that, indeed, it seemed that the most arduous tasks were reserved for the women.²¹¹

Devil-chasing rituals and other cultural practices were also particular to the Li. There are numerous sources on these practices, cited through this chapter, which were observed and recorded in great detail by Chinese and other curious foreign investigators for centuries. While they were often similar to the practices of other peoples of Southeast Asia, they were significantly different from the mainlanders who came from China to settle the Hainan coast. It is in contrast to these Chinese observers that the Li have been portrayed as exotic and ethnically or racially distinct. The differences of Li culture were usually considered by mainland Han as an obstacle to the island's modernization. For the Japanese occupiers of Hainan who arrived in 1939, it was only through understanding the cultural distinctiveness of the Li that the Japanese empire would learn to govern them effectively, and, more importantly, exploit their economic potential as a workforce in their iron and cement enterprises, and their political potential as a buffer between the Japanese and the Han Chinese.²¹²

By the time of the Li Baisha Uprising in 1943, which is at the end of this chapter's trajectory, I believe that the cosmetic and linguistic distinctiveness of the Li people, though pronounced, had become less important than the simple territoriality of Li

²¹¹ Cl. Madrolle, *Hai-nan: Le Pays et Ses Habitants* [Hainan: The land and its inhabitants] (Paris: Comité de l'Asie Française, 1909), 22.

²¹² Kunio Odaka, *Economic Organization of the Li Tribes of Hainan Island*, New Haven, CT: Yale Southeast Asia Studies (Mikiso Hane, tr., Anna Pikelis, ed.), 1950, 90-92. This study was originally published in Japanese in 1943, based on Odaka's fall-winter 1942 survey of several Li villages. The study was made possible by assistance from the Japanese Marines on Hainan, and the Japanese Nitrogen and Electric Company.

identity and community. The lands of the Li had been clearly delineated for centuries. They had once dwelled on Hainan's coasts, but for nearly two thousand years, they had made their homes on the island's interior. Prior to the Han dynasty settlement of the Hainan coast, and the first mainland imperial claim on the island, the Li had lived on the coasts, as is suggested by the discovery of "Sanya Man" in 1993, who was named for that southern coastal city and is probably 10,000 years old.²¹³ But after the arrival of Han Chinese settlers around 100 BCE, anyone but the Li people who ventured into the interior of Hainan island came as guests or would-be conquerors. And all but the Mongols had given up on the possibility of bringing the Li of the island's interior under direct control of a mainland regime.

Dragging the Li into China

In the orthodox jargon of Chinese empires, to "enter the map" (*ru bantu*) is the reward of ethnic minorities and border peoples who become tributaries or subjects of the realm.²¹⁴ In the twentieth century Hainan, this construct was flipped on its head as the Chinese armies retreated into Li territories and it was for the Li to decide their fate. First, in the face of the Japanese occupation of Hainan after 1939, the Nationalists armies withdrew into the southern mountains of the island, which was historically the Li domain. Later, a Li alliance with the Communists made Li territory the main base area for the allied forces on the island. The Li became the kingmakers of Hainan. Wang Guoxing led

²¹³ *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* (2006), 28-29.

²¹⁴ Csete (2006).

the Li people in their alliance with the Chinese Communists, and it was Wang who would introduce the Li people to the rest of China through his 1950 interviews with the writer, You Qi.

Wang's father had also been a leader of his village and several surrounding villages. According to Wang's biographies, his father was well respected in the Li community.²¹⁵ He served in the uncertain years that came after the fall of the Qing and before a strong central government sent new representatives to Hainan. The southern militarists of the 1910s and 1920s gave way to the Nationalists' Nanjing decade (1927-1937). As a result of alliances between the Nationalists and the southern militarists who had been in power since the fall of the Qing, there was no significant break between the so-called "warlord" era, a name that some historians attribute to the republican years after the end of the Qing (1911) and before the beginning of the Nanjing decade.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Zhong Yuanxiu 中元秀, *Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing* 黎族人民领袖王国兴 [The leader of the Li people, Wang Guoxing], *Qiongdao xinghuo* 琼岛星火 [Hainan spark], Vol. 6, (Guangdong Province, publication for internal circulation, 1980). There are two editions of this biography by the same author. One is for "internal circulation" (*neibu*), and contains more sensitive accounts of critiques by and of Wang Guoxing. This is the edition I will use throughout. The differences between this edition and the one published in 1983 by "Nationalities Press" (*Minzu chubanshe*) are negligible for the portions used in this chapter, but they are more substantial in the post-1950 sections, as will be explore in later chapters. The 1983 edition is Zhong Yuanxiu 中元秀, *Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing* 黎族人民领袖王国兴 [The leader of the Li people, Wang Guoxing] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1983).

²¹⁶ Hainan was paid little attention by the central government in this period, and its unimportance was reflected in Sun Yat-sen's rumored willingness to surrender the island to a foreign power for the sum of \$14 million. (M. Savina, *Monographie de Hainan: Conférence faite de 10 décembre 1928 a la Société Géographique de Hanoi* [Monograph on Hainan: 10 December 1928 Conference of the Geographical Society of Hanoi] (Missionnaire apostolique) (Hanoi: Cahiers de la Société de Géographie de Hanoi [17], 1929), 7. See chapter one for the transitional southern government of Hainan in this period by the Guangdong-Guangxi militarists. Also see Diana Lary, *Region and Nation:*

The weakness of the central government in the first two decades of the Republic prevented any coherent and consistent relationship between Hainan's government and the Li people. Even during times of strong central Chinese governance, there were few exceptions to the prolonged conflicts between the Chinese military and the Li. The final century of the Qing, the 1800s, were rife with violence between the Li and government forces. In times of disunity and weakness, the Li felt heavier tax burdens, and this was also the case in the early republic. The Nanjing decade saw an increase in the exploitation of the Li, and Wang Guoxing's father, Wang Zhenghe, felt that burden more than most. Zhenghe was the leader of several villages scattered around his hometown of Hongmao.

Under new Nationalist policies, it had appeared that the Li would be given an increase in their autonomy and their ability to choose their own fate in terms of economic and social activities. This shift toward self-rule echoed the Ming policies of allowing the Li to make their own way simply because the mountain-dwellers were beyond the reach of the central and provincial government.²¹⁷ Work assignments and ritual observances were put in his hands, and social and economic organization seemed to be officially handed over to Li leaders like Wang Zhenghe.²¹⁸

As Hainan officials began making their demands, however, they turned to Wang Zhenghe again and again to implement the policies of extraction. Cattle (water buffalo)

The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925-1937 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

²¹⁷ Su Ke (1998), 417-418.

²¹⁸ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 13-21.

were scarce in the highland Li community, but the Nationalist government made heavy demands on Li livestock, including their cattle, pigs, and chickens. The Li diet was generally low in meat, and slaughtering domestic animals of any kind was reserved for celebrations. An animal hierarchy reflected the value of animal flesh both in terms of nutrition and cultural and philosophical importance. Certain gatherings and minor celebrations warranted the slaughter of a chicken and the drinking of its blood. Slightly more important was the slaughter of a pig, and finally, reserved mostly for weddings and funerals, was the slaughter of water buffalo.²¹⁹ Hunting was also a common source of meat for the Li, but game was neither large nor plentiful.

The meat they eat comes from little animals which they catch while they are at work [in their rice fields]. They bring them home in their little waist baskets and usually boil them. As for game (wild boar and deer) and fish, they are very seldom eaten.²²⁰

In another observation:

After the [rice] harvest, the young men amuse themselves by getting up hunting parties, when spears, bows and arrows, and guns (the latter in surprising numbers) are brought out for use.²²¹

It is noteworthy that this latter observer attributed a kind of sport to the hunt, which is consistent with other observations. The Li did not hunt every day, and when they did it was not a task of subsistence. The scarcity of game meant that they could not count on hunting to sustain their livelihood.

²¹⁹ Odaka (1942), 24-27.

²²⁰ Odaka (1942), 26.

²²¹ Wu Lien-teh (1937), 240.

Taxation in kind by the Nationalist government that targeted livestock thus had a deleterious impact on both the rituals and the diet of the Li community. The Nationalist government was badly in need of supplies for the military that kept it in power. Beef was needed to feed the army, and it was taken without regard to the impact that this extraction would have on the community from whence it came. Graft and corruption within the government and the military wasted much of the supplies that would otherwise be used to build an efficient army that could keep a brutal regime in power.²²² These leaks in the bureaucratic system that directed taxes away from their intended destination, from the perspective of the Li, only meant an ever-increasing need for their precious livestock.

Soon, it became clear that livestock and other taxes would not be enough for the Nationalist regime on Hainan. At first, in 1934, Wang Zhenghe received requests to recommend Li youths to travel to Guangzhou to attend university on government scholarships.²²³ He was asked to choose the most deserving of the people in his village and the surrounding area. There is no record of whether Wang was wary of this order. Old Li men in the village would have remembered Qing policies of sending youths to study in the relatively cosmopolitan Hainan centers of Haikou and Wenchang. Some of them went on to achieve official degrees and serve in the imperial government. So it is not surprising that Wang Zhenghe might have considered this a continuation of a policy that provided a channel to official power for the Li youths who were inclined to follow it.

²²² Lloyd E. Eastman. *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

²²³ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 15.

On behalf of the Nationalists, Wang promulgated this policy in the surrounding region, and soon several hundred men and women had been assembled for the purpose of traveling to the commercial center of Guangzhou to study. It quickly became clear, when the students did not return from the nearby port city for the usual holidays, that Wang had sent off these young people to be conscripted into the military. Later it was learned that the youngest males and the females were not sent to study either, but instead they became a part of an exhibition in Guangzhou on the savage races of China's margins.²²⁴ Under the early Republic and the Nanjing regime, the thin upper crust of Chinese society pushed rapidly into an era of urban wealth and cosmopolitan sophistication, and the naked Li, on display in an exhibition hall in Guangzhou, were a comforting reassurance of their great progress.

While the quaintness of the Li appearance and traditions were appealing in contrast to the bustling Chinese urban centers, the preservation of their culture does not seem to have been a priority.²²⁵ On the contrary, though the Li were an amusing museum piece, the development of the island required improved communications and industrialization, which in turn demanded better relations with, or cooperation from, the Li. The Li territory had to be opened up to investment that would exploit the mining capacity and strategic importance of the island. For this, the Li would have to either do

²²⁴ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 15.

²²⁵ Preserving Li culture has become a priority recently, and efforts especially in the realm of education have been made to document and encourage the distinctiveness of the Li of Hainan. See Zhang Hongxia and Zhan Changzhi, "A Library's Efforts en Route to Salvaging a Vanishing Culture," a paper presented at The World Library and Information Congress: 73rd Annual International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) General Conference and Council, (19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa).

business on the terms of the newcomers to the island, or die in their unwillingness to cooperate. Either way, the culture of the Li was indeed nothing more than a relic for anthropologists to study, while it lasted.²²⁶ The “lack of adequate communication facilities,” according to Nationalist China’s most prominent financier, Song Zewen (T.V. Soong), had been responsible for the past failures of all attempts to develop the island, and the primitive infrastructure continued to hamper development efforts.²²⁷

Pushing forward with these development plans meant first crisscrossing the island with roads and communication lines, which would pull the Li out of their primitive existence. This was a continuation of earlier policy ambitions that had been favored by late Qing officials who turned their attention to southern China. Zhang Zhidong, for example, hoped to establish Hainan as a province separate from the authority of Guangdong Province on the mainland. Zhang believed that building roads around and across the island would be among the most important steps in this process, which would penetrate Li territory and elevate the island to deserving provincial status. In his view, the military development of the island also was essential in preparing it to be a

²²⁶ In this period, the anthropological interest that was shown in the Li people was mostly from the foreign community, and not from mainland China. Hans Stübel (Germany), Kunio Odaka (Japan), M. Savina (France), and earlier, Robert Swinhoe (Great Britain) all toured the island as well as other foreigners cited here, and wrote extensively on the Li people. Meanwhile the cultural and political interest of mainlanders seems to have been at a low point in Hainan’s history. Only economic concerns can be found in the mainland perspective in this period, as is reflected in the Peng Chengwan survey, Chen Zhi’s *Hainan dao xin zhi* [New Gazetteer of Hainan], and the Wu Lien-teh English-language article.

²²⁷ Wu Lien-the (1937), 225-226.

province.²²⁸ These plans for Hainan's elevation to provincial status were never realized in the republican period beyond some occasional and ineffectual responses from Beijing (and later Nanjing).

Sinification of the Li was one consistent prerequisite for modernizing the island, as Peng Chengwan had called for in his 1919 survey.²²⁹ During the Nationalist rule of the Nanjing Decade, this cultural assault became much more pronounced. By the middle of the 1930s, pressure from the Nationalist government on the Li to abandon their cultural practices was evident when one American visitor, Leonard Clark, watched the frantic result of his small party being mistaken for Nationalist agents by a small Li village:

Before we reached Noh-Pong village, the people in the rice fields nearby ran in alarm at seeing my column. The village of 37 longhouses was practically deserted as we entered. A gong was being beaten frantically somewhere.

Only an old naked man greeted us. He was too old to run, I guess. We learned that a ceremony had been in progress, and the people, afraid we were soldiers who had come to smash their gods, had fled in alarm.

Soon the old man called them back, and in an hour, their shyness worn off, they continued with the ceremony. A man who had died three years before was being feted. Two gods about a foot high, and sitting on little chairs, were being "fed" rice balls while men played on flutes by exhaling through their nostrils, and the women wailed.²³⁰

A sober analysis of this situation might reveal that no amount of idol-stomping by Nationalist soldiers would hasten the development of Hainan. The corruption and

²²⁸ Csete (1995), 215; Chen Keqin 陈克勤, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Hainan is made a province] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 20-33.

²²⁹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Li situation.

²³⁰ Clark (1938), 404-405.

mismanagement of economic development on the island had led to the slow development of communication and transportation infrastructure.²³¹ But the backwardness of the island's inhabitants was also targeted, in part because tales of naked savages and their sorcery was more entertaining journalism, whether in 1950 China or 1937 America. The lack of market towns and the emphasis on primitive hunting and agriculture were also to blame in this view, but they were obviously related. Economic backwardness and exotic, primitive, culture are connected in this perspective of racial supremacy, and one attribute rarely exists without the other. Most importantly for the Nationalists in the 1930s, this simplistic story also prevented any blame from falling on the rampant and relentless corruption of the central Nationalist government and its agents on Hainan.²³²

In 1932, Chen Hanguang had been tasked with suppression of the Li by the Nationalist governor of Hainan, Chen Jitang, and along with Wang Yi, Han Hanying, and other Nationalist officers and politicians, they implemented policies that led to the massacre and exploitation of thousands of Li, and also of the Miao minority (another ethnic minority group of Hainan's interior who are known in Southeast Asia as the Hmong). In the view of the Li leadership, there was no doubt that Han chauvinism was behind the merciless treatment of the Li and Miao.²³³ Even in a recollection by one man

²³¹ Peng Chengwan, *Diaocha Qiongya* (1920), Introduction.

²³² Wu Lien-teh (1937), 241.

²³³ Wang Guoxing 王国兴, "Gongchandang shi Lizu Miaozu renmin de jiuxing" 共产党是黎族苗族人民的救星 [The Communist Party is the savior of the Li and Miao people], in *Qiongdào xinghuo bianji bu* 琼岛星火编辑部 [Hainan Spark editorial department] eds., *Qiongdào xinghuo: Baisha qiyi zhuan* 琼岛星火:白沙起义专辑 [Hainan Spark:

who served under Chen Hanguang, his nickname was well-deserved—“the king of the Hainan murderers.” Chen Hanguang’s appointment was based on personal connections he had established while studying in Japan. His classmate in his military courses there was the younger brother of the Hainan governor, Chen Jitang. Chen Hanguang was put in charge of a unit of guards that was not answerable to the command of the political or military leadership of the Hainan government. He was given free rein to deal with unrest throughout the island in any way that he saw fit.²³⁴

Before the arrival of the Japanese on Hainan in early 1939, the Nationalists had already begun attempts to force the Li into submission. Chen Hanguang’s forces had been tasked with bringing the Li under control and forcing their cooperation with the Nationalist government. From January through March of 1932, 500 troops under Chen’s command attacked Li fighters ten times, but the confrontations ended without a formal resolution, and Chen withdrew his troops from Li territory.²³⁵

Baisha Uprising special edition] Vol. 12 (Guangdong Province, publication for internal circulation, 1983), 15.

²³⁴ Yuan jizheng 原吉征, “Chen Hanguang jingweilü zai Qiongya de cansha” 陈汉光警卫旅在琼崖的残杀 [Slaughter by Chen Hanguang’s Hainan guards brigade], in Hainansheng zhengxie wenshiziliao weiyuanhui 海南省政协文史资料委员会 [Hainan Province *wenshiziliao*], eds., *Qiongya fengyu* 琼岛风雨 [Hainan wind and rain], Vol. 1, (Haikou, Hainan, 1989), 60.

²³⁵ Li Duqing 李独清, *Lizu renmin guanghui de zhandou licheng* 黎族人民光辉的战斗历程 [The glorious struggle of the Li people], in Qiongya xinghuo bianji bu 琼岛星火编辑部 [Hainan Spark editorial department] eds., *Qiongya xinghuo* 琼岛星火 [Hainan spark] Vol. 2 (Guangdong Province, publication for internal circulation, 1980), 121.

Following the fall of the Qing in 1911, and especially after the appointment of Chen Hanguang in 1932, the violence against the Li seems to have increased.²³⁶ Massacres of Li villages were verified by foreign observers at the time, where the machine guns of Chen Hanguang's unit of guards answered any disturbance that was led by Li warriors armed with spears, bows and arrows, and flintlock rifles. By the end of the 1930s, the Nationalists only had about 6,000 uniformed soldiers, but their superior firepower made Li suppression through massacres and punitive expeditions a relatively easy task before 1943.²³⁷

Before the Japanese occupation of Hainan beginning in early 1939, the Communist forces were allied with the Nationalists on Hainan in an anti-Japanese united front. Even then without the military distraction of a civil war with the Communists, the Nationalist forces could not manage their relations with the Li peacefully. Collective punishment was the draconian policy of the Nationalists, as Leonard Clark casually observed the fate of a "luckless" target of Nationalist judgment in his *National Geographic Magazine* article on the Li.

Throughout this Ha country the headmen insisted that I be supplied with bodyguards while camping near their villages. They feared that a neighboring village might send assassins to murder us so that the village would be held responsible and be made the object of attack from a Chinese punitive expedition.

I saw the charred remains of one luckless village, punished for robbery. Hundreds of empty machine-gun shells still lay about in piles.²³⁸

²³⁶ *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* (2006), 754-772.

²³⁷ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 19.

²³⁸ Clark (1938), 408.

While Clark's account of what happened in this village is unambiguous, most records of this violence are extremely problematic and few contemporary records are extant. For the most part, besides foreign observers, accounts of Li history from this period and earlier are told from the perspective of the Han Chinese who lived on Hainan's coast or came to the island to serve in an official capacity.

Besides a handful of German, French, and English-language publications, there are only the Chinese-language records of these events simply because there is no Li written language. In You Qi's 1950 account of his meeting with the Li leader, Wang Guoxing, he claims that Wang himself could neither read nor write Chinese, and could not understand Mandarin, the northern Chinese dialect.²³⁹ All other accounts of Wang contradict this.²⁴⁰ You Qi's oversight is negligent at best, considering he spent time interviewing and traveling with Wang. It is more likely that You's depiction of Wang is in keeping with a long tradition of mainland exoticization of the Li of Hainan. Also, it serves to undercut the efficacy of the Li leadership in the overthrow of the Nationalists on Hainan. The illiterate Wang is praised for his bravery and forthright manners, but not for his political tact or military cunning. He follows omens and drinks the blood of chickens instead of signing treaties, in You Qi's and other mainland accounts. You's emphasis on these practices reflects an interest in the exotic, the ceremonial, and the primitive, rather than an interest in the real contribution of territory and personnel that the Li alliance with

²³⁹ You Qi (1950), 4.

²⁴⁰ Wang himself authored several articles cited in this study, and during the uprising, he communicated with other leaders through written Chinese correspondence. It is perhaps ironic that he wrote in Chinese to bring together both Li and Miao forces to attempt to overthrow the Chinese Nationalist forces in their territory. (Zhong Yuanxiu [1983], 28.

the Communists would bring. The extensive Li organization and preparation for its uprising against the Nationalists puts the lie to this facile prejudice, and it will be further examined below. Fortunately, oral and written history projects in the People's Republic of China have preserved some accounts of the Li uprisings and daily lives through the 1930s and 1940s, especially those compiled in the post-Mao (post-1976) era.

Through the 1920 and 1930s, as is noted above, Wang Guoxing's father, Wang Zhenghe, served as *zongguan*, or head local official, to the Hongmao region of Li territory. His own village and several surrounding villages, had chosen him to represent them in their relationship with the ruling Nationalists. For this honor, Wang Zhenghe received no salary, but he did shoulder the burden of his people's anger when the young Li that he had recruited for the Nationalist education program never returned. Zhenghe became addicted to opium, though at what point in his tenure as local leader is not clear from Wang Guoxing's biography. We can assume that he had been widely respected at the start of his service as *zongguan*, since he was chosen and put forth as the choice of the region's Li inhabitants.

Following the 1935 conscription, from which none of the recruited Li returned, Wang Zhenghe protested this injustice on behalf of those he represented. He used his voice as *zongguan* to oppose the policy and demand its reversal and recompense. For this insubordination, he was thrown into prison. The fine and bail that was set for his release was 600 *yuan*, a fee that an entire Li village would have difficulty paying, let alone an individual or a family.

By this time, perhaps due to his father's debilitating opium addiction, Wang Guoxing had risen to a position of respect within his own and the surrounding villages.

He did not have any official position of authority, but he usually led hunting parties, helped plan harvests and food storage, and oversaw rituals and celebrations. From his teens, he had worked as a porter for Han merchants who did business in Li territory. He carried loads of salt and kerosene on his back weighing over 100 pounds for distances of over 100 miles, to and from his village and throughout the surrounding area. For this work, he earned 2 *yuan* for three days' work.²⁴¹ While his father had squandered money on opium, Wang Guoxing saved his earnings. In 1920, when Guoxing was twenty-six years old, he had saved up his wages to celebrate the wedding of his younger brother. On the day of the feast, Wang presented his brother with the lavish gifts he had purchased, bringing them out one by one: wine for the occasion, bags of rice, and finally, a pig. Before he could finish presenting the gifts, however, a local official who had gotten wind of the festivities, entered the village with his retinue for an inspection. He left with the wine, the rice, and the pig.²⁴²

Fifteen years later, Wang Guoxing would need to raise 600 *yuan* to post his father's bail. The impossible amount had clearly been set not to raise funds, but to prevent Wang Zhenghe, the aging opium addict, from ever leaving prison. But Wang Guoxing raised the money, borrowing from acquaintances and selling all that he had. After several months he had raised the 600, and he paid the fee. Still, the authorities were

²⁴¹ It is noteworthy that Wang Guoxing, a porter who was the son of an opium addict, was such a prominent figure in his region. He was also an expert marksman and hunter, was physically dominant, and was experienced in the complex agriculture of the Li. These skills gave him great status, as did his knowledge of the neighboring Han, which was gained through his work as a porter for Han merchants.

²⁴² Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 13-15.

reluctant to let Wang Zhenghe go. Finally, after languishing in prison for three years, Wang Zhenghe was released in 1938, gravely ill. A few days later, he was dead. His wife, also aged at the time, died several days after that.

From the high Qing through the early Republican period, Li leadership positions that connected them with mainland officials were hereditary. Passing of leadership duties and privileges from father or mother to son or daughter (for it was not uncommon for women to hold prominent leadership roles) had been a characteristic of Li society for centuries, and it was in the Kangxi reign of the eighteenth century that the Qing state recognized this hereditary practice in its dealings with the Li.²⁴³ During the Republican period, small local elections were encouraged by the Hainan and Guangzhou authorities, as an attempt to break with this old system. This new policy was promulgated as a modernizing break with old practices. Still, when Wang Zhenghe died shortly after his release from prison, the inhabitants of Hongmao and surrounding villages expected his son, Wang Guoxing to take over his father's position of leadership.²⁴⁴

Wang Guoxing's name was put forward for the position, but he was not inclined to take up the position. It seems that his fellow villagers applied some pressure, imploring Wang to take the position and serve as their negotiator with the officials. But

²⁴³ Su Ke (1998), 418-419. Passing hereditary titles among ethnic groups at the margins of the Chinese empire precluded the need to send unwelcome officials from Beijing. These marginal groups were not required to follow the "rule of avoidance" for Chinese officials, which traditionally dictated that an official could not serve in his home district – a measure that was intended to prevent corruption and nepotism.

²⁴⁴ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 17-18.

instead, another Li headman of the same surname took the position that Wang Zhenghe had left vacant. This man was not as popular, and the calls continued for Wang Guoxing to take over his father's post as leader of his village and those in the surrounding area. A few months after his parents' death, Wang disappeared from the village. For an entire year, he stayed away from Hongmao, living in the mountain forests of the region alone. While he was gone, an official election was held in the villages, and Wang Guoxing was officially chosen to represent them. The temporary tenure of the man who had taken Wang Zhenghe's place had been opposed and unwelcome, and Guoxing was their clear choice.

Wang Guoxing had not communicated with the people of his village for a year, but they knew that he was living somewhere in the surrounding forests. The people of Hongmao then began walking into the forests each day, calling his name, imploring him to return to the village and take up his post. "Guoxing!" they called, while combing through the forest in groups. "Please come back and lead us! You are our leader!"²⁴⁵

By that time it was summer of 1941. The Japanese had occupied the Hainanese coast for over two years, and they held strategic and valuable areas of the inland. The Nationalists had retreated to the island's interior, having offered little resistance. In early 1939, the Japanese had landed in both northern and southern ports, taken the northern cities and made their way inland to Ding'an and Nada. In the spring of 1941 there were nearly 11,000 Japanese troops stationed across the island. They had come to the island operating with forces of 700 or 800 and arms that made them unstoppable to the

²⁴⁵ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 17-18.

Nationalists and Communists in pitched battle. Major cities, towns, and ports saw high concentrations of Japanese troops by 1941, like Haikou (1,380 troops), Sanya (2,631), Beili (789), and Nada (741). It is notable, however, that the Japanese stationed very few of their forces in Li territory, except in the iron mining region of Shilu, where 193 troops were based.²⁴⁶

Since the Japanese did not seem interested in Li territory, that became a relatively safe place for over six thousand of the Nationalists' political and military officers and troops. They made the southern highlands their wartime refuge. On the mainland, the Nationalists had withdrawn to Chongqing as their wartime capital, and on Hainan it was Wuzhishan and the Li villages that surrounded it. They brought nothing with them by way of productive capacity, having retreated too quickly and over such difficult terrain that they could not bring anything that would make their stay any easier in the island's interior.

This external pressure that forced mainland and coastal Hainanese Han Chinese to retreat into the island's interior regions was unprecedented. In the Mongol occupation centuries earlier, the Han coastal population had not fled, but rather Han cooperation had allowed the complete conquest of the island, and then a collaborative Li government was established in the interior.²⁴⁷ Now, with the Japanese as the new master of the island's coasts and any interior towns or mines that were of any value, the Nationalists who had

²⁴⁶ Su Zhiliang, Hou Jiafang, Hu Haiying 苏智良, 侯桂芳, 胡海英, *Riben dui Hainan de qinlue jiqi baoxing* 日本对海南的侵略及其暴行 [The Japanese invasion and atrocities on Hainan], Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2005, 32-35.

²⁴⁷ Li Bo (2005), 290.

retreated to Wuzhishan were completely unable to fend for themselves economically. Their weapons were their only significant assets, and these they used to extract their material needs from the Li people. While the Nationalists were far better armed than the Li could hope to be, they were also desperate and they relied on Li cooperation or at least non-confrontation. Nationalist reinforcements were not forthcoming. Their entire numbers could be easily assessed, and Li scouts did just that in their preliminary planning for an anti-Nationalist uprising.

The Nationalists were also beset by hostile Communist guerrillas who had long held a position of some strength in the island's sparsely populated southeast, surrounding Lingshui. More recently, the Communists had moved most of their forces to the northwest, around Lin'gao. The uneasy alliance with the Communists prevented the two groups from cooperating in fighting the Japanese. This might have been the only way of offering any real challenge to the Japanese, but it was not the chosen course of action for either group. By 1941, new clashes at Meihe between the Nationalists and Communists had effectively made them enemies again. The Nationalists were operating in Li territory with the hostile Communists and Japanese in the surrounding regions. They were vulnerable to any other threat, and that is what the Li would become. Surrounded by three hostile forces in overwhelming numbers, the Nationalists still pursued a myopic policy of ongoing suppression and exploitation of the Li.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* (2006), 782. This recent gazetteer claims that between 1940 and the spring of 1943 (that is before the Baisha Uprising and the Nationalist crackdown that followed), the Nationalists were responsible for killing more than 10,000 Li and Miao people in the region. The earlier observed practice of collective punishment and massacre, along with the later observed practice of mass executions, both noted in

Uprising

Wang Guoxing heard his fellow villagers calling his name as they walked through the forest, imploring him to return and lead them. He must have known that in the past year, the Nationalist numbers in the surrounding region had increased, and that any position of leadership had become more difficult for a Li headman. Still, he answered his neighbors, and returned to Hongmao to take up the position that his father had left with his death almost two years earlier. Three days after taking the position, Wang received the order from the Nationalists that demanded that he turn over 120 *yuan* and nine men for conscription. He was also asked to contribute an unspecified amount of beef and pork. The order further stated that this would be Wang's monthly obligation as leader of Hongmao, and that he would be held personally responsible for carrying out the policy every month.²⁴⁹

The tension resulting from Nationalist pressure on the Li had reached a breaking point. The Nationalist forces that had retreated to the island's interior and had taken up residence in Li territory, had become too heavy a burden for the Li to bear. The Japanese occupation had led to execution, massacre, and mass conscription of the Li, but in Wang Guoxing's region, and many of the surrounding regions, it was the Nationalist force that was the target of their anger. The Nationalists, not the Japanese, put the heaviest burden on their population. In fact, some of the Li leaders even entertained the possibility of

this chapter, would account for such a large figure if they were carried on throughout this period, as Li and Communist Chinese sources claim.

²⁴⁹ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 18.

striking some kind of deal with the Japanese that would allow them to fight the Nationalists together.

The Japanese inland activity mainly consisted of constructing a narrow-gauge train that connected several mines to these southern ports, and extracting these products, mainly iron.²⁵⁰ By the time Wang Guoxing returned to his post as leader of the Li people in his hometown and the surrounding villages, the Japanese had been on Hainan for well over two years. While the Japanese mining projects and harbor construction proceeded apace, their political priorities on Hainan had diminished. This is not to say that the violence of the Japanese occupation did not affect the Li people, only that it was significantly less harsh than the Nationalist occupation of their territory. There was a spontaneous anti-Japanese uprising among the Li in April of 1939, just weeks after the Japanese arrival on Hainan. The leader of the thirty-man group of southern Yaxian Li, Tang Tianxiang, was captured and executed, and the uprising was quelled.²⁵¹

Earlier plans had been to turn Hainan into another Taiwan. The Japanese had occupied Taiwan since 1895, and in nearly half a century, had developed the economic infrastructure there in a way that allowed it to be used as a post for developing its occupation of the mainland Chinese coast. The wealth of the Japanese colonies in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria were testament to the prosperity of longterm Japanese investment, but after only a few years on Hainan, the perspective of the island's value beyond its military strategic potential had dwindled in Tokyo. Cement and iron remained

²⁵⁰ Phillips (1980).

²⁵¹ *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* (2006), 774-775.

among the few areas of interest to Japanese developers on Hainan, as did the military development of the island's southern ports. But while the prospect of developing Hainan into another Taiwan had weakened, the Navy Minister loudly opposed abandoning the Japanese position on Hainan.²⁵²

The administration of the island had stayed completely in the hands of the Japanese navy, and the civil administration saw little development. At the local level, corruption and lawlessness was allowed to continue and grow. The lines between collaborators, Nationalist or militarist holdovers, and underground militias were tangled, and sorting them out was not a priority of the Japanese occupying forces. As long as the violence among these groups was directed more at one another than it was at the Japanese, there was little action taken to control it. And this was often the case.

It was in this context that the desperation of the Li community's situation in 1942 grew into an insurrectionary fury directed at the Nationalists, and not at the Japanese. Up until this point in Hainan's history, the Li people had been involved in hundreds, if not thousands, of uprisings against the people who tried to control the island and dictate their policy. Coastal Han Chinese had usually been the representatives of the mainland authorities, and they had felt the effects of the Li violence. Most recently, under the Manchu Qing empire, the Li and the mainland forces had seen long periods of peaceful coexistence on the island, allowing for prosperity and growing trade of luxury goods that were in high demand on mainland China, such as the "sinking incense" (*chenxiang*), that

²⁵² Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: A Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, [1968] 1978), 134.

was harvested from the agarswood tree that was native to Li territory. But this period had come to an end as the Qing declined.

There were several major uprisings of the Li in the final years of the Qing dynasty. The largest of these came in 1897 (year 23 in the Guangxu emperor's reign), and is listed within Chinese nationalist histories as being an alliance between the Han and Li peoples against "imperialism and feudalism." Whether this is a Chinese Communist or patriotic recasting of the events, there was a significant uprising that involved over 4,000 Li fighters.²⁵³ It is not evident that the Li people's uprisings were affiliated with any secret societies or piracy in this time. The Li uprisings do not seem to have been sparked by national motives. That is, while some historians attribute a national political consciousness to the Li uprisings, they were probably never motivated by the greater Chinese national struggle against the Manchus. As mentioned above, there was some affiliation between the Li and Ming loyalists during the uprisings of the early Qing, but this seems to have been an alliance of convenience against the new rulers. Reading the Chinese nation backwards into Li history does not hold up when examining the Li uprisings of centuries past, and even in the uprisings of the mid-twentieth century, it seems still that the Chinese nation, and an alliance with the Han people, was not a Li priority, let alone a motive for them to fight and die.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Li Duqing (1980), 120-121.

²⁵⁴ A later, more scholarly account of the Li uprising of 1897 also notes that it involved over 4,000 Li fighters, but makes no mention of an alliance with the Han. See Cheng Zhaoxing and Xing Yikong 程昭星, 邢诒孔. *Lizu renmin douzheng shi* 黎族人民斗争史 [A history of the struggles of the Li people] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1999), 505.

This is not to say that some Li people did not participate individually in other armed struggles on the island, and ally themselves with various groups. Li identity was not the only community that mattered, and the fluidity between some Li groups and their Han neighbors led them to participate in different movements as individual fighters, and not only as representatives of the Li. Ultimately, the Li-Communist alliance would be the first one that brought the Li into a position of relative power, having bet on the right Han group to take them to military victory.

The Nationalist forces that operated on Hainan were not recruited or conscripted locally, but came to the island as fully formed units. It is not likely that any Li served with these forces except in non-combat roles. The same was true of the Japanese forces, though their smaller numbers forced them to rely on local police forces. The Communist force on Hainan, however, was almost completely constituted of local Hainanese people. As was explained in the previous chapter, attempts to install mainland leadership in the Hainan Communist movement failed repeatedly during the late 1920s and early 1930s. By the late 1930s, from the spies and underground militia, to the regular rank and file, to the highest leadership of the Communist forces on the island, local Hainanese were in control of the movement.

In regions where the Li made up a significant portion of the population, some of them had joined the Communists. The earliest and most important example of this before the 1943 uprising was in Lingshui county, very early in the development of the Hainan Communist movement. Lingshui is on the southern coast of the island, east of the harbors of Sanya and Yulin. During the late Qing, a British observer who was mapping the island's coast had noted that the Li people of this region were more reclusive than

those of other regions, and that when Han or foreigners had come in contact with them, hostilities had been more frequent.²⁵⁵

Half a century later, the leadership of a leftist Nationalist officer in the region allowed the growth of local rural autonomy among peasants in the region, and also local militias that were influenced and sometimes controlled by the Hainan Communists. Peasant associations were sanctioned in 1926, and these included a mixture of Li and Han, who had shared regional and economic interests.²⁵⁶ It is worth noting that this preceded the spring 1927 purge of leftists and Communists within the Nationalist Party. Lingshui later became the destination of the Communists who survived the purge on Hainan, many of whom made their way to the southern refuge from the northern part of the island where the movement had been founded, in Haikou.

Lingshui was the earliest home of the Hainan Communists after the civil war with the Nationalists had begun. The militias and guerrilla Communist forces from this region included both Li and Han fighters, but it is worth noting that this was not a Li movement, organized by Li headmen or in the tradition of Li collective uprisings. It would, however, serve as a foundation for later support between the Hainan Communists and the Li fighters.²⁵⁷

By 1938, communications lines of the Communist command connected Li territory with the rest of the island. A Li commander, Zhou Tangzhen, who was also a

²⁵⁵ Swinhoe (1872), 71.

²⁵⁶ Cheng Zhaoxing and Xing Yikong (1999), 507.

²⁵⁷ In 1943, Wang Yujin remembered that the Lingshui Communist movement had included a mixture of Han and Li fighters (Zhong Yuanxiu [1980], 45).

Communist Party member, helped to establish these lines that allowed the Communists to monitor the Nationalists movements. On the mainland, the Japanese invasion had begun and an uneasy truce had been struck between the Nationalist and Communist leadership. On Hainan, as on the mainland, the two parties continued to operate separately for the most part. Some prisoner exchanges followed the truce that united the parties against the Japanese, but the two parties did not pool their military resources or integrate their armies.

Lingshui, formerly a relatively safe place for the growth of the Hainan Communist movement in cooperation with some of the local Li population, became too dangerous for anything other than underground organization after the Japanese invasion. The Japanese navy led the occupation of the island, and it was the southern harbors that they planned to expand as the main purpose of their occupation of the economically impoverished island. Lingshui was close to Yulin, which was developed under the Japanese occupation as a port for exporting the iron that was mined in the interior, and docking ships in transit between Southeast Asia and southern Chinese ports or Japan.

In the most violent of the Li uprisings prior to the Japanese occupation, the Li were not reacting to a direct occupation of the territory that they had called their own at that time. For centuries they had retreated while newcomers to the island had occupied first the coast and then the northern plains of Hainan. Now, with the Nationalist retreat from the Japanese, the Li were faced with a new kind of total threat that was not avoidable by further retreat into the mountains. The healthiest and most able-bodied of the Li fighters could live in the mountains and survive for a time in a guerrilla existence,

but it would not be possible to exist in their settled village communities until the Nationalists had withdrawn from their territory. The continued existence of the Li people was threatened by the Nationalists' occupation of the island's interior.

Within days of taking up his position as a local leader of the Li, Wang Guoxing recognized the fact of the Nationalist occupation, and he and others began to organize meetings. Arrowheads were circulated, as they had been for centuries, signaling that a council was to be held. There was no hierarchy in this process. There was no obedience to a great leader of the Li people that was demanded by this communication, but all knew that it indicated a communal desperation, and any who failed to answer this summons would have new mortal enemies, this time among their own people.²⁵⁸

Leaders of the Miao people were also invited to this meeting, and the fate of the two peoples was joined in their plans. The meeting was held in secret, high in the mountains. The leaders who were assembled swore mutual loyalty and sealed their oath in drinking the blood of a chicken. The meeting took place in June of 1942, and Wang Guoxing was still officially newly in the service of the Nationalist government.²⁵⁹ The planning that took place for the Li uprising was slow and deliberate, though there is no written record of how it took place. Wang Guoxing sent written communications to leaders from other villages, including those of the Miao people, but these notes are no

²⁵⁸ Csete (1995), 199.

²⁵⁹ Feng Baiju, “五指山尖五朵红霞” “Wuzhishan jianwuduo hongxia” [Wuzhishan red dusk glow], in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi ban'gongshi 中共海南区党委党史办公室 [The history office for the Chinese Communist Party Committee of Hainan district], eds., *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 冯白驹研究史料 [Feng Baiju research materials] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, [article originally written in 1957], 1988), 364-371.

longer extant. Classified histories of the events remain, based on interviews and memories, and compiled in the early post-Mao years, following the loosening of intellectual and political restraints that had characterized the last decade of his life (1966-1976).

These histories were often written in a way that conveys the excitement and adventure of revolution and warfare, and the accuracy of some recollections (including extensive direct quotations when no recorder was present) should be treated with a measure of skepticism. Nonetheless, these are the records that remain, and I believe that the *Hainan Spark* series, on which I will rely for much of my account of the events, is a rich and reliable source.²⁶⁰ The numbers of participants and casualties in the Baisha Uprising, which is the target of this paper's narrative, are shared throughout the sources that I have consulted. The recollections in these volumes are highly personal and localized, and it is not easy to gain a broad perspective on the Baisha Uprising through them. These and other recollections have served as the source material for most Chinese accounts of the events. There is significant disagreement on the number of fighters who took part in the uprising, and it is not easy to know which figure is more accurate.

Taking the smallest of any set of figures, however, still makes the Baisha Uprising one of

²⁶⁰ After working with the *Hainan Spark* series, I have come to trust that they capture not only the spirit, but also, thanks to their rigorous editorship, a responsible retelling of the events. They are characterized by an explicit Hainan-centric perspective, and for this and for their editors, I offer no qualification nor believe one is needed. It should further be noted that the series is completely for internal circulation only, and the fine scholarship and entertaining accounts of Hainan's revolution are unfortunately useful only to the lucky researcher who finds him or herself in the Hainan archives. Since the series is essentially classified, to some extent, I believe this extends the credibility of the accounts contained in it.

the most important events in Hainan's history, and an unprecedented Li movement that would play an important part in deciding the island's modern fate.

Ultimately, it was between 20,000 and 30,000 Li fighters that joined the Baisha Uprising in the late summer of 1943. Kunio Odaka, a Japanese observer of the Li, visited the region bordering Baisha on the eve of the uprising, and estimated that the population of the average village was about 155 men, women, and children.²⁶¹ Accounting for the elderly and children, and the fact that Li women were not traditionally involved in warfare, this means approximately 60 fighters might have joined the uprising from any given village. With these rough figures, it can be assumed that the Baisha Uprising involved at least 350 villages in Li territory, and coordinated their military efforts. Odaka's description of Baisha, observed in 1942, foreshadowed the events that would come in the following year.

[Baisha], which is the gathering center for the Li of this area, is said to have a moat constructed behind its bamboo wall. It is also said that there are dirt walls with holes for rifles. However [the valley] does not have such formidable defense units; some units do not have fences, and some do not even have an entrance to the village... On the whole the villagers were docile and showed no sign of enmity. They get along well with our soldiers too.²⁶²

Beginning simply with the smaller figure of 20,000 Li fighters makes the case for the unprecedented nature of this uprising in Li history, and in Hainan's history. The real significance is naturally in the way that this uprising was brought about, how it was planned and what motivated participation. Wang Yujin, like Wang Guoxing, was a

²⁶¹ Odaka (1942), 14.

²⁶² Odaka (1942), 17.

prominent Li leader, and he was one of Guoxing's earliest collaborators in the planning of a coordinated action against the Nationalist forces that had settled in Li territory. A native of the same Hongmao region, Yujin had been conscripted by the Nationalists as a young man and taken to fight on the mainland. He had later deserted and returned home to Hainan, and to Hongmao. In an early 1942 meeting between Wang Guoxing and Wang Yujin discussed the possibilities of an uprising in their home region of Hongmao, where there were relatively few Nationalist troops at that time. Wang Yujin said:

If we deal with the traitors [*guozei*, meaning the Nationalist forces] in our home of Hongmao of course it would be easy. But the traitors' forces are all mutually connected, and in Baisha County their military strength is several thousand. Our Hongmao forces would not be enough to defeat them all. The forces of all of our townships must also become mutually connected.²⁶³

Wang Yujin's observations do not reflect a perennial characteristic of connectedness throughout the Li community. The localized uprisings of previous periods were often prompted by individual incidents in which an aggressive official or a greedy merchant had caused some offense in a Li village or township, and in this instance, some of the Li local fighters would be summoned to respond to this, often with a guerrilla attack on some government or merchant convoys, or, occasionally, with a direct attack on a neighboring Han village. Wang Yujin and the rest of the Baisha Li community were presented with a new challenge following the Japanese invasion, however, when the Nationalists retreated into their territory with a strength of thousands of soldiers. While morale was perhaps low among the Nationalists, their military superiority was beyond

²⁶³ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980), 21.

question, and any Li attack that hoped to be successful would need a force that was far superior in numbers.

Wang Yujin's experience with the Nationalist military must have revealed that it was not like the loosely cobbled forces of the late Qing or the early republic. Vertical loyalty and a sense of the national mission infused the officer corps of the Nationalist military with an unprecedented nationalism, and Yujin knew that the forces that had arrived in Hongmao and the rest of Li territory would not simply try to hold a town on their own, but would react to any uprising as a single unit, retracting into its area of strength and then counterattacking. It was this perception that led Wang Yujin to the conclusion that the Li would have to unite and similarly act as a single-minded military force.

In this way it was a negative impetus that led the Li people to unite and rise in response to the Nationalist threat to their people and territory. The threat was unprecedented, and the response would bring an unprecedented unity of purpose for the Li people. On the mainland, the Chinese nation, or what some described with that label, had been under threat before the 1937 Japanese invasion. If the Han label was equated with the national one, then it had indeed been twice conquered in the dynastic period, and the foreign and domestic threats of the nineteenth century had thrown its existence into serious doubt. There was no parallel for this in Li history. The Japanese invasion for the Li was not the culmination of over a century of challenges to their very identity, as it was to the Han in the eyes of many on the mainland. It was the Nationalist retreat into Li territory, not the Japanese invasion, that presented a very new and immediate threat to the

Li and their safe existence in Hainan's interior. And this was felt not just by the leaders of the Li, but among the villagers of the Li community throughout the region.

Even while Wang Guoxing and Wang Yujin planned their uprising, scattered preparations for some kind of Li uprising were already underway. Though the leadership of Wang Guoxing, Wang Yujin, and others would bring together 20,000 fighters, the Nationalist presence had already begun to fuel discontent and military preparedness around Wuzhishan. After a meeting of Li leaders in June of 1942, Wang Guoxing personally walked around the Wuzhishan region for two months, and found that in hundreds of other villages, weapons were being consolidated, and preliminary preparations had begun. Volunteers had already voiced their eagerness to join an uprising against the Nationalists, and even by his own account, Wang Guoxing did not personally conceive of and execute the uprising.

By August of 1942, Wang hosted another meeting, this time with fifty representative leaders of the region. Reporting on progress that had taken place since the June meeting, they found that they had 12,000 flintlocks, and thousands of spears and bows. Most importantly, it was reported that 30,000 fighters would join the uprising. As they toasted and sealed their alliance with rice wine and rooster blood, Wang Guoxing proclaimed that there was no way they could lose.²⁶⁴

The actual violence of the Baisha Uprising itself was brief, taking place mainly between July 12 and July 17, 1943. About seven major engagements took place throughout Baisha county, centered around the county seat of Baisha. Initially, following

²⁶⁴ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980), 22-24.

the surprise Li attacks, the Nationalist officers in the county seat abandoned their posts, and the first days of the uprising brought some optimism for the Li. Wang Guoxing was asked to attend an emergency meeting with a Baisha district leader who might offer his help. It was a trap and Wang was captured, leading Wang Yujin to assemble a squad of men to rescue him. Ten Nationalists were killed in the rescue, the first casualties of the uprising in Hongmao. According to Wang Guoxing's biography, of the 100 or so Nationalist forces in the region surrounding Hongmao, all but a handful of deserters were killed.²⁶⁵ The fighting continued throughout the region, but as the initial surprise wore off, the Nationalists were able to regroup. Their superior weaponry had them in control again within a matter of days.

Aftermath

In the aftermath of the initial action of the Baisha Uprising, the killing still continued. The Nationalists sent Li spies into the mountains to infiltrate the remnants of the forces that had taken part in the uprising. Before the groups could reconstitute themselves, the Nationalists had inserted their agents into some of the Li fighting units, and from there, espionage ensued, including assassination of the most prominent leaders using methods such as poisoned wine that was drunk, ironically, in honor of the dead. But the Li fighters that had retreated into the mountains also had their own agents among the Li villages. When they reported to their leaders in the mountains, they told them that the Nationalists had resettled the Li villages in force and in preparedness. Any attempt to

²⁶⁵ Zhong Yuanxiu (1983), 35-37.

return to their homes would be very dangerous. Their one chance at an overwhelming surprise attack had been spent, and it had not eliminated the Nationalist threat. Now there seemed little hope of resuming the conflict without some kind of outside help.²⁶⁶

The Nationalists efforts to mop up the Li threat to their presence in the island's interior were successful in many instances, as one Li leader after another fell. Some fell to assassination or execution, the latter fate being brought upon dozens of fighters or suspected fighters in one day. In one instance, over 150 Li men were executed in one day in a single town. Other Li leaders surrendered to the Nationalists, turning over valuable weapons and some of the fighters that had been under their command.²⁶⁷ In Wang Guoxing's home township of Hongmao, the population before the uprising was nearly 10,000. By the time of the 1947 census, less than four years later, the population had dropped to about 2,000. The elimination or displacement of nearly four fifths of the Hongmao population is attributed to the Nationalist response to the Baisha Uprising. Wang felt the effect and the viciousness of the response in his own family. Nationalist forces took his two daughters. One of them was drowned and the other sold to a man in another village, though she was reunited with her father following the Communist takeover of Hainan in 1950. Nine of his male cousins took part in the uprising, and three were killed.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980), 41.

²⁶⁷ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980), 42.

²⁶⁸ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980), 43.

The prospect of Li extermination now was more real than ever to some of the leaders of the uprising. Under Wang Guoxing and Wang Yujin's leadership, the Li fighters continued to retreat farther and farther into the mountains. Many of the Li people had come to live by agriculture, and not simply by subsistence hunting and gathering. The scarcity of food to be hunted and foraged in the mountain forests made it impossible for the Li fighters to remain together as a fighting force. While some villagers secretly made their way into the mountains to feed the fighters, only the expert hunters and woodsmen were able to survive in the wild forests.

This contradicts the racist misnomer of "wild" that has been attributed to the Li of Hainan. Long hunting trips had given some Li men the skills they needed to survive in the woods without the option of returning to their home villages. This was a kind of sport that the men engaged in during the New Year's festival, and often with the added difficulty of intoxication. But irrigated agriculture made up most of the Li diet, not wild vegetation and game. After less than two months in the mountain forests, Wang Guoxing watched the desperation of hunger take its toll on the fighters who had hoped to follow him to the end. Finally he announced that those who could not subsist in the woods were to return to their villages. If they returned now, they would survive if they could gradually and secretly return to their villages. The risk of discovery and execution by the Nationalists was great, but the alternative was certain starvation in the unwelcoming mountain forests. Reluctantly, most of the Li force returned to their homes, where, they were told, they would receive instructions once the leadership had decided on the next move of the uprising.

By October 1943, another meeting was held that brought together most of the remaining leaders of the movement. None of the fighters who had come this far entertained the possibility of surrender to the Nationalists. According to later accounts of the events, it was Wang Yujin who first put forth the decision to turn to the Hainan Communists at this point. Since the events, and since the Li uprising has been entered into the annals of Communist history, rather exotic versions of the decision to turn to the Communists for help have emerged.

You Qi, the mainland journalist who came to the island in the spring of 1950, did his part to build this magical tale of the Li people being led to the Communists by their own superstitions and omens. Wang Guoxing, in this version, had heard of the Red forces on Hainan, and he and others were entertaining the possibility of turning to them for help against the Nationalist forces. Early one morning, in a moment of introspection and meditation on the matter, a red mist came to him from over the hills, descending on his camp from the north, where the Communists were known to be operating with the greatest strength. At this point, in this retelling, there was no more doubt of what was the best course of action, and Wang sent out messengers to find the leaders of the Communists.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ In fact, the sudden appearance of a bright red mist is not unusual in the mountains of Hainan, and it is striking to observe for the newcomer to the island. This might account for You Qi's eagerness to weave the dramatic natural phenomenon into his account of the events. In his 1937 *National Geographic* article cited above, Leonard Clark was also impressed by the sudden appearance of the "ox-blood red" mist, (Clark [1938], 399-400), and it inspired the name of his short documentary film, also mentioned above, *Beyond the Mountains of the Red Mist in Hainan* (1938) (American Museum of Natural History, 1985).

Actually, in Wang Guoxing's own biographical account, which relies on the recollections and eye-witness accounts of participants in the events rather than the fanciful exoticism of a revolutionary travel journalist, it was Wang Yujin who suggested that the best decision for the embattled Li was to seek out the help of the Communists. Yujin remembered the popularity of the Communists during his time serving in the Nationalist military in the southern mainland. He recounted this to the other Li leaders, and he also told them what he knew of the Han-Li cooperation in the Communist soviet base that had been established in nearby Lingshui. This southeastern base had since been greatly weakened, and the Li fighters would have to seek out the Communists in the northern part of the island. But cooperation between the Communists and the Li was not unprecedented, Yujin urged, and for those with him it would be the best step for them to go to the Communists next.²⁷⁰

The alliance between the Li under the leadership of Wang Guoxing, Wang Yujin, and others, with the Hainan Communists was the most important political result of the Baisha Uprising. The statistics surrounding the events vary with some predictability, depending on the source. There are some localized accounts that are probably more accurate than the figures that are attributed to the entire uprising, but there is not a systematic compilation of local histories that might be cobbled together to provide an accurate set of statistics on the uprising. In terms of the participation of Li fighters, the two figures used most consistently are 20,000 and 30,000. The significantly larger figure of 30,000 is found in the accounts that rely on the recollections and eye-witness accounts

²⁷⁰ Zhong Yuanxiu (1980).

of the Li participants. The figure of 20,000 occurs more often on the whole, and it is found in the secondary accounts of Hainan's revolutionary history. It is notable that in the accounts where the Li struggle is central, the figure of 30,000 is used, and where the Communist revolution is central, the 20,000 figure is more common. Nationalist casualties are similarly divided between these two types of sources, and the figures most commonly used are 300 and 800, used together with the larger and smaller of the Li participation figures respectively. These two sets of figures (20,000 Li fighters and 300 Nationalist casualties, and 30,000 Li fighters and 800 Nationalist casualties) appear together in all instances I have found.²⁷¹

Another important variation in the many accounts of the Baisha Uprising is the treatment of the movement's preparation. In the accounts that do not take the Li as the center of the narrative, there is little or no attention to the early preparations and meetings of the Li and Miao headmen that began over a year before the uprising was launched. This oversight may be explained by a general lack of attention to detail in these accounts of the uprising, but I believe that the discrepancy between these accounts and the Li accounts is more important than simply a lack of detail. There are two conclusions that must be drawn when accurately conveying the context and the extensive planning with more thorough attention than is generally allowed in mainland or Communist accounts. First, the fact that the uprising was planned for more than a year with dozens of village and township headmen involved, completely changes the mainland or Communist

²⁷¹ The following accounts use the smaller figures of 20,000 Li fighters and 300 Nationalist casualties: Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi ban'gongshi, eds., (1986), 171. Zhong Yuanxiu's biography of Wang Guoxing (1980) uses the larger figures for both Li participation and Nationalist casualties.

understanding of the Li as a primitive people who were simply prodded by Nationalist or Japanese injustice and rose in a reflexive response. Second, the planning that was involved in the Li uprising sets it apart from the violent movements of the Li throughout imperial Chinese history and the early republican period. The planning and the massive participation were unprecedented in Li history.

In the Communist version of the Li uprising, it is the Li participation with another group – the Communists, themselves – that sets the movement apart from other Li disturbances. The Li sent messengers to establish contact with the Communist leadership in November and December of 1943, and by early 1944, the two groups had begun working together.

The arrival of the military work unit [in early 1944] was extremely moving for Wang Guoxing and the other leaders of the uprising. Wang Guoxing and Wang Yujin... said, “After hoping day and night, our parental army (*fumu jun*) has finally arrived. The sun has risen over Wuzhishan!” The arrival of this work unit caused the Baisha Li people’s resistance movement to come under the leadership and organization of the Chinese Communist revolutionary movement.²⁷²

It is correct in that the Li had never before collaborated with another force consistently in an attempt to expel a common enemy. The exception of the Ming loyalists in the early Qing dynasty is notable, but it is not well documented, and it does not seem to have been widespread within the Li community.

While the above description is perhaps overly dramatic, the systematic Li-Communist cooperation was the ultimate result of the Baisha Uprising. The initiative for the cooperation came from the Li themselves, and the resulting alliance was quickly

²⁷² *Hainan shengzhi: Minzu zhi* (2006), 787.

welcomed by the Communists. Attempts had already been underway on the part of the Communists to establish good relations with the Li. A July 1940 directive from the mainland Communist Party headquarters instructed the Hainan Communist leadership to pursue an alliance with the Li.

Conduct your work vigorously in establishing alliances with the 300,000 Li people. Respect their customs and rituals. Earn their trust, do not allow them to be used by the enemy, and bring them into our resistance movement. You must recognize that their ancestral home territory surrounding Wuzhishan is the last refuge that we might be able to use as a last resort in our resistance... It is only with access to this region that we can carry out a long-term resistance.²⁷³

The Communist priority of establishing an alliance with the Li reflected their understanding of the importance of the Li dominance in the island's interior. The Japanese did not attempt to settle the Hainan inland region with significant forces, but the Nationalists had been forced to settle there in their retreat from the Japanese occupation of the island's coasts. The Li uprising played perfectly into the hands of the Communists. There are some references to Communist influence in the planning of the uprising, but these come only in secondary sources that provide triumphalist accounts of the Communist struggle, and they are probably not true.

Zhan Lizhi was a Li member of the Communist movement. He served under Wang Guoxing who became the commander of the Li forces in Baisha. Zhan remembered his service with Wang after the initial violence of the Baisha Uprising had subsided, and after the alliance with the Hainan Communists. Zhan's work with Wang

²⁷³ Zhonggong zhongyang shuji chu 中共中央书记处 [Chinese Communist Central secretary], “对琼崖工作指示” “Dui Qiongya gongzuo zhishi” [Directive on Hainan work], July 1940, as quoted in Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi ban'gongshi, eds., (1986), 171.

was to subvert the functioning of the Nationalist government that remained in power in the region. According to Zhan, Wang Guoxing knew of pathways and trails through the mountains around Wuzhishan that it seemed no other person ever knew about. To Zhan, it seemed that Wang could summon trails as if he were drawing them on a map with his own hand as he ran through the forest.

During the Baisha Uprising, many Li men, women, and children had fled to the mountains to escape the violence. Following the uprising, the Nationalists returned to the area and began propaganda work, according to Zhang, which was sometimes successful in building mistrust of the Communists and those among the Li who supported the Communists. Following the gradual work by Zhan, Wang, and others, the Nationalists continued to shrink their occupied territory. Following the Nationalist propaganda campaign, there was some reluctance on the part of the Li who had fled, to return to their villages. Again, Wang is credited with much of the ideological work that was required to reestablish unity among the Li in the region, and encourage some of those who had fled to return to their villages.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Zhan Lizhi 詹力之, “Suqing fandong shili, gonggu minzhu zhengquan: Huiyi yu Wang Guoxing tongzhi gongshi de rizi 肃清反动势力 巩固民主政权: 回忆与王国兴同志公事的日子 [Eliminating the influence of reactionaries, consolidating the power of democracy: A recollection of days working together with Comrade Wang Guoxing], in Zhonggong Guangdongsheng Hainan Lizu Miaozu zizhizhou wei dang shi ban’gongshi 中共广东省海南黎族苗族自治州委党史办公室 [Office of the Chinese Communist Party history committee of the Hainan Li-Miao autonomous region, Guangdong Province], eds., *Baisha qi yi: sishi zhounian jinian wenji* 白沙起义: 四十周年纪念文集 [Baisha Uprising: 40th anniversary commemoration writings] Vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong Provincial publication, for internal circulation, 1983).

For two years, the Li continued to frustrate the Nationalist occupation of their territory, now with the guerrilla training and experience of the Communists. Ties to the Communist movement in the north became stronger, and the alliance of convenience would benefit the Communists most when the Nationalists withdrew from Li territory in August of 1945. The Japanese surrender and withdrawal from the island was followed by the Nationalists' return to the cities and an attempt to reestablish control, as will be explored in the following chapter. For the Communists, access to the refuge of the Li mountains allowed them to subsist out of the Nationalists reach for the next five years as they gradually expanded their bases throughout the rest of the island.

Chapter Four

Holding Aloft Hainan's Red Flag: Disobedience and Self-Defense in the Civil War, 1946

Consolidation and the Civil War

This chapter will explain how a column of Hainan Communist fighters twice disobeyed orders from the mainland central Communist command to abandon their home island in 1946. In Hainanese Communist accounts, Feng Baiju and the Hainanese were proven correct in this decision, and Mao Zedong also retroactively approved of the decision to disobey the order to leave Hainan. It is important to note the asymmetry of perception in these 1946 orders and their response. Through the previous three chapters, the Hainanese Communist movement has turned from a group of cosmopolitan newspapermen to guerrilla fighters in the island's interior. While this quite neatly parallels the development of the mainland movement through the end of the 1930s, by 1946, the Hainanese Communists were an anomaly in the Chinese Communist movement.

The mainland Communists had become a formidable challenge to the Nationalists, and the Japanese withdrawal meant that the two armies were poised for a conventional military civil war. The mainland Communists had passed through the days of guerrilla struggle and clinging to minor gains and partisan victories, and by early 1946, they were marshalling their forces in the north for a conquest in the north-to-south traditional expedition that had successfully established most dynasties of the past. Military and political command was becoming increasingly centralized, and there was an

effort at consolidating the scattered base areas that had characterized an early stage of the Communist movement.

According to an agreement with the Nationalists, the mainland Chinese Communist central command would abandon all of their bases and holdings south of the Yangzi River. Following the Japanese defeat in August 1945, the Communists and Nationalists briefly engaged in peace talks, in the winter and spring of 1945-1946. The southern holdings of the Communists were negligible compared to the northern bases that they had built up during the war with Japan, so this concession to their potential enemies was relatively easy for the Communist leadership. While there were some sticking points in the negotiations between the Communists and the Nationalists, there was no protest from the Communist negotiators over giving up their southern bases, which consisted mainly of the Dongjiang (East River) Column near the southern city of Guangzhou (Canton), and the Hainan Independent Column.

The Dongjiang Column followed their orders, withdrawing to the relative safety of the Communist-held northern bases, and when the civil war broke out in the spring of 1946, they continued to fight for the Communists in their new Shandong home.²⁷⁵ But the Hainan Communists refused the order to leave Hainan and retreat to Shandong, and in the fall of 1946 they refused to obey another directive to retreat to the Southeast Asian mainland and join forces with the Vietnam Communists. This chapter will narrate the Hainan context of these two retreat orders from the end of the Japanese occupation on

²⁷⁵ “Liang-Guang zongdui shi” bianxie lingdao xiaozu “两广纵队史”编写领导小组 [Leading group editors of the “History of the Guangdong and Guangxi Column”], eds., *Liang-Guang zongdui shi* 两广纵队史 [History of the Guangdong and Guangxi Column], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 1-8.

Hainan in the fall of 1945. I will explain the status of the Hainanese Communists and how a direct order could be disobeyed in the name of loyalty to the revolution.

What was the importance of communication between the mainland Communist headquarters and Communist movements like Hainan's that were distant from Yan'an? What were the stakes for the Hainan Communists regarding holding their ground and maintaining their island bases, and how did these stakes differ from those of the mainland Communists in this period? If these differences were so pronounced, beyond nominal loyalty to the mainland Communist headquarters in the early days of the final phase of the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists, what, specifically, was the common cause in the revolutionary goals of the Hainan and mainland Communists, if there was any common cause beyond overthrowing the Nationalist government? What was the nature of the Hainan Communists' relationship with the mainland Communist movement immediately following the Japanese defeat and withdrawal? Did they seek autonomy from the mainland Communist movement, and if so, in what sense?

With the August 1945 defeat of the Japanese military and the end of the Pacific War, the Japanese occupiers of Hainan handed over the command of the island to the Chinese Nationalist regime that was internationally recognized. Since 1941, there had been a Japanese civilian population of over ten thousand, many of whom were technicians who left their work in the mines, factories, fields, and harbors to the Nationalist authorities who would largely allow any developments to go to waste in the

four years of civil war that would follow.²⁷⁶ The Japanese administration of Hainan had been almost completely military, a “Special Military Government” under the Navy.

In January of 1945, Japanese troop strength was increased in an attempt to hold the strategic island as things began to look bleak for the empire. According to a report sent by the Hainan Communist leadership to the mainland Communist headquarters in Yan’an, the “puppet army” of Chinese who served the Japanese numbered over 5,000, and was scattered throughout the island. There were puppet forces in every county of the island, usually garrisoned with the Japanese forces. But the report notes that no prominent Hainanese had joined the puppet army. The leadership was neither famous nor infamous on the island.²⁷⁷ The Japanese themselves, however, were another story, and their military, political, and corporate legacy of institutional rape and murder continues to live on Hainan²⁷⁸

Nearly twelve thousand Japanese marines and over four thousand men in the police force kept the forces of resistance firmly in check. In 1944, the Japanese own

²⁷⁶ R.T. Phillips, “The Japanese Occupation of Hainan,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1 (1980), 107-109.

²⁷⁷ Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai, “Lin Ping guanyu Qiongya qingkuang zhi Zhou Enlai bing Zhongyang junwei dian” 林平关于琼崖情况致周恩来并中央军委电 [Lin Ping’s telegam to Zhou Enlai and the Central Military Commission on the situation on Hainan], May 7, 1945, reprinted in *Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi*, eds. 中共海南区党委党史办公室, eds. [Chinese Communist Party History Office of Hainan District, eds.], in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 冯白驹研究史料 [Historical Research Materials on Feng Baiju] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 478-481.

²⁷⁸ Su Zhiliang, Hou Jiafang, Hu Haiying 苏智良, 侯桂芳, 胡海英, *Riben dui Hainan de qinlue jiqi baoxing* 日本对海南的侵略及其暴行 [The Japanese invasion and atrocities on Hainan] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2005).

estimates of the Chinese resistance were over seven thousand troops loyal to the Chongqing Nationalist government, or the *Bao'an* forces (literally, “Peace-keeping” forces), over four thousand Communist troops, and almost six thousand local irregular forces who did not seem to have any larger cause to identify with except resistance to the Japanese and defense of the island.²⁷⁹ The estimates sent from the Chinese Communist headquarters in Hainan in May of 1945 showed a change.

In one telegram sent to the Communist headquarters in Yan'an (most likely sent from Guangzhou or Hong Kong, since the Hainan Communists had no access to wireless radio until the following year) the Hainan Communists were gaining in strength and cohesion three months before the Japanese defeat. Over five thousand Communist regulars were divided into four units operating in separate areas of the island. Their command had become clearly centralized, with Feng Baiju as the military and political leader of the Communist movement. The telegram claims that the Communist regulars on Hainan were well supported by the villagers of Hainan in terms of their food requirements, but their medical needs were great, and at the time of sending the message, more Hainan Communist soldiers were dying of diseases and complications from wounds than deaths in battle. The Japanese navy surrounded and ruled the island, but the complete lack of Communist sea power was not a problem for the Communist soldiers and guerrillas who mainly restricted their movements to the jungle interior.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Phillips (1980), 96-98.

²⁸⁰ Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai, “Lin Ping guanyu Qiongya qingkuang zhi Zhou Enlai bing Zhongyang junwei dian” 林平关于琼崖情况致周恩来并中央军委电 [Lin Ping's telegram to Zhou Enlai and the Central Military Commission on the situation on Hainan], May 7, 1945, reprinted in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi, eds. 中共

While the regular forces were based mainly in the mountains, the plains of northern Hainan also had Communist allies in underground militias and other irregular forces. According to the May 1945 message to the Communist military headquarters, the Hainan Communist presence was widely felt.²⁸¹ While its regular forces conducted asymmetrical warfare against Nationalist and Japanese forces, their ranks increased during the Japanese occupation, and they grew in popularity. In villages where the Nationalists and the Japanese were rarely seen, it was not a risk to proclaim one's sympathy for the Communists and their leader, Feng Baiju. There was always the risk of being reported to the Nationalist or Japanese authorities in a nearby town, but the long arm of the Communists was growing strong, and Communist supporters walked tall in remote villages during the late days of the Japanese occupation. These were the underground militia members who bided their time, and contented themselves, for the moment, to proclaim their support for their comrades in the mountain forests. Their chance to kill and die for Hainan's red flag would come in 1950.²⁸²

But the Japanese reputation of cruelty and collective punishment extended beyond the regions where they held direct power, and this could counteract the recruiters and

海南区党委党史办公室, eds. [Chinese Communist Party History Office of Hainan District, eds.], in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 478-479.

²⁸¹ Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai, "Lin Ping guanyu Qiongya qingkuang zhi Zhou Enlai bing Zhongyang junwei dian" 林平关于琼崖情况致周恩来并中央军委电 [Lin Ping's telegam to Zhou Enlai and the Central Military Commission on the situation on Hainan], May 7, 1945, reprinted in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi, eds. 中共海南区党委党史办公室, eds. [Chinese Communist Party History Office of Hainan District, eds.], in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 478-479.

²⁸² Interviews, Lin'cheng, March 1, 2008; Xianlai, March 26, 2008.

propaganda workers of the Hainan Communists. Soon after Hainanese learned of the guerrillas' leader, Feng Baiju and his Qionghshan county roots, either through rumors of heroism or "wanted, dead or alive" notices in Japanese and Nationalist papers, Japanese marines paid a visit to his hometown of Changtai, then again, and again. Ten times Japanese and Chinese soldiers in the service of the Japanese authority, raided the village, looking for Feng Baiju or anyone they could find with the surname Feng, terrorizing the village, the county, and the island.²⁸³ A young girl was returning from the forest and she hid and watched as, on the final Japanese visit, a Chinese officer led 100 Chinese and Japanese soldiers into the town. Seven women were publicly gang-raped by the soldiers. All of the villagers that the soldiers could find were then herded into a house, including the girls' parents. The house was doused in gasoline and burned. In remembering this horror sixty-eight years later, she muttered that her family name was not even Feng.²⁸⁴

There was a late attempt, in the early spring of 1945, by the Japanese to bolster its presence on Hainan, but it was soon reversed as the island's aircraft were withdrawn to the Japanese homeland in May of 1945. Desperation in the Japanese military administration also led to increasingly harsh treatment of the prisoners that they held on Hainan. According to one American military observer who arrived on the island in the weeks following the Japanese surrender, the prison camps on the island were "every bit

²⁸³ Su Zhiliang, et. al., (2005), 49.

²⁸⁴ Su Zhiliang, et. al., (2005), 49. The account of the public gang-rape of women and the burning alive of Changtai villagers as written by Su Zhiliang, et al, was confirmed in an interview by the author with the young witness of these events in Changtai village, March 2008.

as cruel as Buchenwald or Dachau.”²⁸⁵ Six years of Japanese occupation on the island escalated to a bloody finale under the authority of the Japanese Navy who worked in concert with zaibatsu like the Mitsui Corporation, to enslave Chinese workers, hold captives in demonstrably unlivable conditions, and massacre military prisoners and civilians in orgies of beheading and bayoneting, “to provide a diversion for the Japanese officers.” Allied servicemen from Australia, Great Britain, Holland, India, and the United States suffered and hundreds died in Japanese captivity, some executed, some perishing in forced labor, some dying of disease or starvation, and some killed by Hainanese bandits when they were out on work parties.²⁸⁶ But the Hainanese suffered the most, with some accounts putting the death toll at fully one third of the adult male population (which would mean nearly half a million dead), and thousands of women. The most recent authoritative Chinese study on the Japanese occupation of Hainan puts the number of violent deaths under the Japanese at over 400,000.²⁸⁷ This figure is about one in five of the Hainanese population, including men and women of all ages, killed under the Japanese occupation. The work of the Japanese historian and documentarian, Sato Shojin, confirms these figures, while emphasizing the human toll through his tireless interviewing among the elderly witnesses and survivors of the Japanese occupation of Hainan.

²⁸⁵ Major General John K. Singlaub, *Hazardous Duty: An American Soldier in the Twentieth Century* (Summit Books: New York, 1991), 94.

²⁸⁶ Singlaub (1991), 94, 91.

²⁸⁷ Su Zhiliang, et. al., (2005), 41.

Beyond the Hainanese and prisoners of war, tens of thousands of Chinese and Korean detainees were brought to Hainan to augment the slave labor force that also consisted of Han and Li Hainanese. Recently, a Japanese historian successfully lobbied the Hainanese provincial government to honor the Korean dead whose mass graves were recently discovered near the southern city of Sanya. The Korean dead had been captured and transported to Hainan to work in the island's southern region building docks and shipyards, and the light-gauge railroad that connected Hainan's iron mines to the southern coast.²⁸⁸

The same American military observer cited above noted that of 100,000 Hong Kong civilian internees who had been brought by the Japanese to work on a Hainan mining project, only 20,000 had survived to see the end of the war with Japan.²⁸⁹ This figure is astounding in itself, and if it can be extended to the rest of Japanese rule of Hainanese slaves and internees, the astronomical figures that are used by most Chinese historians about the death toll of the Japanese occupation of Hainan are probably accurate.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Sato Shojin 佐藤 正人, has done the work of uncovering this and many other burial and massacre sites. The "Korea-town mentioned here was excavated and reported on by Professor Sato in October 1999 reports of his *Hainan Modern Historical Research Association* (海南島近現代史研究).

²⁸⁹ Singlaub (1991), 99.

²⁹⁰ As a standard of Chinese Communist historiography on the subject, see Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi, eds. 中共海南省委党史研究室 [The research office of Hainan province's Chinese Communist Party history], *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* 中国共产党海南历史 [The history the Chinese Communist Party on Hainan] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007).

Like most of the information collected by the Hainan Communist leadership, news of the Japanese surrender of August 15, 1945 came late – on the 23rd of August – and through a Nationalist source.²⁹¹ At the time of the Japanese surrender in August and September of 1945, the Hainan Communist statistics that have since been compiled by Chinese historians stood as follows. The Communists controlled territories inhabited by over one million people – roughly a third of the island’s population at that time. Much of the Communists’ holdings in this period were inland mountainous hideouts that had been secured with the help of the Li people who hosted them there. In the ensuing civil war, these inland bases would be the main operating region of the Hainan Communists, but immediately following the Japanese surrender and withdrawal, the five active detachments of Communist forces occupied were holding or fighting for significant territories throughout the island.²⁹² This was one of the high tides of their regional control of Hainan, which might account in part for the negative reaction to the orders from the northern Communist headquarters to send their best leaders and fighters to the north less than a year later. As was shown in the previous chapter, the Communist alliance with the Li people following the Li Baisha Uprising in 1943 brought a renewed vitality to the Communist movement, including substantial territorial gains.

Following the Japanese defeat, the Hainan Communist leadership expected to build on these gains, not to forfeit them to the Nationalists, who were also reduced to

²⁹¹ Feng Baiju 冯白驹, “Guanyu wo canjia geming guocheng de lishi qingkuang” 关于我参加革命过程的历史情况 [Regarding the historical situation of my participation in the revolutionary process], June 25, 1968, reprinted in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 447.

²⁹² Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi, eds., (1986), maps in frontmatter.

guerrilla tactics in the island's interior. The Nationalists, while enjoying far broader international recognition, most importantly including the support of the Americans and support of a kind from the Soviets, did not have a promising future on Hainan unless the hostile Communist and Li threats could be neutralized. The Nationalist leadership on Hainan, as under Chen Jitang, had established a precedent for relatively autonomous governance from the mainland over the "fiefdom" of Hainan, so that even with nominal control over the island, the Nationalist regime could not necessarily dictate policy on the island as well as in the mainland provinces or Taiwan after the Japanese withdrawal. Following the Japanese defeat, regional peace talks were attempted between the Nationalists and a delegate of the Communist leadership of Hainan in the northern capital of Haikou. While the Nationalists were recognized internationally as the legitimate government on the island, they were not in control of large regions that were under Communist and militia control, and the Communists entered these negotiations with a strong hand to bargain for power. Military victories through the 1940s had reinforced these claims, especially following the 1943 Baisha Uprising. After 1943, Communist strength grew steadily in Li territory through the Li-Communist alliance. The undeclared civil war continued between the Nationalists and Communists, and by early 1946, the Communists were able to claim a series of counterattack victories as the Nationalists violated the armistice that followed the Japanese withdrawal.²⁹³

²⁹³ "Women zai junshi shang shi zenyang fensui diren de qingjiao," 我们在军事上是怎样粉碎敌人的清剿 [How we militarily crushed the enemy's attempt to wipe us out], undated report from the Hainan Communist leadership to the mainland Communist leadership, probably late 1946 or early 1947.

The Communist claim to occupying territories that accounted for nearly a third of the island's inhabitants is explained by their hold on the populous northeastern region of the island. The territory the Communists held did not include the important cities of northeastern Wenchang or northern Haikou, but many of the northern towns that were slightly inland of these cities were under the Communists control at the time of the Japanese retreat. These cities were turned over to the Nationalist government as the Japanese evacuated.

Figures on the forces of the Hainan Communists have generally been accepted by Chinese historians from a report that the Hainan Communist leadership sent to the mainland Communist headquarters, dated October 26, 1945. This message was carried by messenger to the mainland Party headquarters, since it was sent before the reestablishment of two-way radio contact. Lin Ping wrote to Zhou Enlai that there were about 5,000 Communist Party members on Hainan, a military force of over 7,700 regulars in five detachments across the island and about 9,000 militia fighters throughout the counties.²⁹⁴ This last figure seems to be used with some flexibility, probably for the purpose of expressing an enhanced viability of the Hainan Communist forces to the mainland Communist leadership. And yet, Japanese sources credited the Communist presence on Hainan with having provided them far more trouble than the Nationalists, and while they estimated a lower number of Communists in total, the Japanese occupiers

²⁹⁴ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi, eds. 中共海南省委党史研究室 [The research office of Hainan province's Chinese Communist Party history], *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* 中国共产党海南历史 [The history of Hainan's Chinese Communist Party] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007), 411.

also acknowledged an active but politically unaffiliated resistance on Hainan.²⁹⁵ It seems likely that Lin and the Hainan Communist leadership would claim these irregulars as their own, and probably it was a claim with some traction.

Two militia groups from different towns gave me some impression of their daily lives and interaction with the Hainan Communist authority. One militia member explained that he and his fellow supporters of the Communist movement were not constantly making trouble for the new Nationalist regime in their hometown of Lincheng. Lincheng was a significant northwestern town, near enough to the coast for the Nationalists regime to occupy it solidly following the Japanese evacuation. As they were instructed, the Communist militia there operated underground, and did not engage in frequent and dangerous propaganda activity. The Communist militia members exchanged messages with various Communist agents throughout the island, and they would occasionally hold secret meetings. In the months following the Japanese retreat, a unit of Nationalist soldiers arrived in Lincheng with mainland officers, making the work of the underground militia much more dangerous. But they went about their daily lives as best they could. Late in the afternoon they would stop working in the rice fields or tending to the mango, banana, and rubber trees, and gather to play volleyball late into the evening. Often the underground militia members would be on teams mixed with the handful of Nationalist soldiers and officers who were garrisoned in Lin'cheng.

The militia men I interviewed in another more remote village, Xianlai in Feng Baiju's native Qionghong county, told me that the fear of retribution from the growing

²⁹⁵ Phillips (1980), 98.

Communist forces on the island prevented the militia men from being sold out to the Nationalist authorities. In Xianlai, the militia veterans I spoke with explained that while the Nationalists claimed to administer their little town, they almost never saw any representative of the Nationalist military or civilian government. The Japanese had come through the town violently, burning houses and murdering civilians, but they had not stayed to govern, much like their sporadic and terrifying presence in Feng Baiju's hometown of Changtai.

Xianlai is not far from the capital, Haikou, but it was much smaller than Lin'cheng, then a bustling town, where the Nationalist presence was more obvious. But according to several of the militia men who lived in Xianlai, the news of the Japanese did not bring hopes for a unified government with the Nationalists. Living a few villages away from the charred remains of Feng Baiju's hometown, the villages of Xianlai remembered that before the Japanese had burned the village and gang-raped its women, the Nationalists had executed many of the villagers for suspected affiliation with Feng and the Communists. While on the mainland, the titans of the political realm were discussing a unity government, and combining all Chinese forces into a single army, in Xianlai, the Communist militia men knew that there would be no peace with the Nationalist rulers of Hainan. This memory was clear for the men I spoke with in Xianlai, even though they did not hold a hatred for the Nationalist Party's current island home to their northwest. The Japanese withdrawal brought no hopes for peace, as many historians write of the population of mainland China. But for the militia men of Xianlai and

Lincheng, there was no respite while the Nationalists were still the masters of Hainan island.²⁹⁶

Uneasy Transition

Historians have noted the “dilemmas of victory” that faced the Chinese Communist regime in October of 1949, more than four years after the Japanese had been defeated and withdrawn from China. The burden of power weighed heavily on the new regime, struggling to rebuild in the face of external threats from the United States and its allies on the Korean border, and often less than cooperative Soviet allies to the north. The way forward was not clear, and Stalin, as he had done with disastrous results almost two decades earlier, advised that his Communist colleagues in China side with the Nationalists. Stalin was worried that the Soviets would be blamed for fomenting a civil war if he expressed enthusiastic support for the Chinese Communists, so instead he advised the continuation of the old and tattered United Front, and hastened to remove his own troops from China (laden with the spoils of Japanese industrialization – factory equipment that they brought back to Russia).²⁹⁷

But four years earlier, these dilemmas of victory seemed very far off to the Chinese Communist movement, and the dilemmas of a different victory presented

²⁹⁶ Interview, Lin’cheng, March 1, 2008; Xianlai, March 26, 2008.

²⁹⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 31. The phrase “dilemmas of victory” is taken from a recent volume of essays on the early years of the People’s Republic of China: Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

different challenges. The Japanese defeat and withdrawal led to an awkward period in which the Nationalists and the Communists wobbled on the brink of total war. For most of two decades since 1927, the two parties had been in open military conflict with each other, with military engagements even during the Japanese occupation.

The Communists emerged from the war with Japan in 1945 having become a military force that the Nationalists would have to take seriously. In Hainan, the guerrilla struggle had hardened the resolve of a core of partisan fighters who were loyal to their commander, Feng Baiju, and who called themselves the Hainan Independent Column of the Chinese Communist military. While they had operated for nearly five years without radio contact with the central Communist leadership in northwestern Yan'an, they had survived with the red flag held high. Theirs was, and would remain, an unbroken history of resistance to both the Japanese and the Nationalist governments of Hainan. In 1950, the slogan heard around the island was, "For twenty-three years, the red flag never fell." But in 1945, the Communists of Hainan were not yet the masters of the island. Like the mainland Communist central command, the Hainan Communists had retreated to a relatively inaccessible region, in the mountainous forests and jungles of Hainan island. While the inaccessible mountains of Hainan allowed the Hainan Independent Column to survive the war years with Japan, it also prevented regular contact with their mainland counterparts that might have been possible through closer interaction with the Nationalists. The Nationalists and the Japanese cut off the Hainan Communists from both material and political aid from their mainlander allies.

In the wake of the Japanese defeat and withdrawal, on the national scale, even during the halting negotiations between the Nationalists and the Communists, the

Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) “seemed, at this time, to be absolutely sure of victory through force.” There were some sticking points in the peace talks, however, and it was not certain that the Communists were ready or willing to make the concessions demanded of them by the Nationalists, and the Communist leadership seemed divided. But in spite of the division in the Communist high command, “they were beginning to realize that, apart from his ‘American’ divisions, Chiang’s armies were really quite weak.”²⁹⁸ Through the fall and winter of 1945-46, the pantomime of peace brought hope to American observers and negotiators, including General George C. Marshall, who hoped to overcome the crucial step of joining all Chinese military bodies into a single national force.²⁹⁹ President Harry Truman declared the American position that would be Marshall’s marching orders as negotiator: “autonomous armies should be eliminated as such and all armed forces in China integrated effectively in the Chinese National Army.”³⁰⁰ American policy was officially to withhold assistance that would be used by the Nationalist government against the Communists in a civil war, but that did not preclude logistical aid and extensive cooperation. Non-combat military and intelligence missions were carried out in cooperation between the Nationalists and the Americans.

²⁹⁸ Lionel Max Chassin (Timothy Osato and Louis Gelas, trs.), *The Communist Conquest of China: A History of the Civil War, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) 83.

²⁹⁹ F.F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 238.

³⁰⁰ “Statement by President Truman on U.S. Policy towards China, Dec. 15, 1945,” *Department of State Bulletin*, December 16, 1945.

A small American unit of officers parachuted onto Hainan just a few days after the Japanese surrender. Their mission was an “OSS [Office of Strategic Services] Mercy Mission POW rescue.”³⁰¹ The various Chinese missions of this sort were code-named: Magpie to Beijing, Sparrow to Shanghai, Flamingo to Harbin, and so on. Hainan’s was Mission Pigeon. There were other missions throughout the region with similar tasks: Raven to Vientiane, Laos; Eagle to Korea; and Quail to Hanoi.³⁰² Even in the weeks after the Japanese surrender, these missions began to show the fissures that would lead to the monolithic blocks of Cold War alliances. Historian, Maochun Yu wrote about Mission Quail, in Vietnam, Hainan’s neighboring country to the east, asserting that these OSS missions explicitly eschewed political ideology in their inception and objective. After working with archival sources on these missions, Yu believes that it is obvious that the OSS missions were not launched as a propaganda coup, though making political pawns of POWs was not unheard of. Still, Yu notes, Mission Quail ran into political trouble when picking up French POWs from a Japanese camp. These French servicemen “were not necessarily friendly toward the Vietnamese Communists” prior to their internment by the Japanese, and Ho Chi Minh’s followers did not welcome the American OSS working to evacuate them without a reckoning, which caused an international fracas among Japan’s erstwhile enemies.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Singlaub (1991), 83.

³⁰² Yu Maochun, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997), 232.

³⁰³ Yu, Maochun (1997), 232. Ho’s relationship with the OSS was a complex and perhaps paradoxical one that involved cooperation and confrontation, but in this instance

The ongoing hostilities between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists amidst the Japanese occupation would cause some trouble on Hainan's OSS mission as well. The officer in charge of carrying out Hainan's Mission Pigeon, Captain John Singlaub, wrote, "Our orders were to make contact with Allied POWs in our respective areas, take the prisoners under our protection, and render all possible medical and humanitarian assistance to them."³⁰⁴ Captain Singlaub (operating with the temporary rank of major), was concerned with non-Chinese "Allied" POWs, such as the Dutch, Indian (Sikhs from the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery), and Australians, as well as American airmen who had been shot down and were being held in Japanese camps on the island. Singlaub's observations and recollections from this mission provide a unique picture of a newcomer to the island in the late summer of 1945 on Hainan. (In 1981, after duty in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, Singlaub went on to become a founder of the American chapter of the World Anti-Communist League and the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. He was also an early member of the Central Intelligence Agency, and during the Reagan administration worked on for the "Contras" against the Nicaraguan government. One should keep Singlaub's career in mind when reading his account of the situation between the Hainan Communists and Nationalists.) He was the first American whose presence on Hainan is recorded in this period. The American Presbyterian

of evacuating French personnel from Vietnam, a mutual enmity between the US and the Vietnamese Communists was evident.

³⁰⁴ Singlaub (1991), 83.

missionaries who had made Hainan their home for decades were gone now, and had been for nearly four years.³⁰⁵

On August 27, 1945, the C-47 of Mission Pigeon left Kunming for Hainan to drop the squad of fewer than ten men, consisting of several Americans, including a medic, “a damn good weapons man” with a Thompson machine gun, and an intelligence officer; a Chinese Nationalist Lieutenant, and a young Japanese-American lieutenant as interpreter. Including a Nationalist officer and no Communist representative in this period was hardly unusual, and it reflected the ongoing and unbroken cooperation between Washington and the Nationalists.

Besides, Singlaub had his hands full leading a drop of inexperienced men into Japanese Hainan. Some of the men had never jumped from a plane before, and they were still nursing bloody chins and concussions, and tending to broken supply crates when two Japanese army trucks approached them across the open field. Captain Singlaub quickly took charge of the situation, issuing orders to the small group of Japanese soldiers to defend his supplies and his men from a group of Chinese villagers who were watching the curious scene unfold. The uneasy relationship between Singlaub and the Japanese officers and prison guards, and the tricky negotiations with them that he undertook, are the focus of his recollection. But in the captain’s observations as he drove across the

³⁰⁵ Though the beginning of the Japanese occupation in February of 1939 did not prompt the withdrawal of the American Presbyterians, the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 led to the missionaries’ departure first to Hong Kong and then back to America. From 1939 through the end of 1941, the Japanese occupiers appear to have maintained rather close ties to the American Presbyterians on Hainan. The new eastern masters of the island simply became the power that the Americans attempted to work through to spread their faith through schools and hospitals (Lodwick, *Educating the Women of Hainan*, 1995).

island to the prison camps, he conveys a sense of the atmosphere of Hainan in the weeks after the Japanese surrender. He and his squad rode across the island in Japanese trucks.

Japanese soldiers protected Singlaub's men and their supplies from the onlooking Chinese villagers who, even according to Singlaub's own account, seemed to pose no threat whatever. Naturally, as a result of this arrangement, the Japanese soldiers were not ordered disarmed, for they were now in that vague and uncertain limbo between war and peace, and at the service of a handful of Americans who had forced their empire's surrender on Hainan. The surrendered Japanese enemies of the Americans were thus dragooned and, in effect, trusted with armed military duties before any of the local Hainanese population was entrusted with such work. This striking detail is telling in how we should understand the isolation of the Hainanese conflict until this point, in which US intelligence officers operating in that theater would sooner trust their Japanese enemy with armed guard duty rather than risk the uncertainty of local forces. Doubtless this command decision went far to alienate the Hainanese from the hasty Americans and their new Japanese allies.

This little group reflected the political priorities of both the Americans and the Nationalist government at this time: the Japanese-American officer would interpret and ensure a smooth transition of power, the American military muscle and intelligence man reflected the importance Washington invested in China, and the Nationalist officer clearly reflected and anticipated the alliance that would attempt to isolate the Chinese Communists in this early post-war period. Before the Communists were able to capitalize on the gains that they had made under the Japanese occupation, it was essential to the Americans, the Chinese Nationalists, and also the Japanese, that the reins of power

were passed off seamlessly to anyone but the Reds. It seemed that the entire postwar world was conspiring against the Chinese Communists, for in the north even the Soviets were not as cooperative as Mao and the Communist leadership had hoped.³⁰⁶

In the example of Mission Pigeon, one ranking officer saw not only the Communists, but all Chinese, as less than worthy colleagues in the transition of power that followed the Japanese surrender. Captain Singlaub recalled with bilious relish, that this particular senior officer had carelessly crossed the line of protocol in warming up to the Japanese hosts on Hainan.

... Colonel Andrus had ordered all American officers to attend a formal dinner given by the senior Japanese staff... and affair that clearly transcended the bounds of “fraternization” as outlined in our orders. During the banquet, Andrus – who had never heard a shot fired in anger – toasted the enemy and announced that the Japanese had proved to be “a worthy foe,” and that the Americans were “deeply grateful for the cooperation” we’d received on Hainan, which was better, he added, than that he’d received from the Chinese, who were supposed to be our allies.³⁰⁷

When Singlaub confronted Andrus about the misguided affection he was showing to the perpetrators of such atrocities, the colonel retaliated by instructing the Japanese “to no longer obey orders from [Singlaub] or [his] officers.”³⁰⁸ While this petty behavior actually threatened the execution out of a mission that was meant to save the lives of men, many of whom were desperately in the need of immediate medical attention, for our

³⁰⁶ Lionel Max Chassin (Timothy Osato and Louis Gelas, trs.), *The Communist Conquest of China: A History of the Civil War, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

³⁰⁷ Singlaub (1991), 99.

³⁰⁸ Singlaub (1991), 99-100.

sake it shows the way in which Mission Pigeon reflected the larger political rifts that would develop into the Cold War. As one ascended the chain of command, political ideology tinted the decisions of military missions, and Colonel Andrus's cozy relationship with the Japanese officers of Hainan anticipated the relationship between the US and Japan that was born in this takeover.

Even on Hainan, so distant from the political centers of China, Japan, or the US, little Mission Pigeon revealed the priorities of the political powers at work in China after the Japanese defeat. And while the Chinese Communists throughout China were feeling isolated by the chilly treatment and sometimes open hostility from their neighbors and newly arrived peacekeepers from the north and across the ocean, the isolation of the Hainan Communists was even more extreme. Peace talks were planned between the Communist and Nationalist leaderships, and there was talk of a joint government. But there was no question, even at this early stage in post-Japan China, that the southern Communists were surrounded by powerful and unfriendly forces. The priorities of the Chinese Communist Party at the time of the Japanese defeat were clearly in the north. The aim of CCP policy was to "extend the CCP strongholds in Manchuria, defend the party's position in North China, and withdraw from indefensible areas in Central and South China."³⁰⁹

Captain Singlaub, though accompanied by a Nationalist officer, was not tasked with any reconciliation between the Hainan Nationalists and Communists. With the Japanese marines still firmly in control of their prison camps and military bases in the

³⁰⁹ Westad (2003), 46.

weeks following the empire's surrender, there would be no need to work on preventing the outbreak of the Chinese civil war on Hainan. After all, with both the Hainan Communists and Nationalists operating with guerrilla tactics across the island, it would not be easy to tell the difference between the two camps from Singlaub's perspective, let alone bring the two sides to the negotiating table.

Singlaub was willing to work with both the Nationalists and the Communists on Hainan. As it turned out, he would have to.

Over the next few days we got definite word of several Allied evaders in the mountains. With [Nationalist Lieutenant] Peter Fong's help, I drew up some handbills in English and Chinese, requesting contact with Allied personnel still in hiding. We tied these handbills to bottles of Atabrine [an antimalarial drug], and each bottle was attached to a twelve-inch pilot parachute. Then we took a C-47 ride around the island, dropping the messages into the village markets in the highlands, where we knew the guerrillas were located.³¹⁰

In the final days of his mission on Hainan, he received word that a large group of Allied prisoners – Indian, Dutch, Australian, and American – were being held in a Nationalist guerrilla camp. Taking his colonel's jeep, Singlaub bounced up the mountain road to the camp, amazing the Nationalists that he had made it through Communist territory without incident. Singlaub and his men spent the night in the Nationalist guerrilla camp, celebrating with liquor and song their victory over Japan. After bringing back the prisoners on the following day, Singlaub also received a note from an American pilot who was “holed up with the Communist guerrillas.” Surprisingly, Nationalist

³¹⁰ Singlaub (1991), 99.

Lieutenant Fong was delegated to escort the American out of Communist territory, and he did so without incident.³¹¹

Japan's occupation of Hainan left the people of the island reeling as a result of the atrocities noted above, and the unsustainable economic steps taken by the military regime. As in the case of the Japanese occupation of South Korea and Taiwan, passionate debate rages over the economic benefits and the human cost of the Japanese occupation and colonization. For some who remember the Japanese occupation, or for those whose relatives or compatriots suffered and died at the hands of the Japanese, any discussion of development for which the Japanese were responsible is tantamount to traitorous behavior.

While Japanese atrocities on Hainan island deservedly play a central role in any analysis of the occupation period, it is still worthwhile to examine some of the economic plans and efforts on the island in that period. Notably, while the Japanese purportedly planned for long-term occupation of Hainan, and eventually for the establishment of a full colonial governmental infrastructure, they never progressed past a military administration. And rather than progressing toward a civilian colonial government, the reality of the Pacific War sapping the resources and administrative attention of the Japanese empire made the trend on Hainan toward a harsher and more draconian rule, rather than in the opposite direction, as was noted during Captain Singlaub's OSS mission to Hainan following the Japanese defeat. Singlaub, a young but experienced

³¹¹ Singlaub (1991), 100.

officer at the time, with the first-hand military experience of the worst atrocities in both the European and Asian theaters of World War II, wrote that life for the Hainanese people under the Japanese occupation was “absolute hell.”³¹²

From February 1939 until August of 1945, the Japanese military mining and transportation developments had proceeded apace, but in a way that would not benefit the long-term growth of the local Hainanese economy. The two main developments – the southern naval ports and the inland iron mines – would not help Hainan’s postwar recovery, even if it had not been for the chaotic civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. The iron mines and the light rail that connected them to the southern ports were useless, for they had been largely mined out and their bounty sent to Japan for use in the development of the Japanese military and economy.³¹³

Japanese soft power on Hainan was not a priority, though Japanese language education took hold on the island’s schools, and even continued after the defeat and evacuation of the Japanese forces. From 1943 to 1947 the number of schools teaching Japanese increased from 300 to 500, and the number of students studying the language increased from 20,000 to 36,000.³¹⁴ While the initial implementation of the Japanese language education policy was mandatory, it is perhaps significant that Hainanese continued to teach and learn the language even after the departure of the Japanese military administration. As in Hainan’s special relationship with Southeast Asia that is

³¹² Singlaub (1991), 98-99.

³¹³ Phillips (1980).

³¹⁴ Su Zhiliang, et. al., (2005), 145.

not shared by all of mainland China, this trend in Japanese language education perhaps reflects an alternative national identity on the island, which has not been defined over the course of the twentieth century as being anti-imperial and specifically anti-Japanese – a sentiment which largely and increasingly defines the current Chinese national identity.

As for the southern ports, no significant ship-building industry was developed in Hainan by the Japanese, and the harbor of Yulin was only useful for ships in transit, coming from Singapore to Hong Kong or Japan, or connecting to the Southeast Asian mainland. “Hainan had been a backwater in China, and Japan almost succeeded in drawing it fully into the economy of East Asia, where its geographical situation and rich resources should have earned it an important role.” Ultimately, as a result of Japanese military priorities in the Pacific Ocean and broken communications that endangered shipping to and from the island, “Hainan could no longer serve its new master with the resources it had to offer and thus became another isolated part of a defeated empire.”³¹⁵

This role of being a neglected outpost of great potential at the margins of a crumbling regime was Hainan’s pigeonhole. As long as Hainan has been ruled from without, viewed from without, and used from without, it has always been labeled a backwater. And as the Japanese retreated, even the political calculus at the dawn of the Cold War did not prompt any representatives of the powers except for Singlaub’s Mission Pigeon to visit Hainan. There were no Soviet advisers in Hainan to help with the takeover of the Japanese industry, as was the case in the Japanese colony of Manchukuo in northeastern China, or in North Korea.

³¹⁵ Phillips (1980): 109.

Trying to Reconnect the Hainan Communists to the Mainland

The Communists and Nationalists on Hainan had been fighting since the Meihe Incident of December 1940, but with the Japanese surrender, there was nothing that would keep them from focusing all of their efforts on each other in an attempt to secure the strategic island for their respective camps. At the time of the Japanese surrender, both the Communists and the Nationalists had been forced to revert to guerrilla warfare. From most accounts, the stiffer resistance came from the Hainan Communists.³¹⁶

The Nationalist regime on the mainland had retreated from coastal Nanjing to their wartime capital of Chongqing, and in doing so, had demonstrated their preference for conventional warfare. The Communists, on the other hand, had early learned the benefits of guerrilla struggle, or “people’s war,” in which each soldier was motivated not only by discipline and fear of punishment, but by an understanding of the political aspect of the conflict, at least at the local level. The Nationalist military discipline was born in the elite classes of the Huangpu (Whampoa) Military Academy. While many of the high-ranking Communists of the Party’s early development had also come through Huangpu, during the formative military experiences of the Jinggangshan base struggle, to the Long March, and then to the Yan’an period, and emphasis was not on top-down military discipline, but on educating the soldiers as to why they were fighting and for whom.

³¹⁶ Phillips (1980). Phillips notes that this was the Japanese view that the Communists were more active in their resistance fighting, and this view is not surprisingly shared by the contemporary and historical Chinese Communist views.

Just as on the mainland, the negotiations between the Hainan Communists and Nationalists following the Japanese surrender and withdrawal had years of hostility and violence to overcome, and it was simply not possible amid the ruins of postwar China. The Hainan Communists had strengthened their hand during the Japanese occupation, and they knew that they were in a position to last a far longer. This was the sentiment that was powerfully expressed by the Hainanese Communist leadership in the weeks and months following the Japanese defeat. Certainly the Japanese were a more efficient and deadly fighting force than the Chinese Nationalists, and the Communists had survived, in spite, or, more likely, because of, the Japanese occupation of the island. With 7,000 local cadres, 5,000 Communist Party members, 7,700 regular troops in the Hainan Communist military, and over 9,000 militia fighters, the Hainan Communist movement was stronger than ever, and growing fast by the fall of 1946.³¹⁷

And so the momentum of the conflict on Hainan between the Communists and the Nationalists was certainly with Feng Baiju and the Hainan Independent Column, even though the Nationalists' American sponsors had an interest in seeing the end of Chinese Communism. The Nationalists' military capability on Hainan reflected the larger reality of the Chinese mainland at the end of the war with Japan: "During the latter half of the eight-year war with the Japan, the Nationalist army was in an advanced state of

³¹⁷ Lin Ping 林平 "Guanyu Qiongya gongzuo fangzhen gei Zhongyang de baogao" 关于琼崖工作方针给中央的报告 [Report to Party Central on the direction of work done on Hainan], October 26, 1945. As cited in Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds., 中国共产党海南历史 *Zhongguo gongchandang Hainan lishi* [Hainan's history of the Chinese Communist Party] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2007), 411.

disintegration... This exhaustion and decrepitude were to be of supreme significance, for the army was soon called upon to fight a civil war with the Communists.”³¹⁸

On Hainan, there were peace talks held between the Communist and Nationalist forces in December of 1945 and again in January of 1946. Their expressed intention was to implement the fragile peace between the Nationalists and the Communists on mainland China, namely to end any preparations for civil war and to implement a policy of a single national military. The “Haikou Negotiations” were attempted twice, but they did not get far. While they were underway, the Nationalist 46th Army was landing on Hainan’s shores and securing important cities and towns as the Japanese withdrew. The talks fell apart with little accomplished except an increased knowledge of the opponents leadership.³¹⁹

One colorful anecdote emerged from the talks, and was remembered by the Hainan Communist delegate to the peace talks, Shi Dan. Shi was approached by the Nationalist officer, Han Liancheng during the talks. Han informed Shi that he was in command of the 46th Army, and that he had made a secret agreement with Zhou Enlai to serve as a Communist agent. To hear that such a high-ranking officer could act as a Communist agent was too much to believe, and the Communist delegation did not trust Han’s appeal to be genuine, but feared it was a trap.³²⁰ Since there was no radio contact

³¹⁸ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 156-157.

³¹⁹ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds. (2007), 418-421.

³²⁰ Shi Dan 史丹, “Haikou tanpan” 海口谈判 [Haikou negotiations], in *Qiongdào xinghuo* 琼岛星火 [Hainan spark] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1987), 454.

between the Hainan Communists and their mainland counterparts who were aware of Han's status as high-ranking military Communist agent, and also since Han was in no position to verify his claim by offering up the 46th on a platter, both sides chose to bide their time in mistrust.³²¹ The lack of clear communication on this meant that Han Liancheng could not fully reveal himself as a Communist agent until the Communist takeover of Hainan in the spring of 1950. In a December 1948 speech to the Hainan Communist military leadership, Feng still put Han Liancheng in the line of Nationalist militarists and dictators who had been defeated to date by the Hainan Communists.³²² Han and the 46th left Hainan to fight elsewhere on the mainland, and the Hainan Communists claimed this as a successful repulsion of the Nationalist onslaught, and it was celebrated as a Communist victory at the mainland Party Central as well.³²³

But before the 46th Army of the Nationalists had left Hainan, the Hainan Column was badly outmatched by its force, and February of 1946 brought news to Hainan that the Communist leadership had agreed to abandon all of their bases to the south of the Yangzi River, including the island.

³²¹ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, eds. (2007), 411.

³²² Feng Baiju, "Zai Qiongya jian jun shi zhou nian jinian dahui shang de yanshuo" 在琼崖建军十周年纪念大会上的演说 [Speech at the commemorative meeting for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Hainan army], December 5, 1948, reprinted in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 150.

³²³ "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu XX Qiongya budui jixu fenzhan gei Feng, Huang, Li dian" 中共中央关于鼓励琼崖部队奋战给冯黄李电 [Telegram from Party Central to Feng (Baiju), Huang (Kang), and Li (Ming) regarding encouragement of the Hainan army's struggle], September 30, 1946, in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 485.

When the Hainan peace talks broke down in January of 1946, hostilities had quickly resumed, with skirmishes erupting in February between the 46th and the Hainan Communists. Unofficially, though, hostilities had never truly ceased, at least beginning from the Meihe Incident of late 1940, which seems to closely reflect the New Fourth Army Incident of January 1941 in southern Anhui. Though the Nationalist military infrastructure was still staggering out of years of pounding from the Japanese military, their dominance over the Communists in the air and at sea was undeniable. The Nationalist authority on the island easily prevented the Hainanese Communists from moving significant numbers of troops or supplies across the Qiongzhou Strait. Contact between the Hainan Communists was limited messages carried by hand. The relief of Japanese defeat and withdrawal would not last long. Communist messengers would still have to travel carefully, always under assumed names and with false documents, to communicate with their mainland counterparts.

After the winter of 1945-46, the Hainan Communists were continuing to grow in strength and support. Their base areas were expanding, and with the help of the Li tribes, they were able to maintain strong bases beyond the reach other Nationalists. So when, in April of 1946, the central command of the Communist Party on the mainland issued an order for the Hainan Communist leadership and most of its strength to evacuate the island and make their way to the northern mainland, there was much confusion and initial resistance among the Hainan Communist brass.

From June of 1941 until September of 1946, the Communist leadership of Hainan had no radio communication with the mainland Chinese Communist headquarters in Yan'an. In that period, agents of the Hainan Communist movement attempted several

times to procure the necessary instruments and operators to reestablish communications, but every effort ended in their capture and execution.³²⁴ Following the Japanese defeat, Yan'an had stepped up its efforts to establish contact with its bases. The fragile peace between the Nationalists and Communists allowed more open attempts at communication between the Party's central command and its regional outposts that proclaimed their loyalty to Yan'an, even if they had endured half a decade without hearing their commands in real time.

The Yan'an broadcast was sent out in the fall of 1945 and into the winter that followed, waiting to be picked out of the air by anyone affiliated with the Hainan Communist force. A repetitive message was sent specifically to the Hainan headquarters, even naming its leader: "Comrade Feng Baiju...Please use XX wavelength and XX call sign to communicate with us."³²⁵ But without a two-way radio, it was impossible for the Hainan Column's leadership to respond. Feng could not trust the tentative truce that prevailed on the mainland. The vulnerability of this mere digit of the Communist Party had been reinforced by the Meihe incident of 1940, in which the Hainan Communists were attacked by the Nationalists. After the fact, any Communists throughout China could expect an afterlife of celebrated martyrdom, as did so many of the New Fourth

³²⁴ Chen Dagui, Chen Qin, and Wang Jun were among the leaders of the Hainan Communist military who lost their lives in this attempt to reestablish this vital line of communication between the mainland Chinese Communists and the Hainan movement. See Qiongya wuzhuang douzhengshi bangongshi, eds. (1986), 212.

³²⁵ Xing Yikong, Peng Changlin, Qian Yue 邢诒孔, 彭长霖, 钱跃, *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* 冯白驹将军传 [The Biography of General Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1998), 327. This account is taken from a personal recollection of Wang Yuzhang, who was tasked with organizing the communications of the Hainan Column.

Army; but pragmatism drove the will to survive of the Hainan island Communists, and they were not reckless. It might be argued that they were not as zealous in the spirit of self-sacrifice as some of their mainland Communist counterparts. This is a complex and squishy subject that does not lend itself well to historical analysis, but there are characteristics of the Hainan revolution that did set it apart from the mainland, and it is relevant to examine the ways in which the Hainan island culture influenced the way in which the Communist revolution was waged on Hainan.

There are only passing references to the importance of the medium of radio contact between the columns of the Chinese Communist movement in this period, though it was a vital life-line that was maintained by trained personnel and at the cost of many lives. Between 1938 and 1940, the Yan'an headquarters of the Communist Party and the Eighth Route Army sent about 800 radio technicians to work with the Communist New Fourth Army.³²⁶ This was in a time of professed cooperation between the Communists and the Nationalists, and unified resistance to the Japanese. Following a series of military confrontations between the Communists and Nationalists in 1940 and 1941, logistics and technical aspects of the Communist military infrastructure suffered, to say the least. Recruitment in technical schools was forced underground in the major cities, and on Hainan, a radio technician remembered the Nationalist raid in June of 1941 that ended the hope for Hainan's ability to contact the mainland Communist headquarters. The commander of his unit of radio technicians was killed, causing a chaotic retreat in which their radio equipment was stolen. For the next five years they continued to try to

³²⁶ Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance Along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 59.

rig up a functional radio. There were no desks, let alone sophisticated equipment, and two timbers were roped together for a makeshift workspace. Mosquitoes incessantly buzzed around their ears, interfering with their concentration and their ability to hear signals from the mainland.³²⁷ Without help from Guangzhou or Hong Kong it was a hopeless task. Even the American OSS mission to Hainan, with the full cooperation from the Japanese occupation forces in the fall of 1945, had difficulty getting a wireless radio communication with their central command.³²⁸

Hainan's ability to relay messages of its progress back to the mainland was cut off, except for the occasional messenger who made the precarious trip through hostile territories controlled by either the Japanese or the Nationalists. Not only were there no wireless radio communications between the Hainan and mainland Communist leadership, Feng Baiju, the military and political leader of the Hainan Communist movement wrote very few directives in this time of any kind, and none of his speeches from this interim are extant. The communications sent from Hainan to the mainland headquarters, often hand-written directives carried by messengers, requested that more trained Communist cadres be sent to Hainan to aid in political and military leadership.

Reports on the status of the Hainan Communist movement during the interim revealed the improvisational nature of the guerrilla force, constantly kept on the move by

³²⁷ Huang Yunming, as told to Zhou Longjiao 黄运明口述，周龙蛟整理 “Wo tong Qiongya diantai de qingyuan” 我同琼崖电台的情缘 [My love for Radio Hainan], in Hainan gemingshi yanjiu hui, eds. [Hainan revolutionary history research association, eds.] 琼崖风云 *Qiongya fengyun* [Hainan wind and clouds] (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2006), 228-229.

³²⁸ Singlaub (1991), 95.

harassment from both the Nationalists and the Japanese. Connections to landlord classes locally and merchant supporters on the island and throughout Southeast Asia showed that the revolution had not adhered closely to the shifting political and economic policies of the mainland movement. While the Long March that ended in Yan'an had separated the mainland Communist movement from its urban roots in Shanghai and its rural roots in Jiangxi. The remaining connections to a homegrown Jiangxi movement had been smashed with the massacre of the much of the Communist New Fourth Army in January 1941 at the hands of their purported Nationalist allies. It was clear that the Communist movement could only be sustainable either in underground guerrilla movements when it was near Nationalist forces or behind Japanese lines. Otherwise, the remoteness and economic unimportance of Yan'an was the only place that allowed blockhouse, positional warfare, and political expansion.

In this environment, improvisation was the only option for maintaining a viable fighting force. Policies made for the settlements of Yan'an were not relevant to the realities of Hainan. Farming methods were different, land ownership did not follow the same patterns, wealth distribution was not the same, and all of these factors prevented the close adherence to mainland economic policy. Absolutely no monetary or materiel support was received in Hainan. Like Chiang Kai-shek, Mao held on tightly to his nucleus of support, in anticipation of the resumption of civil war that would follow the defeat of the over-extended Japanese advance. Partisan sprouts of the Communist movement in China grew and sometimes flourished in opposition to the Nationalists and the Japanese. But the Yan'an command had little choice but to leave these partisan

groups to fend for themselves. This is probably simply because the Yan'an Communists were not able to spare any support for them.

It is difficult to reconcile any notions of obedience to the central command of the Chinese Communist Party in Yan'an with the necessary improvisation that took place in the guerrilla struggle throughout China. In remote area such as Hainan, where a small but coherent Communist movement existed, lack of radio contact prevented daily directives from being sent. Constantly changing conditions under the Japanese occupation and in the civil war with the Nationalist government demanded policy adjustments, and without clear reports and directives sent between the mainland headquarters and the Hainan leadership, decisions were made hastily and with the prime objective of the survival of the guerrilla movement on Hainan. This last point seems self-evident, but it is one of the major distinguishing factors of a guerrilla struggle as opposed to conventional warfare. Survival is the first order of business of the guerrilla, not ideological purity, and in the example of Hainan, not obedience to the national Communist movement.

The lack of radio contact between Hainan and the mainland Communist Party center was either the result or cause of a historical southward and westward orientation of Hainanese culture and economy. Hainanese native-place associations were common throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania urban centers, with frequent movement between Hainan and cities like Singapore and Manila. Even throughout the Japanese occupation, merchant networks that had been established centuries earlier continued to operate and allow movement from Hainan to the Southeast Asian mainland and other islands throughout the region. With the end of the Japanese occupation and the resumption of

the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, a new decision of alliance confronted many within the overseas Hainanese community.

Communication and networks of support remained active throughout this period between the Hainanese Communists and the Southeast Asian mainland and Oceania, especially Singapore. During the Japanese occupation of Hainan, coastal China, and Southeast Asia, Hainan native-place connections continued to flow throughout the region. In these groups there was often a kind of pilgrimage mentality in which the ultimate aim of Hainanese in Southeast Asia was to return to their home island to fight the Japanese. Throughout much of Southeast Asia there were opportunities to fight the Japanese on one's own doorstep, but the idea of fighting for Hainan, on Hainan, seemed to have a more sacred meaning among the Hainanese abroad.³²⁹

Even while it was impossible to establish radio communication between Hainan and the mainland Communist headquarters, the southern and western orientation of the Hainan Communists allowed them to maintain frequent contact with their supporters throughout the region. One Hainanese Communist operative established a newspaper in Singapore that provided its readers with updates on the progress of the Hainanese “people’s army” as it was forced, in the words of the paper’s editors, to renew its fight against the Nationalists, even before it could fully recover from the Japanese occupation that so devastated the economy and morale of the Hainanese people. The paper, *Hainan Tide* [Qiongchao bao], was mainly the work of a Chen Xianguang, who had received directives from the Chinese Communist Party central command. As a paper that was

³²⁹ Xing Yilin, Han Qiyuan, Huang Liangjun, *Qiongqiao cangsong* 琼侨沧桑 [The ups and downs of Overseas Hainanese (English title)] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 1991), 47.

only circulated among the Hainanese community in Singapore, the circulation of 1,000 was significant. The British authorities closed the paper in the summer of 1948, again reflecting, as in the example of Mission Pigeon, the way that the Hainan Communists were besieged by an array of international forces.³³⁰ The British had returned to power in Singapore after the Japanese defeat, and they continued in their tradition of anti-Communist counter-intelligence.³³¹

Loyal Disobedience

In April 1946, the order came to shift the bulk of the Hainan Communists far north to Shandong province. The order reflected the disconnect between the northwestern mainland Communist movement, and that of Hainan. For five years there had been no radio contact between the two forces, and under Japanese occupation beginning in 1939, it was never easy for messages to travel in any other way either. The messenger who came in April of 1946 made his way to Feng Baiju via the Guangdong Communist movement, which also had maintained only poor and sporadic communications with the Yan'an base area during the war with Japan.

³³⁰ Xing Yilin, et. al., (1991), 76-78.

³³¹ As was noted in Chapter Two, the British were also most likely in part clandestinely responsible for the arrest and execution of a prominent Hainan operative, newly arrived from Hong Kong in the early years of the Communist Party on Hainan. See Chan Lau Kit-ching, *From Nothing to Nothing: The Chinese Communist Movement and Hong Kong, 1921-1936* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 188-189. This operative was Sichuan native, Li Shuoxun, who arrived in Hainan in 1931 and was executed within weeks. He left his son (the now well-known Li Peng) and wife in the care of Zhou Enlai. Also see Hainan gemingshi yanjiu hui, eds. [Hainan revolutionary history research association, eds.] 琼崖风云 *Qiongya fengyun* [Hainan wind and clouds], (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2006), 9-10.

The winter of 1945-46 had revealed the intentions of the Hainan Nationalist leadership to bend all its efforts to eliminating the Communist presence on Hainan once and for all. There had been many times in the 1930s and early 1940s that it would have been easier, when the Hainan Communists were a much less significant and popular force, but Feng and the Communists had resisted complete annihilation and now their numbers were growing with their inland territories, and their popular policies and resistance credentials won them favor not only among Hainan's population, but also throughout the overseas Hainanese community, especially in Southeast Asia.

Still in spite of the Hainan Communists' growing popularity, there was no overcoming the Nationalists superiority at sea and in the air. This imbalance provided an effective blockade on the Communists in Hainan. There was no way for the Hainan Communists to obey the order to retreat north (*beiche*). They simply did not have the resources to get two thousand or more Communist officers and soldiers off of the island and up the coast to Shandong.

Sending the messenger back to Yan'an with this response – that it would be impossible for the Hainanese Communists to obey this order and that they would be forced to remain on the island – would have been sufficient explanation for why the northern Communists could forget about being joined by the southern guerrillas. But Feng went a step further, and emphasized the strength and vitality of the Communist movement on the island. He noted that indeed it was impossible for him to implement the order to retreat to the north because of the Nationalist sea power and the blockade that prevented any movement of significant forces to and from the island. And then he went on to remark that even if it were possible to move the bulk of the forces under his

command, he did not see how they would be able to preserve their gains on the island, and then, how they might return to the island and take it without a friendly force there to coordinate the attack.

While the Hainan Communist movement had taken on a distinctly local character, by all accounts, the reestablishment of radio contact with Yan'an was celebrated by the Hainan leadership as the renewal of the guerrilla movement's sense of purpose, and vindication of decades of struggle. The Hainan Communists never avoided the tutelage or threatened to actively oppose their mainland commanders. And their activities over the past half-decade of radio silence were congratulated in 1946, and they were encouraged to keep on this path.³³² The order to retreat south, to Vietnam, was a clear vindication of Hainan's valued and time-honored connections with the Southeast Asian mainland. And in explicit advice from the mainland, shortly after the resumption of radio contact, the Hainan Communists were encouraged to expand their connections with Southeast Asian overseas Chinese supporters. This reflected similar orders that they had received as early as 1940 from the mainland Party Central.³³³ So the Hainan revolution was not willfully violating mainland Communist orders in its policies to connect to the Southeast Asian international community, or to move forward with improvisational plans

³³² “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu XX Qiongya budui jixu fenzhan gei Feng, Huang, Li dian” 中共中央关于鼓励琼崖部队奋战给冯黄李电 [Telegram from Party Central to Feng (Baiju), Huang (Kang), and Li (Ming) regarding encouragement of the Hainan army's struggle], September 30, 1946, in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 485.

³³³ Ma Biqian 马必前, “Qiongya dianbo” 琼崖电波 [Hainan broadcast], in Hainan gemingshi yanjiu hui, eds. [Hainan revolutionary history research association, eds.] 琼崖风云 *Qiongya fengyun* [Hainan wind and clouds] (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2006), 211.

in its economic and military policy. But there was precedent for the concerns of mainland Communist leaders that the Hainan Column and its leadership was becoming too focused on its local revolution, and that when the time came, the Hainan Communists might not be prepared to sacrifice for the new nation.

But as the final arrangements were being made, in the summer of 1946, for the resumption of radio contact between the Hainan and mainland Communist commands, the Hainan Communist leadership sent one of their highest officials, Zhuang Tian, up through Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Shanghai to meet with local and provincial Party leaders, and finally to Nanjing, where he met with Zhou Enlai.³³⁴ This was a strategic move by the Hainan Communists, if their aim was to convey a sense of loyalty and adherence to the mainland Communist Party even while gaining a sympathetic ear and increased autonomy in their local revolution. Zhuang Tian was a “Long Marcher” and a native son of Hainan, having returned to the island from Yan’an in 1940.

In Nanjing, among Zhou Enlai’s retinue he met many old classmates from the “Japanese Resistance University” in Yan’an where he had been a student and instructor. Zhou gave Zhuang three days to prepare a report for him. While Zhuang had traveled aboard a British steamer from Hong Kong, he did not carry any documents that might compromise his mission. While Zhuang was preparing the extensive report, Zhou Enlai impressed his guerrilla guests – Zhuang and another native Hainanese – by presenting them with gifts of Western-style suits, leather shoes, and comfortable quarters.

³³⁴ Wu Zhi, He Lang 吴之, 贺郎, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯白驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju], (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 588.

Zhou listened with surprise as Zhuang finally made his extensive report, which emphasized the survival of the Hainan Column in spite of overwhelming odds. After over twenty years the red flag had never fell over Hainan, in spite of the best efforts of the Japanese and the Nationalists, and now, with the Nationalist 46th Army being removed from Hainan after a series of embarrassing defeats at the hands of the Communists, it would be easier than ever for the Hainan Column to continue its fight. “We can continue the fight indefinitely, and we trust that Party Central will not lightly discard this piece of South China’s revolutionary base areas.”³³⁵

Zhuang Tian received Zhou Enlai’s support for continuing the resistance on Hainan. As Feng would term the ongoing struggle was a “struggle of self-defense.”³³⁶ Feng continued to be more feisty than Zhuang in asserting the local nature of the Hainan struggle, often distinguishing it from the larger civil war on the mainland. In Feng’s speeches and reports that were extant from and about the early civil war period immediately following the Japanese withdrawal, his emphasis is always on Hainan. His speeches begin, “*Tongbaomen, Tongzhimen...*,” which translates as, “Compatriots, Comrades...” *Tongbaomen*, or compatriots, meant “My fellow Hainanese,” and not, “My fellow Chinese.” His speeches and writings dealing specifically with the retreat orders are not openly defiant, but it is clear that the Qiongzhou Strait that separates Hainan from mainland China seemed far wider in that time to Feng. One phrase that he

³³⁵ Wu Zhi, He Lang (1996), 591.

³³⁶ Feng Baiju, “Gongbu san nian ziwei zhanzheng zhi zhanji” 公布三年自卫战争只战绩 (Report on the successes in three years of the struggle of self-defense,” December 10, 1948, in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 156.

used in describing the mainland Chinese civil war context was “*guonei*,” which might be translated as “within the country,” “domestically,” “the interior.” He uses this phrase in contrast to the Hainan revolution, even while he professes his loyalty to the cause of the greater Chinese Communist revolution. While the mainland Communist rallying cry became, “Fight to Nanjing, capture Chiang Kai-shek alive,” Feng even changed that to suit his local purposes, invoking the chant, “Fight to Haikou, capture Han Hanying alive.”³³⁷

Feng Baiju, as the unrivaled leader of the Hainan Communist movement, was beyond the reach of the mainland Communists. He was the authority on Hainan for the Communists, and he aimed to keep that movement alive. It is clear that Feng’s priority was in Hainan. There is no indication in Hainan or in the mainland Communist leadership’s assessment of Hainan’s Communists of any concern about what would later be called “localism,” or what in other regions of China was called “mountaintoppism.” “‘Mountaintoppism’ is Chinese Communist jargon used to describe someone who suffers from ‘mountain-stronghold mentality, a type of sectarianism,’ that is, a tendency on the part of individuals or groups to stress their own importance and identity and to act independently of central Party authority.”³³⁸ Benton, in this study that narrated the foundational Communist entities that would later coalesce in the New Fourth Army, does not include the Hainan Communist movement because his focus is on those movements

³³⁷ Feng Baiju, “Zai Qiongya jian jun shi zhou nian jinian dahui shang de yanshuo” 在琼崖建军十周年纪念大会上的演说 [Speech at the commemorative meeting for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Hainan army], in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 150-155. Han Hanying was the military leader of the Nationalist forces on Hainan in 1948.

³³⁸ Benton (1992), xxxvii.

that did feed the later New Fourth. But Feng Baiju seems a likely candidate for the label of “mountaintoppist.” He would later be one of the main targets of the Anti-localism Campaigns of 1952 and 1957, and the characteristics of a localist in this period seem to be precisely those of a “mountaintoppist” who has made the transition from revolutionary to ruler.

Perhaps it was Hainan’s distance from Yan’an, or its perceived irrelevance to the Communist leadership, or the impossibility of cracking the whip of discipline over the island’s leadership, but in actuality, Feng’s revolutionary *raison d’être* was always Hainan. Benton goes on, “Mountaintoppists are often accused in Party literature of wanting to set up ‘independent kingdoms.’”³³⁹ And this is precisely the same language that the Communist establishment would use in their later persecution of the “localists who favored providing for their home province instead of sacrificing for the sake of the new national regime. Ezra Vogel, in his study of the first two decades of Communist rule in Canton, notes that “Hainan island had been the one place in [Guangdong] where localism was so firmly entrenched that the area was left alone during land reform. Gradually, the outside authorities attempted to infiltrate the ‘independent kingdom of [Feng Baiju].’” While Vogel maintains the quotation marks for the *Nanfang ribao* editorial voice in labeling Feng the king of Hainan, he does not seem to take issue with the central Communist view that an essentially federated or provincialized perspective of state-building in a revolutionary regime might allow an alternative path.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Benton (1992) xxxvii.

³⁴⁰ Vogel (1971 [1969]).

Although these labels of “mountaintoppist” and “localist” are taken from different times and place in the history of the Chinese Communist movement, it is clear that Feng would wear both of those labels. And his persistence in the type of leadership decisions that would earn him those labels, even being aware that other leaders throughout China were suffering persecution for similar behavior, seems to suggest that he would accept them without reservation or regret. Feng’s treatment in the political campaigns of the 1950s will be examined further in chapter six, but the 1946 retreat orders should be understood as part of a pattern in an uncomfortable and asymmetrical disciplinary relationship between the Communist Party’s central authority and the Hainan leadership. The perception of motives in Hainanese localism, on the part of the mainland Communists leadership, was that the zero-sum relationship of local and national loyalties and priorities was tipped in favor of the local in Hainan, and the leadership sought to ensconce itself as the local satraps.

If he had left Hainan as he was ordered to do by all of the authorities of mainland China in 1946, or if he had tried to run the Nationalist blockade and make his way to the north, Feng claimed that the Hainan Nationalist movement would use the opportunity to come down hard on those portions of the Hainan community that were expressly supporting the Communists. The Li people, the progressive students and intellectuals in the coastal towns and cities, the farmers and fishermen of the inland and coast who sent their sons and daughters to join Feng, they would all suffer for the support that they had provided Feng and the Hainan Communists.

Or at least this was the case that Feng made when he responded to the order to move his fighting force off of the island and to the north. Feng’s language combined an

articulation of his obedience to the central command of the Party and an assertion his position as Hainan's leader. In this case, he was simply not able to implement an order from the central command, but he also did not waste the opportunity to assert his command of the Hainan Communist movement. He would be here, he said, when the time came for the final Communist victory on Hainan. And he would be the leader who would protect the interests of the Communist movement on Hainan and the lives of its supporters until that final victory. Feng's desire to assert his strength on Hainan in relation to the central command is not clearly an asymmetrical power play. Throughout his communications with the mainland Communists during the 1930s and 1940s, he solicited orders and direction for the development of the Hainan Communist movement.

Still, Feng must have been aware that there was not simply a single revolutionary line that never wavered and changed with the times. The improvisation of his leadership during the early period of the civil war, before the Japanese invasion of Hainan in 1939, Feng had been forced to keep the Hainan movement afloat without any help from the mainland. The political and military lines of the Communist movement did not always dovetail into a coherent and single plan that all could easily follow throughout the massive country. For the guerrilla, the first order of business is survival. Survival of the movement, but also survival of the individual. There was not glory in needless sacrifice in the civil war, in spite of the Cultural Revolution propaganda and the current Chinese popular cinema that put sacrifice in battle (*xisheng*) at the absolute pinnacle of revolutionary immortality. Survival was the most important.

Whether Feng sought to keep the Hainan movement alive and in Hainan for the sake of the national Communist movement, or whether his primary motivation was to

keep his feet on his home soil, cannot be clearly known. What is known is that decisions like the disobedience of 1946 led to a perception on the part of the mainland Communists that the Hainanese were interested mainly in perpetuating their own leadership over their Hainan fiefdom rather than contributing their blood to the national revolution. This became clear during the anti-localism campaigns of the 1950s. In the longer context of the Hainanese Communist movement, from its predecessors who helped bring about the fall of the Qing, straight through the victorious 1950 campaign, it is clear that we should challenge the zero-sum equation of national and local loyalty that developed in the campaigns of the 1950s. The dramatic campaign to take Hainan for the Chinese Communist cause in the spring of 1950 proved that victory could be won and shared between the locality and the nation.

Chapter Five

Sharing Victory: The Chinese Communist Conquest of Hainan Island

Histories of Hainan

Hainan became a part of the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) following the military campaign of the spring of 1950, seven months after the founding of the PRC. With this success, approximately half of the Nationalists' territory fell into Communist hands, the other half being Taiwan. Tibet also remained outside of the new regime's control, but plans and propaganda targeted both of these regions.

The announcement from Beijing was triumphant but simple: "Our Guangdong vanguard of the People's Liberation Army overcame the resistance of the enemy's army, navy, and air force. With the assistance of the Hainan Column, they heroically landed on Hainan, and swiftly mopped up the remnants of the enemy forces, completely liberating the entire island." The declaration congratulated the victorious forces, citing the leadership of nine commanders. Eight of the commanders were with the mainland force and one was Hainanese. In conclusion, it was noted that the success of the Hainan campaign was an example for the imminent liberation of Taiwan and Tibet.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ "Zhongguo renmin geming junshi weiyuanhui dianhe Hainandao quanbu jiefang" 中国人民革命军事委员会电贺海南岛全部解放 [Telegram of congratulations from the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Committee on the complete liberation of Hainan island], May 5, 1950, reprinted in Zhu Yihui 朱逸辉, ed., *Qiongya qizhi* [The Colors of Hainan] (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2004), 8.

But this announcement conveyed none of the complexity that had made the Hainan conquest possible. So divergent were the mainland and Hainanese views of the island's conquest, that, depending on one's perspective, the Chinese Communist fight for Hainan island had lasted either two weeks or twenty-three years. The final and decisive push in the victorious campaign during the spring of 1950 took only a few weeks, as People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops landed on the island's northern beaches and joined with the local guerrilla soldiers to defeat the Nationalist forces there. But these guerrillas, the Communist Hainan Column, had been fighting the Nationalists for twenty-three years, since the spring of 1927.

In historical memory, therefore, the Hainan campaign has at least two distinct narratives. One recounts a "people's flotilla" of wooden junks, some with motors hastily rigged to the stern, ferrying thousands of PLA soldiers through the dangerous eddies and shifting shoals of the narrow Qiongzhou Strait to liberate Hainan, enduring punishing fire from Nationalist warships and planes. In a recent history of the modern Chinese army, the case of Hainan is opened and closed tersely: "The landing forces quickly overran the island."³⁴² Other accounts of the campaign, remembered from the perspective of the troops who crossed with the PLA Fourth Field Army's Fifteenth Corps, also emphasize crossing the treacherous strait as the most important part of the campaign, with the

³⁴² Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 133. This assessment is not incorrect, and it is not within the author's stated goals to include the nuance of every regional struggle in the Communist revolution. However, this brief treatment does perpetuate the notion that the Hainan campaign was fought and won by an overwhelming landing force that simply swept the enemy before them. As I will note below, the disastrous Jinmen (Quemoy) campaign six months earlier had proved that the PLA, with no navy and no air force, was independently incapable of this type of amphibious attack.

indelible image of wooden boats captained by fishermen volunteers taking on modern warships.

A 1998 Chinese history, *Liberating Hainan (Hainan jiefang)*, begins with the winter planning on the mainland of 1949-50 for the assault on Hainan. While the focus in that study is mainly a history of the Fourth Field Army, it is telling that the local Hainanese context of the campaign is not introduced until the fifth chapter, where five lines of text are apportioned for the twenty-three year struggle of the Hainan Communists examined in the previous four chapters of this study.³⁴³ The same text quotes a firsthand account of the events from the perspective of a soldier with the landing force, which reveals the precedent of this bias in praising the accomplishments of the preparations and the landing on Hainan over the coordination and cooperation with the local forces: “This miracle [of setting sail to take Hainan with soldiers who had never been to sea before] surprised many of the old seamen, and they praised the men saying, ‘Chairman Mao’s army is full of true warriors, true warriors.’”³⁴⁴ Miraculous indeed, as one sailor cried out in relief after waiting in the doldrums of the Qiongzhou Strait, “Chairman Mao has called the east wind. Hurry and raise the sails.”³⁴⁵ As with the image of wooden boats taking on

³⁴³ Liu Zhenhua, *Hainan jiefang* 海南解放 [Liberating Hainan] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1998), 81.

³⁴⁴ Han Xianchu, “Hainandao saotao zhan” 海南岛扫讨战 [The Hainan island mop-up campaign], from *Xinghuo liaoyuan* 星火燎原 [A single spark can start a prairie fire], translated and reprinted in the appendix of Reed Richard Probst, *The Communist Conquest of Hainan* (George Washington University, PhD dissertation, 1982), 228.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 235.

Nationalist destroyers, hyperbole and apparently even supernatural characterized the retelling of the PLA crossing to take Hainan.

The other narrative of the Hainan conquest is summed up by the slogan, “For twenty-three years, the red flag never fell,” recalling the long and difficult insurgency waged by the local Hainan Communist forces. A year after the campaign, in early 1951, the Hainanese Communist leader, Feng Baiju wrote an article to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the 1921 founding of the Chinese Communist Party. In this piece, he recounted the glorious and long history of the Party on Hainan, enduring through “the endless, dark days, and finally joining in the great victory of the entire people’s revolution.” He noted that Hainan was just a “small example,” but he went on to describe the “special circumstances” of being “blockaded, surrounded on four sides by counter-revolutionaries.” He also reiterated that the Communists on the mainland had been unable to support the Hainan revolutionaries with materiel, and that the Hainan Column had relied on the people of Hainan for their support. This was the victory of the people of Hainan.³⁴⁶ During the Japanese occupation of Hainan as well, the Hainan Column had been heralded in song as the righteous defenders of the island:

Who are the saviors of Hainan? The Hainan Column.
Everyday they strike the Japanese devils, and protect Hainan.
Protecting Hainan and saving the people, the Hainan Column.
Who are the saviors of Hainan? The Hainan Column.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ “Zhongguo Gongchandang de guanghui zhaoyao zai Hainan shang” 中国共产党的光辉照耀在海南上 [The glory of the Chinese Communist Party shines on Hainan], 1951. Reprinted in Zhu Yihui 朱逸辉, ed., *Qiongya qizhi* [The Colors of Hainan], (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2004), 492-498.

³⁴⁷ “Hainan’s saviors,” Hainan anti-Japanese wartime song, reprinted in He Lang and Wu zhi 贺朗, 吴之, eds., *Chengqi Qiongya banbi tian* 撑起琼崖半壁天 [Lifting up half of the Hainan sky] (Huacheng chubanshe: Guangzhou, 1992), 440.

In this chapter on the conquest, I will rely mainly on recollections by participants in the campaign, and the biographies of Hainan's Communist leadership – primarily Feng Baiju and Ma Baishan. I will explain how the conquest and its preparations that brought Hainan into the People's Republic of China in the spring of the 1950 was experienced on the island, and how it has been remembered in history. Much scholarly work has already explored the totality of the Communist Revolution in China at the expense of regional difference, so for most of this study I will only incorporate the mainland experience of the Hainan conquest where it is relevant to explaining the revolution from the local Hainanese perspective.

In choosing this focus, my implicit argument is naturally that the work of the local Hainan Communists was essential to the success of the final conquest, and the nearly seamless incorporation of Hainan into the PRC that followed. I will begin with an introduction to the campaign and its relevant context, then discuss two of the main figures in the Hainan Communist movement. Feng Baiju was the leader of the political and military Communist movement, and is recognized as the symbol of the revolution on Hainan. Ma Baishan was also a high-ranking political and military leader on Hainan, rising to the rank of general following the war. Ma traveled to Beijing several months before the Hainan conquest and met with the highest political and military commanders of the Chinese Communist Party.

While Feng represents the improvisational and pragmatic aspect of the Hainan revolution, Ma represents the constant awareness of Hainan's connection to the larger

Chinese Communist revolution. More than simply a trip to report Hainan's local conditions in Beijing and receive orders, Ma's mission to Beijing on the eve of the Communist takeover of Hainan was a kind of tributary journey – a promise of allegiance and submission to the new Communist regime that he would actually witness being founded on the Gate of Heavenly Peace. There was never a plan for secession on Hainan, and never hope by the Communist forces there of making common cause with the Nationalists. Their commitment to the national Communist movement was never challenged from within the movement, and that unswerving loyalty is embodied by Ma Baishan. Feng's improvisational leadership was perceived as potentially subversive, and his local loyalties and priorities would obstruct his further advancement in the Party in the decade to come.

The central Chinese Communist perspective – that of Beijing, in the spring of 1950 – will be most important in the concluding section, in an examination of the geopolitical importance of the Communist conquest of Hainan, and how national, regional, and global politics shaped the historical narrative that emerged from the campaign. Cold War geopolitics put the Hainan campaign center stage, and the military performance of the PLA was important in establishing its global image and prestige. The heroics of a band of scrappy local revolutionaries like the Hainanese had already become an old story seven months after the founding of the PRC. This type of narrative had been important as propaganda during the war against Japan, and earlier in the Civil War with the Nationalists. It had been useful in strengthening national resolve years earlier, but in the spring of 1950, this type of “people's war” was not likely to intimidate the

commanders of the new perceived enemy – the American destroyers patrolling the Pacific.

So the history of the local origins of the Hainanese revolution, like many others that were not sanctioned in Beijing, has not been important to the geopolitical world of bluster and threats. But still the legacy of Hainan is wrapped tightly with that national narrative of the early Cold War. In May of 1950, half a year after the founding of the PRC and a month before the Korean War began, for Beijing’s purposes, Hainan’s debut on the global stage was to be seen most importantly as a triumph of the mighty PLA, not the local scrappers.

I will therefore conclude with a brief examination within the Hainanese context of what Michael Szonyi calls “geopoliticization” in his recent study of Jinmen (Quemoy) in the Cold War. While Szonyi explains how the lives of the people of Nationalist Jinmen were affected by their precarious and unique Cold War situation, I will focus on how the global politics of the early 1950s affected the rewriting and forgetting of Hainan’s history.³⁴⁸

Hainan welcomes the PRC, and the PRC welcomes Hainan

³⁴⁸ Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Quemoy is a Hokkien romanization that is still sometimes used for Jinmen. Crossing the Qiongzhou Strait with the Fourth Field Army was a Soviet documentarian whose footage has become the source for seminal images of the campaign. Some of this footage has been compiled in historical documentary film accounts of the campaign at: <http://v.ifeng.com/his/201005/b8a742dd-e53b-44ec-bfe5-7eeb6ffc65b2.shtml>

The speed of the Hainan conquest, and the Nationalist enemies' hasty retreat to Taiwan, amazed even the Communist victors. The Communist military expedition from north to south China had been carried out with exceptional speed on the mainland, surpassing even the ambitious plans announced by Party headquarters. Almost overnight, after more than two decades of struggle, the Hainan guerrillas were transformed from harried bandits, living in jungle and mountain hideouts, into masters and heroes of their homeland. And with victory came a welcome new contingent of political and military paragons who, they expected, would help them build their new Hainan, free of the corruption and incompetence of the Nationalist rulers.³⁴⁹

Deng Hua, a Hunan general, was the main tactical officer of the PLA landing force, leading the Fifteenth Corps of the Fourth Field Army. His recollection of the final campaign for Hainan is an unadorned account of the maneuvers of the battles. This source outlines the campaign itself, and exceptionally, Deng pays little attention to the difference between the Hainan and mainland Communist perspective. Deng's account emphasizes the campaign as a successful conquest for the new PRC, though he also minimizes the contribution of the Hainan Communists, and celebrates the unstoppable might and courage of the landing forces. While this paper does not make the fighting of

³⁴⁹ Suzanne Pepper emphasizes corruption and incompetence in her unsurpassed 1978 study of the Chinese Civil War. The Nationalists' administrative corruption and incompetence lost the war as much as any Communist attributes won it (Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* [University of California Press, Berkeley: 1978], 423). On Hainan this nepotism was embodied by Chen Jitang and Han Hanying. The military leadership of Xue Yue in the final days of Nationalist rule on Hainan offered a glimpse of another road of efficiency and responsibility in Nationalist rule, but Xue's tenure was quickly ended by the Communist campaign.

the campaign its focus, it is worthwhile to glean from Deng's account the relevant data for putting the conquest of Hainan in context.

The planning for the campaign began in the winter of 1949-50 on the mainland's Leizhou Peninsula of Guangdong Province, just over ten miles from the northern Hainan coast. By February 1, 1950, a final conference was held involving the leadership of both the Hainan Communists and the PLA officers, including Deng and Ye Jianying. In the first week of March, several vanguard units in thirteen junks were launched from Leizhou Peninsula, and after some fighting on the beaches of northwestern Hainan, they managed to join with the Hainan Communists and retreated to Communist bases inland.

This success led to a more substantial vanguard force of several dozen junks, deployed on March 10, 26, and 31, which followed the pattern of the first. Some of these units were scattered, and the Nationalist enemy was unable to track how many mainland Communist forces were now augmenting the Hainan Column. By mid-April, the full-scale attack was launched. On the night of April 16, the Communist junks began crossing the Qiongzhou Strait in waves, totaling 318 boats of various sizes. They landed after losing boats and taking casualties in the crossing, and were met and aided by the Hainan Communists in the early morning hours of April 17. After this landing, the conquest proceeded rapidly, with the Nationalists retreating to the south. Communist forces marched into Haikou in the north on April 23, and only seven days later, the southern towns of Sanya and Yulin had also fallen. The Nationalist commanders and

thousands of the Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan, and on May 1, 1950, complete victory was announced in Beijing.³⁵⁰

The differences were stark between the PLA regulars and their Hainan guerrilla comrades. As they met, on the palm-lined beaches of Hainan, in the towns and small cities, and in jungle hideouts across the island, both were surprised at the others' appearance. The Hainanese guerrillas wore sandals, shorts, and light collared shirts, if they chose to wear any shirt at all in the tropical heat. Their skin was copper, their faces gaunt, their muscles wire cables of strength from decades of warfare and jungle subsistence. Their clothes were worn and their packs were light. Among the few essential components of their kit were a rifle, a canteen, a few days' supply of food, and a hammock.³⁵¹ Everyday that military and weather conditions allowed, the guerrillas hung their hammocks and took long afternoon naps to avoid exhaustion during the hottest hours of the day. The PLA regulars, many of them northerners and not accustomed to the slower life of a tropical island, joked about this local custom. For some of the mainlanders, the custom of midday napping seemed to reflect Hainanese laziness, or worse, a lack of revolutionary zeal. The mainlanders had, after all, braved death and lost hundreds

³⁵⁰ Deng Hua, "Jiefang Hainan" 解放海南 [Liberating Hainan], in He Lang and Wu zhi 贺朗, 吴之, eds., *Chengqi Qiongya banbi tian* 撑起琼崖半壁天 [Lifting up half of the Hainan sky] (Huacheng chubanshe: Guangzhou, 1992), 415-423. Liu Zhenhua, *Hainan jiefang* 海南解放 [Liberating Hainan] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1998).

³⁵¹ Interview with three guerrilla veterans from Xianlai village of Qiongsan county provided eye-witness accounts of their first meetings with the mainland PLA forces, October 8, 2008.

of their comrades in crossing the Qiongzhou Strait from Guangdong to Hainan to liberate these loafers.³⁵²

The PLA regulars had spent three months on the mainland coast of Guangdong, learning to swim and sail, and to operate their improvised motorboats. They were well-outfitted and well-fed compared to their guerrilla counterparts, and they lacked nothing that Beijing or Moscow were able to supply. The Hainan campaign was, after all, center stage in China's civil war in the spring of 1950.³⁵³ The Fourth Field Army had been assigned the task of liberating Hainan, and posted to Guangdong Province's Leizhou Peninsula, which stretched south, close to the northern coast of Hainan. But not close enough for the PLA soldiers, many of whom had marched from their home provinces in the northeast. For them, it was a terrifying prospect to swim – or try to swim – after tumbling out of a crowded junk.

Han Xianchu, Fifteenth Corps Commander of the PLA's Fourth Field Army remembered the early days of the training. "Beginning the training at sea, a company

³⁵² This interview with a PLA captain, currently living in Haikou, provided eye-witness account and opinion of the first interactions between PLA regulars and the Hainan guerrillas, October 15, 2008. (Numbers of casualties are wildly divergent in contemporary sources, based on propaganda, especially in a specific engagement like the initial crossing of the Qiongzhou Strait. Today most estimates of total Communist casualties in the Hainan campaign are around 4000. Most of these were probably incurred in the earliest phase of the fighting, namely in the initial crossing, when Nationalist warships and planes were able to sink entire unarmed junks full of PLA soldiers.)

³⁵³ Interview with PLA captain, October 15, 2008. In late 1949 and early 1950, both the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* provided daily updates on the progress of the Communist conquest of Hainan, with information coming via press offices on Hong Kong and with little delay. The world watched intently as half of the Nationalists territory (considered by some to be "free China") was on the verge of falling to the Reds.

boarded a boat, and 80 percent of them looked as if they wanted to throw up.”³⁵⁴ But crossing the narrow Qiongzhou Strait in April and May, after the most favorable winds of the winter had passed, was difficult for even an experienced sailor. The rough waters were an unwelcome introduction to life at sea for the northern soldiers, and the increasing heat would make the conquest even more difficult. But the crossing was ultimately successful, and the jokes and the teasing overheard on the beaches between the regulars and the guerrillas went both ways.

This teasing began as welcome levity in the flush of victory that followed the campaign. But the light ribbing about lazy jungle bumpkins of Hainan or flailing doggy-paddlers of the mainland was perhaps not seen for what it was – the first step towards decades of sour relations between Hainanese leaders and their new mainland masters. For his part, Feng Baiju, unrivaled leader of the Hainan Communists for almost twenty years, was rarely seen to joke among the men and women under his command.

Three militia members I spoke with in the fall of 2008 smiled as they remembered having lunch with the apparently humorless Feng some years before the final 1950 conquest. One of the three octogenarians had been an incorrigible jokester for all his life, and he told me that on the afternoon that he met Feng, he had brought out his best and most bawdy material to try to impress Hainan’s favorite son. Feng only nodded politely in response, and tucked into his food. Not even a smile. When I asked the comedian if he had been hurt by Feng’s cold response, he laughed and shook his head: “When I think

³⁵⁴ Han Xianchu, “Hainandao saotao zhan,” (225-241).

about it, I'm glad that my commander was a man who wouldn't laugh at the kind of jokes I was telling!"³⁵⁵

The Hainan revolution had cost Feng close friends and dear family. A young wife executed by the Nationalists, a brother, aunts, uncles, and fellow villagers of his hometown, Changtai, in Qionghshan county.³⁵⁶ Most of them had been civilians, executed simply because they shared the surname of the forty-six-year-old man. Feng had come to embody Hainan's revolution, and he wore the heavy burden of his command soberly. Still, the soldiers surrounding him in the spring of 1950 had seen suffering too, and he allowed them this moment of levity.

To celebrate the Communist victory on Hainan, Feng even organized a festive banquet for the officers of both mainland and Hainan forces.³⁵⁷ It would be an opportunity for speeches and celebration, and Feng chose to hold the event at the Five Ministers' Temple. The Temple stood close to the northern Hainan city of Haikou, and it had been commissioned half a century earlier by the Qing reformer, Zhang Zhidong, to honor five Tang and Song dynasty officials who had been banished to Hainan.³⁵⁸ These officials, along with a sixth, Su Dongpo (also known as Su Shi, who shone brighter than

³⁵⁵ October 8, 2008, interview with three Xianlai militia members.

³⁵⁶ For a dramatic account of the capture and execution of his first wife, Wang Huizhou, see Wu Zhi and He Lang, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯百驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 203-205.

³⁵⁷ Ma Baishan and Ma Biqian 马白山, 马必前, *Yuxue tianya* 浴血天涯 [Bloody Horizon] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 2007 [volume 2]), 387-389.

³⁵⁸ Chen Keqin, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Making Hainan a province] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 20-33.

all the luminaries in Hainan's pantheon) had risked all to criticize imperial excess or corruption, and they had been banished to this malarial and barbaric southern island. After arriving, the ministers made the most of their exile, reforming and building local infrastructure, educating candidates for the imperial examination, and becoming off-center heroes of China, and the pride of Hainan.³⁵⁹

In this sense, the Temple represented an uneasy connection between Hainan and the mainland. Students had studied for the imperial examinations there, and it was certainly not a place of overt protest against the mainland empires or republics. But the people of Hainan had adopted the heroes of this Temple after the ministers had been rejected by the central government. And so through these adopted sons of Hainan, the people of the island had established a separate realm of heroism, but also of politics and culture. The banished ministers had worked dutifully with the people of Hainan to do everything from digging wells to educating scholars, to drinking with local farmers and fishers and teaching them to compose inebriated verse. Su Dongpo socialized with the indigenous Li people, and he wrote fondly of stumbling home from a night of drinking with the Li families who lived near him.³⁶⁰ The Temple was a significant place to choose for the banquet, because it emphasized Hainan's distinct culture within China's imperial history.

³⁵⁹ Zhou Quangen 周泉根, *Sui, Tang, Wudai Hainan renwu zhi* 隋唐五代海南人物志 [Prominent figures of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties] (Haikou: Sanhuan chubanshe, 2007), 164-204.

³⁶⁰ Burton Watson, tr., *Su Tung-p'o: Selections from a Sung Dynasty Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

The Hainanese had welcomed the spirits of the imperial ministers who were honored and worshipped at the Temple, and their spirits are still summoned and soothed, as testified by heaping mounds of incense burned at their shrines. These ministers might have anticipated the tension between the newly welcomed PLA guests and their Hainan hosts. Centuries earlier, the ministers had come to Hainan in disgrace and had been welcomed and adopted by the Hainan people. Now, the new mainland Communist arrivals came to Hainan with triumphant and zealous utopian plans to remake Hainan in their revolutionary mold, and quickly.

The Hainan campaign in the spring of 1950 successfully brought the greater Chinese Communist revolution to Hainan, and brought Hainan into the newly formed PRC. Through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, historians have worked to better understand the Chinese Communist revolution. In many of these wide-ranging studies, the explicit or implicit aim of the analysis has been to diagnose the causes for the success of the Communist revolution, or the failure of the Nationalists. Until recent years, these analyses almost invariably aimed very high at totalizing theories of the Chinese revolution that seek to explain the causes of success or failure. Often the approaches of different analysts pit their theories of revolution in an uncompromising struggle of answers that seem to be mutually exclusive.

In 1978, Suzanne Pepper bluntly assessed earlier attempts to explain the Chinese Communist success by comparing these historians to the proverbial blind men and the elephant, arguing in maddening futility that the single element they had encountered was sufficient to explain the whole. Just as the elephant's legs, tail, tusks, or ears do not singularly make up an elephant, neither, in Pepper's view, do the main causes cited by

historians of the Chinese Communists' success explain the entire revolution, whether they be "the Japanese invasion, the strength of the Stalinist organization, socio-economic conditions, the weakness of the [Nationalists], or the amount of foreign aid given and withheld."³⁶¹ In the case of Communist success on Hainan, coming so late in the Civil War, another such simple and misguided explanation would be to cite the military momentum of the Communists and the fatigue of the Nationalists. This is essentially the "people's flotilla of wooden boats" explanation that PLA historians continue to cite, for it has been dusted off in an era of revived nationalism to memorialize the early might of Communist China.³⁶²

Hainan Island is perhaps not the most representative part of Pepper's elephant. The island was neglected by Qing reformers, ignored by Nationalist administrators, and only peripherally incorporated in the plans of empire and nation-building of the Japanese and then the Communist People's Republic. But the Hainan Communist movement was crucial to the victory of the campaign. In the recent work of Gregor Benton, Stephen Averill, and others, more important than trying to understand the totality through a single, regional case study, these social historians have transcended the tug-of-war over grand explanations of the political concerns of the nation-state.³⁶³ It is ironic that it was

³⁶¹ Pepper (1980), 433.

³⁶² See Li Xiaobing above.

³⁶³ Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Stephen C. Averill, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

Pepper's impulse – herself a historian of the national political struggle – that led this critique of the quest for totalizing answers to Communist success in China. The 1978 date of Pepper's work, however, coincided logically with the beginning of a dramatic political and economic opening of the PRC, which also extended to archival access for foreign and Chinese scholars. So her frustration with earlier works was natural, as she likely understood that the future of Chinese scholarship would be open to local analyses such as Benton's and Averill's.

The population of Hainan, approximately 2.3 million in 1950, was a very small fraction of China, and its unique geography precludes it from being the grounds for any grand extendable theories of Chinese revolution.³⁶⁴ Forming such a theory is not my goal. But the explanation of the successful Chinese Communist conquest of Hainan must necessarily be an aggregate of those studies of the revolution that have come before, with some distinct elements of causality. The historical explanation of the success of the Chinese Communist revolution on Hainan is made up of a conglomerate causal explanation, just as the subject of the analysis – the final campaign for Hainan, and most of China – was an aggregation of revolutionary successes. The Nationalist Northern Expedition of 1926-28 relied heavily on alliances and compromises with local leaders. In the same way, the Communists "Southern Expedition," at least in the case of the Hainan campaign, relied on strong, popular local leaders like Feng Baiju and Ma Baishan. The Southern Expedition was an unstoppable rolling campaign that swept the Nationalists out

³⁶⁴ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi [Hainan provincial local history and gazetteer office], eds. *Hainan shengzhi: Renkou zhi, fangyan zhi, zongjiao zhi* 海南省志：人口志，方言志，宗教志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Population gazetteer, dialect gazetteer, religion gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1994), 212.

of power and to their final refuge of Taiwan, but in Hainan success came necessarily through a collection of distinct revolutionary movements. Even after the successful campaign, the new PRC regime would have to accommodate the popularity of Hainan's leadership. Only in the consolidation of PRC rule in the 1950s could the central Party leadership begin to crack down on what it saw as "localist" concerns, or local "contradictions" that Beijing perceived to be inhibiting progress on the local and national level.³⁶⁵

In Hainan, the Chinese Communists did not simply roll over the Nationalist opposition in order to establish a completely new regime, unprecedented or immaculate in Chinese history. The revolutionary victory on Hainan and the transition that came with it would have been impossible had it not been for the commitment of Hainanese local leaders to the new PRC government.

The "Southern Expedition" that ended in Hainan, then, would not lead to a "New China" in every sense of the term. Prior to the conquest, the Hainanese Communists had been unable or unwilling to obey many orders from the mainland, causing concerns in the Party's central leadership that they would not be able to bring the Hainan Communists to heel when the time came. Then following the conquest, local Communist leaders were yanked off of Hainan, some sent to mainland posts of bureaucratic impotence, others simply jailed. Judging by the behavior of Hainan's Communist leadership, they did not simply wish to offer themselves up to be molded by the mainland Communists. They did

³⁶⁵ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 211-216.

not simply wish to bring “New China” to Hainan. The Hainan Communist leadership believed that helping in the conquest would give them a stake in the island’s future.

The question of speed and urgency is a central one in *Dilemmas of Victory*, a recent volume of essays on the early years of PRC rule.³⁶⁶ This revolutionary urgency was a radically different cultural construct than the Hainanese guerrilla struggle. For twenty-three years the Hainan Communists had met with varying success, sometimes with their ranks swelling to thousands of armed fighters, and at other times, having as few as twenty-six partisans camped in their commander’s family home.³⁶⁷ The Hainan Communist movement was characterized by improvisation and unusual allies throughout two decades of Feng Baiju’s leadership. The geographic necessity of maintaining close ties with the civilian population led to Feng’s popular maxim, “Mountains can’t hide people; only people can hide people.”³⁶⁸ This meant political flexibility and patience. Both of these qualities of the Hainan revolution would be discarded in the urgency of the new regime that came to Hainan in the spring of 1950. The following section will elaborate on some of Feng’s background, and his strategies on the eve of the takeover.

³⁶⁶ Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁶⁷ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi, [Hainan Provincial Committee for Historical Research, Chinese Communist Party] eds., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun: Hainan jiangling zhuan* 中国人民解放军：海南将领传 [Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Biographies of Hainan’s Military Officers] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1991), 201-203.

³⁶⁸ Lu Jun and Xing Yikong 陆军，邢诒孔，“Dui Qiongya genjudi 23 nian hongqi budao de chubu tantao” 对琼崖革命根据地23年红旗不倒的初步探讨 [A preliminary inquiry into the Hainan base areas “holding aloft the red flag for twenty-three years”], in Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiu shi, eds., *Qiongya geming yanjiu lunwenxuan* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1994), 19.

In Feng We Trust

Zhou Enlai called Feng Baiju (1903-1973) the “banner of Hainan.”³⁶⁹ Feng was the political and military leader of the Communists on Hainan for over two decades. He rose quickly in the Party, emerging as the undisputed leader of the Communist movement on the island before he was thirty years old. The son of a stonecutter from Changtai village in Qiongsan County, Feng was a bright student in his small community, but his family’s limited means kept him from completing higher education on the mainland. After less than a year at Shanghai’s Daxia University, his father’s illness and the resulting crisis in the family’s modest fortunes forced him to return home.³⁷⁰ But his brief stay in Shanghai introduced him to the trends of social and political unrest among China’s urban students and workers.

After returning to Hainan, Feng witnessed the successful strikes of salt workers and fishermen, and was inspired by the local organizing of the Hainanese. He met with an old friend, Li Aichun, who introduced him to the Chinese Communist Party on Hainan, based then in the main northern city of Haikou near his hometown.³⁷¹ At that time, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the make-up and concerns of the leadership of the Party on Hainan reflected that of mainland China. That is, the Hainanese Communists

³⁶⁹ Xing Yikong, et al. eds., *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* 冯百驹将军传 [The biography of General Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1998).

³⁷⁰ He Lang and Wu Zhi 吴之, 贺朗, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯百驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 1-42.

³⁷¹ He Lang and Wu Zhi 吴之, 贺朗, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯百驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 31-32, 45-47.

were weakened by internal intellectual struggles, which were similar to the debates on the mainland, which in turn reflected the struggles for the voice of the Communist Party in Moscow.

The qualities in Feng that Zhou Enlai would later conflate with the people of Hainan began with Feng's forceful entrance into the island's Communist Party. In his early association with the largely urban intellectual leadership, Feng brought a very different voice into the organization. Reflecting the rural emphasis of unpopular and volatile mainland Party upstarts like Mao Zedong, Feng went outside the Party, directly to the village communities of his native and surrounding counties, and built support there. For his early militia organizing, Feng chose a rural region of his home province of Qiongsan. The Nationalist hold on that area was weak, and this decision showed Feng's early pragmatic and ruthless leadership. He won support among local armed militias, and quickly eliminated the feeble titular Nationalist leadership there.³⁷²

Activity like Feng's militant organizing was frustrating to Nationalist control of Hainan, and similar Communist activity was taking place on parts of the mainland – or at least the threat was enough to draw a Nationalist response. The end of Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition brought an abrupt shift to the right in Nationalist priorities. Following the Nationalists' successful military conquest, they turned their guns on the leftists and Communists within their party, executing, jailing, and expelling thousands. The ripples of this purge – the White Terror – moved quickly across the country, and the new Nationalist leadership, with the help of warlord allies, violently asserted their control

³⁷² Ibid., 59.

over the urban centers of China. Haikou was no exception, and much of the vulnerable urban-based Communist Party leadership on Hainan was eliminated. Feng's childhood friend, Li Aichun, along with much of the urban Hainan Communist leadership, was executed.

Following the Nationalist crackdown, Feng's rural work continued beyond the reach of the Nationalists, building networks of local militias and land reform committees. His friend and comrade, Wang Wenming, survived the purges, but died of illness in January of 1930 after retreating into the mountains with Feng. Following Wang's death, Feng redoubled his efforts to build a rural guerrilla force, and the Communist force on Hainan grew to about 1300 fighters. While the debates on "leftism" or "rightism" of mainland leaders reached a fever pitch in the early 1930s, Feng did not speak to the peasants in the language of Marxist dialectics and class struggle. (His later fluency on these theoretical matters suggest that he was aware of their prevalence in certain forums, but he did not see his mission as simply channeling the latest trends in the Party centers of Shanghai, Jiangxi, Yan'an, Beijing, or Moscow – or Haikou for that matter.³⁷³)

Being so far removed from the Party center on the mainland, Feng established Communist base areas – in Chinese, *genjudi*, literally "according to the locality." These soviet-style bases were not the result of a debate over whether it was more appropriate to develop urban bases or underground struggle. The latter was not an option. The voices for urban revolution on Hainan had been eliminated in the purges. The findings of Communist conferences on Hainan were brief: "Strengthen the old soviet base areas;

³⁷³ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 122. Vogel refers here to a 1958 article written by Feng in which he tried to defend himself from persecution by citing *Das Kapital*.

develop new soviet base areas; strengthen and develop the peasant revolutionary base areas.”³⁷⁴ There was always the possibility of straying from the current Party line in terms of building support and making revolution. Strengthening the revolution on Hainan was the priority for Feng, not debating the political future of the Party.

On the mainland, the Long March began in 1934 and stranded isolated groups of partisan revolutionaries, and at the famous Zunyi conference shortly thereafter, the Party leadership debated blame and political planning. In Hainan, Feng did not have the territorial luxury of marching thousands of miles away from the Nationalists’ guns. While the Hainan revolution cannot be simply explained with reasons of geographical determinism, certainly the surrounding waters forced a higher level of physical closeness between the military and civilian populations, in a way similar to the Cuban revolution of the 1950s.

Building the strength of the revolution in Hainan was in this way already removed from the foundation of the mainland Party’s policies. But Feng’s improvisation and his emphasis on rural bases were not dissimilar from trends that would also prevail on the mainland. Feng did not propose that his methods ought to be enshrined as orthodoxy for the Chinese revolution. Defining and adhering to some notion of political purity and correctness was never an apparent concern of Feng’s work. Throughout the 1930s and 40s he frequently requested that more trained cadres be sent to Hainan from the mainland Party center. His concern was with organizational and military training, and he expected

³⁷⁴ *Hainan shengzhi: Haiyang zhi, geming genjudi zhi*, 130-132.

these newly arrived cadres from Yan'an to adhere to his improvisational view of politics, while working to strengthen the Communist presence on Hainan.

Feng's pragmatism in his organizational work was not enough to prevent the near obliteration of the nascent Communist movement on Hainan, first by the Nationalists, and then by the Japanese occupation between 1939 and 1945. Still Feng and others maintained a visible and indefatigable Communist entity on Hainan, politically impure as it was. The red flag did not fall.

In many documents that Feng issued as both military and civilian leader prior to the Communist takeover he referred to the Hainan Communist movement as the "Hainan Interim Democratic Government" (*Qiongya linshi minzhu zhengfu*), and signed the directives and reports, "Chairman Feng Baiju." Some of these directives were clearly repetitions of orders he had received directly from the mainland Party headquarters. In some periods of limited communication between the Hainan and mainland Communists, however, Feng and the Hainan leadership had no choice but to try to move the revolution forward politically and militarily without specific orders from the mainland. And in other instances, even when communications were frequent between Hainan and mainland Party authorities, Feng took considerable license in his activities.

In late 1948 and early 1949, Feng took the initiative to organize political and military schools within Communist-controlled base areas. In an October 24, 1948 notice, "Chairman Feng" announced a planned Hainan Public School to be opened in March of the following year. The purpose, Feng proclaimed, was to "foster mass criticism," and to meet the educational needs of the island, or at least the parts of the island controlled by

the Communists.³⁷⁵ In January of the following year, Chairman Feng announced plans of the Hainan Interim Democratic Government to establish a military school as well.³⁷⁶ This type of education work was not in itself disobedience of any mainland directives. But in all Feng's work, his priority was first the survival of the Hainan Column of Communists, not obedience. As I will show in earlier chapters, resistance to the Nationalists and the Japanese was the solid foundation of the Hainan Communists' development. The brutality, corruption, and incompetence of both regimes on Hainan made the Communists a more appealing alternative. But this demanded political flexibility. On the eve of the Communist conquest of Hainan, Feng Baiju and the Hainan Communist leadership launched financial initiatives that were designed to succeed where the Nationalists had spectacularly failed. But telling aspects of the policy revealed that it was first in Feng Baiju that the Hainan revolution was to trust, perhaps vindicating mainland concerns about early strains of local interests trumping the national revolution.

For the most part, the Nationalists' handling of Hainan's financial sector ran parallel to the disastrous policies of the Nationalist mainland regime.³⁷⁷ In late 1949 and early 1950, the Nationalist governor of Hainan, Chen Jitang undertook an effort to consolidate Hainan's banking system. In an attempt to unify and strengthen Nationalist

³⁷⁵ “Dongyuan xuesheng canjia Qiongya gongxue xuexi tongzhi” 动员学生参加琼崖公学学习通知 [Notice on mobilizing students to attend Hainan Public School]. Issued by Chairman Feng Baiju, Hainan Interim Democratic Government, October 24, 1948.

³⁷⁶ “Guanyu Qiongzong fuban junzheng xuexiao de zhishi” 关于琼纵复办军政学校的指示 [Directive on the Hainan Independent Column reestablishing the military and political schools]. Issued by Chairman Feng Baiju, Hainan Interim Democratic Government, January 12, 1949.

³⁷⁷ Pepper (1980), 95-131.

control of the island's economy, Chen tried to summon prominent local bankers under a single "Hainan Cooperative Bank." Chen's gesture came very late, however, and it met with no success. It is easy to dismiss the effort as posturing for the Taiwan central authority, but Chen did not receive the Nationalists' endorsement in this effort. The failure of the Nationalists to support Chen's last minute effort to shore up the island's apparatuses of governance was not an isolated incident, as became apparent in the military confrontation to come. Chen was given neither the titular endorsement nor the concrete support he needed to realize his efforts to save Hainan for the Nationalists. He received only ambivalent directives from Taiwan.³⁷⁸ Apparently, Chiang Kai-shek felt that such an effort would have overstretched the Taiwan defensive capabilities.

The Hainan Column had experimented several times with issuing currency in the territories under its control.³⁷⁹ They met with limited success, but it was the issuance of "liberation bonds" (*jiefang gongzhai*) in the winter and spring of 1949-50 that caught Chen Jitang's attention by strengthening the movement, and led to a final attempt by the popular Nationalist general, Xue Yue, to eradicate the Communist guerrillas on Hainan. In denominations of one *yuan*, 400,000 *yuan* in bonds were printed and issued, with the

³⁷⁸ *Hainan sheng zhi: Jinrong zhi*, 533-534.

³⁷⁹ *Hainan sheng zhi: Jinrong zhi*, 28-28, 72, 532-533. Most recently there had been two notable attempts. In December of 1948 a small run of about 80 *yuan* was printed in denominations of 1 and 2 *jiao*, and 5 *fen* notes (1 *yuan* = 10 *jiao* = 100 *fen*). This was clearly only an experiment, and the notes were recalled in May of the following year. At the time of the recall, though, the Hainan Column authorities printed another run of paper money. This was presumably a more ambitious venture, though there are no records of how much money was printed in this second issuance. The notes issued in this second run were also recalled, but not until the Communist takeover a year later, in May of 1950, when the Communist government essentially bought the old money using the new currency, the mainland *renminbi* ("the people's money").

promise of an annual interest rate of 5 percent. The bonds were issued in exchange for supplies in anticipation of the Communist takeover. According to government records, by the end of 1951, all of the principal amount, plus interest on the bonds, was paid out in exchange for *renminbi*, the new currency of the People's Republic of China.³⁸⁰

Neither Nationalist nor Communist sources record any resistance to this substantial issuance of bonds. The policy was carried out by the Hainan Column under Feng Baiju, and at the behest of the Southern Branch Party Bureau as preparation for the imminent invasion.³⁸¹ While Feng had approval for the issuance of these bonds, one noteworthy characteristic in the isolated Hainan example was that the bonds were imprinted with a woodcut image of Chairman Feng Baiju and his signature, along with that of his Vice Chairman, He Dan.

Prior to the issuance of this Communist currency, the Nationalist currency issued on Hainan bore the image of Sun Yat-sen, not one of the local Hainanese leaders, nor even of Chiang Kai-shek. The infrastructural isolation of Hainan meant that the presses for liberation bonds used by the Communists on the mainland were not imitated or brought to Hainan to be used by the local revolutionaries. The Japanese occupiers of Hainan had also made unsuccessful attempts at implementing a currency policy that would work on Hainan. This and the Nationalist economic failures were the foundation for Feng's monetary policies.

³⁸⁰ *Hainan sheng zhi: Jinrong zhi*, 533-534.

³⁸¹ Telegrams between Feng Baiju and Deng Hua, *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 183-191.

The successful distribution of the Hainan Column's war bonds had broad implications for the transition to Communist rule. Each member of the amphibious force that arrived in mid-April carried three days' rations to sustain them on the march through the jungle to the Communist base areas. When this ran out, the distribution of war bonds allowed the Hainan Column to stock sufficient grain and other supplies in preparation to carry on the campaign with ranks that would be swollen by the arrival of the PLA regulars. Further, the war bonds allowed for a smooth transition to a centralized banking system. As late as the first week of May 1950, Feng was still managing the financial transition. Rather than wait for an appointment from Beijing or Guangzhou, Feng appointed his Hainan comrade Lin Keze to the task of consolidating the Haikou banks. Lin was trained on the mainland, but his knowledge of the local gold reserves and banks of the Nationalists allowed him to accomplish the task quickly.³⁸²

Where Chen Jitang had failed in his attempt to unify the banks of Hainan under a single authority, the Communists quickly succeeded. By May 28, 1950, the Hainan Civil and Military Administrative Committee had taken control of the six major banks on Hainan, and by June 9, had consolidated them into the Hainan Branch of the People's

³⁸² He Lang and Wu Zhi 贺朗, 吴之, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯百驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 726-727. Lin accomplished the task of collecting the Nationalist reserves nearly perfectly. Feng only scolded him on one point. When Lin and his men were collecting the gold reserves, Lin suggested Feng's wife take a bauble for herself – "a souvenir of the revolution." For the austere Feng, this type of behavior would not stand, and according to this account in Feng's biography, Lin quickly acknowledged his mistake under Feng's criticism.

Bank of China.³⁸³ Within weeks of the May 1 declaration of Communist victory on Hainan, the major financial apparatuses were solidly under CCP control. The work of the Hainan Column in preparing for the takeover made this an almost seamless transition.

Ma Baishan and the Tributary Revolution

Ma Baishan recalled the May 1950 celebration at the Five Ministers' Temple as a joyous occasion, with speeches, singing, dancing, and many toasts to the victory that was shared by the Hainan and mainland Communists.³⁸⁴ As they first assembled in a small field under the walls of the Temple, some of the officers and men and women who could not understand each other's dialects communicated by enthusiastically gesturing with their hands, or scratching the Chinese characters that they both understood in the sand.³⁸⁵ Feng Baiju and Deng Hua entered together, and the crowd erupted in applause for the two most celebrated heroes of the campaign. There was a stage set up for them, with red flags hanging from each corner, and a banner hung across it that read, "Conference to celebrate Hainan's victorious liberation and joining forces." The outdoor banquet was an occasion for relatively lavish celebration. Though the food was simple, it filled the shrunken bellies of the guerrillas for the first time in what seemed like ages. Ma Baishan sat with Feng Baiju and looked on with pride. Ma noted the speeches of both Feng and

³⁸³ *Hainan sheng zhi: Jinrong zhi*, 72, 75, 533-534. The name of the bank would be changed in November 1950, and the Hainan Branch would become simply a division of the Guangdong Branch of the People's Bank of China.

³⁸⁴ Ma Baishan and Ma Biqian 马白山, 马必前, *Yuxue tianya* 浴血天涯 [Bloody Horizon] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007 [volume 2]), 387-389.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

the Hunan general, Deng Hua, who had landed on the beaches with the forces of the Fourth Field Army.

Months earlier, Ma had seen a far grander celebration. He had traveled to Beijing with the commander of Hainan's Li people, Wang Guoxing. Their mission had been to report and receive orders for the final Hainan campaign.³⁸⁶ Just as Feng Baiju was the leader of the Communist movement on Hainan, Wang Guoxing was the leader of the Li minority group that made up about 15 percent of the island's population.³⁸⁷ For centuries of imperial Chinese rule of Hainan, the Li people had been an annoyance to attempts to control the island, at times rising in open rebellion, and consistently obstructing Han Chinese settlement of the island's interior.³⁸⁸ Beginning in the 1920s, the Nationalists were clumsy and brutal in their attempts to negotiate with the Li people, leading to the latter's further estrangement from their mainland colonizers.

The Japanese were more efficient in suppressing and controlling the Li, beginning with their occupation of Hainan in February of 1939. Japanese enslavement of much of the Li population for mining operations in the central Li regions of the island led to

³⁸⁶ Ma Baishan 马白山, "Beishang canjia zhengxie huiyi" 北上参加政协会议 [Going north to attend the Political Consultative Conference], in Ma Baishan and Ma Biqian 马白山, 马必前, *Yuxue tianya* 浴血天涯 [Bloody Horizon] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007) [Vol. 2], 122-125.

³⁸⁷ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi [Hainan provincial local history and gazetteer office], eds. *Hainan shengzhi: Renkou zhi, fangyan zhi, zongjiao zhi* 海南省志: 人口志, 方言志, 宗教志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Population gazetteer, dialect gazetteer, religion gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1994), 67-69.

³⁸⁸ Yang Dechun 杨德春, *Hainandao gudai jianshi* 海南岛古代简史 [A brief history of Hainan island in ancient times] (Jilin: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1988), 143-148.

violent and organized uprisings by the Li. Finally, in 1943, after the Japanese forced the Nationalists to seek an inland refuge, they massacred several Li villages, leading to the Li Baisha Uprising against them in July of 1943. This was shortly followed by Wang Guoxing's successful efforts to link the Li forces under his command with Feng Baiju and the Hainan Independent Column.³⁸⁹ While the Li did not come to their alliance with the Hainanese Independent Column by the path of Communist ideology or even Chinese nationalism, the alliance resulted in the significant strengthening of the Hainan Communist forces. Wang's help was to be indispensable in the survival of the Communist presence on Hainan, for the Li maintained control of many of the nearly inaccessible reaches of the island's southern mountainous and jungle interior.

Wang's trip with Ma Baishan to Beijing in the fall of 1949 was a kind of tribute mission, in the tradition of the missions of imperial China that secured regional alliances and shored up the military, political, and cultural boundaries of China. Ostensibly, Ma was Hainan's representative at the Political Consultative Conference that was to be held there. In the summer of 1949, much of southern China was still in Nationalist hands, so Ma and the rest of the Hainan delegation to the conference had to travel with fake documents and under assumed names, and separately. The traveling was dangerous and slow, and Ma bought his tickets under the name Li, his cover that of a businessman. He frequently changed trains, boats, and trucks when it was possible he had aroused some suspicion. Ma reached the northern city of Qingdao by early September, and was safe within Communist territory. The Hainan delegation regrouped joyously, and in the

³⁸⁹ Zhong Yuanxiu 中元秀, *Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing* 黎族人民领袖王国兴 [The leader of the Li people, Wang Guoxing] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), 33-38.

surreal atmosphere of peace, the band of guerrillas was given two days to see the sights in Jinan.³⁹⁰ Then they made their way on to Beiping (Northern Peace), the city that had long been China's imperial capital, but had been supplanted by the Nationalists' Nanjing regime as capital of the republic. In a few days it would again be named Beijing (Northern Capital).

On October 1, 1949, Ma was invited to a grand event to be held in the center of the city. Atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) Ma Baishan watched as Party Chairman Mao Zedong announced the founding of the Communist People's Republic of China. After meeting with the highest military officials of the new nation, and giving his report, Ma and Wang made their way back south. So fast had the Communist military conquest of the mainland progressed, that he did not need to travel under an assumed name with fake documents, moving through newly secured Communist territory. Arriving back in Guangdong, at the February 1950 meeting that established the final plans for the assault, Ma communicated Feng Baiju's assessment of the situation, and counseled against a direct assault on the north. Instead, he advised several pincer movements that would avoid a blunt battle of attrition to take Haikou.

Having observed the weakened state of the Nationalist forces that had retreated there in front of the southern Communist expedition, Ma and Feng realized that a frontal assault would most likely lead to a bloody and protracted battle for the city. This might have revitalized the morale of the Nationalists and turned the civilian population against

³⁹⁰ Ma Baishan 马白山, "Beishang canjia zhengxie huiyi" 北上参加政协会议 [Going north to attend the Political Consultative Conference], in Ma Baishan and Ma Biqian 马白山, 马必前, *Yuxue tianya* 浴血天涯 [Bloody Horizon] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007) [Vol. 2] 123-124.

the Communists.³⁹¹ The examples of Jinmen and Dengbu were still fresh in the memory of all Communist military commanders, and doubtless remembered as a rare and proud victory for Nationalist leaders.

While almost all of the news from China's military front in 1948-49 was favorable to the Communists, the attempts in the fall of 1949 to take Jinmen and Dengbu were tactical blunders. When the Nationalists moved their political and military headquarters to Taiwan, and maintained significant, threatening island holdouts, amphibious warfare took on new urgency for the Communists. The Nationalists maintained massive fortifications on the Zhoushan archipelago, Jinmen, Hainan, and Taiwan. The Communists lacked any credible sea or air military force, though contemporary and historical bluster and propaganda suggested that was not the case, or that Soviet aid might soon change this. Similar to the Hainan preparations that began three months later, Communist military commanders assembled a flotilla of junks to ferry soldiers across the narrow channel that separated the tiny island of Jinmen from the mainland. The momentum of the land war that had been so favorable to the Communists was drowned in the narrow waters, as communications failed, boats were scattered, and Nationalists fighters and warships obliterated the amphibious force. The Communist forces were repulsed, and Jinmen today is still administered by the Taipei government, in spite of its proximity to the mainland.

The lessons of Jinmen chastened the Communist high command, and far more preparations went into the Hainan campaign. But Chairman Mao stated the obvious, as

³⁹¹ A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve of the Communist Takeover* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 296-303.

he was wont to do in military matters during the final stage of the civil war, when he remarked in a telegram that Hainan was not the same as Jinmen. He noted that the enemy force was relatively weak, and that on Hainan, there was Feng Baiju. While the first statement was self-evident in the fall of 1949, Mao perhaps was wrong when he said this in January of 1950. Hainan forces had been reinforced in the meantime, and the Nationalist General Xue Yue had been assigned to the defense of the island. Xue was universally respected as a tenacious and brilliant tactician, and he wasted no time in attempting to eradicate the Hainan Independent Column.

At the May 5 banquet, Feng Baiju gave one of the two main speeches that drew roars of approval from the assembled audience. Deng Hua gave the other speech. Deng was to become the political and military authority on Hainan, with Feng as his second in command. Deng's speech acknowledged the help of the Communist forces, and he credited the local guerrillas with a major role in the victory. "Had it not been for the Hainan Independent Column, the liberation of Hainan would not have been accomplished in the manner that it was."³⁹² Feng, in turn said that the Communist conquest of Hainan would have been impossible without the help of the "great army" (*dajun*), that arrived from the mainland.

While the speeches of both Deng and Feng paid compliments to each other's forces and their mutual roles in the Communist takeover of Hainan, there was some tension in apportioning of credit. It seemed that there was immediately an awareness of the zero-sum perception of the mainland and local Communist forces. That is, there was

³⁹² Deng Hua speech, *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*.

only so much glory to go around, and it had to be carefully apportioned to the two clearly distinguished forces. This reflected a concern with the divergent hopes of the mainland and local interests for Hainan's future. If the Hainan guerrillas gave all credit for the conquest to the mainland forces, or vice versa, the side that laid claim to that glory would be in a position to steer the political future of the island. Jinmen was an undeniable example of the Communists' pathetic naval and amphibious capabilities, along with the failure to mount any credible assault on Taiwan. The obvious conclusion was that indeed the Hainan Communist presence was a crucial factor that allowed victory, and set it apart from other islands and regions.

While the interests of the local guerrillas and the mainland regulars were different going into the campaign, and continuing in the wake of the victory, the military campaign itself was an unqualified success for both sides. The shared enemy of the Nationalists was the foundation of their cooperation. The Hainan Independent Column had relied heavily on the Li for its survival. Orders from the mainland to abandon the Hainan base has been flouted, albeit as deferentially as possible, by the Hainan Independent Column.³⁹³ But this had reflected a consistent preference on Hainan for representing local interests over those of the mainland revolution.

The banquet of May 5, 1950 was the first moment of moment of negotiation following the victory. The speeches represented both past conflict and cooperation between the Hainan and mainland Communists, and future hopes for the island. Feng's

³⁹³ Qiongya wuzhuang douzheng shi bangongshi [Hainan military struggle history office], eds., *Qiongya zongdui shi* 琼崖纵队史 [History of the Hainan Column] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 209-217.

references to a “new Hainan” and the hopes for democratic change on the island reflected the interests of the Hainan revolution.

The Communist victory in the Hainan campaign, seen from the perspective of the island guerrillas, was in turns a negotiation and a leap of faith. With victory came the greater Chinese Communist revolution, and naturally Hainan would become a part of the new Beijing regime. But the extent to which Hainan would maintain its leadership was not clear. It was also not clear that Beijing would endow Hainan island with provincial status, as had been long discussed in certain circles of Chinese politics in the far south. This had been a hope of many Hainan political leaders, and the move had also been advocated by several prominent non-Hainanese politicians since the late Qing. Though the movement to grant Hainan provincial status would make the island China’s smallest province, the territorial waters that surround it, including Vietnam to the west, the Philippines to the east, and Singapore and Malaysia to the south, make Hainan a crucial geographical entity within the Chinese map.

In the spring of 2001 and 2009, confrontations between American and Chinese military intelligence operatives have led to diplomatic flaps between the two remaining global empires, putting Hainan front and center, and reviving a tone of militant impotence reminiscent of Cold War posturing. It seems likely that such incidents will continue, as neither side proposed any significant change in their respective border protection and intelligence gathering policies.

Hainan’s ongoing political issues as a maritime border province made the provincial question significant in 1950 and before that. But more importantly, perhaps, was the concern that the work done by the local guerrillas in twenty-three years of

holding aloft the red flag, would be brushed aside by a few pen strokes in Beijing. If this happened, the Hainanese leadership would surely make efforts to reverse this, but the question remained how vocal they would or could be. In the victorious ebullience of May 1950, leaders like Feng Baiju considered it to be the wrong moment for taking a stand on this question. Perhaps provincial status would come in time, but still, it was important that the local guerrillas were given their due, and Feng worked immediately to make sure that happened. As it happened, Hainan was not granted provincial status shortly after the Communist takeover. Only in 1988, almost fifteen years after Feng's death, did Hainan become a province, and, according to one Hainan author, finally "history proved that Feng's views and management had been correct."³⁹⁴

The snoozing Hainan island guerrillas, swinging slowly in their hammocks between a couple palms in the warm sea breeze, were subject to gentle ribbing by the northern PLA regulars in the spring of 1950. But there was a seriousness to this cultural difference. The guerrilla struggle on Hainan had not allowed for the same type of regular drilling and indoctrination that the mainland regulars had seen. And with the victorious conquest of most of the mainland, the training, recruitment, and conscription of the regular PLA forces had become far more systematic and effective than what they found on the beaches of Hainan. The Hainan guerrillas had come to the Hainan Independent Column by a far different route than their comrades. And this affected the way they thought about China, the way they thought about Communism, and the way they fought.

³⁹⁴ Chen Keqin, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Making Hainan a province] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 54.

The long tradition of conscription allowed for the maintenance of China's empires' borders, and the maintenance of internal stability. Hainan garrisons were staffed by a combination of locally conscripted forces and mainlanders. The officers for the most part were mainlanders. Only one region of Hainan, Wenchang county, had a long tradition of producing excellent military leaders. By the time the Qing empire fell in 1911, Wenchang was still sending its brightest sons to the mainland to study, many of them to study in the military academies. Most of them went on to attend the famous Whampoa (Huangpu) Academy, and become officers in the Nationalist military.³⁹⁵

While Wenchang had an exceptionally glorious military reputation, conscription of Hainanese into the military was violently opposed on many occasions. As noted above, the Li people often led this opposition, launching uprisings that became especially frequent during the Qing dynasty. But resistance to sometimes brutal mainland military policies was not limited to the Li of the inner island. The Communist triumphalist histories of the Party often contrast the recruitment methods of the Party with those of the Nationalists.³⁹⁶ While these accounts of the transition from Nationalist dragooning to

³⁹⁵ Guo Wenyong 郭仁勇, *Wenchang jiangjun zhuan* 文昌将军传 [Biographies of Wenchang generals] (Hong Kong: Tianma tushu youxian gongsi, 2002). Since the 1911 revolution, Wenchang produced 197 high level officers (referred to in Chinese with the umbrella and loose term of “generals”) in the Nationalist army. This is an astounding figure for such a small city. One noteworthy exception to the Nationalist alliances of Wenchang officers is Zhang Yunyi, general in the PLA and Long Marcher. Other than his birthplace, however, his military career had little to do with the Hainan revolution.

³⁹⁶ Hainansheng difang shizhi bangongshi [Hainan provincial local history and gazetteer office], eds. *Hainan shengzhi: Junshi zhi* 海南省志: 军事志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Military affairs gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1998), 141-152.

Communist voluntarism must be read with skepticism, the nature of the Hainan guerrilla war demanded military as well as political flexibility.

The Baisha Uprising of 1943 brought much of the Hainanese Li community into alliance with the Communist Hainan Independent Column, but not through any successful propagation of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideas. The brutality of the Nationalists and the Japanese led to the alliance of convenience between the Li people and the Communist guerrillas. The reputation of the small, beleaguered, and often weak Communist forces on Hainan was not as stained as that of the Japanese or the Nationalists. Further, they had implemented some gradual land reforms and progressive rent and tax policies where they were able to do so. So, as Pepper suggests, a singular causal explanation of the Communists' survival and success on Hainan is not appropriate here. Progressive policies and alliances of convenience had built the strength of the Hainan Independent Column, but it was certainly the latter that played a stronger role in its survival in the darkest hours of the revolution.

Feng's political acumen throughout his two decades of revolutionary leadership leaves no room for the possibility that the Hainanese revolutionary leadership was simply naïve in its leap of faith into the arms of the Beijing regime. He had expectations for Hainan's treatment in the new PRC regime, most obviously, provincial status for the island. But he was realistic about Hainan's weak position in bargaining with a popular and powerful new Beijing government. The victorious conquest that brought the Communists to power on Hainan was a long fought struggle. The Communist leadership had allowed the Hainan leadership considerable leeway in its improvisational policy-making, and the flush of success perhaps masked the inevitable crackdown that would

come with the rise of the Communists to power. Feng certainly realized this, judging from his writings. He often referred to the leadership of the Hainan Communists as being not adequately trained in matters of ideology.

In his speech at the Five Ministers' Temple that came years after his repeated requests for better instructors and cadres to be sent to Hainan from the mainland, he still explicitly referred to the need for the Hainanese revolutionary leadership and its ranks to learn from the correct example of the mainlanders. Like Ma, Feng sought to strengthen ties to the mainland revolution at every opportunity, but this did not necessarily mean sacrificing the experienced leadership – not least, himself – for the sake of political purity or unquestioning obedience to the central Communist authority. This, however, is what happened quickly on Hainan. The first casualty was the history of the Hainan revolution, followed shortly by the weakening of the Hainanese leadership.

Sharing victory

The insulated political and military situation on Hainan of the 1930s and 1940s was forever changed with the Communist victory there in the spring of 1950. The island became a prominent story throughout international headlines when the Communist victory meant that half of Nationalist-held territory had fallen into the hands of the Reds. While taking Taiwan presented far more logistical difficulties for the Communists, it was seen as the next step in the conquest. At the Five Ministers' Temple, on the night of May 5, 1950, no rambunctious toasts were offered about the imminent taking of Taiwan.

The forces that were preparing for this campaign were hundreds of miles up the Chinese coast, and their preparations to cross a broader expanse with little hope of having

sufficient naval support was more than daunting. It seemed it would require a miracle, unless the campaign preparations stretched on for another year. But the United States did not offer direct support for holding Hainan, the way that they would with the Seventh Fleet for Taiwan following the outbreak of the Korean War. At the time of the Hainan campaign, however, there was no promise that sufficient direct US military aid would be forthcoming in the final battle of the civil war that many expected would be fought for Taiwan. While the ideological world of the Cold War had been far from Hainan, it became an immediate factor once the PLA troops landed on the shores of the island.

But even with the strength of the PLA, and the extensive preparations of the local Communist forces, the Beijing regime's posturing suggested insecurity in the volatile and uncertain early years of bluster and dissembling in the Cold War. What this meant on Hainan was that the victory must be swift and absolute. On the global stage, the Hainan campaign was not a foregone conclusion. Outsiders saw this as a significant test of the young PRC, and its success or failure would be broadcast to the world by reporters in Hong Kong who were close enough to Hainan to bypass the propaganda reports from Beijing.

Feng Baiju and the leadership of the Communist movement had consistently built their revolution on improvisation and sensitivity in Hainan's specific political and cultural environment. They had welcomed all comers to their cause, needing all the support that they could get to strengthen their forces in the face of relentless Japanese and Nationalists attempts to wipe them out. In earlier chapters I will show the improvisational nature of this type of revolutionary leadership, which remained a factor straight through the final phase of the Communist conquest on Hainan, but only from the

perspective of Hainan. This had allowed the survival of the revolution on Hainan, but on the national level, the transition from revolution to rule meant that there was no longer as much of a need for survival-based policies. The days of guerrilla warfare were over, as much as the propaganda emanating from Beijing and Moscow insisted that the revolution was still alive, and would remain the perpetual life force of the new regime.

Beijing aimed to solidify its holdings, and to appear strong and unified on the global stage. The weakness of the Nationalists was already apparent to the world, and the Cold War rhetoric of China having been lost to the Communists was prevalent, especially in the view of the Americans. The global realm of politics in this period left no room for nuance on the ground. The titans of the Cold War made Hainan nothing more than a pawn in the game, a trophy island. And so Hainan became again the treasure island of China. Its strategic importance now took the place of its natural beauty and its exotic resources as its regional importance, but still the Hainan revolution was not the narrative that emerged from the conquest. In the wake of the success, the Hainanese revolutionaries cast their lot in with the new Beijing regime, and the PRC history of the events became one of revolutionary fishermen volunteering their boats and their skills and knowledge of the region, and ruddy-faced northern peasants braving the dangerous waters of the Qiongzhou Strait to bring the revolution to Hainan.

So the ebullient atmosphere of the celebration was tempered perhaps by several factors. Tibet and Taiwan had not yet been incorporated into the PRC, and both presented the new regime with formidable challenges. Taiwan was much farther from the coast than Hainan, and would require a much more sophisticated naval assault. Tibet was to become a pawn in the Cold War clashes, its insurgents encouraged, trained, and armed

by the Americans. Meanwhile, nearby Vietnam, and Korea to the north were also flashpoints in the titanic struggle for influence in the region. This was another important difference between the Hainan Communists and the mainland regulars. The interests in the revolutionary struggle were different in their connection to this larger political context.

Winning and losing the campaign

Most of the forces of the Forth Field Army were far from their homes in northeastern China. Many of them had never stepped on a boat, and had only a few weeks of training along the Guangdong coast to prepare. As noted above, the high-ranking PLA officer, Han Xianchu, remembered the preparations with a combination of humor and hyperbolic celebration. The constant seasickness of the once landlocked Fourth Field Army amused some of the local fishermen, who ribbed them even as they praised their determination and eagerness to learn. Han's account is full of Communist boilerplate and perhaps for this reason it has become one of the classic narratives about Hainan within the mythology of the Party's rise. But Han seems to have had little regard for the work of the Hainan Column. In reference to the conference in which Ma Baishan instructed the mainland forces on how they should execute their landing operations, Han inserts Mao Zedong, standing over maps consulting with Lin Biao on how to proceed. Mao Zedong was in Moscow at the time, and Lin Biao was in Beijing!³⁹⁷ Ma Baishan

³⁹⁷ Han Xianchu, "Hainandao saotao zhan" 海南岛扫讨战 [The Hainan island mop-up campaign], from *Xinghuo liaoyuan* 星火燎原 [A single spark can start a prairie fire], translated and reprinted in the appendix of Reed Richard Probst, *The Communist Conquest of Hainan* (George Washington University, PhD dissertation, 1982), 227.

does not appear in Han's account, nor is Feng Baiju's name mentioned. Still, Han's account is full of amusing and heroic scenes, even if the account of the events is less accurate than a *Los Angeles Times* report datelined from Hong Kong.

The Hainan campaign has taken on mythic proportions both on the island and the mainland. In most official accounts of the campaign, narratives like Han Xianchu's version have come to prevail, recounting a spectacular, even miraculous battle at sea between wooden junks and Nationalist warships. Indeed even with the lack of vigorous support from Taiwan, the Nationalists were far better equipped for the battle, with twenty-five warplanes, and over fifty military vessels of various sizes and capacities.³⁹⁸ Nationalist bombing campaigns went essentially unanswered over the Communist troops on Guangdong's Leizhou Peninsula, while they were preparing for their assault on Hainan.³⁹⁹

As has been noted, the Taiwanese Nationalist headquarters had not favored the task of holding Hainan Island with much aid. Taiwanese papers had accused the Nationalist head of Hainan, Chen Jitang, of harboring his own parochial views, in language that foreshadowed later Communist accusations leveled at Feng Baiju.⁴⁰⁰ The same journal that criticized Chen for his localist views also encouraged the Nationalist fighters on Hainan to make "another Jinmen" of this battle and repel the Communist

³⁹⁸ *Dangdai Zhongguo de Hainan* 当代中国的海南, [Hainan in modern China] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993), 77.

³⁹⁹ *China Handbook, 1951* (Taipei: China Publishers, 1952), 151.

⁴⁰⁰ "Chen Jitang yao zuo Hainan wang," [Chen Jitang wants to be king of Hainan] in *Xinwen tiandi* (December 4, 1949), 9.

assault.⁴⁰¹ Although high-level pessimism on Taiwan meant that little more materiel would be committed there, some popular optimism remained.

In spite of the wide variance in statistics on military capabilities of both Communist and Nationalist forces, it is clear that the strategic advantage appeared to be with the Nationalist. Most observers agreed that Hainan could be held, but concerns had grown among advisors who had experience with Communist guerrillas. Yan Xishan presented a classified assessment of the situation on Hainan, advising an immediate adoption of policies that built support at the village level.⁴⁰² This was the only way the popularity of the Communists could be challenged. The policy answer to Yan Xishan's report was to put a Nationalist national hero in charge of the suppression campaigns on the island. Xue Yue, like Chen Jitang, was a Guangdong native.

Two months before the Communist assault was launched from the mainland, Xue launched a suppression campaign against the Hainan Column and any other resisters to Nationalist rule.⁴⁰³ February 1950 was devastating to the Hainan Communists, but even after takeover of the island, Xue's reputation as a hero of the resistance precluded any denigration of his character by the Communists. Other Nationalist leaders like Chen Hanguang did not share Xue's credentials, and they became the villains of Hainan's local

⁴⁰¹ *Xinwen tiandi* (December 31, 1949).

⁴⁰² Yan Xishan, *Taiwan ji Hainan dao baowei an* [A plan for the protection of Taiwan and Hainan Islands], 17-24.

⁴⁰³ *Hainan shengzhi: Junshi zhi* 690.

history, with oral histories remembering him as a ruthless butcher.⁴⁰⁴ But even with the heroism or brutality of the various Nationalist leaders, it was indeed the “end of the line,” as A. Doak Barnett reported.

Between local militia forces and army regulars there were still as many as 200,000 Nationalist troops on Hainan, and the highest concentration of them was in Haikou. When Barnett visited Hainan in November of 1949, he reported on the pathetic state of the Nationalist forces in Haikou. Many of them had been fleeing before the Communist lines as the PLA marched more swiftly than they themselves had anticipated from the northeast to the south. The Nationalist forces in Haikou were demoralized and malnourished. They were also poorly armed, for Barnett reports witnessing some of the troops selling their rusted weapons for food or money that was not forthcoming from Taiwan. While the Nationalist central authorities hoarded munitions and the best-trained troops on Taiwan, Nationalist forces on Hainan languished in bitterness. Many of these troops were ripe for Communist recruitment, and desertion was endemic among those who were healthy enough to make their way to the Communist base areas.⁴⁰⁵

The quick destruction of the Nationalist defenses still did not prevent the Hainan campaign from being a significant propaganda coup for the new Beijing regime. Though the final battle had not been as taxing on the PLA as some had predicted, it was still a great triumph on the international stage. And so the Hainan revolutionaries who had held

⁴⁰⁴ Yuan Jizheng “Chen Hanguang jingweilü zai Qiongya de cansha” [Chen Hanguang’s guard brigade’s massacre in Hainan], He Kaiqia “Chen Hanguang dui Hainan shaoshuminzu de xuexing tongzhi” [Chen Hanguang’s bloody rule over the ethnic minorities of Hainan].

⁴⁰⁵ Barnett (1963), 296-303.

aloft the red flag for twenty-three years were silenced in a matter of months, drowned out by the rhetoric of a new, unified China. The Korean War and the Taiwan Straits shelling of Jinmen in the 1950s reduced Hainan again to being a backwater of China, and a trophy island won in the final days of the civil war.

Economist and historian Feng Chongyi sees cause for optimism in the crisis of Hainanese culture. Like the latter-day Confucian, Du Weiming, Feng believes that it may fall to China's peripheral peoples to reinvigorate the decaying cultural center of Chinese identity.⁴⁰⁶ At least on the history of the Hainanese revolution, the past two decades have seen a flood of historical analyses and recollection volumes published. It is no longer possible to tell the history of Hainan as an island saved by a "people's flotilla" of volunteer fishermen and seasick PLA regulars. The essential role of the Hainan revolutionaries in the Communist success on the island complicates this narrative. What came after demands new scrutiny of the "honeymoon" myth of the early PRC.

⁴⁰⁶ Feng Chongyi, "Seeking Lost Codes in the Wilderness: The Search for a Hainanese Culture," *China Quarterly* 160 (December 1999): 1036-1056.

Chapter Six

Bringing Hainan to the Nation's Heel: Anti-Localism in the 1950s

Following the successful Communist conquest of Hainan, came celebration for those who counted this as their victory. The guerrilla forces, along with their civilian support base, hosted the newly arrived “main army” (*da jun*) from the mainland. There were feasts for officers and joyful greetings on the beaches and throughout the villages and cities of the Hainan. The celebration would be short-lived, and the relationship between the local Communists of Hainan would be traumatically fractured within two years. On the national level, the beginning of the Korean War in June cast doubt on the feasibility of taking Taiwan, and the momentum of the civil war fizzled. Following the beginning of the Korean War in June, the US Seventh Fleet steamed into the waters between Taiwan and Fujian, and established that island as a foothold in the region that the US would not allow to be incorporated into the new People's Republic of China (PRC).

In celebrations of the Hainan conquest only a month earlier, before US interests had been made so clear, cries were raised to follow Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan and finish him off. To the west, the conquest of Tibet was another major preoccupation, also with an international dimension that could complicate early PRC ambitions. And so, the Hainan conquest, within a matter of weeks, slipped into the new normalcy of the PRC, and the pivot from revolution to rule on Hainan was a very sharp turn. There was no period for acclimation, but rather an expectation from the mainland authorities that

nation-building on Hainan would hit the ground running, and joining the flow of national campaigns that had already been underway for months or years in other regions of Communist territory.

In the previous chapters, we have seen the ongoing problems with communications and command between the Hainan and the mainland Communist leadership. The distance had given the Hainan leadership some degree of de facto autonomy, but with the May 1950 incorporation of Hainan into the Communist regime, and the island's incorporation into the province of Guangdong, Hainan would be brought to the heel of the national government, and quickly. In official documents, there are no references to the mistakes of disobedience, improvisation, or moderation on the part of the Hainan leadership in this earlier period, but this was doubtless a factor in the early implementation of policy on the island. As noted above, the fact that the Hainan leadership was beyond the reach of the mainland Communist command's discipline accounted for the lack of impotent orders from the Party center, and instead, any disobedience was retroactively sanctioned, as was the case in the 1946 "retreat" orders.

The specter of "localism" (*difang zhuyi*) was raised early in PRC rule of the island, referring to any leadership that favored Hainan local interests over national priorities. Often mainland cadres and bureaucrats perceived localism in the form of moderation of radical policies, most importantly land reform. This chapter will examine the troubled relationship between the local Communists leadership of Hainan and that of the mainland in the early 1950s. Feng Baiju continued to represent and work for Hainanese interests in this period, and for nearly a year after the Communist conquest he was fully supported by the central leadership. Then, in early 1951, as the land reform

campaign on Hainan began in earnest, the unacceptably slow pace of reform on Hainan led to an influx of outside cadres, or the Southbound workforce (*nanxia ganbu*), whose main task was to overcome the local obstacles to speedy implementation of land reform policy. As land reform accelerated, perceived local resistance continued in various forms. The perception of “localism,” or resistance to this acceleration, however, is worth examining. From the perspective of Beijing and Wuhan (the headquarters of the Communist southern bureau), the southern regions like Guangdong, and especially Hainan, were resisting the implementation of radical land reform policies out of an alleged desire to create an “independent kingdom” on Hainan.

Whether this was true, the voices coming out of Hainan in this period seem to express frustration, and ultimately despair, as Hainanese attempts to resist the centralization that came with the land reform campaign ultimately failed. Later, Feng Baiju blamed the newly arrived leadership in Guangdong, including Ou Mengjue, Zhao Ziyang, and Tao Zhu for the harsh policies that led to the uprooting of local cadres and the local leadership at the highest levels, including himself. These three high-level officials arrived in Hainan, according to Feng, with a sense of superiority and even infallibility. Like the flood of young intellectuals who arrived on the island to implement land reform and radicalize local politics, Feng believed that these three leaders had put on airs of superiority, and not solidarity, from their first arrival in the region. This had

created a rift that was impossible to bridge, and necessitated a conflict between the local and mainland leadership.⁴⁰⁷

In the early 1950s, however, this type of resistance to newly arrived cadres was difficult to express safely. This resistance manifested in different ways, and it was interpreted in different ways by the Hainan and mainland leadership. In some instances, what was perceived as resistance was in fact something else, like obedience to outdated directives or abject despair and exhaustion. Indeed, Feng and others later referred to the 1920s and 1930s leadership of Mao and Zhu De in Jinggangshan and Yan'an, asserting that their reliance on local conditions for survival was similar.

Feng Baiju reflected on the political consciousness of the Hainan leadership on May 8, 1950, referring to those political workers and guerrillas under his command in the twenty-three year Communist struggle (1927-1950).

The revolutionary struggle on Hainan has a history of over twenty years, and in that time there have been Communist Party, military, civilian government, and other types of people's organizations. The struggle has been a trial and a tempering for the people. But this is not enough. If the main army did not come to Hainan, liberation would have been impossible... If the main army had not come, we might still be in Wuzhishan... We have many difficult challenges before us, but we can overcome them all. Most important is still our understanding of ideological problems. It is incorrect to try to implement guerrilla work methods in our new environment. Comrades! We have persevered for over twenty years in our struggle on this isolated island, not receiving the direct help of outside revolutionary strength and cooperation. Today is a great opportunity. Not only do we have outside revolutionary strength of help and cooperation, but we also have an opportunity to study. We must

⁴⁰⁷ Feng Baiju 冯白驹, "Feng Baiju tanpan Ou Mengjue qingkuang" 冯白驹谈攀区梦觉情况 [Feng Baiju discusses the situation with Ou Mengjue], undated, hand-written document, probably a speech in a closed Party meeting, dating to 1961 or 1962.

make the most of this time, grasp this opportunity, and study from the main army in order to transform, strengthen, and enrich ourselves.⁴⁰⁸

In this article, as in other speeches and writings, Feng readily acknowledges the need of Hainan Communist workers to study and learn new methods from the main army and the newly arrived cadres. Feng would eventually be charged with favoring local cadres over those newly arrived ones that he praised in the above quote.⁴⁰⁹ He even would be accused of supporting a military insurrection against the mainland political and military operatives who arrived in Hainan in the early 1950s. Those who called him a localist said also that he had spread the idea that (contradictory to what he said here in April 1950) the Communists of Hainan could have taken over the island without the help of the mainland force.⁴¹⁰ There is no evidence to support any of these accusations, and they seem to contradict the sentiments Feng expressed in this article published in the early days of Communist rule on Hainan.

Feng's warm rhetoric of spring 1950 would be challenged a year later, however, when a much larger contingent of Southbound cadres arrived to accelerate land reform.

⁴⁰⁸ Feng Baiju 冯白驹, "Zhaojin jihui xiang jiefang dajun xuexi" 抓紧机会向解放大军学习 [Seize the opportunity to study from the PLA main army], originally printed in *Xin Hainan bao* 新海南报 [New Hainan Journal], May 8, 1950, and reprinted in Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi ban'gongshi 中共海南区党委党史办公室 [The history office for the Chinese Communist Party Committee of Hainan district], eds., *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* 冯白驹研究史料 [Historical Research Materials on Feng Baiju] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 192-195.

⁴⁰⁹ Ou Mengjue. "What Have Been the Mistakes of Ku Ta-ch'un and Feng Pai-chu?" in *Survey of China Mainland Press* 1899, pp. 16-23. (Originally published in the first issue of *Shangyou* [1958]).

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

In this context, many Communist cadres on Hainan began to push back against the increasing loss of autonomy in making local policy as well as military and political staffing.⁴¹¹ Resistance in this time is difficult to track however, since rhetoric such as Feng's article cited above continued through this era. For clarity on this issue, we must take the risk of looking not only at contemporary sources, but also at some retrospective one. While the focus of this chapter is the early 1950s and the first stage of the "localist" activities on Hainan, some of the best insights came from events, speeches and writings from several years later. A military uprising in late 1956 reflects the intense frustration of demobilized local military leaders and the soldiers under their command; a recorded speech by Feng in the political calm of 1962 is a frank counterattack that was not possible (or not recorded) in 1952; the official rehabilitation of Feng in 1983 and Hainan's 1988 provincial status perhaps represents the vindication of the Hainan localists. These all shed light on the early 1950s.

The previous chapters have established the tension between the mainland and Hainan Communist leadership. Within the first three years of Communist rule on Hainan, this conflict was firmly resolved in favor of the mainland command. While Hainan had traditionally been a destination of exiled officials, Feng Baiju was exiled in reverse, sent off of the island first to a post in Guangzhou and then in Zhejiang, in 1953 and 1957 respectively. These two changes for Feng were technically promotions within the Party, but their main purpose was clearly to uproot the Hainan leader from his home island, transplanting him into an environment where he could do little localist harm, and

⁴¹¹ Frederick C. Tiewes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-1965* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1979), 357-358, 366-367.

indeed little of anything since he could not understand the Zhejiang dialect.⁴¹² Perhaps the most indicative of local frustrations with new mainland controls on Hainan came with the series of uprisings in the winter of 1956-57. This was the culmination of the troubled relationship between local and newly arrived cadres, and a brief examination of this incident will serve to introduce the tensions that pervaded Hainan in the early 1950s.

The “Little Hungarian Incident”

In the fall of 1956, a revolution in Hungary broke out that challenged the rule and influence of the Soviet Union. It lasted several months, but Soviet troops finally crushed the movement and by early 1957 a new regime was in place, loyal to Moscow. While the uprising failed, the challenge it presented to Communist hierarchy was cause for concern throughout the Communist world. Just as Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization process had worried Mao about his own legacy, so too did he see possible Chinese parallels to incidents like the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Local uprisings based on regional interest could challenge Beijing’s centralized rule just as Hungary had challenged Moscow.

In Hainan, local soldiers and cadres were demobilized and dismissed from their posts as the Southbound cadres arrived on the island to take their places. Citing contemporary publications in his 1979 study, Frederick C. Tiewes notes that fully eighty percent of cadres of county-level and higher rank in Guangdong (then including Hainan) were relieved of their duties during and immediately after the land reform campaign

⁴¹² Wu Zhi, He Lang 吴之, 贺郎, *Feng Baiju zhuan* 冯白驹传 [Biography of Feng Baiju] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 844-845.

(1950-53).⁴¹³ By December of 1956, a relatively small-scale uprising in Lingao County on Hainan island earned the nickname the “Little Hungarian Incident” (*xiao Xiongyali shijian*). Coinciding with the Hungarian movement, timing was obviously a factor in the nickname, but like the movement in Hungary, the Lingao uprising clearly articulated a regional frustration with central directives, and a movement on the part of the central authorities to increase, rather than decrease, their administrative penetration. A group made up mostly of disaffected soldiers had risen against the newly installed Party apparatchiks from the mainland.

For many of these troops, there was no life to which they could return. They had left their hometowns and fled to a life of guerrilla subsistence and soviet-base life, and they had foregone their education and any professional training. A relatively high proportion of the Hainan fighting force was women, and they were ordered to return to their homes and start families. This was hard to take, especially considering the self-proclaimed progressive New Democracy of the Communist regime in Beijing. The fighting women of Hainan protested the order to go from being Communist spies, soldiers, and field doctors one day, to housewives and wet-nurses the next. Along with the rest of the demobilized Hainan forces, they watched as Hainan’s leadership was also removed from high posts on Hainan and throughout the southern region. These and other factors combined to drive several hundreds of the former Hainan forces to rise against their new mainland political leaders.

⁴¹³ Tiewes (1979), 368.

Most official records of the incident note only briefly that a small uprising occurred and was quickly put down. Accounts of the incident were published in southern Chinese newspapers at the time, but the most remarkable accounts are found in recollections published in the *Wenshi ziliao* collections of Lingao County. These personal histories, sometimes provided in interviews and sometimes written by the witnesses themselves, provide a richer account of the incidents that occurred at that time. As personal histories, and as accounts collected by agents of the Chinese Communist Party and government, they should be treated with some skepticism. Even so, collected during the 1980s and 1990s – a period of relative political openness – and published in volumes not intended for public circulation or for sale, we should treat them as relatively trustworthy accounts the events.⁴¹⁴ Other sources used here include interviews conducted by the author, recorded speeches of Party leaders, Hainan’s provincial gazetteers, and official communications between the provincial and central leaderships during the 1950s.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Zhengxie Lingaoxian wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui 政协临高县文史资料研究委员会 [Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Lingao County Historical Research Committee], eds., *Lingao Wenshi* 临高文史 [Lingao literature and history], volume 12, Hainansheng feiyingli chuban (Hainan Provincial non-profit publication): Lingao, 1998.

⁴¹⁵ For a major 1962 retrospective speech by Hainan’s most prominent Communist leader in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, see Feng Baiju’s February 5, 1962 speech, “Zai Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zhaokai de tanxin hui shang de fayan” 在中共广东省委召开的谈心会上的发言 [Speech at the meeting of the Chinese Communist Party Guangdong Provincial Committee], reprinted in Guangdong Qiongya gemingshi yanjiuhui 广东琼崖革命史研究会 [Guangdong, Hainan revolutionary history research association], eds., *Feng Baiju huiyilu* 冯白驹回忆录 [Feng Baiju recollection volume] (Hong Kong: Xianggang dongxi wenhua shiye gongsi, 2000). For official communications between the Hainan and mainland leadership during land reform of the early 1950s, see 海南省史志

Casualties are not listed in the official sources or the oral accounts, but the incident consisted of several hundred demobilized soldiers storming a government compound where local cadres had recently been disciplined and detained. The protests involved some violence, though the sources are not specific beyond citing the disruption of communications and the raiding of a detention house to free the local cadres. The incident was quickly contained, but it was held up as an example of the kind of insidious localism that lurked beneath the surface in regions like Hainan.

This chapter will explain the genesis of the frustration on the part of local Hainan Communists that could lead to uprisings like the “Little Hungarian Incident” of December 1956. What caused the rift between Hainanese and mainlanders in the 1950s? What political and cultural differences made their views of the island’s future so irreconcilable that it led demobilized Hainanese soldiers to violence? Why were Hainanese leaders removed from their posts in this period? How did this localist activity and the anti-localist crackdown that followed fit into the nation-state building project of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s?

The question of motivation, ideology, and the causes of Communist success must be asked repeatedly by successive generations because the Chinese Communist Party has shifted its priorities and perhaps even its reason for being. Sometimes this has been done deftly, and brought the CCP great victories against a militarily superior enemy or as a global economic force, and at other times, the Party shifted its goals and identity with

工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002).

disastrous consequences. Observed from different levels of society, great successes and catastrophes could overlap. In the case of the early 1950s, as the Communist regime consolidated its rule at light speed, the groundwork was also established for the streamlining of command that would allow the famine and chaos of the two decades to follow. The pivot from revolution to rule in 1949-50 represented a shift from besieged insurgent to master of China. While this historical transition may be challenged in favor of other major historical breaking points, on Hainan it represented a dramatic shift.⁴¹⁶

In the early twenty-first century, the Chinese leadership has emphasized its role as standard-bearers of a patriotic nation, rather than as international leaders of Marxist revolution. Historically, this means that the nationalist identity of the CCP legacy is currently the most important, while class struggle is far less so. In this context, the excesses and errors of revolutionary radicalism based on class struggle can therefore be held at arm's length from the current priorities, confined to the past, and safely acknowledged as a failed historical experiment. The identity of non-ideological modernizers and nation-builders is more important today than the revolutionary class-struggle identity of radical Communists. Indeed the ranks of the Party are full of the privileged class of capitalists who would be the victims of nearly every political campaign of the 1950s and 1960s.

The anti-localism campaign was a convergence of the two seemingly bipolar identities of patriotic nation-building on the one hand and class struggle on the other. It

⁴¹⁶ In a volume of essays, *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), the many different authors as well as the editors, Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, frequently note the aspects of continuity between Nationalist rule and the early Communist regime.

was a project of nationalism and nation-building, for it sought to bring to heel those regional leaders and interests that threatened to spread power too thinly and dilute the potency of Beijing's command over China. On the other hand, it was a radical ideological program, which aimed to implement a zealous policy of class struggle that could shatter the residual networks and associations of traditional society and build a truly new culture in its place. So in the anti-localism campaign, as well as in the “localist” movement that it sought to repress, ideologies of nationalism and communism are braided together inextricably as motivating factors. Contradictions abound in this type of braided policy, as do constant incremental adjustments.

Hainan's preeminent Communist leader, and target of the anti-localism campaigns, Feng Baiju, articulated this complexity when he remarked that in his reading of *Das Kapital* he had never come across anything about relying on any minority segment of the population – in this case, newly arrived cadres and soldiers from the north – who were trying to tell him and his fellow islanders how to make revolution and redistribute land.⁴¹⁷ Moving back in time from the tensions of the anti-localism campaigns that culminated in the military uprisings of 1956-57, the early days following the military conquest saw a smooth transition, as Feng Baiju was left in power as the favorite son of the island. The work of accepting the surrender of bedraggled Nationalist soldiers and

⁴¹⁷ Feng Baiju, “Zai Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zhaokai de tanxin hui shang de fayan” 在中共广东省委召开的谈心会上的发言 [Speech at the meeting of the Chinese Communist Party Guangdong Provincial Committee], February 5, 1962, reprinted in Guangdong Qiongya gemingshi yanjiuhui 广东琼崖革命史研究会 [Guangdong, Hainan revolutionary history research association], eds., *Feng Baiju huiyilu* 冯白驹回忆录 [Feng Baiju recollection volume] (Hong Kong: Xianggang dongxi wenhua shiye gonsi, 2000) 253-254.

completing the takeover of power was done smoothly, thanks to both the guerrilla and militia presence on the island, and to the initial reluctance to replace local cadres and demobilize the local fighting forces.

From Revolution to Rule: Hainan Honeymoon

After the success of the Communist takeover in the spring of 1950, there was a brief celebratory phase in which local leaders were praised and rewarded with high posts in the political and military infrastructures of Communist Hainan. For their part, the Li people, so crucial to the survival of the Communist movement on Hainan, were among the first of fifty-five ethnic groups to be officially recognized by the People's Republic of China (PRC), and thus granted special rights and territories under the new national government. As early as June of 1950, the four counties of Baoting, Ledong, Qiongzong, and Baisha were incorporated in an autonomous district for the Li and Miao people.⁴¹⁸

This brief period would not last, at least in the view of many local leaders who were made to obey the orders of cadres who had come south, serving in Hainan on behalf of national and Guangdong Provincial governments. While the official celebrations began, there was tension between the local Communist leaders and those who were newly arrived, and in spite of official rhetoric and ceremonial feasts, that tension was immediately apparent. The conflict between Hainanese and mainland cadres began innocently enough with teasing and mild humor. After a few months it escalated into

⁴¹⁸ Wang Xueping 王学萍, *Zhongguo Lizu* 中国黎族 [The Li Ethnic Group in China] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2004), 465.

clear political divisions, accusations of corruption and nepotism on the one hand, and carpetbagging on the other. By 1952, official “anti-localism” campaigns had begun, and by 1957 they would reach the climax that connected them to the anti-rightist movement that traumatized and alienated many of the political leaders and intellectuals of the PRC.

In August of 1950, three months after the Communist victory on Hainan, Feng Baiju was invited to Beijing to meet with Mao Zedong for the first time. He ultimately made the trip in November with his secretary, and with Ye Jianying, one of the most prominent military leaders in the Communist revolution. Although Ye had not made Guangdong the base of his revolutionary activities, after the military victory was complete there, he was brought in as the top provincial authority, based in part on his ties to the region. Prior to his trip to Beijing, Feng had met with Ye, Zhou Enlai, and other prominent national leaders, and he had communicated directly with Mao through central commands and responses. On his train ride from the south, Feng turned over in his mind what he would discuss with Mao. As supreme leader, Mao’s unrivaled power could serve to realize many of Feng’s wishes if he was willing. The possibility of immediate provincial status for Hainan was a major issue that Feng considered raising in his audience with the leader of Communist China.⁴¹⁹ The hierarchy of command at the time meant that Hainan had to report to Guangdong Province, and then to the Southern Party Bureau, and finally to Beijing. Feng would be the obvious candidate for provincial leadership and immediately a player on the national scene if Hainan should be elevated to provincial status.

⁴¹⁹ Chen Keqin 陈克勤, *Hainan jiansheng* 海南建省 [Hainan is made a province] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 50-51.

En route to Beijing, Feng stopped in Wuhan for several days, and there he met with Deng Xiaoping and Deng Zihui, two more prominent politicians. While Feng waited to continue his trip north, Deng and Deng visited him frequently and the three became well acquainted. Feng later remembered them joking that they were worried he would be lonely in a new city, so they came to his room often to play chess. By the time Feng arrived in Beijing, he must have begun to feel like something of a national celebrity. Immediately upon arrival, a steady stream of new and prominent acquaintances came to his hotel room, along with a package from the Party's Central office containing five million *renminbi*.⁴²⁰ Three times, Feng sent this back to the office, until finally a personal explanation from Mao accompanied the money, clarifying that this was Feng's "pocket money." Feng then accepted and turned over the funds to his secretary.

Feng met with Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi and Premier Zhou Enlai, giving them a full report of the Communist movement on Hainan, its history and its current progress. Feng also emphasized the ongoing challenges on Hainan, and explained that significant help was needed from the central government. Both Liu and Zhou encouraged Feng to formally submit this report and ask for the funds. He did so, requesting 600 million *renminbi* in economic aid. The request was quickly granted and Feng formally thanked the government on behalf of the three million people of Hainan. In a meeting with Zhu De, commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Feng explained the communication difficulties that had cut off Hainan from the mainland Communist

⁴²⁰ This took place following the shift in name of the currency to *renminbi*, or "people's money," but prior to the adjustment in denominations in 1955 from the inflated Nationalist currency. So Feng's 5,000,000 would actually be the equivalent of 500 *yuan*, following the adjustment.

movement. Zhu immediately ordered forty wireless radio devices to be sent back to Hainan with Feng.

Ultimately, Feng decided against pushing for this cause, and instead he gave an essential report of progress on Hainan island, and awaited Mao's instructions. Mao did not take this opportunity to chasten Feng for disobeying central orders (see Chapter Four) or for implementing a moderate land reform policy that made the campaign far slower there than anywhere else in China. Instead, Mao instructed Feng to return to his command on Hainan and to focus on two main areas: military training and land reform. With the Korean War underway, and Chinese involvement a possibility, national defense was a priority in Beijing. Also, Beijing perceived Nationalist and American espionage designs on Hainan that required immediate attention. As for land reform, the relatively moderate policies of Hainan, and the island's relatively late inclusion into Communist administered territory, meant that there was much work to be done in order to bring economic policy up to speed.⁴²¹

While in Beijing, Feng took ill due to complications related to a severe case of hemorrhoids. Upon Zhou Enlai's insistence, he reluctantly postponed his return to Hainan and convalesced in a Beijing hospital. From his "pocket money," to meeting with many of the most prominent figures of the national revolution, and finally to his treatment in a Beijing hospital, Feng was a long way from his home in Hainan. After an operation and ten days in the hospital, the forty-eight-year-old Feng left the hospital in

⁴²¹ Hu Tichun, Xu Chunhong, Wang Huanqiu 胡提春, 许春宏, 王焕秋, *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* 冯白驹将军传 [Biography of General Feng Baiju], *Qiongdao Xinghuo* (Hainan Spark) Series, Vol. 3 (Internal Circulation, Haikou: Guangdong Province, Hainan New China Press, 1981), 108-111.

his best health in years. While Feng had only met with Mao briefly, Zhou visited him frequently in the hospital, and before Feng's departure, Zhou reminded him of Mao's final instructions, to focus on both land reform and military training. Feng returned to Guangzhou (Canton) to a hero's welcome, and he announced these two priorities of the new regime, and did the same when he returned to Hainan. With him came the promise of 600 million *renminbi* in aid from the central government.

It was during this first year following the Communist victory that Feng Baiju wrote his own account of the Communist movement on Hainan, *Zhongguo gongchandang de guanghui zhaoyao zai Hainan dao shang* (The radiance of the Chinese Communist Party shines on Hainan island).⁴²² Feng's account marked the thirtieth year of the CCP's existence: "The organization and victory of the Hainan Party is inseparable from the CCP's national victory; it is a very small part of the heroic thirty-year struggle and our Party's great victory."⁴²³

Feng emphasized the way in which the Hainan movement had relied on the masses, the people of Hainan, as the foundation of its success. This may seem a boilerplate platitude, and perhaps in 1950-51 it was; but in the coming months, the gap would grow between "relying on the people of Hainan," and "relying on the Southbound Workforce (*nanxia ganbu*)," sent by Party central to dictate policy on the island. But for the moment, at least, as Feng made his debut on the national stage and Hainan was

⁴²² Feng Baiju 冯白驹, *Zhongguo gongchandang de guanghui zhaoyao zai Hainandao shang* 中国共产党的光辉照耀在海南岛上 [The radiance of the Chinese Communist Party shines on Hainan island] (Guangzhou: Huanan renmin chubanshe, 1951).

⁴²³ Feng Baiju, *Zhongguo gongchandang de guanghui zhaoyao zai Hainandao shang*, 1.

embraced by the new regime, it seemed that a honeymoon period would mark the beginning of the new Beijing's relationship with Hainan. Feng's account of the "CCP's radiance" shining on Hainan was, in 1950-51, no more than a paean to Beijing and the success of the new regime. This same text, however, would take on new meaning in the months and years to come, and it will be worth revisiting in an examination of the troubled 1950s on Hainan.

The souring of relations between the Hainan leadership and the mainland Party authorities in Wuhan and Beijing, paralleled in large part throughout Guangdong Province, can be divided into issues related to land reform and civil-military leadership and ideology. In both of these areas, relations began very smoothly as reflected in Feng's trip to Beijing and the celebration of the Hainan conquest both in Haikou and Beijing. Land reform began with a period of moderation that quickly shifted into a radical phase that ultimately cleared out the ranks of local leaders in favor of newly arrived cadres from the north. As for the civil-military leadership and ideology, the celebration of the conquest began with praise for the heroics of the Hainan guerrillas, but it then shifted toward a narrative of the main army in wooden junks and fishing boats – a people's flotilla taking on the warships and beach defenses of the Nationalists. This directly reflected the priorities of the people's struggle and national unity as the PRC weighed the possibilities of entering the Korean War, which began just a month after the Communist victory on Hainan.

Land Reform: From Cultivation to Uprooting

Land reform was undoubtedly one of the most important pillars of CCP policy during the civil war and into the early period of Communist rule. It defined much of the CCP's support in their territories, from the days of Jingtangshan in the late 1920s, in Yan'an and behind Japanese lines in the late 1930s, and throughout much of northern China in the 1940s. Ever since the split with the Nationalists in 1927 and the shift from an urban to a rural emphasis, the CCP either drove or unleashed rural class warfare, calibrating the violence and scale according to their needs. Certain periods saw relatively moderate reforms and rent reductions, while in other periods the CCP implemented violent struggles and radical economic leveling in the countryside. One generalization about land policy leading up to the Communist victory in 1949-50 was quite self-evident, namely that areas under secure and unrivaled Communist control saw a more systematic and permanent policy of land reform. Those areas that were disputed, either by the Japanese, the Nationalists, or some other group, did not experience as radical or systematic a policy of land reform.

Hainan was one such disputed territory all the way through the Communist takeover in the spring of 1950. This was why, when Mao met with Feng in late 1950, he told Feng to make land reform a top priority in the early work of the new regime. This was not the first time that Feng had received such instructions from the central Party leadership. In 1947, Feng had conveyed a similar directive to "vigorously develop the revolutionary land movement" across Hainan, but this ambition reflected the reality of the increasingly solid hold the Communists had on northern China, not Hainan. While Feng and the Hainan leadership attempted to implement land reform policies in the late 1940s as in earlier periods, the lack of solid administrative control over much of the

island made this impossible until 1950.⁴²⁴ The Communists of Hainan had held certain territories with relative impunity, especially following their alliance with the Li and the shift of the movement's locus to the southern mountain bases of Wuzhishan in 1943-44. In the relative safety of this territory, economic policy could be enforced, but the lack of large landlords in the region, and the need for cooperation from powerful Li leaders, prevented them from implementing any significant policies that radically transformed the social fabric of the Li territories or the rest of Hainan.

Rather, the Hainan Communist fighters made a priority of base-building and disseminating a progressive political ideology that favored sexual equality, broad political participation, universal education, and indeed some degree of economic justice.⁴²⁵ Some of the Hainanese Communist leaders were familiar with the policies of land redistribution and rent reduction as they were being implemented in secure Communist territories in the north. But even by 1950, there was no precedent for the kind of far-reaching implementation of these policies on Hainan. Like the rest of Guangdong Province, Hainan was one of the latest regions to be incorporated in the new PRC. Unlike the Guangdong mainland, the Communist fighting force on Hainan had remained in place and had helped coordinating the final assault on the island. Much of the Communist military presence on the Guangdong mainland, also for the most part a

⁴²⁴ Hainansheng difangzhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan provincial gazetteer office], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Tudi zhi* 海南省志: 土地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Land gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007), 357-359.

⁴²⁵ Hainansheng difangzhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan provincial gazetteer office], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Haiyang zhi, Geming genjudi zhi* 海南省志: 海洋志, 革命根据地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Maritime gazetteer, revolutionary base area gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2006), 186, 193, 195.

guerrilla force, had evacuated their bases in the late 1940s, and joined the main Communist armies in the north. The Communists of Hainan had been unable and unwilling to leave their revolutionary bases when that order came from the mainland in 1946.

So in 1950, the mainland soldiers and cadres arrived to find a fighting force that knew the local terrain and had many local allies. The military conquest and the early transition to Communist rule was facilitated by these local connections, and by the popularity of local leaders, most importantly, Feng Baiju. Among the Li people, Wang Guoxing's unrivaled leadership and his alliance with Feng Baiju and the CCP brought in that significant group and bolstered the local credibility of the Party. Feng, Wang, and Ma Baishan all traveled north to Beijing as a way of confirming their loyalties following the success of the Communist conquest.

But it quickly became apparent to the newly arrived cadres and administrators that implementing land reform and class struggle would have to be undertaken almost from scratch. Conditions were very different from northern China, but the initial urban takeover of Guangzhou (Canton) was a success story in early Communist policy. Fueled by early signs of success in Guangzhou, thousands of young cadres, mostly from northern China of intellectual backgrounds and unfamiliar with southern rural society, spread out across Hainan and the Guangdong mainland. Their task was to implement a relatively moderate land reform policy that had been announced in the weeks following the takeover of Hainan.⁴²⁶ In June of 1950, this policy was put into effect, and the obvious

⁴²⁶ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 95.

places to begin were the areas that had been Communist bases prior to the arrival of the mainland forces.

The relatively smooth transition in both political leadership and economic policy can be attributed to several factors. The newly arrived cadres respected the popularity of local leaders and left them in positions of power. Land holdings of overseas Cantonese and Hainanese were not immediately seized, and a relatively small percentage of the local population was categorized as landlords who deserved punishment and confiscation of their land. Also, it seemed, early land reform development brought with it experts in agricultural development who taught Hainanese farmers how to change their methods and even their crops in order to make better use of their territories. The scale of this operation was unprecedented in the economic relationship between Hainan and the mainland, and plans for growing rubber trees were realized as soon as March of 1951, when nearly 6000 hectares of undeveloped land were planted with rubber trees.⁴²⁷

Less than a decade later, as much of the country's agricultural sector hurtled toward disaster in the late 1950s, the improved development of tropical agriculture in Hainan, such as rubber and coconuts, earned the national spotlight in propaganda publications. Improved development methods along with local suitability proved these early policies to have been a success for Hainan.⁴²⁸ A central government loan along with early harmonious leadership between Hainan and the central Party had laid the

⁴²⁷ Hainansheng difangzhi bangongshi 海南省地方志办公室 [Hainan provincial gazetteer office], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Tudi zhi* 海南省志: 土地志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Land gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 2007), 360.

⁴²⁸ Cai Dizhi 蔡迪支, *Guangdong 1949-1959* 广东 1949-1959 [Guangdong, 1949-1959] (Guangzhou: Guangdong hua bao she, 1959), 104-105.

foundations for success in the early rubber development. A typical rubber tree must grow for between five and six years before it can first be tapped, hence the success story of Hainan's rubber industry during the late 1950s.

With the successful launching of improved rubber farming in March of 1951, Feng Baiju announced that expectations would be surpassed, and that the first phase of land reform would be complete before the end of that year. This vitality and enthusiasm spurred much of the early work, as thousands of Hainan revolutionary cadres were employed by the effort. The ebullience of this period, however, stands in stark contrast to the revolutionary land reform that took place during wartime throughout northern China. The military success was celebrated across Hainan, and it became increasingly difficult to discern who among the population were in fact deserving of having their land confiscated, either for political crimes or excessive holdings. From the perspective of mainland cadres, local Hainanese cadres went about land reform, especially the task of confiscation and punishment, with insufficient urgency and zeal. This was the basis of what later would be labeled “peaceful land reform,” a crime of the highest order in a time of violent revolutionary class struggle.⁴²⁹

In an era of modernization and class struggle, the charge of “peaceful land reform” was a crime that was both pre-modern (“feudal” in the jargon of the time), and counter-revolutionary. The lineage and village ties that connected communities of Hainanese were targeted by mainland cadres newly arrived on Hainan, for they were the “feudal” remnants of an earlier society. More importantly, these ties stood in the way of

⁴²⁹ Tiewes (1979), 367.

the kind of radical national policies that would have to carry the day in order for the new regime to collect enough revenue to prosper and to fight the United States on the Korean peninsula.⁴³⁰ Both nationalism and class struggle were brought to bear as rhetorical and political tools to break down local ties. These ties of local identity and loyalty that were under attack included the family, clan, and village, but by 1952, even island-wide ties of Hainanese identity would become the focus of a larger campaign of “anti-localism.”

In early 1951, the official land reform campaign began in earnest on Hainan. In official documents from this period, the special conditions on Hainan island were already an issue that preoccupied both Hainanese and central Party planners. In February, Feng Baiju and the Hainan leadership repeated the orders from Beijing to focus on military training and land reform. While military training seemed to be less of a contentious issue, a February 13, 1951 circular issued by the Hainan authorities, declares the launching of the land reform movement on Hainan. Considering the conflicts between

⁴³⁰ Nationalizing work was underway in many walks of life, since the Nationalist (Guomindang) government had been largely unable to successfully penetrate local levels of society with its administration following the disunity of the 1910s and the 1920s. Naturally the Japanese invasion prevented the successful implementation of many of the Nationalists’ policies, but with the success of the Communist conquest, much of the nationalization project resumed with renewed force. Since the Communist conquest was a north-to-south conquest, as had been most successful conquests and reunifications of Chinese history, the northern territories were the first under its administration. The national capital was again declared to be in Beijing instead of Nanjing, and the northern dialect (Mandarin, or *putonghua*, lit. “common speech”) was enforced as the official dialect of all China. While many of the Nationalist regimes prominent political and military leaders had emerged from Guangzhou and other southern centers, from the October 1, 1949 announcement of its founding from the imperial palace, the Communist regime established its credentials not only in revolutionary action, but also sometimes in the raiment of old Beijing officialdom. The propagation of a policy making Mandarin the official national dialect came in the same month as the Communist conquest of Hainan, April 1950.

local and central leadership that would later develop, the confidence of the local leadership in the February circular is remarkable. The authors declare that although they have recently received a central directive ordering them to speed up the land reform campaign on Hainan, they will be able to complete land reform in two years, completing a third of the campaign's planned land redistribution by the end of 1951, and the rest of the island by the end of 1952. The authors, presumably Feng Baiju and Deng Hua, immediately note the extensive revolutionary experience of the Hainanese Communist cadres, emphasizing both their competence and their popularity, which will serve them well in the coming campaign: "After over twenty years of revolutionary struggle, the political consciousness of the masses is rather high. Political organizational work of the Party is very widespread, and land reform has begun in a number of places giving us experience."⁴³¹

In March of 1951, the official tone was still one of marked restraint and moderate land reform. Nearly every specific note in one relatively thorough list of provisions about land reform on Hainan emphasizes moderation. A list of potential target groups are listed as not being immediate targets of confiscation of their land, including wealthy tenant-peasants (*dianfunong*), Li and Miao villagers in Hainan's mountains, absentee

⁴³¹ "Zhonggong Hainan qu wei guanyu tugai gongzuo jihua," 中共海南区委关于土改工作计划 [Chinese Communist Party Hainan District Committee plan regarding land reform work], February 13, 1951, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953], Haikou, 2002, page 6.

landlords, and counter-revolutionaries who have already been punished. The absentee landlords mentioned were those who were not present or could not be found, and included both those who lived in the towns and cities of Hainan and those who lived abroad, mainly in Southeast Asia. The list of provisions notes that it is not necessary to confiscate the landholdings of these and other groups. Even “traitors” (*Hanjian*), those who had collaborated in some way with the Japanese occupiers (1939-1945), were given special mention in this March 1951 document. While traitors could generally be punished in keeping with usual national policy, this document notes that there will be “special circumstances.” These special circumstances are not clearly defined, but the assumption seems to be those circumstances are “special” in cases where the possible punishment of an individual would significantly disturb the local peace. In this brief stipulation, the document advises any cadre adjudicating such a case should rely on two factors: first, “the opinion of the masses” and second, the cadres own understanding of the situation.⁴³²

Overall, the deference to local conditions is striking in this March 1951 document. Feng Baiju was then serving as vice-chairman of Hainan’s civil-military committee. The chairman was Deng Hua, who was not Hainanese, but who had commanded the main army’s assault on Hainan a year earlier. The two worked closely in this year following

⁴³² “Hainan junzheng weiyuanhui guanyu tugai zhong ruogan teshu wenti de guiding” 海南军政委员会关于土改中若干特殊问题的规定 [Provisions regarding a number of special problems in land reform by the Hainan military administrative committee] March 17, 1951, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), pages 19-22.

the conquest. While some of their policies reflected moderation compared to what was to follow, there were areas of strictness in their policies, including the threat of espionage and sabotage from Nationalist remnants, and also the continuation of flagrantly exploitative behavior by landlords. In a document they issued several days after the above March 1951 proclamation, they stipulated that the hasty selling or giving away of land and property by landlords was forbidden. This was done to avoid the adjudication of Party cadres who were on their way to officially parcel out land. Also noted in the document was the duty of every Hainanese to report any kind of sabotage or espionage. “It is not permitted to connive and cover for saboteurs. Those harboring violators will be brought to justice.”⁴³³

In this early period, pragmatism made a priority of dealing with sabotage and the illegal sale of large plots of land and significant amounts of property. On the Guangdong mainland, harsher land reform policies were already being implemented, but it seems these were delayed on Hainan.⁴³⁴ This variation may be explained by the experimental

⁴³³ Hainan junzheng weiyuanhui shishi tudi gaige de bugao 海南军政委员会实施土地改革的布告 [Hainan military administrative committee announcement on the implementation of land reform] March 22, 1951, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), 24-25.

⁴³⁴ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 99-110. The precision with which Guangdong land reform is striking in Vogel’s account. January and February are labor-intensive in the Guangdong calendar since these are the planting months. According to Vogel, January and February of 1951 saw moderate policies that did not alienate farmers while their planting labor was needed, and then the spring brought a flood of radicalized northern cadres to take over the process.

nature of these early policies. Indeed a circular (*tongzhi*) announcement made regarding Hainan's land reform policies refers to problems with the "land reform experiment" (*tugai shidian*) on Hainan.⁴³⁵ But while Deng Hua and Feng Baiju continued to issue quite moderate reports and announcements that emphasized stability and consideration of the "opinion of the masses" over radical policy, on the neighboring mainland, and within the same province, a shift was underway.

By April of 1951, a critical mass of northern cadres had arrived in Guangdong and on Hainan so that their presence came to dominate the local cadres. In that month, Fang Fang, a hugely popular local revolutionary, made a public self-criticism in which he confessed to having put too much emphasis on orderly transition and peaceful land reform.⁴³⁶

By mid-April, a circular on land reform and class designations showed early signs of conflict. Work teams had become aware of some individuals hiding land (*mantian*) in order to avoid higher class assignments, and naturally to avoid having the land confiscated and divided. This problem was a common one, and the work teams and

⁴³⁵ "Hainan tugaiwei guanyu tugai shidian ji ge wenti de tongzhi" 海南土改委关于土改试点几个问题的通知 [Circular by the Hainan land reform committee regarding some problems with the land reform experiment], April 13, 1951, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), 28-29.

⁴³⁶ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 112.

cadres implementing land reform on Hainan were to pay more attention to this type of deceit.⁴³⁷

This circular ends by acknowledging a phenomenon that would cause some concern in the coming months and years: “local tyrants” (*eba*) were committing suicide in great enough numbers that it was noticed as a trend, and that the work teams and cadres should compile statistics and rosters of these suicides. Over the coming months, suicide of those targeted by land reform policies, usually referred to as “local tyrants,” was a frequent topic in the circulars and directives regarding the calibration of land reform. Studies of suicide in China, as in any other society, usually do not employ “single-cause models” which fail to convey the complex fabric of social and individual factors that might lead to suicide.⁴³⁸ Still, the cause of the suicides mentioned in the directives and circulars of the Hainan land reform movement seem to share some aspect of the trauma of that movement as their common cause. In fact, while the writers of these documents insist on using the term “suicide” (*zisha*), most of the deaths referred to result from being driven to such an act through coercion, threats, and resulting desperation.

And yet, a citizen of the nation committing suicide as opposed to subjecting himself or herself to the laws of that government is certainly problematic. When it occurs

⁴³⁷ “Hainan tugai gongzuo di yi tuan guanyu huafen jieji gongzuo wenti de tongzhi” 海南土改工作第一团关于划分阶级工作问题的通知 [Circular by the Hainan first land work group regarding some problems with class divisions], April 14, 1951, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), 30-31.

⁴³⁸ Michael R. Phillips, Huaqing Liu, and Yanping Zhang, “Suicide and Social Change in China,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* Vol. 23, No. 1 (1999), 25-50.

on the scale that it gains the attention of the government, it is more likely that the epidemic is due to a clumsily or brutally enforced policy, rather than simply being due to the wickedness of certain class elements. Still, suicide was generally considered by authorities to be an admission of guilt, if it came in the case of a persecuted official or landlord. In either case of political suicide, either as protest or admission of guilt, it represents the most absolute impasse between the ruler and the powerless ruled. Whether an inward revolution or a shameful confession, political suicide is the final claim and perhaps the only vestige of individual power. In the existentialist view of Jean-Paul Sartre, suicide was “an opportunity to stake out our understanding of our essence as individuals in a godless world... not a choice shaped mainly by moral considerations but by concerns about the individual as the sole source of meaning in a meaningless universe.”⁴³⁹ It is the utmost in localization of political struggle – to the individual.

Land reform was not the only cause of unsettling suicide statistics. The Marriage Law of 1950 was one of the earliest pieces of PRC legislation, and while it promoted sexual equality and outlawed the practices of bigamy, prostitution, and child weddings, it also suddenly altered the fabric of Chinese life, especially among the rural population. In a study of adjudication in China, Philip C. C. Huang noted that in the first three years following the policies enactment, between 70,000 and 80,000 people annually committed suicide or were murdered in cases involving divorce as permitted in the new law.⁴⁴⁰ The

⁴³⁹ Michael Cholbi, “Suicide,” in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Ed.) (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/suicide/>).

⁴⁴⁰ Philip C. C. Huang, “Civil Adjudication in China, Past and Present,” *Modern China*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 2006), 135-180.

Party's "coping mechanism" became a kind of institutionalized mediation that Huang considered more like an adjudication process that followed every contested divorce case. This was an active government response to a wave of suicide and murder that came in response to its implementation of a radically new social policy and law. In effect, according to Huang, the adjudication process that was put in place in response to the violence of the early 1950s actually reversed some of the progressivism that was originally enshrined in the famous 1950 Marriage Law. Progressive gender equality policies were not worth the violence that resulted, and the radical policy was effectively muted by the adjudication process.⁴⁴¹ Huang's findings here are far from the usual narrative of PRC gender equality, which had been a part of the Chinese Communist creation myth ever since Yan'an.

The suicides that indirectly resulted from the new Marriage Law were roughly contemporary with the suicides that caught the attention of work teams and central administrators during land reform on Hainan beginning in the spring of 1951. On Hainan, it is difficult to determine whether the death rate, either from natural or unnatural causes, was significantly affected during this time, since mortality statistics were only systematically recorded beginning in 1955. Population growth, however, saw its greatest rate of increase in 1952, in the midst of the land reform campaign. There are many factors to consider besides the violence of land reform, including a "rubber rush" to Hainan, which saw an influx of agricultural workers to Hainan.⁴⁴² Since mortality for the

⁴⁴¹ Huang (2006), 160-161.

⁴⁴² Hainansheng difang shi zhi bangongshi 海南省地方史志办公室 [Hainan provincial historical gazetteer office], eds., *Hainan shengzhi: Renkou zhi, Fangyan zhi, Zongjiao zhi*

first two years of PRC rule on Hainan are not available in provincial gazetteers, it is difficult to gauge the exact toll of the land reforms violence. Further complicating the issue, besides the new Marriage Law, there were other factors that overlapped with the time period of the land reform movement in Hainan and throughout the rest of China, making it difficult to isolate a single cause for the suicides and other violent deaths that caught the attention of local cadres and central Party bureaucrats.

In Yang Kuisong's 2008 study of the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries (*zhenya fan 'geming*), the author examines the ways in which a revolutionary regime must continue its violent ways beyond the transition from revolution to rule. Yang explains the use of "executions by quota" in this campaign of the early 1950s, in which a "contest among officials of different places to execute large numbers of people was propelled by these officials' eagerness to prove themselves to higher levels by filling and overfilling quotas."⁴⁴³ Some officials stood against this policy in the early years of the campaign, at the local, provincial, and even at the national levels. Yang quotes a report on the campaign by Ye Jianying from May of 1951, almost at exactly the same time as the beginning of the reports noted above by local land reform work teams on the increasing incidence of suicides and violent deaths. Ye wrote that many of the executions carried out in Guangdong and Guangxi were not even based on the slightest bit of information about the accused. Victims were killed without knowledge of their age or family

海南省志: 人口志, 方言志, 宗教志 [Hainan provincial gazetteer: Population gazetteer, Dialect gazetteer, Religion gazetteer] (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1994), 13-14.

⁴⁴³ Yang Kuisong, "Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries," *The China Quarterly* Vol. 193 (March 2008), 109, 115.

background, let alone any clear charges of any crime. According to Ye, only a single character – *huai* (wicked) – was enough of a criminal dossier to lead to one’s execution.⁴⁴⁴ Ye’s outspoken criticism of the implementation of this campaign at the local level, which employed the very quotas that Mao himself had determined, would soon lead to his own removal from authority in his native southern China. Besides Ye’s report quoted by Yang, Ye also remarked that the best results in the land reform campaign in Guangdong were found in those areas that had been old guerrilla bases. This observation was taken by the central authorities as evidence of Ye’s “localist” tendencies – favoring the work of local cadres in the guerrilla bases to the work of newly arrived Southbound Cadres – and in the later anti-localism campaign, Ye would be “promoted” to a post in Beijing and away from affecting policy in his native Guangdong.⁴⁴⁵

While considering the many campaigns and factors that overlapped in this period, it is difficult and indeed inadvisable to connect these suicides and violent deaths to a single cause. It is noteworthy that in the Hainan case, many of the references to a troubling number of suicides, especially among wealthier peasants and landlords, and the actions that should be taken in response, are noted in directives and circulars relating to the land reform movement. Although discerning violent death statistics from larger population figures is impossible in this period, it seems from these directives and from the later urgency in the “anti-localist” crackdown in Guangdong and Hainan, that the land reform movement was a traumatic period in Hainan’s relationship with the mainland.

⁴⁴⁴ Yang Kuisong (2008), 116. Yang quoted Ye Jianying’s report on the *zhenfan* work in southern China from May 17, 1951.

⁴⁴⁵ Vogel, (1971 [1969]), 115, 119.

By February of 1952, increasing incidence of suicide drew the attention of the South China Bureau of the Party command, as well as the attention of Party central in Beijing. Party authorities in Guangdong (including Hainan), Hunan, Henan, and other provinces were reporting an increase in suicide, which included not only the “local tyrants,” but also middle and lower peasants. Directives and circulars that were issued in this time outlined different ways of dealing with suicide or attempted suicide pertaining to different class elements as well as those peasants who had been tainted by some counterrevolutionary activity as opposed to those who had not.⁴⁴⁶ Each suicide case was to be dealt with according to class, family background, or revolutionary history.

There is a dearth of academic materials treating the issue of suicide in Chinese history. The cultural significance of suicide for political or social reasons is beyond question, and the number of deaths by suicide must have been substantial enough to demand action. There is, however, a precedent of discounting suicides among deaths in catastrophic conditions, in the midst of massacres, or in wartime. One account of the Qing conquest of Yangzhou, for example, cites a death toll figure, “not including those who threw themselves into wells and rivers, those who closed their doors and immolated

⁴⁴⁶ “Zhonggong Hainan quwei zhuanfa ‘Zhongnanju guanyu chuli nongmin zisha shijian de si zhong banfa’ de tongzhi” 中共海南区委转发“中南局关于处理农民自杀事件的四种办法”的通知 [Circular by the Hainan Chinese Communist Party district committee first “Central Southern Bureau regarding four methods of handling peasant suicides”], February 12, 1952, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), 436-437.

or hanged themselves, nor those who died in captivity.”⁴⁴⁷ The author does not go on to provide the number of deaths by suicide, though they were doubtless significant. Perhaps the reason of the author’s choice is to emphasize the cruelty of the Manchus by focusing on those deaths directly caused by the violent invaders, rather than focusing on the despair of the residents of Yangzhou. And yet certainly the suicides mentioned in this account were directly caused by the Manchu invasion, just as the suicides mentioned in the land reform directives were connected to the campaign.

Traditionally, female suicide was more common than male suicide in China, especially during the Qing, and it was often related to chastity, as in a widow’s suicide. One study of female suicide in imperial Chinese fiction notes that suicide can be an act of free will and passionate strength rather than simply a despairing submission to an unlivable condition.⁴⁴⁸ While this study focuses on literature, the author notes the cultural possibility of suicide as dynamic and active protest and not simply despair. This type of performative suicide was not limited to premodern China according to Paul Pickowicz’s study of film-making in the early years of the PRC. Shi Hui, a prominent and beloved actor, chose to commit suicide, and in so doing, he took his fate into his own hands, in Pickowicz’s view: “His final performance was ingenious. Suicides committed by prominent people were not reported because they made the party look bad. Shi Hui,

⁴⁴⁷ “‘Horrid Beyond Description’: The Massacre of Yangzhou,” in Lynn A Struve, ed., *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers’ Jaws* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 48.

⁴⁴⁸ Paola Zamperini, “Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction,” in Paul S. Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, eds., *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 77-104.

finding a way to silence the critics, got the last word.”⁴⁴⁹ As in the study of female suicide in literature noted above, Pickowicz takes Shi Hui’s suicide to be more of an act of personal dynamism and even panache, rather than just abject misery. Shi Hui, like many landlords and rich peasants in the land reform campaign on Hainan, had suffered harsh criticism and shame, and yet, as Pickowicz notes, also like the Hainanese who took their own lives, his suicide was not reported. In this way, the performance is only for those Party members who are aware of it, and suicide as a performance of protest might not become news outside of the halls of power.

The case of Gao Gang’s 1954 suicide is also worth considering. As one of the leading figures in the Party during the revolutionary period and the early PRC, Gao was accused of organizing a clique within the Party and moving into a position of even higher power. When his maneuvering was discovered, he suffered extreme criticism, including having an excessively warm relationship with Stalin and the Soviet Union. Gao’s suicide came a year after Stalin’s 1953 death. Gao was accused by the central Party authorities of setting up his own kingdom in northeastern China. Maurice Meisner, an authority on the history of the Party elite, wrote, “Gao Gang, it was said, conveniently responded to the accusations by committing suicide.”⁴⁵⁰ While Gao’s suicide was a high-profile death,

⁴⁴⁹ Paul G. Pickowicz, “Acting Like Revolutionaries: Shi Hui, the Wenhua Studio, and Private-Sector Filmmaking, 1949-52,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 287.

⁴⁵⁰ Maurice J. Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2007), 116. Meisner uses a nearly identical characterization of Gao’s “convenient” suicide in another account of the events: *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: The Free Press [1977] 1999), 121.

it seems to have been a cautionary tale of what happens when internal Party disputes threaten the central holders of power. Meisner calls the suicide “convenient” since it cleared out a large-scale regional threat in the northeast that could have caused local officials to rally behind the popular and charismatic Gao Gang. Gao’s alleged suicide by poison followed an early attempted suicide by pistol, and it does not seem to have the same power of performative protest as that of Shi Hui. It is more likely that his persecution and the heavy charges leveled against him left him in despair that indeed he had no other way out.

Suicide that coincided with unprecedented central government penetration of Chinese communities must have been troubling to the new regime. In Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals final installment of the former’s Cultural Revolution histories, the topic of suicide is a recurrent one: “This phenomenon worried the CCP center, since ‘class enemies’ who had committed suicide were obviously useless as sources of information on additional ‘more deeply entrenched’ class enemies. Suspects had to be kept alive until everything of interest to the part had been extracted from them.”⁴⁵¹ In this analysis, reflecting the attitudes of high officials in the Public Security leadership during the Cultural Revolution, suicide was only a problem insofar as the dead individual could no longer provide information. The concern in this period was not that the new regime was suffering from the protest character of large numbers of suicide. Indeed, Mao is quoted in the same study of the Cultural Revolution as saying,

⁴⁵¹ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 255.

“People who attempt to commit suicide – don’t attempt to save them! ... China is such a populous nation, it is not as if we cannot do without a few people.”⁴⁵²

In a 2010 study of suicide in China, philosophy and religious studies scholar, Wu Fei, wrote, “In public politics, suicide is understood as an act of protest, a fear of punishment, or a struggle for help (not as a cry for help). When people understand a single suicide case from public perspectives, its meaning undergoes important changes.”⁴⁵³ Records of suicides that trouble a regime, as in the cases of those noted by the land reform work teams and Party bureaucrats or in the example of a monk setting himself on fire, certainly urge a reconsideration of the act of suicide as simply a will to no longer be.⁴⁵⁴ Since the CCP records of the land reform movement do not provide an accurate accounting of deaths by suicide, we can only assume the prevalence of incidence of suicide from the land reform circulars and directives. The attention paid to the question of suicide during the land reform campaign can serve as a window onto the relationship between Hainanese individuals and the central Party policy that was brought to there island and implemented shortly after the Communist conquest.

The statistics in Party records are extremely detailed, providing an inventory of every piece of property confiscated from every landlord, rich peasant, or bad class

⁴⁵² MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), 110.

⁴⁵³ Wu Fei, *Suicide and Justice: A Chinese Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2010), 159.

⁴⁵⁴ Edward Wong, “Tibetan Who Sets Himself Afire Dies,” March 17, 2011, *The New York Times*; Edward Wong, “China: Monastery Sealed off After Suicide Proterst,” April 12, 2010, *The New York Times*.

element. The punishments of death, imprisonment, and education are all listed with clear and seeming precise figures for each category. And yet the official reports from the land reform period do not distinguish the suicide figures with specific data, at least in contemporary and open sources. Ultimately, the question of suicide then is difficult to handle with statistics, but the fact that it occurred repeatedly in official reports illustrates its significance. For the purposes of this study, the act of suicide in Hainan must be considered in the context of what has been considered a honeymoon of Chinese nation-building in the early 1950s. Clearly, bringing the local population into the national fold was a shock to the many revolutionary leaders and their civilian supporters, and a shock that could not be overcome. The new Chinese state penetrated far deeper than any Chinese regime before it, and in the remote reaches of Hainan, this imposition of authority was alien and unbearable for many.

By the spring of 1952, it was clear that the local cadres had become one of the most important obstacles to the implementation of centrally dictated land reform. The main line of accusation was that these cadres were “rightists,” and that their methods were too moderate for the planned land reform policy. In Li territory, land reform was also a special problem. As in the rest of Hainan, cadres familiar with the language, culture, and farming practices of the north were frustrated by the ways in which the Hainanese reality did not fit their training.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ “Zhonggong Hainanqu” 中共海南区委关于克服干部右倾思想深入反霸退租斗争的通报 [], April 19, 1952, reprinted in 海南省史志工作办公室, 海南省档案局(馆) [Hainan provincial historical office, Hainan provincial archives (museum)], eds., *Hainan tudi gaige yundong ziliao xuanbian, 1951-1953* 海南土地改革运动资料选编, 1951—1953 [Selected materials on the land reform movement in Hainan, 1951-1953] (Haikou, 2002), 510-514.

By July of 1952, the central Party authority in Beijing issued a directive to rely on the Southbound cadres and the main army in order to complete land reform. Guangdong was the slowest province to enact and complete land reform, and Hainan was the slowest part of Guangdong to do so. Even the Guangdong ally of Hainan, Ye Jianying, pointed out to the central leadership that within the province of Guangdong, Hainan needed the most spurring along in its completion of the campaign. The new slogan was, “Rely on the Southbound cadres, rely on the main army, complete land reform.”⁴⁵⁶ It was in the implementation of this stage of land reform that the first anti-localism campaign began in Guangdong. The main purpose was to eliminate any local obstructions to the work of the newly arrived cadres.

Wang Guoxing, the leader of the Li people who brought them into alliance with Hainan Communists, was celebrated as a paragon of the ethnic minority groups and their service to the revolution. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai lectured on Wang’s exemplary leadership, and granted him a post as a representative in the national government. The southern territories of Hainan that had long been the home of the Li and Miao people were granted status of autonomous districts, and Wang was appointed their leader. Land reform in the Li-Miao district, however did not go smoothly. The Southbound cadres who arrived in Hainan to complete land reform, especially in large numbers in 1952, also moved into the Li-Miao district for their work. The ethnic distinction was obvious, and

⁴⁵⁶ Hu Tichun, Xu Chunhong, Wang Huanqiu 胡提春, 许春宏, 王焕秋, *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* 冯白驹将军传 [Biography of General Feng Baiju], *Qiongdao Xinghuo* (Hainan Spark) Series, Vol. 3 (Internal Circulation, Haikou: Guangdong Province, Hainan New China Press, 1981), 112.

the “Han chauvinism” of the newly arrived cadres was clear in their relationship with the Li.⁴⁵⁷

Removing the Head Once the Legs Are Gone

The CCP leadership made room for dissent and differing opinions in the early years of the PRC. This meant that Zhou Enlai and others could court the big capitalists of Hong Kong and Shanghai, and convince them that their wealth would not be completely nationalized, and that indeed there was a place for them in the new regime. For many moderates, this was not needed and the ebullient atmosphere of the early years of the regime was enough to attract their loyalty even if they did not share the same radical ideology that had occasionally been revealed in CCP policies of the 1930s and 40s. The “national bourgeoisie” and the moderates would eventually be harmonized into a new society with varying degrees of force and persuasion. But most threatening to an ideological regime is the critic within the political establishment who claims that current policies are straying from the founding ideology. These individuals claim a truer truth, often an earlier truth, and they are the first target in the purges and inquisitions of history. The decision to criticize an authoritarian regime on its own ideological terms can come only from a special kind of audacity, or the belief that one’s ideas will be respected, heeded, and not punished.

⁴⁵⁷ Zhong Yuanxiu 中元秀, *Lizu renmin lingxiu Wangguoxing* 黎族人民领袖王国兴 [Wang Guoxing, leader of the Li people], *Qiongdao xinghuo* (Hainan Spark series), Vol. 6 (Haikou, 1981), 142-144.

In the case of Feng Baiju, he became a loyal dissenter when he referred to his own reading of Marx as being inconsistent with the policies he saw implemented on his Hainan island. As the Southbound Cadres and the main army began to dictate policy, running roughshod over local Hainanese interests, the Hainanese cadres were told to respect this group. The policy directive was to “rely on the Southbound Cadres, rely on the main army.” Feng witnessed this shift away from local policy and local leadership, and in a 1952 speech he bluntly stated his opposition. “I can find no mention in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism of relying on any minority segment of the population. The Southbound Cadres and the main army are a minority segment of the Hainanese population. In Marx’s *Das Kapital* there is no prescription for relying on such a minority segment of the population. In my policies, I rely on the will of the masses, and not on the will of a minority segment of the population. This has been the foundation of the Hainanese revolution.”⁴⁵⁸ Ten years later, Feng criticized this statement himself, saying that he was mistaken and should not have said it. He does not clarify how he was wrong, however, and while his self-criticism acknowledges that he was wrong, he does not substantiate how such a statement is mistaken. The confession seems pro forma, and should be treated with some skepticism. Ultimately, the accusations of localism that

⁴⁵⁸ Feng Baiju, “Zai Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zhaokai de tanxin hui shang de fayan” 在中共广东省委召开的谈心会上的发言 [Speech at the meeting of the Chinese Communist Party Guangdong Provincial Committee], February 5, 1962, reprinted in Guangdong Qiongya gemingshi yanjiuhui 广东琼崖革命史研究会 [Guangdong, Hainan revolutionary history research association], eds., *Feng Baiju huiyilu* 冯白驹回忆录 [Feng Baiju recollection volume] (Hong Kong: Xianggang dongxi wenhua shiye gonsi, 2000).

destroyed his career and ended his service on Hainan would be overturned, and in 1983 Feng was completely exonerated, ten years after his death.⁴⁵⁹

For centuries, Hainan has been perceived with appetite and grand designs from the mainland, “suspended like a baroque green gem from the south coast of China.”⁴⁶⁰ Such was still the case in 1921 with Peng Chengwan’s survey, and still on the eve of the Communist takeover with T.V. Soong’s plans for the island and Chen Zhi’s Hainan gazetteer. With each successive mainland regime or individual’s plans to develop the island came an acknowledgement of the obstacles to development and modernization. Usually these obstacles boiled down to local resistance and factors related to that resistance, usually traced to the island’s Li population.

By 1950, the local Communist movement had made common cause with these perennial obstructions to progress in helping to fight the Japanese and Nationalist occupiers of the island. This leap of faith on the part of a portion of the island’s Han and Li population anticipated a new kind of relationship with the mainland in which they would hold more control over their political fate. Ultimately there was no room for this in the early PRC, and the priority of nation-building and political streamlining served to sideline any attempts to assert provincial autonomy. The military victory had been

⁴⁵⁹ Zhongyang jilü jiancha weiyuanhui 中央纪律检查委员会 [Central committee on disciplinary inspection], *Guanyu Feng Baiju, Gu Dacun tongzhi de wenti shenli yijian de baogao* 冯白驹，古大存同志的问题审理意见的报告 [Report of opinions on the hearing over the problems of Comrades Feng Baiju and Gu Dacun] (1983), in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao*, 527-528.

⁴⁶⁰ Edward H. Schafer, *Shore of Pearls: Hainan Island in Early Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 5.

shared, but the peace that followed could not be. The question of how this history connects to the Cultural Revolution era, the reform period, and the island's current situation will fuel future work, but I will briefly explain some of the most recent developments on Hainan in the epilogue.

Epilogue

Following the Anti-Localism Campaigns of the 1950s, Hainan's political and economic development seemed to be headed for another disappointment, with the new mainland regime failing to develop the significant strategic and agricultural potential of the island. In Hainan, the Anti-Localism Campaign can be connected to the Anti-Rightist campaign that preceded the disastrous Great Leap Forward. And so in the late 1950s and through the first years of the following decade, Hainan's lack of development was no exception in China, where one of the greatest manmade famines took years of recovery. In the early 1960s, while relative political and economic moderation prevailed throughout most of the country and led to recovery, on Hainan, the Anti-Localism Campaigns were impossible to reverse for Feng Baiju. Feng had been exiled first to the mainland and Guangzhou, and later to Zhejiang. In 1962 he spoke openly about the duplicity and character assassination of Zhao Ziyang, Tao Zhu, and Ou Mengjue, but this criticism was the limit of his freedom. He was not allowed to serve on his home island, but remained in Zhejiang, where he managed a schistosomiasis outbreak, and became a popular figure in the province especially for this accomplishment even though he could not speak the local dialect.

By 1973, Feng's chronic illnesses overcame him, and he passed away in Beijing. He had been summoned to the capital for treatment when he became gravely ill. According to several accounts this transfer was on Zhou Enlai's orders, and his family was also brought to Beijing to be by his side. His eldest daughter told me that she brought his favorite snack of dried shrimp to cheer him. In the Cultural Revolution,

Hainan's Communist history was patronizingly essentialized in the model opera, *Red Detachment of Women* (Hongse niangzi jun), with intentional manipulations of the actual female unit's history, including a fictitious male character who was born on the mainland. In conversations with nearly anyone outside of Hainan, a discussion of Hainan's revolutionary history, this high-flying fable has eclipsed all other narratives.

Following Mao's death and the economic opening of China in the early 1980s, there was a revived campaign for Hainan's elevation to provincial status. This effort was marred by a corruption scandal in which high officials allocated funds marked for developing Hainan's import economy and transportation infrastructure as a Special Economic Zone. In the "Hainan Car Incident" of 1984-85, many Hainan officials were approved to purchase with government funds more vehicles than the island had imported in the past thirty-five years, including vans, which some of the officials then promptly tried to sell for their own profit. Other officials, however, hoped to simply use the authorization to bring in the vehicles as an opportunity to enrich their local work units or towns, and did not consider the relatively large shipments of vehicles to be incongruent with general plans for economic development and opening.⁴⁶¹ Ultimately, this conflict between local ambition and national control was resolved with the dismissal of the officials in charge of the operation, and it was a bump in the road to Hainan's eventual ascension to provincial status in 1988.

The 1990s saw a real estate bubble in Hainan grow and burst by the end of the decade. Hotels and high-rises sprouted across the island, especially in the southern resort

⁴⁶¹ Ezra Vogel, *One Step Ahead In China: Guangdong Under Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 291-294.

of Sanya. Some of them stood empty or incomplete when the tourists and pensioners did not follow the ambitious developments. In the early twenty-first century, as the unflagging growth of the Chinese economy caught up with the dreams of the developers of Hainan, the real estate market stabilized and again began growing with an increase in retirement communities, golf courses, and luxury hotels.

Today, Hainan's importance for Beijing and the region has changed from the early and mid-twentieth century agricultural plans for the island to become a new breadbasket of China. Most importantly, efforts by both the provincial and national government have begun to shape the island into a major tourist destination for both Chinese and international visitors. Another factor that puts Hainan in recent headlines is its proximity to maritime disputes in the South China Sea, mainly with Vietnam and the Philippines, but also involving Malaysia, Brunei, and other countries.

With these new priorities for Hainan – as an international vacation destination and as a maritime border region – the plans for the island to become a new Taiwan or Singapore, or a breadbasket, have faded. New plans, unlike the ambitious development plans of the past, are built more realistically on Hainan's past. As a maritime border area, unavoidable geography puts Hainan in a position to monitor and police the South China Sea and its potential wealth of energy resources.⁴⁶² Historical claims to many islands throughout the South China Sea make Hainan (otherwise the country's smallest province) the largest province in the People's Republic of China, if we accept Beijing's maritime borders, which put nearly the entire sea under Hainan's jurisdiction. Speculation about natural resources under the water make Hainan a global flashpoint, and even Hainanese

⁴⁶² Li Jinming, "Nansha Indisputable Territory," *China Daily* (June 15, 2011).

fishermen can become national celebrities if they bump into a patrolling Japanese coast guard vessel, as was the case in the fall of 2010.⁴⁶³ The detention of this fishing captain by the Japanese led to broader implications for Japan and China in the form of a temporary suspension of rare earth mineral shipments (essential to many high technology devices) from Japan to China. Beyond regional maritime boundary disputes, the importance of the South China Sea as a major shipping lane has even led the Chinese foreign ministry to warn the United States about “playing with fire” when the US declared its national interests in the Sea.⁴⁶⁴ The Chinese patrols of the region are based out of naval headquarters in Hainan, and if the rhetoric of all parties involved can be trusted, the importance of these conflicting maritime claims cannot be overestimated.

As a tourist destination, Hainan is like some Southeast Asian countries and Pacific or Caribbean Islands, in that its undeveloped economy and infrastructure is hardly an obstacle to decadent vacationers; on the contrary, this relative poverty can serve to add rich enjoyment to the experience of the island’s quaint, exotic, and seemingly timeless charm. Some regions of the island have been highly developed for wealthy visitors, with golf resorts sprawling green across the hills, the resort city of Sanya, and the major political conference center of Bo’ao.⁴⁶⁵ Other regions are on display as authentic ethnic

⁴⁶³ James Manicom, “Understanding the Nature of China’s Challenge to Maritime East Asia,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* (December 24, 2010).

⁴⁶⁴ Edward Wong, “Beijing Warns US About South China Sea Disputes,” *New York Times* (June 22, 2011).

⁴⁶⁵ The annual Bo’ao Forum for Asia draws an impressive roster of dignitaries, including current and former heads of state, whose expressed aim is to increase the economic integration of the region. This economic integration has prevailed in recent years, even over any escalation of regional tensions. (<http://www.boaforum.org/html/home-en.asp>)

communities, where the local people dance for tourists and perform rituals in traditional costume. This “ethnic tourism” is a significant draw for Hainan, as are the beaches, golf resorts, and luxury hotels.⁴⁶⁶ The glitz of international beauty contests and sporting events has also served to attract the kind of attention that local and national developers of the island hope will turn into major tourist revenues. In the spring of 2011, Hainan’s provincial government launched a further attempt to draw wealthy travelers in the form of a tax rebate program that allowed foreign and domestic tourists to the island to regain approximately 30 percent of the price of luxury goods that they purchased during their stay.⁴⁶⁷

This rapid growth is naturally not without opponents, and in the unlikely forum of a February 2011 *People’s Daily* editorial, one writer criticized the hasty and unannounced government-authorized destruction of a housing block. While the reason given for the destruction was the unsanitary condition of the housing and the fire risk, the writer has little doubt that the stealthy destruction, carried out while most tenants were gone celebrating the New Year’s Festival, was one of many demolitions in the name of a revitalized real estate market.⁴⁶⁸

The past two decades have revealed that major shifts in direction can take place in a very short time. Hainan’s economy seems poised to continue to benefit from tourist

⁴⁶⁶ Philip Feifan Xie, *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2011).

⁴⁶⁷ “Hainan to Expand Tax Rebate Program to Domestic Tourists,” *People’s Daily Online* (March 22, 2011).

⁴⁶⁸ “Slum Razing by ‘Caring’ Officials Lusting for GDP,” *People’s Daily Online* (February 18, 2011).

revenue and friendly government policy. Certainly, the island's popularity with domestic tourism continues to rise as the number of middle class Chinese who can afford a vacation there continues to grow. Finally, the island has something to offer that can be developed in a way that supplies a demand of the mainland. Sustainable tiers of autonomy are based on the stable point in the power negotiation among the different levels. Hainan's position as watchtower of the South China Sea and major tourist destination seem to have provided that stasis.

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