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Estranged Comrades: Global Networks of Indonesian Communism, 1926-1932

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Estranged Comrades: Global Networks of Indonesian Communism, 1926-1932

by

Kankan Xie

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Committee in charge:

Professor Peter Zinoman, Chair
Professor Eric Tagliacozzo
Professor Jeroen Dewulf
Professor Sylvia Tiwon

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies
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Professor Peter Zinoman, Chair

Scholars have carefully studied the history of Indonesian communism from its inception in 1914 to its destruction after 1965 with a noticeable exception between 1927 and 1945. The justification is simple—the Dutch authorities crushed the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) completely after its unsuccessful revolts in 1927 and exercised tight political control in the remainder of the Dutch colonial period. Communism also played an insignificant role under the Japanese occupation due to the effective military suppression of clandestine activities. Historians commonly describe Indonesian communism during this period as generating lasting impact on Indonesian politics by providing a useful ideological weapon for carrying on anti-colonial struggles, but it lost its organizational significance as a cohesive force to mobilize the masses and gather them under the common political banner. Such claims are problematic for two main reasons: First, historical writings concerning Indonesia's wide array of anti-colonial struggles, communism included, have been mostly following a nation-state-based paradigm; The second is that current scholarship tends to equate the history of Indonesian communism to the history of the communist party (PKI).

This dissertation seeks to examine Indonesia's ongoing communist movement beyond the colonial borders after the 1926/27 PKI revolts by focusing on its global connections. I argue despite the party's collapse in the aftermath of the uprisings, Indonesian communism persisted internationally in three "worlds" of global networks, namely international fugitive networks, the international policing networks, and networks of the Comintern-dominated international communism. Specifically, the movement continued in the fragmented fugitive networks; yet, these groups took drastically different directions due to the split of the party leadership. Additionally, Indonesian communism existed as an existential threat throughout the remainder of the colonial period and loomed large in the world of international policing. Moreover, Indonesian communism remained marginal in the world of international communist revolution, but those stayed close with the course of the Comintern gained the authority in shaping the narratives concerning the PKI's failure in the 1920s, which served as an essential source of legitimacy for reclaiming the party leadership in the 1940s.

To Jeffrey Hadler

Pisang emas dibawa belayar,
masak sebiji di atas peti;
Hutang emas boleh dibayar,
hutang budi dibawa mati.

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This dissertation examines the global networks of Indonesian communism during the interwar period. I have not the slightest doubt that this research would be impossible without the enormous help, inspiration, and encouragement I have received from numerous professors, librarians, archivists, friends, and family members from different parts of the world.

I dedicate this dissertation to my late principal advisor Jeffrey Hadler, an extraordinary scholar and caring mentor who supported me through every step of my PhD career until he succumbed to cancer in early 2017. His deep knowledge in Indonesian history and broad interests in language, arts, literature, and political culture profoundly influenced my academic endeavors. Additionally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my other extremely supportive committee members at Berkeley. Peter Zinoman, who stepped in as my primary advisor after Jeff's passing, was most helpful in making me think about Indonesia's political history from comparative and global lenses. Jeroen Dewulf introduced me to the Dutch language and studies of colonial history, which significantly broadened my horizons in understanding my research subjects. Sylvia Tiwon, whom I am more used to call *Ibu*, further deepened my knowledge in Indonesian literature and trained me to become a better teacher and storyteller. TJ Pempel pushed me out of my comfort zone in the humanities and exposed me to the rich scholarship of international relations. I am also grateful to my other teachers such as Penny Edwards, Alexander Cook, Inez Hollander, Esmée van der Hoeven, Pheng Cheah, and Munis Faruqui, whose instructions and assistance made my learning experience at Berkeley full of joy.

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I have received continuous support from my teachers and friends of Cornell's Southeast Asia Program (SEAP). Eric Tagliacozzo served as an external member of my dissertation committee after Jeff passed away. His expertise in Indonesia and transnational networks is crucial for me to link the Indonesian history to the wider world. Other professors such as Anne Blackburn, Tamara Loos, Andrew Willford, Jolanda Pandin, Audrey Kahin, and Thomas Pepinsky kept encouraging me throughout my PhD career. My fellow graduate student friends, now embarked on new

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After completing my Qualifying Exam in 2015, I stayed in Indonesia for a year collecting materials for my dissertation while working for the Transparency for Development (T4D), a joint initiative by Harvard Kennedy School and the Results for Development Institute. Driven by my interests in contemporary issues of Indonesia, I conducted a seven-month ethnographic study for the T4D project by focusing on rural development and public health in Bantaeng, South Sulawesi. I received the strong support of the T4D team consisting of Stephen Kosack, Courtney Tolmie, Jessica Creighton, Jenna Juwono, Iqra Anugrah, Mohamed Yunus Rafiq, and Megan Cogburn. I also enjoyed the sincere hospitality of my hosts Pak Amir Saba, Ibu Samsinar Amir, and their children. Moreover, I cultivated genuine friendship with villagers, healthcare providers, village officials, and other interlocutors in Onto, Bonto Manai, and Ereng-Ereng. Upon completing the project, I resumed my dissertation research across Indonesia's major cities where many people helped me along the process. I benefited enormously from the assistance of my Indonesian friends Suryo Ariyanto Nugroho, Widodo Pamudji, Satrio Adi Wicaksono, Sigfried Looho, Mirwan Andan, and Rudhiro Pratomo. Meanwhile, Chinese and Malaysian expatriates in Jakarta such as Tao Huang, Jibin Li, Jingying Luo, Xueya Zhuang, and Roseli Abdul have been very supportive of my work.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1. Setting the context

From November 1926 to January 1927, a series of insurrections broke out in several districts across the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), currently Indonesia.[1] First started in the capital city of Batavia, the revolt soon spilled over to the rural areas of the nearby Banten region, and finally reached the West Coast of Sumatra at the turn of the year. Behind the movement was the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), the earliest communist party in Asia. While the PKI had been spearheading the colony's anti-colonial struggles for years, it was crumbling due to the crises in the months leading up to the event: the government's anti-communist repression on the one hand, and the party's internal conflicts on the other. Without adequate coordination, the rebellions played out in an extremely disorganized manner. The Dutch authorities managed to crush each of the insurrections within a few days. The revolts themselves were insignificant events, or in PKI leader's own words, they were just "*putsch kecil*," or literally "small putsch."[2] However, such incidents were significant in the sense that they provided the NEI authorities ideal justification for carrying out full-scale suppressions of the PKI and affiliated organizations. In the events' aftermath, the colonial government further tightened its already stringent measures against communism to an unprecedented level. The government arrested approximately 13,000 people for their direct involvement in the uprising and 5,000 more for having displayed the so-called "communist tendencies." While the Dutch authorities only sentenced a few PKI members to death for killing officials, they banished as many as 1,308 alleged communist leaders to a remote panel colony in Boven Digul, Dutch New Guinea.[3] The anti-communist repression brought about the destruction of the party organization, marking the end of the first phase of the communist movement in Indonesia. Despite attempts to reorganize the party in the late 1920s and throughout the long 1930s, the PKI would not play any significant role in Indonesian politics again until its reestablishment after World War II.

On a global scale, nationalism was rising rapidly with a clear anti-colonial and anti-imperialist outlook during the interwar era. The rise and fall of the PKI were by no means exceptional, as many similar movements took place around the same time throughout the colonized and semi-colonized world. Western powers reacted to such movements differently and considered some of them more dangerous than the others. Particular threatening were those under the banner of international communism to which the PKI allegedly belonged. Galvanized by the victory of the Russian Revolution in 1917, communist parties sprung up in many parts of the globe. These parties quickly established connections with the Communist International (Comintern), the Moscow-based organization in charge of supervising and facilitating global revolutions. Imperial

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[1] The official name of the Dutch colony was the "Netherlands East Indies" during this period, but the term "Indonesia" had become increasingly popular among intellectuals because of the rising national consciousness. The two terms are used interchangeably in the dissertation.

[2] Tamin, Djamaluddin. "Sejarah PKI." [A History of PKI], Unpublished Manuscript, July 1957, 54.

[3] Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 353; J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935), 111

powers saw communism—or more specifically, Bolshevism—as posing unprecedented threats to their global interests, as it seemed to have provided both a coherent ideological weapon and a workable organizational framework to the burgeoning nationalist movements. Founded in 1920 and 1921 successively, the PKI and Communist Parties of China (CPC) were representative of such a global movement.[4] Coincidentally, both the PKI and CPC experienced dramatic ups and downs during the brief period between 1925 and 1927. They rose to play prominent roles in their respective nationalist revolution, but soon suffered fatal setbacks due to anti-communist suppressions and were both driven underground from 1927 onward.[5]

While experiencing radical crackdowns domestically, the PKI and CPC movements received international attention at different levels. The Comintern thoroughly reflected on its China policy and made various efforts to assist the CPC to carry on its struggles; To a much lesser extent, the organization discussed the PKI uprisings and explored possibilities of reinstating the communist movement in Indonesia. In February 1927, Indonesian and Chinese representatives attended the inaugural conference of the Comintern-influenced League against Imperialism (LAI) in Brussels, where 175 delegates from around the world voiced their support for revolutionaries of the two countries in carrying out continuous struggles against imperialism.[6] Meanwhile, colonial powers regarded communism as a common issue and sought to strengthen the cooperation among each other to keep the threat at bay. The British, in particular, kept a watchful eye on the development of two communist movements. The reason behind was not just that the British Empire heavily invested in the entire Far East, but also the immediate threats facing its colonies in the aftermath of the anti-communist repressions. British authorities considered Malaya as especially vulnerable to communist threat from outside due to its strategic location and diverse population. While people and goods constantly flow in and out of the colony in significant volumes, it also hosted a large number of Chinese and Indonesian immigrants who still maintained close ties with their places of origin and were presumably more receptive of external political influences. Following the two unsuccessful uprisings, many PKI fugitives escaped to Malaya to elude Dutch arrests, which coincided with the increasing anti-British activities of the communism-inspired Malayan Chinese. Although no evidence suggests that the Indonesian and Chinese movements coordinated with each other, such a coincidence alarmed the British authorities, which prompted the formation of the Anglo-Dutch partnership to fight the common enemy even before communist forces firmly established themselves in Malaya.

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[4] The PKI was founded as the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDA) in 1914 and adopted the name Communist Union of the Indies (Perserikatan Komunis di Hindia, or PKH) in 1920. The name changed to PKI in 1924. The CPC was founded in Shanghai in July 1921.

[5] Starting from the Shanghai massacre of April 12, 1927, the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang) under Chiang Kai-shek launched a nationwide anti-communist purge in China, which will be discussed in detail in Part II.

[6] Klaas Stutje, "To Maintain an Independent Course. Inter-War Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage," *Dutch Crossing* 39, no. 3 (September 2, 2015): 205-8.

2. Issues, questions, and the main argument

The history of Indonesian communism in the 1920s has received scholarly attention for many decades.[7] Using materials in multiple languages, McVey has produced a detailed account on the rise and fall of the PKI between its inception in 1914 and first disintegration in 1927.[8] Some scholarship focuses specifically on the uprisings, regarding them as the cause of the party's destruction[9]; and as a significant milestone of the country's independence movement.[10] Some have scrutinized the dynamics of the uprisings from a local perspective.[11] Irrespective of the topic, scholars invariably use the 1926/27 uprisings as a convenient marker to end their narratives about the first phase of Indonesia communist movement. Despite occasional discoveries of real and imagined communist agents and activities in the following years, communism faded away from the political scene of Indonesia and would not return to life until the end of WWII.[12]

The second phase of the PKI started in October 1945 when a young activist named Muhammad Yusuf reestablished the party following the Japanese capitulation. PKI fugitives of the older generation soon returned from abroad and took over the party leadership in 1946.[13] Despite fierce power struggles among leftwing forces and setbacks the PKI suffered in the 1948 Madiun Affair, the party's influence grew rapidly in the following years by cooperating with nationalists in the Indonesian Revolution.[14] The PKI became the third largest communist party in the world

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[7] The Dutch government conducted intensive investigations into the PKI movement in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings and produced many reports in the colonial era, but official documents were not released until the post-war era. Many of the documents are available at the National Archives of the Netherlands. See"40 Dossiermap 70-II. Los aangetroffen stukken betreffende het Communisme [Uncovered documents about Communism]" in Het archief van het Ministerie van Koloniën: Indisch Archief, 1945-1950 [The Archives of the Ministry of Colonies: Indies Archive, 1945-1950]. 2.10.36.15. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, the Netherlands.

[8] Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).

[9] J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935).; Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960); McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*; Justus M. van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia: Its History, Program and Tactics* (Vancouver, B.C.: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1965). Arnold C Brackman, *Indonesian Communism: A History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976).

[10] George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (SEAP Publications, 1952); Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961).

[11] B Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings: Part 1-2*. (The Hague-Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1955); Michael C Williams, *Sickle and Crescent: The Communist Revolt of 1926 in Banten* (Jakarta: Equinox Pub., 2010).

[12] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 354; Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 86.

[13] Soerjono and Ben Anderson, "On Musso's Return," *Indonesia* 29 (April 1980): 67-70.

[14] The Madiun Affair is an armed conflict between the Indonesian government and the PKI-led party coalition *Front Demokrasi Rakyat*, which lasted from September 1948 to the end of that

in the early post-independence period thanks to the radicalization of Indonesian politics under the left-leaning president Sukarno.[15] Nevertheless, the party met its ultimate destruction in 1965 when the military carried out a radical anti-communist purge throughout the country by accusing the PKI of plotting a coup.[16] Around 500,000 people died in the mass killing for their real or alleged association with communism, but those committed the atrocities have been enjoying impunity up till now.[17]

In short, scholars have carefully examined the PKI history from its inception in 1914 to its final destruction in 1965 with a noticeable exception between 1927 and 1945. The justification is simple—the Dutch authorities crushed the PKI completely after the unsuccessful revolts and exercised tight political control over the colony. As a result, various forms of nationalism replaced communism as the major force of resistance in the remainder of the Dutch colonial period.[18] The existing scholarship also suggests that communism played an insignificant role under the Japanese occupation due to the effective military suppression of clandestine activities.[19] A handful of scholars have touched on issues relating to Indonesian communism during the 1927-1945 period by focusing on the concurrent nationalist, Islamic, and trade union movements.[20] Additionally, the topic also often appears in memoirs, biographies, and studies of colonial policing.[21] An important feature of such works is that they describe communism as generating lasting impact on Indonesian politics by providing a useful ideological weapon for carrying on anti-colonial struggles, but it lost its organizational significance as a cohesive force to mobilize the masses and gather them under the common political banner. After all, with

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year. Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948*, Monograph Series / Cornell Modern Indonesia Project (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1989); Soerjono and Anderson, "On Musso's Return," 73-78

15 Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*. (Ithaca, NY u.a.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978).

16 John Roosa, *Pretext to Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup Détat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

17 Geoffrey B Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

18 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 354

19 Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944-1946*. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972), 206; Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 26.

20 For nationalist movement, see Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia,* 64-100; For Islamic movement, see Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927-1933)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1971); For Trade union movement, see John Ingleson, *Workers, Unions and Politics: Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s*, Brill's Southeast Asian Library (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

21 For biography, see H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid*. ('s-Gravenhage: Brill, 1976). For memoirs, see Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); and Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 1954, ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History. For policing, see Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," in *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson* (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 47–74; and Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, no. 63 (1997): 1–46.

stringent anti-communist measures in place, any attempt to associate with communism would be too dangerous a risk to take. Political organizations had to distance themselves from communism and operate within the legal parameters set by the NEI authorities.

Was Indonesian communism really so insignificant between 1927 and 1945 that scholars only feel the need to cover the entire eighteen years of history in passing? I attribute existing literature's lack of attention to Indonesian communism during this period to two main reasons. First, historical writings concerning Indonesia's wide array of anti-colonial struggles, communism included, have been mostly following a nation-state-based paradigm formulated in the early post-independence period. As Denys Lombard and Christopher Goscha point out, although colonial and nationalist historiographies appeared to be opposing one another, they are similar in the sense that they both tend to partition Southeast Asia into fragmented and independent geopolitical entities such as the "Dutch East Indies," "French Indochina," and "British Malaya." While colonial scholarship usually demarcates the region along the boundaries of empires, nationalist histories seek to counterbalance the tendency by downplaying external factors in favor of the indigenous.[22] The more internationally oriented communist movement preceded the emergence of secular nationalism in Indonesia, but nationalist historiographies commonly regard the PKI movement as part of the nationalist movement. As a result, narratives about communist movement terminated when communism ceased to play a prominent role in the nationalist movement due to the collapse of the PKI in Indonesia. Such a perspective ignores the fact that many PKI fugitives remained active outside the NEI border. It is thus necessary to liberate the analysis from the "straitjackets of the modern nation-state."[23]

The second reason is that existing scholarship tends to equate the history of Indonesian communism to the history of the communist party (PKI). Although the Dutch authorities crushed the PKI, communism still existed in other forms and was adopted by new organizations, propagated by new agents, embodied in new networks, and modified with new objectives. Conventional studies of Indonesian communism tend to overlook that Indonesia still maintained its contact with international communism through channels other than the PKI. Despite the mass arrest in the colony, the party leadership in exile remained mostly intact. While some of the leaders decided to distance themselves from the Comintern, others stayed close with the international movement in the following years. Consequently, scholars have not yet sufficiently explored the mismatch between the supposed the communist failure in 1927 and the continuous anti-communist suppressions throughout the remainder of the colonial era. In other words, colonial authorities needed to justify their anti-communist measures by either confronting the real communist threat or creating a discourse about who the communists were. Then the question is, what was the target of such political policing after the PKI's destruction?

Moreover, several issues worth further consideration concerning what we know about Indonesian communism in the 1940s. First, if the Dutch authorities had eradicated Indonesian communism

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[22] Denys Lombard, "Networks and Synchronisms in Southeast Asian History," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995): 10, 14.

[23] Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 4.

so thoroughly after 1927 and communist activities were virtually non-existent under the Japanese occupation, how could the PKI have such a strong comeback to the central stage of Indonesian politics in the immediate aftermath of WWII? Additionally, despite the PKI's reestablishment in 1945, it failed to include many of its veterans who remained radical but took different positions in the anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s. How did Indonesian leftwing groups, sharing the common PKI root, become so fragmented in the Indonesian Revolution for independence? Furthermore, some PKI leaders of the so-called "1926 generation" claimed legitimacy over the party leadership after they return to Indonesia from abroad after the war, while others were further marginalized due to the supposed "mistakes" they committed in the 1920s. Was international communism the source of legitimacy? What was the relationship between Indonesian and international communism after 1927? Did such a relationship shape the discourse of the party history of the 1920s? If yes, then how?

It is impossible to answer such questions without a thorough investigation into the often ignored 1927-1945 period. This dissertation seeks to approach some of these issues by examining Indonesia's ongoing communist movement beyond the colonial borders after the 1926/27 PKI revolts. Specifically, this research focuses on the global connections of Indonesian communism between 1927 and 1932. I argue despite the PKI's collapse in the aftermath of the 1926-27 uprisings, Indonesian communism persisted internationally in three "worlds" of global networks, namely international fugitive networks, the international policing networks, and networks of the Comintern-dominated international communism: I argue despite the party's collapse in the aftermath of the uprisings, Indonesian communism persisted internationally in three "worlds" of global networks, namely international fugitive networks, the international policing networks, and networks of the Comintern-dominated international communism. Specifically, the movement continued in the fragmented fugitive networks; yet, these groups took drastically different directions due to the split of the party leadership. Additionally, Indonesian communism existed as an existential threat throughout the remainder of the colonial period and loomed large in the world of international policing. Moreover, Indonesian communism remained marginal in the world of international communist revolution, but those stayed close with the course of the Comintern gained the authority in shaping the narratives concerning the PKI's failure in the 1920s, which served as an essential source of legitimacy for reclaiming the party leadership in the 1940s. The following sections will elaborate on the three worlds of global networks in a reversed order.

3. Situating Indonesian communism in the international communist movement

Scholars have written about the international communist movement during the interwar period extensively. Irrespective of the area focus, the Comintern was invariably one of the central topics in such discussions. In Asia, the Chinese Revolution in the 1920s and its connections with the Comintern are particularly well researched, which is consistent with the fact that the organization paid more attention to China than any other place in the region during this period.[24] While the

[24] Hans J. Van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920-1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).; Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Roland Felber and A.M. Grigoriev, *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s Between Triumph and*

Comintern played a significant role in the establishment of CPC in 1921, it also exerted profound influences on the Chinese Revolution from 1923 to 1927 by promoting the First United Front of the CPC and the nationalist Guomindang (GMD) in their armed struggles for national unification. The Comintern ardently advocated a strategy called "bloc-within," by which they encouraged CPC members to join the GMD as individuals and spread communism among the GMD rank and file. Although the GMD-CPC Alliance made great military success in the Northern Expedition against the northern warlords, the partnership fell apart when Field Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the GMD Rightwing, launched a nationwide anti-communist purge from April 1927. The collapse of the GMD-CPC United Front eventually led to the civil war between the two parties' armed forces, which also affected the Comintern operation in China and drove the organization underground. As a result, the Comintern moved its regional headquarters, comprised of the Far East Bureau (FEB) and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS), to Shanghai's International Settlement, where some of its agents could enjoy the protection of extraterritoriality by claiming to be citizens of 14 Western powers.[25]

The Comintern influence in Southeast Asia during the interwar period was comparatively less researched. Published in 1966, Charles McLane's *Soviet Strategy in Southeast* is the only monograph-length study dealing specifically with this topic at the regional level.[26] Nevertheless, other scholars have approached the subject from the angle of party history on a country basis. Representative works include Kasian Tejapira's *Commodifying Marxism* on Thailand;[27] Ben Kiernan's *How Pol Pot Came to Power*;[28] Bertil Lintner's research on Burma;[29] Cheah Boon Kheng and Yong Chin Fatt's study on Malaya.[30] It is noteworthy here that in all these places above, communism first emerged among immigrant communities. As a result, the Comintern relied on the Chinese and Indian communist networks to influence the local movements.[31]

Disaster (London: Routledge, 2015).

[25] The fourteen countries include: Britain, the United States, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. See Henry J Lethbridge, *All about Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook* (Hong Kong: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 22.

[26] Charles B McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[27] Kasīan Tēchaphīra, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*, Kyoto Area Studies on Asia, v. 3 (Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press, 2001).

[28] Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

[29] Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)*, Southeast Asia Program Series, no. 6 (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1990).

[30] Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party: Selected Documents and Discussion [i.e. Discussion* (Ithaca, N.Y: SEAP, Southeast Asia Program, 1992); C. F. Yong, *The Origins of Malayan Communism*, South Seas Society Monograph, no. 40 (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997). Newer works also include Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities: The Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the Foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 03 (November 2014): 447–70; Fujio Hara, *The Malayan Communist Party as Recorded in the Comintern Files* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017).

[31] Anna Belogurova, "Communism in South East Asia," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

Indonesia and Vietnam stood out as having more "homegrown" communist movements, and their ties with the Comintern were maintained directly by native activists. In the case of Vietnam, historians have studied the issue mostly from the perspective of Ho Chi Minh's life stories.[32] For the PKI history in the 1920s, almost all works discussed the party's interactions with the Comintern as a crucial background.[33] Ruth McVey's *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* is by far the most comprehensive account of the PKI history during this period. Combining interviews and party documents with Comintern publications such as *Inprecorr* and *Pravda*, McVey has devoted a good deal of space to discussions of such connections. Several individuals played critical roles in keeping the contact. For example, Henk Sneevliet, the Dutch founder of the PKI's predecessor ISDV, worked for the organization in Europe and was sent to China in 1921 to facilitate the establishment of CPC.[34] PKI leaders such as Semaun, Darsono, and Tan Malaka were also active in the Comintern after their banishment from the NEI. In 1923, the Comintern appointed Tan Malaka as the representative for Southeast Asia. He worked closely with international communist organizations in the region up until the outbreak of the PKI revolts.[35]

As far as the 1926/27 uprisings are concerned, however, many historians suggest that they should be primarily studied as a domestic political movement, in which international communism played a tangential role:

> The situation of the PKI was quite different from that of the only other important Asian communist movement of the time, the Chinese Communist Party. The pressures on the PKI in this period arose from conditions inside Indonesia and not from outside influences; it can thus be studied as a purely Indonesian phenomenon much more easily than can the concurrent history of Chinese Communism, which was so deeply affected by Russo-Chinese relations and the decisions laid down by the Comintern against the background of the feud between Stalin and Trotsky.[36]

While such a statement reflects the shallow nature of the PKI-Comintern interactions, many details remain missing as to why the Comintern treated the PKI and CPC movements so differently. Why did the Indonesian revolution receive so little attention? What were the original voices behind the empty yet well-crafted "resolutions" and "statements"? How did Comintern representatives, with

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[32] Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years; 1919-1941* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003). William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (Hyperion Books, 2000).

[33] J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935).; Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960); Justus M. van der Kroef, The Communist Party of Indonesia: Its History, Program and Tactics (Vancouver, B.C.: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1965). Arnold C Brackman, Indonesian Communism: A History (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976).

[34] PKI's predecessor ISDV (Indies Social Democratic Association, or *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging*) was founded in 1914. The Dutch authorities deported Sneevliet in 1918 for his radicalism. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 43-46.

[35] Helen Jarvis, "Tan Malaka: Revolutionary or Renegade?," *Critical Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 1987): 45-47.

[36] Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), xix, xxx.

their distinct backgrounds, sit together in Moscow and discuss the Indonesian situation about which many of them know very little? To fill the void in the existing literature, I used the archives of the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam. The main documents consulted for this research include meeting minutes, personal writings, and original correspondence, which originated from the *Archief Komintern-Partai Komunis Indonesia* that the IISH duplicated from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (PGASPI), Moscow in the early 1990s.[37] I also examined unpublished memoirs and speeches of Indonesian communist leaders in the IISH's PKI Collection. Specifically, I am interested in studying the discrepancy between how PKI members perceived the Comintern and how the organization actually worked. I demonstrate in the dissertation that the Comintern loomed large in the eyes of Indonesian communists as an omnipotent source of power and legitimacy. PKI members regarded it as the party's last resort for solutions to reconcile internal disagreements and to overcome external pressures imposed by the colonial authorities. In reality, however, the Comintern was self-serving and highly hierarchical, which failed to deliver any substantial assistance that the PKI expected. While being ignorant of the situation on the ground, Comintern officials were obsessed with solving Indonesian problems with theories and experiences of other countries. I argue that such a discrepancy resulted in the disillusion of certain PKI leaders and eventually led to their breakaway from the Comintern course after the failed uprisings.

My study of the PKI-Comintern relationship consists of two parts: the first concentrates on how PKI members failed to obtain what they expected in Moscow before the revolts; the second discusses how Comintern reactions evolved towards the PKI movement in the aftermath of the rebellions.

The starting point was December 1925, when a group of ultra-leftist members of the PKI met in Prambanan, Central Java in response to the increasingly tightened political control of the colonial government. Despite the absence of the party's core leaders, the group made a desperate decision to rebel against the Dutch authorities in mid-1926. The party leadership met several times in Singapore in the following months to discuss the plan and sent Alimin to Manila to seek the approval of Tan Malaka, the highest-ranking Comintern agent for the region. To their dismay, Tan Malaka opposed the decision and stressed that the party must restore discipline rather than going into a reckless revolt. Too eager to carry out the rebellion, Alimin deliberately concealed Tan Malaka's disapproval to the Singapore group. He and Musso then went on a mission to Moscow in hopes of circumventing Tan Malaka's objection by obtaining the Comintern's direct authorization and financial assistance. In the Soviet Union, the two emissaries jointed PKI leaders in exile Semaun and Darsono and participated in the Comintern discussions on the Indonesian revolution. Nevertheless, Comintern officials appeared to be poorly informed of Indonesia and were unable to conduct a thorough analysis of the PKI movement. To make sense of the circumstances—or perhaps more accurately, to talk the communist talk—many had to refer to "similar cases" in drastically different contexts. As meetings of the Anglo-American Secretariat were the main venue for discussions of Indonesian questions, British and Indian representatives frequently brought up issues such as parliamentary democracy and the non-cooperation movement. Similarly, Soviet representatives often compared the NEI to Russia during the pre-October-Revolution period.

[37] Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

While the Comintern discussions on Indonesia often lost contact with the situation on the ground, they closely associated with simultaneous events elsewhere. The ideological debate between Stalin's socialism in one country and Trotsky's permanent revolution shaped the interpretation of the Indonesian situation, especially by comparing it to that of China, the focal point of the Comintern operations in the Far East. The CPC-GMD United Front served a major frame of reference for analyzing the PKI movement vis-a-vis other nationalist organizations. When the alliance was making good progress, the Comintern attempted to replicate the success story in Indonesia by insisting that the PKI should keep implementing a similar "bloc-within" strategy with *Sarekat Islam* as the CPC did with GMD. Additionally, The Comintern hoped to eventually link the PKI and CPC movements via the Indies Chinese community. While PKI members might find such directives useless, they had limited power to influence the direction of the discussions. As I will demonstrate in Part I, Comintern officials constantly suppressed PKI representatives' voices in the meetings and accused them of lacking sufficient grasp of "theories." Despite the ignorance, Comintern representatives vetoed the PKI decision to revolt against the Dutch after realizing that the party lacked proper preparations. While the rejection might sound disappointing to Alimin and Musso, it ended up irrelevant to the development of the events—The PKI revolts broke out when the emissaries could deliver the message.

Additionally, it is essential to situate the PKI-Comintern connections in a global context and make sense of how local revolutions shaped the international discourse concerning world revolution. In the immediate aftermath of the PKI revolt, the Comintern publicized the Indonesian revolution with a lofty tone by using the uprisings to showcase the success of its China policy. As the movement gradually died out, the Comintern conducted lengthy reflections on the movement's failure. The Comintern finally put forward a carefully crafted resolution on Indonesian questions almost a year after the revolt, but it was too late to exert any substantial impact on reviving the revolution. As the government carried out repression at an unprecedented scale, the Comintern could hardly find a channel to reestablish its communication with Indonesia, let alone trusted individuals to restore the party organizations. Not only did the Comintern attempt to replicate the success story of the Chinese Revolution failed in Indonesia, but the CPC itself also suffered tremendous setbacks in 1927 due to Chiang Kai-shek's anti-communist purge. Following the PKI revolts, the Indonesian representatives' attack on collaborative nationalists was in line with the Comintern's policy shift towards a more radical line against the moderate left in the so-called "Third Period." Despite the total defeat of the PKI movement in Indonesia, such a change would have a significant impact on how the PKI fugitives position themselves in response to the rise of the nationalist movement in the following years. From 1928 onward, those stayed close with the Comintern maintained a radical and non-cooperative stance while a new wave of nationalist movement was on the rise. Taking such a position certainly has its trade-offs, as the Dutch authorities further strengthened its political control after the abortive uprisings, the PKI was never able to revive under the so-called "*rust en orde* (peace and order)" over the long 1930s.

4. Colonial policing and international policing

The antithesis of communist movement is the anti-communist policing carried out by colonial states. Of course, colonial policing came into existence long before the emergence of the Comintern-led international communist revolution. To some extent, colonial policing was central to the very existence of colonial rule as it reflects the relationship between the imperial powers and their colonized subjects. Colonial policing coexisted with various forms of anti-colonial

resistance ranging from labor unrests to peasant rebellions, from mutiny of native soldiers to insurrections under religious banners, and so forth. In his study of imperial repression across the globe, Martin Thomas points out that colonial policing was closely linked to the management of colonial economies, control of the native labors, and containment of uprisings and dissent.[38] Consequently, it is inseparable from the fundamentals of political and socio-economic issues of colonial states.

With the growing population and development of the colonial economy, the NEI authorities saw the increasing demand for improving the security of the colony after entering the 20th century. Marieke Bloembergen suggests that such a demand grew "out of care and anxiety (*Uit zorg en angst*)." On the one hand, the NEI administration introduced the so-called Ethical Policy in 1900, shifting from the previous profit-driven colonial exploitation to a more benign way of governance. While the colonial state promised to make the broadly defined welfare more accessible to the vast native population, the Dutch authorities regarded "peace and order (*rust en orde*)" as a vital aspect to the fulfillment of state obligation. On the other hand, the broadened opportunities for education and political rights gave rise to national awareness among the natives, prompting the emergence of political activities striving for greater autonomy and even independence. Despite such nerve-racking movements, the Dutch colonial state insisted that political status quo must be maintained at all cost.[39]

While the nascent political movements remained manageable, deeply worrisome to the Dutch colonial state were threats difficult to detect or beyond their control. Such anxiety was perhaps most vividly portrayed in Louis Couperus's famous novel *De Stille Kracht*, better known in English as *The Hidden Force*. Written at the turn of the 20th century, the novel illustrates the unbridgeable gulf between the Dutch and natives, suggesting that the colonial rule only touched on the surface of Indonesian society:

> Outwardly, [Indonesia is] a docile colony with a subject race, which was no match for the rude traders…But down in its soul, it had never been conquered, though smiling in proud contemptuous resignation and bowing submissively beneath its fate. Deep in its soul, despite a cringing reverence, it lived in freedom its own mysterious life, hidden from Western eyes, however these might seek to fathom the secret.[40]

The intangible forces exerted profound psychological effects on colonial officials, creating a sense that things are different from what they see, and that there are always underground activities that they do not know.[41] Although the "hidden force" originally referred to the mysterious dangers in the colony's native world, it was no doubt an apt description of communism in the eyes of the Dutch authorities. A. E. van der Lely, the chief of the *Algemeene Recherche Dienst* (ARD, General Investigation Service) wrote a detailed report to reflect on

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[38] Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

[39] Marieke Bloembergen, *Uit zorg en angst*, De geschiedenis van de politie in Nederlands-Indië (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009), 22-23.

[40] Louis Couperus, *The Hidden Force* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 17.

[41] Anne L Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 39.

Indonesian communism in the aftermath of the PKI uprisings.[42] In this report, Van der Lely emphasized that the international intrigue played a critical role in instigating the rebellions. It was the "the phantom of external agitation," rather than the political, economic, and social grievances facing the native population, that made the PKI movement particularly threatening. He thus suggested that the colonial authorities must take stringent measures to prevent the international communist conspiracy from penetrating the NEI any further. Additionally, Van der Lely highlighted Tan Malaka as the leading figure of the PKI movement by (over)analyzing Tan Malaka's writings such as *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Towards the Republic of Indonesia) and *Semangat Moeda* (The Youth Spirit). He depicted Tan Malaka as a worthy enemy to the colonial state because this communist leader was intelligent, well educated, highly prolific, extensively traveled, and most important of all, a Comintern representative for the entire Far East. As Shiraishi puts it, Tan Malaka "shared the Dutchman's fantasies, glorious for one and nightmarish for the other, yet all parts of the same imagined world."[43]

In his study of colonial policing in India, Christopher Bayly suggests that the British Empire was essentially an "empire of information," and it was particularly true during dramatic moments such as native uprisings. Specifically, he argues that the colonial conquest depended on the colonial powers' capability in information gathering and manipulate the knowledge production of the native world.[44] In the same vein, both Takashi Shiraishi and Harry Poeze attribute the expansion of the NEI policing apparatus in the 1920s to the rise of Indonesian communism.[45] Such expansion, with a special focus on surveillance and intelligence gathering, climaxed in the aftermath of the PKI uprisings in 1927 when the ARD started to produce a monthly report named the *Politiek-Politioneel Overzicht* (*Political Policing Overview,* or *PPO*).[46] Marked as "top secret" (*zeer geheim*), the *PPO* had a very limited readership. Besides a handful of top-ranking officials in Batavia and The Hague, the ARD only allowed heads of NEI's 32 regions—who were concurrently appointed as heads of the police force—to access the *PPO*. From November 1927,

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[42] Politieke nota over de Partij Kommunist Indonesia: Rapport, waarin is samengevat wat gebleken is omtrent de actie der Partij Kommunist Indonesia, (Nederlandsch-Indische kommunistische Partij), Sectie der 3e Internationale, vanaf Juli 1925 tot en met December 1926, reproduced in Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), 1-18.

[43] Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, no. 63 (1997): 3-9.

[44] Christopher Alan Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

[45] Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," in *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson* (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 60-70; Harry A. Poeze, "Political Intelligence in the Netherlands Indies," in *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies, 1880-1942* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), 229–45.

[46] In the first issue of the *PPO*, the Attorney General noted that "My intention is that with such an overview, in which we analyze the most important events and information, should be continued as frequent as once every month." Although he did not give further explanation, the *PPO* is related to the occurrence of the PKI uprisings in November 1926 and January 1927. *PPO* has been reproduced in Harry Poeze, *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië* [Political-Policing Overviews of the Dutch East Indies], vol. 1, (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), vii.

the ARD also sent *PPO* copies to Dutch envoys in important posts such as Beijing, Singapore, Shanghai, and Hong Kong.[47] The *PPO* primarily concerned with domestic issues in the NEI. The format of *PPO* reports was consistent throughout its period of appearance, which always contained five sections, namely (1) Extremist (Communist) Movement; (2) Nationalist and Mohammedan Movement; (3) Chinese Movement; (4) Native Trade Union Movement; and (5) Movement Abroad. Poeze points out that *PPO* reports were "colored by the NEI government's vision on political movements," in which "'dangerous' movements received far more attention than those 'law-abiding' ones."[48] Nevertheless, the *PPO* became valuable sources for studying Indonesian communism in the post-1927 period, as its "ripe and green" information not only records the dry facts of historical events but also reflects the (mis)understanding of the NEI authorities surrounding such issues.[49]

Comparatively speaking, the British intelligence network was much broader than that of their Dutch counterpart because of the omnipresent British Empire. Accordingly, historians have also researched the subject more extensively than other colonial powers. Looking beyond the border of British India, James Hevia shows that intelligence gathering was not only critical to the planning of its imperial strategies towards the colonized areas to the east but also essential to creation and preservation of the very idea of "Asia."[50] Other scholars have looked at specific British practices of policing and information gathering in various locations across Asia. Fredrick Wakeman's *Policing Shanghai*, for example, examines the enormous challenges facing the British-led international police in countering crimes and political activities in China's largest metropolis.[51] Similarly, Ban Kah Choon has studied operations of the Straits Settlements Police in Singapore. Focusing on the interwar period, the two authors have paid particular attention to how the British police handled communist movements.[52] In Shanghai, the threat originated from both the CPC and Comintern's underground activities; In Singapore, the government concerned primarily with the CPC and PKI influences among immigrant communities before the establishment of the MCP. While British authorities cared chiefly about the areas of their respective jurisdiction, they shared a broad vision of the empire and maintained close contact with policing and intelligence apparatuses throughout the imperial network. They invariably regarded communism as a dangerous threat from "outside," but it was not enough to only keep them out of Shanghai and Singapore—the red menace must be kept outside of the British Empire. As Rene Onraet, the director of the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police, stated sensationally in his memoir:

> One point must be stressed. From the very outset, subversive activities in Malaya were due to outside influences. There was no irritant within Malaya to give rise to such a reaction (to communism). There was no organization within Malaya which was capable

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[47] Poeze, *PPO*, vii-viii.

[48] Poeze, *PPO*, xx.

[49] Ibid.

[50] James Louis Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16.

[51] Frederic E Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[52] Ban Kah Choon, *Absent History: The Untold Story of Special Branch Operations in Singapore, 1915-1942* (Singapore: Raffles, 2001).

of producing such clever political propaganda. All of it came from China![53]

A good example that showcases such British anxieties about external threats is the secret *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI),* produced monthly by the Political Intelligence Bureau (PIB) of the CID.[54] The PIB distributed only a small amount of *MBPI* copies among high-ranking officials. On the distribution list of May 1926, for instance, 33 out of 71 recipients were inside of Malaya. Meanwhile, the PIB sent the other 38 copies to British authorities in places such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Batavia, and Medan.[55] The *MBPI* covers critical political issues across Asia, in which only a small proportion of its content concerned Malaya directly. The bulletin almost always organizes its sections in the following order: (1) Affairs in China; (2) Affairs in the NEI; (3) Affairs in the Hejaz; (4) Affairs in Malaya; (5) Kuo Min Tang (or Guomindang, GMD hereafter) in Malaya; (6) The Communist Center (NEI) in Singapore, and so forth.[56] While authors of such reports remained anonymous, the intelligence played a crucial role in assisting British authorities across Asia to make decisions.[57]

As Cheah Boon Kheng points out, using colonial archives to study early communist movements can be highly problematic, as information in official documents can be often biased, selective, inaccurate, and incomplete. Sources such as the *MBPI* and *PPO* tend to treat communist activists as "faceless" enemies and usually reveal very few of their personal details.[58] Due to the relative scarcity of materials produced by the underground movements, however, scholars of Southeast Asian communism have been relying heavily on colonial archives.[59] In recent years, a growing number of historians have sought to remedy the shortcomings by adopting an international perspective. For example, Anna Belogurova and Fujio Hara have reinvestigated the early history of Malayan communism by using Comintern documents.[60] On the Indonesian side, Rianne Subijanto has examined the issue by studying the revolutionary press;[61] Klaas Stutje's research focuses on the PKI movement on the Dutch-European stage.[62] While such discoveries have

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[53] René Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (Dorothy Crisp & Co.: London, 1947), 109.

[54] The PIB was affiliated with the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police, which was formed in 1918. The PIB started to print the *MBPI* from 1922 and ceased to do so in 1930 when the PIB was abolished. The CID changed its name to Special Branch in 1933. See Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 44.

[55] Colonial Office (CO), 273-534, "Distribution List" in *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI)*, 1 May 1926, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 1925-1927, Colonial Office, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.

[56] The six sub-headings mentioned here are the most common ones, which almost always appeared in the Bulletin. Other sections include, but are not limited to: Affairs in Indochina; Soviet Political Activity in the Far East; Affairs in India.

[57] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 45.

[58] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 5.

[59] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 6.

[60] Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities," 447-470; Fujio Hara, *The Malayan Communist Party as Recorded in the Comintern Files* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017).

[61] Rianne Subijanto, "Enlightenment and the Revolutionary Press in Colonial Indonesia," *International Journal of Communication,* 11(2017), 1357–1377.

[62] Klaas Stutje, "To Maintain an Independent Course. Inter-war Indonesian Nationalism and

significantly deepened our understanding of the subject, many gaps remain unfilled. One of the crucial aspects is the implications of the early communist movements at the immediate regional level. That is, to explore issues that transcend colonial boundaries while avoiding the convenient assertion that they "belong" to networks such as Chinese diaspora, anti-imperialism, and international communism. In other words, although it is vital to study the rise of communism beyond the frameworks of the Malayan or Indonesian history, situating the subject in another transnational network—either ethnically or ideologically oriented—can be quite slippery, as networks may often intersect, overlap, and contradict among each other.

From a regional perspective, Anne Foster has studied the anti-communist cooperation among the American, British, Dutch and French colonial authorities in Southeast Asia during the interwar period. She argues that the abrupt PKI uprisings prompted colonial governments to take sterner measures against communism, which permanently changed the colonial and foreign policies in the region.[63] While Foster is right in claiming that the intelligence sharing among the imperial powers became more routine after 1927, she has presented only two cases—both happened in the immediate aftermath of the revolts—to illustrate her point. Many details of the anti-communist cooperation in the region remain unexplored. Following this line, I propose to make sense of the post-1927 history of Indonesian communism by studying the bilateral anti-communist intelligence network between the British and Dutch governments. Adopting a comparative method, revisiting colonial archives shed new light on the subject, which has been confined mainly within the conceptual framework of party histories in previous studies. Specifically, I regard official documents not only as useful materials to study communist movements themselves, but also an indispensable lens, through which one could understand such movements as how colonial officials saw them. Such an approach echoes with what Ann Stoler describes as reading "along the archival grain."[64] In her critical study of Dutch colonial archives, Stoler points out that there was a sense of "epistemic anxieties" among officials, who often got confused in the process of archival production. Under such circumstances, officials usually had no better options but to "generate truths" through subjective views, thoughts, and even imagination. They need to figure out "what kinds of knowledge they needed, what they needed to know, and what they knew they did not."[65] To some extent, epistemic uncertainties—either written or unwritten—can be no less significant than the perceived facts. Such anxieties, as I will illustrate in the dissertation, were pervasive among British and Dutch colonial intelligence officers, which played a significant role in shaping their strategies in handling communism in the following years.

5. Fugitive networks

The NEI authorities' full-scale suppression dealt a crushing blow to the PKI. The party lost its

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International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage". *Dutch Crossing*. 39 (3)(2015): 204-220.

[63] Anne L Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 38. Also see Anne L. Foster, "Secret Police Cooperation and the Roots of Anti-Communism in Interwar Southeast Asia," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 4, no. 4 (1995): 331–50.

[64] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[65] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 3.

entire leadership in the NEI due to the ceaseless arrest, imprisonment, and banishment. However, it is unfair to say that the PKI movement was completely dead in the months following the unsuccessful revolts. While the party dissolved in Indonesia as a result of the crackdown, hundreds of PKI members managed to escape to nearby British Malaya. Moreover, the party leadership in exile remained largely intact. Despite escalating pressures, the PKI liaison office in Singapore was still operating under the influence of Tan Malaka's inner circle. Alimin and Musso were on their way to join the Singapore group from Moscow. Semaun and Darsono stayed in Europe, where they sought to influence the Dutch government by working with the Communist Party of Holland (CPH) and Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, Dutch and British colonial authorities had not formed institutionalized cooperation to fight communism yet at this point. A question thus arises as to whether the PKI leadership overseas had taken the opportunity to reinstate the party. If it was the case, then, why did such attempts end up unsuccessful?

Existing literature commonly attributes the PKI's failure to the ruthless suppression of the NEI government, and suggests that communism ceased to play a crucial role in Indonesian politics until its revival after (WWII).[66] While such observations reflect the truth from an Indonesian perspective, they downplayed the fact that many PKI fugitives outside of the colony carried on underground struggles in various forms throughout the remainder of the colonial era.[67] In the meantime, however, it is also inaccurate to say that the PKI turned into a clandestine party after 1927. Due to the heated debates over who should be responsible for the poorly organized uprisings, and consequently, the party's disintegration, PKI fugitives split into many small factions. While all these factions claimed to be legitimate successors of the PKI, no central leadership was in full control of the party. At least three PKI factions coexisted outside of the NEI with limited interactions among each other. The Tan Malaka group formed the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI). While distancing themselves from the Comintern-influenced international communism, the PARI group operated mostly in neighboring countries of the NEI and sought to infiltrate into the NEI through various religious and nationalist networks. By contrast, Alimin and Musso traveled back to Moscow via China after British authorities released them in Singapore. The two studied at the International Lenin School (ILS) for two and a half years where they received systematic training in communist theories and gained prestige as new Indonesian representatives at the Comintern. Finally, Semaun and Darsono engaged in troubled cooperation with the CPH and Indonesian students in the Netherland. Despite their efforts to save the situation, the two gradually retreated from the front line of communist struggles for different reasons.

Therefore, at least three PKI fugitive networks co-existed in different parts of the world following the unsuccessful revolts. I argue that the history of Indonesian communism from this point onward was no longer the history of a cohesive communist party, but the history of separated communist networks across the globe. While being international, such networks were in stark contrast to the Comintern-influenced international communist network we normally know. Only one of the three groups maintained close ties with Moscow, and there were limited

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[66] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 353-354; Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), xviii; George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 86-87.
[67] Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, no. 63 (1997): 1–3.

interactions among each other due to betrayal, personal grudges, communication difficulties, and police surveillance by different colonial powers. However, the separation of the three networks does not necessarily suggest that there was no contact among different groups of Indonesian communists at all. In rare cases, old comrades did manage to reestablish connections and even reach a rapprochement. The meaning of the Comintern, too, was subject to constant changes under different circumstances. As a result, the conventional framework for studying international communism is not transplantable to analyzing the post-1927 history of Indonesian communism outside of the NEI border. I propose to examine each of the networks in their own right while taking into account both the larger international context and personal contacts on the ground.

A close comparison to Indonesian communism was the Vietnamese revolution during the same period. Historians have written about the European connections of the Vietnamese communist movement mostly from the angle of Ho Chi Minh's life stories.[68] Like many radical Vietnamese students of his time, Ho converted to communism while studying in France around 1920 and secured a high-ranking position in the Comintern after his political training in Moscow between 1923 and 1924. Although Ho traveled back and forth between Europe and Asia in the remainder of the late colonial period, his connection with the Comintern never broke off after 1923.[69] In his study of Vietnamese communist movement, Christopher Goscha explores how Vietnamese activists went to neighboring countries to build revolutionary bases, which served as a critical part of the extensive Vietnamese revolutionary network during the colonial period and wartime. Southern China and northeastern Thailand were ideal places for such purposes for two main reasons: the first is the existence of large Vietnamese communities; the second is their strategic locations—"close to Vietnam but located just beyond the reach of the omnipresent French Sûreté[70]." Goscha's research focuses on Thailand, where revolutionaries such as Phan Boi Chau and Dang Thuc Hua established themselves among the Vietnamese immigrants and continued to organize the anti-colonial movement against the French through the intra-regional network. With the backing of the Comintern, Ho Chi Minh established Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Thanh Nien) in Guangdong (Canton), China in 1925 and then grafted this international communism-oriented organization onto the existing revolutionary network in Thailand[71]. Such connections would later become "the western bulwark of a larger Vietnamese revolutionary network" that connected the Asian bases such as Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore to the European communist headquarters in Moscow, Berlin, and Paris.[72]

The global networks of Indonesian communism shared many similarities with the Vietnamese ones. The PKI had established connections with the Comintern and communist organizations in the metropole long before the revolts broke out.[73] Additionally, the *Perhimpoenan Indonesia*

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[68] William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (Hyperion Books, 2000); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years; 1919-1941* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003).

[69] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh,* 252-254.

[70] The detective branch of the French civil police force, See Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 65.

[71] Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954,* 64-68.

[72] Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954,* 8.

[73] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 198-256.

(Indonesian Association, or PI), an Indonesian student organization in the Netherlands, maintained close contact with the PKI movement up until the party's destruction.[74] Particular noteworthy is that PKI also built a regional network in British Malaya with Singapore as its center, which very much resembled the pattern of Vietnamese communist network in Thailand. With its convenient location and sizable Indonesian immigrant population, Singapore functioned as a central communication hub and safe meeting place for PKI members before the uprisings. In the wake of the uprisings, it became a popular destination for Indonesian communists to take refuge. With the help of party members who resided in Singapore, PKI fugitives could settle down without much difficulty by working as seamen in the port city or finding employment through the religious networks in Malaya's hinterland. Similar to Ho Chi Minh's approach in Thailand, Indonesian communists also "grafted" the fugitive network onto existing networks of Indonesian immigrant communities such as seamen, merchants, and pilgrimage brokers. A key network that the fugitives relied on was a group of Islamic teachers from the Minangkabau area of West Sumatra. Usually well established in Malaya, this group was sympathetic towards the PKI struggles because many fugitives were fro, the same area and had attended Islamic schools that played critical roles in the ongoing Kaum Muda Movement[75]. Djamaluddin Tamin, Tan Malaka's right-hand man who used to be a religious teacher himself, requested the Minangkabau network to assist the fugitives, which enabled them to elude police surveillance while maintaining close contact with Indonesia.[76] As a result, PKI fugitives in Malaya managed to disseminate anti-colonial literature through such regional networks and influence the nationalist movement by cooperating with a wide array of non-communist organizations.

However, there were also significant differences between the Indonesian and Vietnamese revolutionary networks. In the case of Vietnam, the general trend after 1925 was a gradual confluence of revolutionary forces under the communist leadership. What happened to Indonesian communism was the opposite. The PKI's global network, which used to link the Indonesian revolution cohesively to communist networks in West Europe, the Soviet Union, and different parts of Asia, became fragmented after the unsuccessful revolts. Additionally, the Vietnamese revolution always maintained close ties with the Comintern via its top leaders such as Ho Chi Minh. Ho's Indonesian counterpart Tan Malaka, by contrast, had a somewhat complicated relationship with Moscow. Tan Malaka had been working for the Comintern as its representative for Southeast Asia since 1923 but broke away from the organization after the PKI uprisings. The Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI) he co-founded with Djamaluddin Tamin and Subakat in June 1927 was independent of the Moscow influence. In May 1931, Tan Malaka reconciled with the Comintern in Shanghai and accepted a new assignment from the organization in exchange for medical treatment. The assignment was never carried out, however, as the Comintern's Far East Bureau suffered a substantial loss due to the arrest of its chief Hilaire

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[74] Klaas Stutje, "To Maintain an Independent Course. Inter-War Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage," *Dutch Crossing* 39, no. 3 (September 2, 2015): 204–20.

[75] The Kaum Muda movement was an intellectual battle that Muslim modernists launched against the conservatives scholars (*kaum tua*) to renegotiate issues such as the interpretation of Islam, customary laws (*adat*), and relationship with the Dutch colonial state. See Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927-1933)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1971).

[76] For the Minangkabau influence on the 1926/27 uprisings, see Kahin, Audrey. *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity, 1926-1998*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999*, 31-49*.

Noulens (Jakob Rudnik) just a month later.[77] Tan Malaka cut off his ties with the Comintern entirely from this point onward. Other PKI leaders such as Semaun and Darsono also had a troubled relationship with Moscow and were gradually marginalized from the Comintern network. Alimin and Musso stayed close with the Comintern, but they had minimal influence over Indonesia's anti-colonial struggles until the end of WWII.

Moreover, Indonesian communism experienced more significant difficulties in British Malaya than Vietnamese revolutionaries in Thailand, the only Southeast Asian country that was never formally colonized. With the formation of the anti-communist cooperation between the Dutch and British authorities, the fugitive network faced constant surveillance and strict repressive measures by two competent colonial states. The extensive British intelligence network across Asia, in particular, posed enormous challenges to the fugitives' attempts to revive the communist movement. It is worth noting here that the Vietnamese communist network also encountered considerable pressures imposed by the Thai government. As Kasian Tejapira points out, Thailand's European-cultured ruling elites adopted an anti-communist attitude long before the emergence of communist activities among the Sino-Vietnamese immigrant communities. Thai authorities participated in the region's anti-communist cooperation in intelligence sharing, as well as the search, arrest, and deportation of foreign communist suspects in the country.[78] Nevertheless, such incidental cooperation was not commensurable with the British authorities' active surveillance and repressive measures taken across the entire Far East.

To study the fugitive networks, it is crucial to make sense of individual perspectives while avoiding overwhelmingly relying on one side of the story. For this purpose, I consulted memoirs and writings of the key PKI leaders who fell out with each other after the revolts. The representative works include Tan Malaka's *Dari Penjara ke Penjara* (From Jail to Jail) and *Thesis*, Djamaluddin Tamin's *Sedjarah PKI* (The PKI History), and Alimin's *Analysis* and *Riwajat Hidupku* (My Life Story).[79] Additionally, I also referred to memoirs of non-PKI members such as Mohammad Hatta's *Untuk Negeriku* (For My Country) and Iwa Kusuma Sumantri's *Sang Pejuang Dalam Gejolak Sejarah* (The Fighter in the Turmoil of History[80]). A common issue with such sources is that the narratives are often contradictory with each other and the accuracy of the recollection may vary drastically. To tackle this problem, I cross-checked other sources not only in hopes of retrieving the facts, but also understanding how the contradictions, omissions, lies, disputes, and ambiguities came about. For instance, Tan Malaka's *Thesis* and Alimin's *Analysis* were both written in the middle of the Indonesian National Revolution of the 1940s, when the two engaged in fierce debates over each other's legitimacy in

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[77] Frederick S. Litten, "The Noulens Affair," *The China Quarterly* 138 (June 1994): 492–512.

[78] Kasīan Tēchaphīra, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*, (Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press, 2001), 13-18.

[79] Tan Malaka, *Thesis* (Djakarta: Moerba, 1946); Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); Alimin, "Analysis" (Agit-Trop CC Partai Komunis Indonesia, 1947), ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Netherlands; Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 1954, ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History; Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI" (Unpublished Manuscript, 1957).

[80] Iwa Kusuma Sumantri, *Sang Pejuang Dalam Gejolak Sejarah: Otobiografi Prof. Mr. R.H. Iwa Kusuma Sumantri*, Cet. 1 (Bandung: Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan, Universitas Padjadjaran: Satya Historika, 2002); Mohammad Hatta, *Untuk Negeriku: Sebuah Otobiografi* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2011).

leading the country's leftwing forces. Unsurprisingly, the 1926/27 uprisings still lingered as a fundamental issue irreconcilable among the Indonesian radicals after twenty years.

6. Structure

Consisted of two chapters, Part I explores the relationship between the 1926/27 PKI uprisings and the Communist International.

Chapter Two investigates how four Indonesian representatives—Semaun, Darsono, Alimin, and Musso—participated in the Comintern discussions in Moscow, and how the Comintern discourse on the PKI movement evolved before the outbreak of the revolts. To understand the Indonesian situation, Comintern leaders frequently referred to concurrent events such as the Chinese Revolution and the Non-cooperation Movement in India. Additionally, the ongoing power struggles between the Stalin and Trotsky groups also affected how the discussions were conducted. Although the PKI movement received international attention thanks to the Comintern discussions, it remained of secondary importance in Moscow's theoretical and policy debates for worldwide revolutions. Unlike the Comintern's overt enthusiasm for the Chinese Revolution, their attitude towards the PKI's plan to rebel was lukewarm. Such an attitude reflects the organization's indulgence in empty talk and lack of proper understanding of the situation on the ground. As a result, the Comintern played an insignificant role in affecting the course of the 1926/27 PKI uprisings, which ended up a homegrown movement easily suppressed by the Dutch colonial regime.

Chapter Three examines how Comintern reacted to Indonesian communism differently within a relatively short period after the two unsuccessful uprisings. Specifically, the Comintern used the PKI case in the revolts' immediate aftermath to defend its China policy by claiming that the communist influence had spread all over Asia. Soon after, however, the massive suppression of Indonesian communists coincided with the doom of the much-boasted Chinese Revolution. By the end of 1927, the Comintern shifted towards an ultra-left line despite the expulsion of Trotsky, the chief proponent of world revolution. The organization put forward its new rhetoric that capitalism had entered its final stage, and communist parties worldwide must adopt a more militant attitude against imperialism and the moderate leftwing "traitors." The changing discourse not only affected how the PKI revolts were interpreted internationally but also how PKI fugitives positioned themselves in relation to the subsequent nationalist movement after the party suffered the destruction. Such an impact would leave an indelible mark on Indonesia's anti-colonial struggles in the following years.

By juxtaposing China, the NEI, and British Malaya at the same historical moment, Part II scrutinizes the origins of the anti-communist cooperation between Dutch and British colonial authorities around 1927.

Chapter Four investigates how concurrent political events in China and the NEI between 1925 and 1927 shaped the Dutch and British views on Asian politics, especially their understanding of the broadly defined communist movement. Although the PKI and CPC movements were independent of each other, they exerted a significant impact on Malaya due to the frequent contact among the three places. Because of the disturbances in China and the NEI, British

authorities adopted a vigilant attitude towards the penetration of leftwing organizations long before communist forces firmly established themselves in the colony. The existence of large Indonesian and Chinese immigrant communities in Malaya also prompted the British government to take strict measures against incoming PKI and CPC fugitives. Therefore, The British crackdown on leftist movements in Malaya was mainly a preemptive action towards perceived communist threats, rather than a reaction towards the establishment of CPC branches and predecessors of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).[81]

Chapter Five illustrates how the Dutch and British authorities reached a consensus by regarding communism as a common enemy, and how the two governments firmly established anti-communist cooperation in the aftermath of the PKI revolts and Singapore's Kreta Ayer Incident in 1927. As a result, the British and Dutch governments managed to keep communist activities in check both within and beyond their respective colonies. The extensive British intelligence network in the Far East helped the Dutch authorities to prevent the PKI movement from reviving outside the NEI borders. With the Dutch assistance, the British were not only able to crush the nascent Chinese communist movement in Malaya but also curtail its expansion to Indonesia through the pan-Chinese network. Consequently, communism had little chance to regain its momentum in the region until the outbreak of WWII.

Part III explores the split of the PKI in the aftermath of the 1926/27 uprisings and the fugitive networks from 1927 onward.

Chapter Six discusses the party's split and how British Malaya became a popular destination to which Indonesian communists escaped. Geographical proximity aside, Malaya was on the main route of Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. To evade Dutch arrest, many PKI fugitives traveled to Singapore under the guise of pilgrims. With the assistance of PKI members in the city, these fugitives managed to settle down by finding employment as seamen at the port or working as religious teachers in inland Malaya. While such conditions provide favorable opportunities for the party to regroup, the PKI leadership split further due to the argument over who should be responsible for the failure of uprisings. The polarization of the party leadership took Indonesian communism into drastically different directions, which exerted a crucial and lasting impact on Indonesian politics. Although communism subsided inside the NEI under the government's full-scale suppression, PKI fugitives managed to carry out clandestine activities overseas and influence the country's nationalist movement through multiple networks. When the PKI regained its prominence in Indonesia's national revolution after WWII, the split remained central to the debate over the legitimacy of the new party leadership.

Chapter Seven focuses on the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI), a small party network operated in East and Southeast Asia, which carried out clandestine activities by working closely with Indonesian nationalists. Former PKI leaders Tan Malaka, Djamaluddin Tamin, and Subakat founded PARI in Bangkok in June 1927. The party embodied both continuities and discontinuities from the PKI movement: On one hand, it meant to carry on the revolutionary

[81] The CPC established an overseas branch in Malaya around 1925-26, which gradually transformed into the Nanyang (or South Seas) Communist Party (SSCP) in 1927. As I will show Appendix 1, however, the influence of CPC-affiliated organizations was almost negligible in Malaya during the 1925-27 period.

momentum against the NEI authorities; On the other hand, PARI broke away from the Comintern altogether and adopted a more nationalistic approach to anti-colonial struggles. During its most active period from 1927 to 1932, PARI activists scattered in various locations in Malaya, Siam, and China. PARI's main tasks covered two areas. The first was to penetrate Indonesia and influence the anti-colonial struggles there from inside the nationalist organizations. The second was to smuggle Tan Malaka's writings and carry out propaganda to educate intellectuals, workers, and the masses. However, the party met limited success, as it was constantly subject to tight surveillance and repressive measures taken by both Dutch and British authorities. PARI activists also struggled to maintain contact with each other due to the effective international policing cooperation among colonial powers, which had been further institutionalized in the years following the PKI revolts. As a result, the party turned idle in 1932 owing to the mass arrest of its members.

For further exploration, this research will continue by investigating PKI fugitive networks in other parts of the world, which would potentially include two location-based chapters. Chapter Eight analyze the activities of the Alimin-Musso group, which stayed mostly in the Soviet Union and China until the end of the war, but became the de facto leaders of the new PKI in the national revolution. Chapter Nine discusses struggles of Indonesian communists in West Europe, who, despite attempts to influence Indonesian politics in the metropole, gradually retreated from the front line of anti-colonial struggles due to the political predicament and personal disputes.

Part I: The Communist International and the PKI Uprisings, 1926-1927

Introduction

From November 1926 to January 1927, a series of armed insurrections broke out in various places across the Netherlands East Indies (NEI).[1] First starting in the capital city of Batavia, the revolt soon spilled over to the rural areas of the nearby Banten region, and finally reached the West Coast of Sumatra by the turn of the year. Behind the movement was the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), the earliest communist party in Asia. Despite having many years of experience in anti-colonial struggles, the PKI was crumbling due to the crises it had gone through in the months leading up to the event. Without adequate coordination, the rebellions played out in an extremely disorganized manner. The Dutch colonial authorities managed to crush each of the insurrection within a few days. In the aftermath of the uprising, the Dutch government raised its stringent measures against the communists to an unprecedented level. The authorities arrested approximately 13,000 people for their direct involvement in the uprising and 5,000 more for having displayed communist tendencies. While only a few of the arrested PKI members were sentenced to death for killing officials, as many as 1,308 alleged communist leaders were banished to the remote labor camp in Boven Digul, New Guinea.[2] The anti-communist suppression following the revolts brought about total destruction of the party organization, marking the end of the first phase of the communist movement in Indonesia.[3] Despite attempts to reorganize the party throughout the long 1930s, the PKI would not rise to play a significant role in Indonesian politics again until the end of World War II.

The 1926/27 PKI Uprisings have been approached from many different angles. Shortly after the end of the insurrections, the Dutch government conducted intensive investigations regarding the movement. Although the authorities produced many reports around this time, the official documents were not released until the post-war era.[4] Over the years, scholars have studied the 1926/27 revolts both as an important episode of Indonesian communist history;[5] and as an

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[1] The official name of the Dutch colony was the "Netherlands East Indies" during this period, but the term "Indonesia" had become increasingly popular among intellectuals because of the rising national consciousness. The two terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

[2] Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 353.

[3] The PKI was founded as the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDA) in 1914 and adopted the name Communist Union of the Indies (Perserikatan Komunis di Hindia, or PKH) in 1920. The name changed to PKI in 1924.

[4] Many of the documents are available at the National Archives of the Netherlands. See"40 Dossiermap 70-II. Los aangetroffen stukken betreffende het Communisme [Uncovered documents about Communism]" in Het archief van het Ministerie van Koloniën: Indisch Archief, 1945-1950 [The Archives of the Ministry of Colonies: Indies Archive, 1945-1950]. 2.10.36.15. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, the Netherlands.

[5] J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935); Arnold C Brackman, *Indonesian Communism: A History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976); Justus M. van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia:*

indispensable milestone of the country's independence movement.[6] Some have scrutinized the local dynamics of the uprisings from a regional perspective.[7] As a crucial background, all these works discuss the PKI's interactions with the Communist International (the Third International or Comintern)—the chief coordinating organization of world communism in Moscow. As many academics have observed, however, the 1926/27 PKI uprisings were primarily a homegrown movement triggered by domestic conflicts, and international communism and its spokesmen in the colony played a tangential--rather than an originating or causal--role.[8]

Such a conclusion notwithstanding, it is also important to place the PKI-Comintern connections in a global context so as to make sense of how local revolutions shaped the international discourse on world revolution and vice versa. Ruth McVey's *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* is by far the most comprehensive account of the PKI history up to 1927. By using the Comintern publications such as *Inprecorr* and *Pravda*, as well as interviews with PKI representatives at the International, McVey devoted a good deal of space to this issue in her analysis of the PKI rebellions[9]. While her work constructed a coherent narrative concerning the PKI-Comintern interactions, many details remain missing as to what were the original voices behind the well-crafted "resolutions" and "statements." How did Comintern representatives, with their distinct backgrounds, sit together in Moscow and discuss the Indonesian Revolution many of them know very little about?

To fill the void of McVey's research, I used the archives of the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam. The main documents consulted for this research include meeting minutes, personal writings and original correspondence, which come from the *Archief Komintern-Partai Komunis Indonesia* that the IISH duplicated from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (PGASPI), Moscow in the early 1990s.[10] Besides, I also explored the unpublished memoirs and speeches of Indonesian communist leaders in the IISH's PKI Collection.

This chapter shows that the Third International played an unimportant role affecting the course of the events, and that the uprising was primarily a homegrown movement without the direct involvement of foreign forces. While the Comintern discussions about the Indonesian questions are closely intertwined with major issues such as the Stalin-Trotsky feud, the Indonesian Revolution only played a secondary role in Moscow's ongoing theoretical and policy debates. Unlike the organization's overt enthusiasm for the Chinese Revolution, the Comintern's attitude

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Its History, Program and Tactics (Vancouver, B.C.: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1965); Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960); Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

6 George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (SEAP Publications, 1952); Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961).

7 B Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings: Part 1-2*. (The Hague-Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1955); Michael C Williams, *Sickle and Crescent: The Communist Revolt of 1926 in Banten* (Jakarta: Equinox Pub., 2010).

8 Benda and McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia,* xix.

9 Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 323-358.

10 Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

towards the PKI's plan to rebel was lukewarm at most, which could be attributed to the party's lack of necessary preparation and Moscow's ignorance—despite the participation of four Indonesian representatives—of the changing situation on the ground under the severe oppression by the Dutch colonial regime.

Chapter Two: (Un)preparing a Revolution

1. Reporting the Indonesian crisis from afar

After the suppression of the PKI-led general strike of the railway workers (VSTP) of 1923, Semaun, the party's first chairman, was expelled from the NEI. While staying in the Soviet Union, he worked as a PKI representative at the Third International. Darsono, another co-founder of the party who was also in exile, joined Semaun in Moscow in early 1926. The two participated in the discussions of PKI-related issues in the meetings of the Comintern's Indian Sub-Secretariat.

In early May, Darsono submitted a report, in which he discussed the worsening situation that the PKI had been facing since the dockworkers' strike in August 1925. The NEI government implemented rigorous regulations that aimed to isolate the party from the masses. In addition to the mass arrests of the party members, the authorities prohibited all public meetings. Meanwhile, the government also adopted stringent measures to crack down on the PKI propaganda. The party newspaper "Red Flag" encountered serious problems in its distribution. By reading Dutch newspapers available in Moscow, Darsono realized that the PKI could no longer get any of its papers out.[1]

To overcome the difficulties, Darsono suggested that the party should lead a mass movement by including the petty bourgeoisie such as the native intellectuals and the Chinese "without letting it become apparent that it is under communist leadership." Darsono considered working with the Chinese community very important due to the group's huge population size.[2] The grievances of the Chinese were discernable; they were subject to constant legal discrimination and restricted to live in designated quarters in urban areas. While the oppressive policies against the Chinese provided the basis for forming a united front across ethnic lines, the aggravated tax burden in recent years presented the PKI a good opportunity to deepen the cooperation. Darsono pointed out that the party had already gained influence among the Chinese in helping their fundraising campaigns in the aftermath of the May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai.[3] Moreover, Darsono held that "practically all the Chinese papers (in the NEI) sympathized with us and protested against this (the government's) oppression." As the political situation continued to deteriorate in

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[1] "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[2] Darsono claimed in the report that there were two million Chinese in Java. According to the 1930 census, however, the Chinese population in the NEI is 1.2 million. See *Volkstelling 1930* [Census of 1930 in Netherlands Indies]. Batavia: Departement van Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel.

[3] The May Thirties Movement started as a labor movement, in which the Shanghai Municipal Police, largely controlled by the British, shot Chinese protesters to death in the city's International Settlement on 30 May 1925. The incident triggered nation-wide anti-imperialist demonstrations and riots.

Java, he proposed a party conference in China. Darsono believed that a liaison center in China would strengthen the party's Central Committee: "When the comrades feel that they have a party leadership outside, they will be more enthusiastic and the situation will be improved."[4]

Understandably, the Sub-Secretariat found Darsono's plans inadequate. Although they agreed that a representative should be sent to Java, the ECCI ordered Darsono, Semaun, Voitinsky, and Roy to draft a more detailed program of action before the agent's departure.[5] The drafting process, however, met unexpected delays due to the divergent views between the Sub-Secretariat's Indonesian members and non-Indonesian advisors.

In the name of the Sub-Secretariat, the non-Indonesian advisors criticized the PKI leaders for making a number of mistakes in relation to the party's role in national liberation, the relationship with sympathetic mass organizations, and the so-called "leftist deviation" of the Central Committee.[6] One of the most dangerous errors, as a member of the ECCI John Pepper pointed out, was that the PKI prematurely exposed itself as the bellwether of the nationalist movement when the party was still young but enjoyed the legal status. Such an error led to the NEI government's ruthless suppression of the nationalist movement, which ultimately drove the PKI underground: "If the communist party is weak then the communist party ought to strengthen itself and not to drive back the nationalist movement."[7] Pepper concluded that the conditions in Indonesia were not ripe enough for a radical revolution to establish a soviet system. Instead, the party should work on demanding the Dutch to recall the governor-general and elect a native through the "National Assembly."[8] Roy added that at the present stage, the PKI should regard changing the head of the central government as its "minimum program"—So long as the Dutch remain in control of the center, changes at local levels are meaningless. Roy also insisted that the PKI must consider what form of government to adopt after obtaining independence. The party should be clear to its members now whether a parliamentary system was the ultimate goal.[9] Finally, Roy warned that "petty bourgeoisie and little sympathetic elements" throughout the East tended to call themselves communists. Therefore, the final resolution must also address this issue

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[4] "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[5] "Minutes of the Indian Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[6] "Minutes of the National Secretariat for India and Indonesia," 3 June 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[7] "Draft of the Indonesian Programme," 3 June 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[8] Without sufficient understanding of the real situation of Indonesia, Pepper considered the *Volksraad* (People's Council) as the equivalence of a parliament or national assembly. However, the power of the *Volksraad* was limited to consultation only. Its sixty members were partially elected from various ethnic groups and partially appointed by the colonial governments.

[9] The ECCI at this point had not yet issued a resolution to recommend the PKI to pursue the parliamentary path. It could be Roy's personal opinion at the meeting.

seriously.[10]

Semaun acknowledged that being too close to the poorly organized nationalist revolutionary movement (esp. Sarekat Rakyat) could undermine the power of the PKI in the government's systematic reppression. He maintained, however, that the party should continue the long and painful struggles inside the nationalist movement to eventually win it. Semaun suggested that the PKI leadership should first seize control of the party from the ultra-left elements, as the current situation was indeed not suitable for the PKI to initiate a radical revolution to establish a Soviet-style dictatorship of the proletariat overnight. Instead, the party must lead Indonesia to fight for a kind of "pure national democracy with indirect universal suffrage." In Semaun's opinion, Indonesia should pursue neither the Russian model nor a parliamentary system but a middle road in between. Although the situation in the NEI might not seem to be ripe for a Soviet-style revolution, "this ripeness will find its expression in a proper form of democracy." He elaborated that the national democracy he envisioned should be very adaptable but shall not be compromised by any foreign power. By rallying the Indonesian masses around the middle road, the "pure" national democracy can be achieved even without a world revolutionary situation. Eventually, if circumstances permit, the national democracy can be changed into a soviet. However, as the nationalist movement was currently not under the PKI's control, the party should focus on winning over the masses to fight against oppression. Semaun pointed out further that the widespread discontent across the NEI had forced the government to reform. The PKI's new program for national democracy would be timely and have the great potential to be put at the center of the colony's political thinking and activities.[11]

The most heated debate between the two groups centered on whether the PKI should support parliamentarism in its present struggles against the colonial regime. The non-Indonesian advisors accused the PKI leadership's anti-parliament attitude of being naïve and ultra-left. By referring to the fact that Lenin supported the Duma in the pre-October Revolution period, Roy and Pepper believed that the Indonesian party should emulate the Russian experience. In response, Semaun fought back by demonstrating the distinct circumstances facing the PKI. First of all, he argued that the Russian Revolution enjoyed the good foundation laid by a revolutionary national bourgeoisie and intellectuals. In Indonesia, by contrast, there was virtually no national bourgeoisie that strove for a parliamentary system. The situation in Indonesia might not be favorable for establishing a parliament, but this by no means indicated that the colony was not ripe for a proper form of democracy. Secondly, Semaun suggested that the parliamentary system had been discredited in many countries after the revolutions. In Italy, for instance, the fascist party seized the parliament, which vividly illustrated the fact that parliamentarism could go wrong. The establishment of Soviet Russia, however, showed that "it is not necessary that the democratism [*sic*] should have its form in a parliaments [*sic*] system." Thirdly, Russia was a nation free from foreign domination. The nationalist struggles of the bourgeoisie against foreign powers in Russia were not as intense as that of a colony. In sum, Semaun pointed out that fighting for a parliament in Indonesia would be "a theoretical, political, tactical and

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[10] "Draft of the Indonesian Programme," 3 June 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[11] Semaun,"Something after the discussions in the British Sub-Secretariat," 3 June 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 32, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

organizational impossibility." He concluded his argument by quoting one of Lenin's other famous doctrines: "Do not forget the concrete situation in determining your tactic and policy."[12]

2. The emergence of a revolutionary situation

After more than six months' delay in Singapore and China, Alimin and Musso, two representatives of the PKI Central Committee, finally arrived in Moscow in July. The message they tried to convey to the Comintern was clear and urgent: the PKI had held a so-called "Prambanan Conference" in Central Java in December 1925, in which the party decided to organize an insurrection against the Dutch colonial government. The primary purpose of Alimin and Musso's trip to Moscow was to ask the Comintern to sanction this plan. The Sub-Secretariat convened on 22 July 1926 to discuss several issues surrounding the PKI's preparations for the upcoming insurrection.

Despite colonial authorities' harsh suppression, Alimin seemed to be very confident about the party's strength. He stated that the number of PKI members had exceeded 8,000. Sarekat Rakyat (SR), the biggest mass organization in the colony with more than 100,000 people, was completely in the hands of the party leadership. All of the eight members sitting on the SR's executive committee were also PKI members. Besides, Alimin claimed that the party had a great influence over trade unions in almost all the important industries. The organizations of the railway and harbor workers were among the strongest. Additionally, the party enjoyed the sympathies of the native police and military personnel, who accounted for the overwhelming majority of the NEI armed forces but were quite dissatisfied with the poor treatment they received from their Dutch superiors.[13] The PKI Central Committee had planned to encourage workers to ask for higher wages through a handful of trade unions under its control. Based on past experiences, Dutch business owners and government authorities would immediately reject such demands. Should this happen again, the PKI and its mass organizations would react by launching a general strike in major industries in Java. The Central Committee anticipated the strike to cause the administration's violent suppressions at an even greater scale, which would inevitably involve enormous sacrifices by the party members. Meanwhile, the PKI CC was also of the opinion that the suppression could create a favorable revolutionary situation, which would ultimately lead to uprisings of workers, peasants and native soldiers across the whole of the NEI:

> Alimin: We are of the opinion that as soon as the strike is suppressed the uprising will begin. There are bound to come together. We are absolutely sure that the general strike will be suppressed.
> Q: …what plans do you have to bring this about? How are you going to organize this? How will this begin?
> A: When the general strike begins it is a sure sign of the general uprising.[14]

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[12] *Ibid.*

[13] According to Alimin, the VSTP alone had 8000 members, in which 20% were communists.

[14] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Despite the optimism, the Sub-Secretariat's non-Indonesian representatives showed serious concerns over the party's readiness in organizing the insurrection. Unable to receive direct intelligence through reliable channels, the Comintern's evaluation of political circumstances had to rely on a handful of PKI members' selective report such as Alimin's.[15] The conversation below is a good example demonstrating the Sub-Secretariat's lack of knowledge about Indonesia and the PKI members' blind confidence about the party influence over the armed forces:

> Q: Do you have any military forces at all?
> A: We have our colonels (??) [Incomprehensible to the Sub-secretariat members]
> Q: I do not mean the standing army and navy. I mean organized defense corps.
> A: It is impossible to have defense corps, as it is strictly illegal. We have a few arms, about 3 or 400 pistols. We are of the opinion that the soldiers will bring the arms with them.
> Q: Do you have any organization among the military?
> A: They are all illegal. Every Saturday there is an investigation and the investigators look into the trunks of the soldiers and always [sic] communist books, newspapers, etc. are found.
> Roy: That indicates there is a certain amount of political influence. We cannot begin an insurrection depending on loose political influences. We must have some sort of organization. Do you have nuclei? How many do you have, where are they, and what branch of the armed forces are likely to join the insurrection?
> A: We have five (sergeants) at present in Batavia, in the cavalry. We have our men also in the aviation corp, etc., and if there is an insurrection they say that practically all will come to our side. We have these in every first-class barracks.
> Q: Do you have nuclei inside the army in all the places mentioned? What form do these organizations take?
> A: Every sergeant has his sixty men, and every corporal has 40 men. So, if we get five sergeants, we get five times 60 or 300 men.[16]

While Alimin tried to convince the Sub-secretariat that the ground situation was favorable for an uprising, his answers indicated that the party's influence over the armed forces was confined to only a handful of native soldiers. Apparently, the soldiers were not organized under the party leadership. Moreover, recent propaganda efforts also encountered increasing difficulties in reaching the targeted groups, as the authorities took more stringent measures against communism. Various hardships notwithstanding, Alimin's optimism was unshaken. Such confidence, in part, was based on the assumption that the discontent was widespread among the native police and soldiers, who experienced substantial wage cuts due to the "algemene bezuiniging," or general austerity, to lower expenditure under De Fock administration. Alimin suggested that the natives in the armed forces would join the insurrection voluntarily once the general strike broke out:

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[15] In 1927, the Comintern acknowledged that their main sources of information on Indonesia were British and American newspapers. See "Aktionsprogramm der K.P. Indonesiens" in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 5, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[16] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

> [The Central Committee] do not believe there can be a prepared revolution only on paper. They believe that the spontaneous factor will be very big and for this reason it is not so difficult to change the power of the Dutch by power of the Action Committee and that is the meaning of the movement in Java. We have many soldiers who are disgusted because they do not want to help the government. They declare openly that they are only willing to fight for their own country.[17]

Murphy responded by pointing out that the PKI CC had taken so many things for granted. The party should measure its influence based on the actual strength of the organizations under its command rather than speculate about unreliable resolutions people expressed in different circumstances. To make his points clear, Murphy discussed the issue by relating Alimin's statement to the experience of the Police Strikes of 1918/19 in England:

> Prior to the strike we had very similar reports as you give us now. Not a branch, not a local organization, but we got a report that everybody was unanimous for this demand, everybody was discontented, etc., but when the call for action took place only two centers responded. All the police were rotten ripe for action but when the time came a part of the London and Liverpool police took action.[18]

The Sub-secretariat representatives raised further questions by asking if the PKI CC had devised a detailed plan for potential political consequences after instigating a general strike. The questions included whether the party was ready to carry out protracted guerilla warfare; whether the PKI leadership had considered the questions of obtaining power from the Dutch; and what form of state would Indonesia ultimately adopt, etc. Semaun and Alimin admitted that these issues had not been thoroughly discussed, but maintained that uprising would be a viable path to consolidate the party:

> Alimin: In every revolution, we cannot explain so clearly. We cannot make a clear program. We are sure we can capture the whole population and after that we will make a political program. Of course, as soon as the time comes, if we are ready, we have the power in our hands. It is easy to explain the revolution.
> Semaun: The question is that in 1924, it was decided in the Congress of the Party there will be propagated the will to power and as a consequence of this program, now everybody wants to come to power. For this reason this program is not grown in the head of one or a few comrades but really from the movement. The question of the power is not combined with the question of the form [sic]. And in connection with this, many comrades have not discussed this clearly. They think the Comintern is powerful enough to do anything. If there is a revolt, the Comintern will help and everything will be all right… The question is this—the comrades are in favor of a decision as soon as

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[17] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
[18] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

possible.[19]

Musso, identified as an "Indonesian comrade" in the minutes, added that the PKI CC had already decided to start a general strike in June 1926. They departed from Java right after the "Prambanan Conference" in December 1925 and finally arrived in Moscow in July 1926. He complained that they were held in Singapore for too long due to Tan Malaka's fault.[20] According to Musso, the PKI CC sent them to Moscow only to ask for a definitive answer: if the Comintern approves the plan, he and Alimin would bring a new program of action back to Java; should the Comintern disagree, they would surely still deliver the message, but "there will be terror."[21] Semaun added that he and Darsono, both had been in Moscow the whole time, had consulted with the two newly arrived comrades (Alimin and Musso) before the Sub-secretariat meeting. While the two groups had not yet reached any meaningful agreement among themselves, they wanted to put forward a joint program sanctioned by the Comintern. Semaun was well aware that the PKI members in Java had not carefully considered the political consequences of an uprising and lacked a sufficient analysis of the international situation. However, he admitted that those staying in Moscow had underestimated the situation—"the spirit in Indonesia [was] warmer than [we] thought."[22] Semaun warned that even if the Comintern disapproves of the PKI's plan, there would still be a revolt independent of the party's control. As a result, disorganized uprisings would significantly weaken the PKI and undermine the Comintern's prestige.[23]

Understandably, Roy and Murphy reacted with caution by pointing out that what the Indonesian communists proposed at the meeting was an extremely serious matter. The Comintern could not simply accept or reject a program without a careful study of the circumstances. Besides a yes-or-no answer, it must also give the PKI a clear political direction.[24]

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[19] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[20] Tan Malaka heard about the Prambanan Decision while he was in Manila and he strongly opposed the idea to revolt. He asked Alimin to deliver his message to the Singapore group, but it was unclear whether Alimin actually followed his instruction. When Tan Malaka arrived in Singapore himself, Alimin and Musso had left for Moscow. See McVey, Ruth Thomas. 1965. *The rise of Indonesian communism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 316-322. According to the PKI record, however, Tan Malaka refused to attend the meeting in Singapore. So the Singapore group decided to send Alimin and Musso to the Soviet Union. See Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan Nasional Pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961), 53-54.

[21] "The Indonesian Conference," 22 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

3. Debates on the Russia-Indonesia Differences

The Sub-secretariat reconvened a week later, this time with the participation of more senior ECCI members such as Osip Piatnitsky and John Pepper. The Indonesian members seemed to have come to an agreement in favor of the uprising. Semaun suggested that the NEI government was not likely to make any concessions unless there was going to be a crisis. He acknowledged that the PKI was currently imbued with a "desperate spirit", which very much reflected the hopelessness of the Indonesian people. He maintained, however, that an insurrection would bring about some positive changes: "if we lose, we lose, but it is sure that after the loss of the uprising—anyhow there will be an improvement."[25] As all of the four PKI members at the Comintern reached the consensus that the situation was ripe, Semaun drafted an action program, in which he proposed to launch a general strike "under a nationalist flag" on the 15th of August. Semaun reiterated that initiating an insurrection was the PKI's only option. Otherwise, the whole communist movement would be suppressed under the deteriorating circumstances.[26]

While recognizing the revolutionary spirit and the widespread discontent in the NEI, the Comintern's non-Indonesian representatives were not convinced by Semaun's analysis. Pepper believed that the dissatisfied masses had "flooded" the PKI, which made the latter unable to pursue a clear path to lead the movement. Many signs indicated that neither the PKI nor its affiliated organizations were ready for a revolution. Due to the lack of information, the Comintern was not in a position to endorse the PKI's plan to revolt. Pepper pointed out that the risk of being driven underground (by the government) was insufficient to justify the PKI CC's decision to start an ill-prepared insurrection:

> When we have an armed uprising we will have also a white terror. Many thousands will be killed. This will frighten many people and perhaps this would cause the movement to be set back for ten or twelve years.[27]

Piatnitsky related the situation in the NEI to what had happened in Russia in 1903-04, as he saw issues in the two places shared some similarities: the discontent was widespread in the society, but the party was relatively weak. Therefore, Piatnitsky suggested that the PKI should focus on strengthening its power. He was of the opinion that the PKI should take first steps by putting forward demands for better working conditions, organizing workers, soldiers, and peasants, as well as fighting for freedom of assembly and speech. The PKI must bear in mind its two tasks: (1) liberating Indonesia from the Netherlands and other imperialist powers; (2) conducting constant struggles to free the working class. The working class of Indonesia, in Piatnitsky's opinion, was not going to lend strong support to an armed uprising at the current stage, as not many of them fully understood the meaning of the movement:

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[25] "Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Pepper,"Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands..

> Did we make the revolution in Russia in one day? We had many uprisings all over Russia during a long term of years. It was only in 1917 that the whole mass of workers was so organized that we could make an uprising…we cannot make an armed uprising before the workers [and] the masses understand why they are revolting…we cannot have a movement where in one day we can organize a general strike.[28]

Alimin responded by suggesting that the socio-political circumstances in Russia and Indonesia were fundamentally different. The Bolshevik-led October Revolution, as he pointed out, enjoyed the good foundation of the February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution. In other words, the class struggles of the Bolshevik revolution were real. In the NEI, on the contrary, the anti-colonial movement was primarily race-based with the absence of the native middle class:

> Alimin: When the Dutch came to Java they crushed the native capitalists…there are no petty bourgeoisie or capitalists, like in India.
> Pepper: No petty bourgeoisie?
> Alimin: the petty bourgeoisie are only very small merchants…they are all on our side. Through heavy taxes, burdens, they are all on our side, they all complain.[29]

Following this logic, the natives' hatred against the Dutch and Russians' hatred against the Czar were thus not entirely comparable: "We have nothing to do with the bourgeoisie or with other elements except against the Dutch. They are not strong."[30] Alimin elaborated further that the PKI had nothing to lose, as 97% of the employees in the state apparatus were natives and the Dutch only occupied the top 3% leading positions.[31] Throughout the meeting, Alimin repeatedly expressed his confidence about the PKI's influence over the masses. He portrayed the situation as very favorable to the party, as if the impending uprising would enjoy unquestionable support from the native population:

> If there is an insurrection or so-called revolution, we will be able to increase our power ten times. I have travelled all over Java just to have connections with the people. All are discontented. They all ask when we will have our revolution and become independent from the Dutch.[32]

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[28] Piatnitsky,"Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[29] Alimin,"Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] According to Alimin, the number of Dutch police was 1249 while the natives 25000; Among the 30000 people in the army, 7363 were Dutch, and around 26000 were natives; There were slightly more Europeans (1633) than natives (1163) in the navy; In the colonial government, 20000 were Dutch, and 139,927 were natives. Although it is unclear how Alimin came to his conclusion that the natives accounted for 97% of the colonial apparatus, the point he tried to make was correct: while the Dutch occupied all the top positions, the overwhelming majority of the NEI state employees and the armed forces were the natives. *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*

Optimism aside, technical problems remained as to how to initiate an insurrection when many of the party organs were paralyzed in the government's recent crackdown. The PKI enjoyed relative freedom to operate up until late 1924. In 1925, however, several strikes broke out across the major cities in Java. While the party saw many of these strikes as positive outcomes of the movement, the disturbances also pushed the authorities to take more stringent measures to calm down the increasingly intensified situation. Not only were the party and its affiliated organizations banned from gathering publicly, but the government also introduced the so-called "Article 153", or "*muilkorfwet*"—literally the muzzle law—to prevent the press from carrying out anti-colonial propaganda.[33] As a result, all three PKI newspapers were no longer functioning at the time of the Comintern meetings in 1926. Nevertheless, Alimin firmly believed that the Indies Chinese press, which included more than ten major newspapers in Dutch, Chinese and Malay languages, was sympathetic toward the PKI-led communist revolution. He regarded this as a positive sign that most of the Chinese would also stand on the communist side if an insurrection broke out.[34]

In terms of preparation, Alimin claimed that the party had mobilized around 25000 well-organized workers in Surabaya, where the PKI-influenced trade unions had proven records in leading a series of strikes in 1925.[35] Although the 1925 strikes made the government take even stricter actions against these red trade unions, the PKI CC was of the opinion that the momentum was still there. In Alimin's view, "this strike was really the beginning of a general strike, but the communist [Central Committee] set this back and sent us here to get the opinion of the Comintern."[36] Moreover, as strikes sprung up continuously, Alimin believed that the movement had overwhelmed the state apparatuses: "the government is always trembling. They do not know what to do. They have simply lost their heads."[37] To react, the government was busy expanding their espionage network, which, from the PKI CC's perspective, showed the weakness of the Dutch authorities. They also noticed that the government was particularly suspicious of the native elements in the armed forces. While many lower-ranking officers lost their jobs in the immediate aftermath of the strikes, police and soldiers alike were ordered to rotate from one city to another to prevent communist penetration. As a result, the armed forces were often not stationed inside of Surabaya, which made it an ideal city to start the general strike. From there, the PKI expected that the movement would eventually expand to its other stronghold cities such as Batavia and Semarang.[38]

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[33] Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961), 49.

[34] Alimin,"Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[35] The major unrests in Surabaya in 1925 included strikes participated by the printing workers in September, by machine factory workers in October, and by workers in electricity and other Industries in December. See Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961), 47.

[36] Alimin,"Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

The heated debates in Moscow on the Indonesian questions led to no direct result. The Sub-secretariat decided one day later (30 July) to establish a special commission to conduct more in-depth investigations into the issues. It was hoped that this special commission would ultimately come up with a resolution and a program of action as guidance for the subsequent PKI activities. The Sub-secretariat suggested that the commission to include Pepper, Murphy, Roy and a Russian delegation consisted of Pavel Vasiliev and Fyodor Raskolnikov (alias Petrov), as well as a German representative. There was no mention of any Indonesian communist would take part in the commission. Instead, the Sub-secretariat assigned Darsono to write a statement regarding the situation in Sumatra, and others to write an article on Java for the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda*.[39]

4. The missing three months

There were no records of subsequent meetings in the same folder of the Comintern Archive until the PKI uprising in early November. It is unclear whether this is a deliberate omission, or for some unknown reasons, the Comintern decided not to hold similar meetings from early August onward. Given the matter's urgency and seriousness, it is improbable that the Comintern put aside the Indonesian issues altogether. Alimin and Musso left Moscow around October with the hope of delivering directives to the PKI members at home. Whatever the message may be, it never reached the intended audience in the way that the Comintern expected—Alimin and Musso heard about the outbreak of the uprising on their way back to Indonesia and were arrested by the British in Malaya on 18 December.[40] Approaching the issue from different angles, scholars have provided distinct interpretations as to what happened between the Comintern and the PK in the months leading up to the revolt.

In *The Communist Party of Indonesia,* Van der Kroef suggests that Alimin and Musso could not, in any likelihood, get anything more than a "lukewarm assent" from Moscow. Without sufficient information and careful planning, there was no chance that the Comintern would wholeheartedly endorse the PKI's reckless plan to revolt. Even if the two PKI emissaries did carry important instructions from Moscow, the fact that the insurrection broke out before their arrival, followed by their arrests in Malaya, made the Comintern directives meaningless.[41]

Brackman speculates that in Moscow, Alimin and Musso "found themselves drawn inexorably

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[39] "Minutes of the National Sub-Secretariat for India and Indonesia," 30 July 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[40] The British Police arrested Alimin and Musso in Johor and transferred them to Singapore, where they were detained for four months. At their trial, the British judge rejected the NEI government's request to extradite the two PKI members on the ground that they did not pose a direct threat to the British colonies. Instead, they were allowed to leave Singapore for Hong Kong. For more details, see Alimin's autobiography (1955) "Riwajat Hidupku" in *Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection*. ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 13-14.

[41] Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 18.

into the Stalin-Trotsky vortex."[42] As the two leaders held very distinct views on the world revolution, one would easily assume that Trotsky might have supported the PKI plan and Stalin opposed it. Nevertheless, Alimin and Musso seemed have obtained Stalin's approval in the end:

> …Perhaps in return for their loyalty, or perhaps because Alimin and Musso informed Stalin, the likely winner, that Tan Melaka harbored Trotskyite sympathies. What we do know incontestably is that Alimin and Musso proceeded with their plans for revolution, that they enjoyed Stalin's confidence during the remainder of his rule, and that when the revolution in Indonesia materialized, they received a warm endorsement from ECCI.[43]

Without citing any original sources, the credibility of such claims is questionable. Top communist leaders in Moscow rarely talked about the Indonesian revolution in an elaborate style. It is also doubtful whether Stalin and Trotsky—deeply engaged in many heated debates at the time—actually fought over Indonesian issues without knowing much about the subject. Moreover, as discussed above, the PKI initiated the insurrection without Alimin and Musso's participation. In other words, there might not be any causal relationship between the planning in Moscow and the actual revolts that took place in the NEI at all. Finally, as Brackman admits, the ECCI may have had no option but to lend its moral support to the NEI revolution (in the aftermath of its outbreak), as after all, it was waged under the banner of communism.[44] (1963, 17).

Written in 1947, Alimin's own account on his 3-month stay in Moscow in 1926 is brief. In a document entitled "Analysis," Alimin stated that he tried his best to explain the political and economic situation of Indonesia to the ECCI leaders. The four PKI members (Alimin, Musso, Semaun, Darsono) had good impressions (*kesan*) of the meetings. He mentioned the Stalin-Trotsky feud in a rather vague tone:

> After staying at the center of the Cold Country, we gained certain perspectives on [our] issues related to the issues facing the Great Party (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). We were told that since 1924, there had been several streams of opposition against the party leadership. Trotsky was a well-known former party member who started an opposition faction. The opposition was quite small at the beginning… After we returned to the Cold Country again in 1927, we realized that the opposition continued to oppose the party leadership by blaming and defaming party leaders. Trotsky and his clique had been warned several times that they should not create any conflicts inside the Party. However, the opposition ignored such warnings and became increasingly active.[45]

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[42] The feud between Josef Stalin and Leon Trotsky intensified after the death of Lenin in 1924. Trotsky advocated for permanent world revolution and criticized the Stalin regime for suppressing democracy. Stalin insisted his theory of "socialism in one country," in which he stressed that the Soviet Union must concentrate on defending and strengthening itself. Trotsky was removed from his positions in the Red Army in 1925 but was not completely out of power until his final defeat in November 1927. Trotsky united with Zinoviev and Kamenev in the "United Opposition" to fight against Stalin during much of the 1926-27 periods.

[43] Brackman, *Indonesian Communism,* 16-17.

[44] Brackman, *Indonesian Communism,* 17.

[45] Alimin, "Analysis" in *Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection*. 1947. ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 14.

Alimin also wrote about his Moscow experience in his 1955 autobiography, in which he noted:

> Musso and I went to Moscow via Canton and Shanghai. Upon our arrival in the Soviet Union, we met with Central Committee members of the Communist Party, which was chaired by Comrade Stalin. After almost 3 months, Musso and I were sent back to inform the comrades in Singapore about the results of our mission. When we were on our way back to Singapore, we suddenly heard that in November 1926, a revolt had broke out on the island of Java.[46]

As an ardent advocate of the revolution, Alimin would have stated very explicitly if Moscow favored his plan. However, Alimin mentioned neither Comintern's institutional endorsement nor Stalin's personal support for an insurrection in Indonesia. Instead, the new mission that the Comintern assigned to Alimin and Musso was just to "inform the comrades in Singapore"—not those in the NEI—about the new decisions. What remains unclear though, is to what extent did the Stalin-Trotsky feud affect the Comintern discussions of Indonesian issues in the "missing" three months. One could imagine that the political atmosphere in Moscow was intense during this period, which ultimately led to Trotsky losing his seat in the Politburo at the end of the 15th Party Congress in October—around the same time of Alimin's departure. Is it possible that the Comintern temporarily suspended meetings on Indonesia owing to such an environment? What did Alimin mean by "gaining certain perspectives on our issues related to the issues facing the Great Party?"[47] Did he specifically refer to the friction between his Prambanan Group and Tan Malaka, who opposed the uprising and was later accused of a Trotskyist?

By conducting direct interviews with Semaun and Darsono in 1959, McVey presented a more nuanced narrative on how Alimin and Musso's mission to Moscow intersected with the political background at the time.[48] According to Semaun, Zinoviev and other Trotskyists favored the revolt plan brought by the two PKI emissaries, as they believed that supporting the Indonesian movement was consistent with the Trotskyist theory of "permanent revolution." It was hoped that running a successful revolution abroad would reverse their disadvantageous position while undermining the prestige of the Stalinist group, who maintained that the current world situation was not suitable for waging extensive proletarian revolutions, and that the Soviet Union should focus on defending socialism of its own. Conceivably, such support was appealing to Alimin and Musso, who "had as little idea of what was going on in Russia as the Comintern did of events in Indonesia."[49] However, the more experienced Semaun and Darsono sent out timely warnings to their Indonesian comrades, which made them eventually back off from the internal power struggles of the Soviet party.[50]

Towards the end of Alimin and Musso's stay in Moscow, the four PKI delegates had an

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[46] Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku" in *Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection*. 1955 ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 13-14.

[47] *"Kami mendapat sekadar pemandangan tentang soal-soal jang berhubungan dengan soal-soal Partai Besar."* See Alimin, "Analysis", *op. cit.* 14.

[48] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 337.

[49] According to McVey's interview with Semaun, Musso was initially very close to the Zinoviev group, see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 485.

[50] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 485.

opportunity to meet Stalin in person. According to Semaun and Darsono, Stalin was not against the revolution per se, but opposed the idea of starting one when the movement seemed to be disorganized and the chance to win looked quite slim.[51] This ambivalent assent, as McVey suggested, could be partly attributed to the changing international situation in 1926. While defending his theory of "socialism in one country," Stalin at this point was still backing the united front between the Nationalist Party (GMD) and the Communist Party (CPC) in China.[52] In order to fight against the country's warlords, the alliance's National Revolution Army (NRA) launched the Northern Expedition, which was considered a big success in the second half of 1926.[53] To a certain degree, the temporary triumph of the Chinese Revolution enhanced the credibility of the Stalinist agenda, which may also help to explain the seemingly contradictory views of Stalin on the Indonesian Revolution.[54]

As had been discussed among the Prambanan leaders in Singapore, the PKI would proceed to launch an insurrection with or without the Comintern authorization: if Moscow approves their plan, they would delay the uprising until assistance arrives; in case of a Comintern rejection, however, the PKI would launch the revolution on its own.[55] While Alimin seemed to have readily accepted the fact that the ECCI was not going to endorse their program anytime soon, Musso was unwilling to give up. Instead of informing the PKI regarding the Comintern's disappointing reaction, he was determined to make every effort to set the revolution in motion. From Musso's perspective, the situation had already reached the point where the alternate Singapore plan must

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[51] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 338.

[52] Soviet Union's foreign policy towards the Chinese Revolution was a main area of contention in the ideological debate between Stalin and Trotsky. Stalin encouraged the CPC to merge with the GMD, as he believed the GMD was more capable of leading a bourgeois revolution, which was essential to start a Soviet-style proletarian revolution later. Trotsky, on the contrary, advocated that the CPC should break away from the GMD, as the latter opposed the notion of proletarian revolution. See Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Struggle for Modern China*, 1st Harvard University Press pbk. ed (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 56-57.

[53] The NRA had been making significant advances until the end of the GMD-CPC alliance in April 1927. However, such an alliance was by no means stable. During the period when the alliance still held, many CPC members joined the GMD, which increased the communists' influence over the GMD's leftwing faction. Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of both the GMD and the Northern Expedition, believed that the communists should be held responsible for the internal split of GMD. As a result, Chiang ordered an anti-communist purge in Shanghai (the Shanghai Massacre of 1927), where hundreds of communists were arrested and killed. See Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114.

[54] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 338.

[55] In January 1926, a group of PKI members (including Alimin, Musso, Sardjono, Sugono, Subakat, Mohammad Sanusi, Winanta and Budisutjitro) met in Singapore, where they decided to carry out the Prambanan Decision to revolt in a few months. After the meeting, Alimin went to Manila to get Tan Malaka's approval. However, Tan Malaka rejected the plan and maintained that the party had to strengthen its organization first. Despite Malaka's opposition, Alimin and Musso dismissed the group in Singapore and went on the mission to seek for support from the Comintern. For more details about the process, see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 316-322.

be activated. McVey's work revealed that before the revolt broke out, Musso had probably sent off a message from Moscow via a secret channel between the Communist Party of Holland (CPH) and a Chinese doctor named Kwa Tjoan Siu in Batavia. According to Semaun, the line was set up in hopes of forwarding critical information to Indonesian comrades in extreme situations. Knowing too well about Musso's intention, Semaun initially refused to disclose the secret address to his strong-willed comrade. Musso subsequently approached Semaun's assistant Iwa Kusuma Sumantri and managed to send out the potentially decisive wire. Although Semaun soon found out what had happened, he decided to keep silence in front of the ECCI to avoid troubles. Three out the four PKI delegates were aware of the incident when they met Stalin. What remains unclear though, is whether the PKI actually received the fake command and proceeded to revolt according to the Prambanan Decision. Neither could party sources verify that Dr. Kwa got the message, nor did the government reports indicate that they had intercepted it. In any case, the dramatic episode might not have played a significant role in the whole process.[56]

Soon after, Alimin and Musso journeyed back home—probably not in a rush to deliver the Comintern directives. Even if they intended to do so, the messages would be proved useless due to the sudden outbreak of the PKI uprising in November. However, the two PKI emissaries did go back with some Comintern aids—the British police discovered 2,500 US dollars worth of banknotes in their arrests in Malaya in December. The much-desired Comintern support, as limited as it was, turned out to be bearing no particular significance in the course of events.[57]

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[56] According to McVey, the NEI government was eager to prove in its later reports that it was foreign influences that triggered the 1926 revolt. They would have emphasized Musso's message if they had intercepted it. Similarly, the PKI leadership in Bandung would have used the message, which assured the much-needed Comintern endorsement, to consolidate power. However, neither was the case. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,*339-340.

[57] For Alimin and Musso's arrests, see "Java Communists: Two important arrests in Singapore," in *The Straits Times*, 7 January 1927, p. 9; "Java Notes," in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser,* 5 January 1927, p.7 and McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 346.

Chapter Three: Talk the Communist Talk

1. The immediate response

Chapter Two shows that the Communist International played an insignificant role in affecting the planning of the PKI 1926/27 Uprisings. The movement was primarily a homegrown movement without the direct involvement of foreign forces. This chapter discovers how the Comintern discourse on the Indonesian Revolution evolved between late 1926 and 1927—a relatively short period. By cross-referencing concurrent events such as the Stalin-Trotsky feud, the Chinese Revolution, and the Non-cooperation Movement of India, the Comintern narratives elevated the political meanings of the Indonesian Revolution at the international level:

In the immediate aftermath of the 1926/27 insurrections, the Comintern used the PKI case to defend its China policy by claiming that the communist influence had spread all over Asia. Soon after, however, the massive suppression of Indonesian communists coincided with the doom of the much-boasted Chinese Revolution. Towards the end of 1927, the Comintern gradually shifted towards an ultra-left line despite the expulsion of Trotsky, the chief proponent of world revolution. The International put forward its new rhetoric that capitalism had entered its final stage, and communist parties worldwide must adopt a more militant attitude against imperialism and the moderate leftwing "traitors." The changing Comintern discourse not only affected how the Indonesian Revolution was depicted in the international arena but also how the PKI fugitives position themselves in the nationalist movement after the party suffered a complete destruction. Such an impact would leave an indelible mark on Indonesia's anti-colonial struggles in the subsequent years.

The Comintern's immediate reaction towards the PKI revolt was recorded in a one-page meeting minutes under the name of the "National Secretariat for Indonesia."[1] Held only five days (dated 17 November 1926) after the revolt broke out in Java, this meeting was perhaps the Comintern's very first response to the event. Apparently shocked by the unexpected news, yet unable to acquire more detailed information, the attendees made some preliminary decisions as follows: (1) to send Comrade X to Java; (2) to draft new directives for the PKI while pointing out the errors in their policies; (3) to carry out campaigns of agitation in the Netherlands; (4) to instruct the CPH to include Indonesian communists in their political campaigns; (5) to ask Semaun and Darsono to write articles for both the Russian and Dutch press; (6) to accept the manifesto drafted by Semaun, but the manifesto should be addressed to the "Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World" rather than just the "People of Java".[2]

It was not until 20 November 1926 that the ECCI finally adopted a more crafted version of the manifesto, in which it voiced its recognition of the Indonesian *fait accompli* and asked for the

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[1] "Minutes of the National Secretariat for Indonesia," 17 November 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
[2] *Ibid.*

working class worldwide to support the revolutionary efforts:

> The Communist International welcome the revolutionary struggle of peoples of Indonesia and pledges its complete support...suppressed peoples of the world! The insurgency Indonesians are your advance guard, they express the will to freedom, which is your common property. Do everything in your power to support them in their struggle! Down with imperialist terror! Long live the united anti-imperialist front of the workers and the suppressed peoples of the world! Long live the free people of Indonesia![3]

The sudden change of tone in only three days may seem a little surprising—the ECCI's "complete support" is surely a far cry from its initial stand of "pointing out errors." As McVey noted, the Comintern's attitude towards the PKI insurrection in its immediate aftermath closely associated with the agenda of the 7th Enlarged Plenum[4] Convened from 22 November to 16 December 1926, the Plenary Session marked an important policy shift of the Comintern. Instead of focusing on encouraging alliances between communist and non-communist groups in the previous phase of "stabilization of capitalism," the Comintern turned more aggressive in articulating revolutionary agitations from this point onward.

The change, to a large extent, was again significantly affected by the intensifying Stalin-Trotsky feud and its projection on the Comintern's China policy. Trotsky just lost his Politburo seat at the 15th Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in October, but the influence of his United Opposition had not been completely wiped out. The Trotskyist group criticized the Comintern's China policy for putting too much emphasis on the GMD-CPC alliance, which deviated from the course of proletarian revolution. As the GMD started to show growing tendencies to break away from the CPC after the Canton Coup of March 1926, the Trotskyist criticism seemed to be gaining ground.[5] In the meantime, on the contrary, Stalin was still trying to maintain the Soviet alliance with the GMD, which he regarded as the only political force capable enough to lead the Chinese Revolution[6]. The military advances that the GMD made in the Northern Expedition, of course, was used to back Stalin's position against the challenges posed by the Trotskyist group. Under such circumstances, the Comintern found itself in an awkward situation: on the one hand, it must defend Stalin's policy by announcing that the revolutionary tide was on the rise in the East thanks to the success of the Soviet-supported Chinese Revolution; on the other hand, however, there were not so many revolutionary progress

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[3] The manifesto was published in the journal *Inprecorr* on 25 November 1926, see Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 347.

[4] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 348-350.

[5] The Canton Coup is also known as the Zhongshan Incident, through which Chiang Kai-shek consolidated his power in the Nationalist Army by purging the communist elements after an alleged coup against him. Historians cannot agree on whether the whole affair was a plotted conspiracy or mainly caused by miscommunication. In any case, the relationship between the GMD and CPC turned sour after the incident, which paved the way for China to carry out a more radical anti-communist purge in the Shanghai Massacre a year later. See Mechthild Leutner, ed., *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and Disaster* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 52-65.

[6] C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114.

outside China that could prove such a claim.[7]

The outbreak of the communist uprising in Java, understandably, was a perfect story to be weaved into the revolutionary narrative of Comintern at this particular moment. By reiterating support for the PKI revolt, the Comintern was able to gain considerable legitimacy for carrying out right strategies under the Stalin leadership—revolutions were now spreading from one place to another in the East; the Chinese revolutionary model was a transplantable success; and imperialism was on the verge of its final defeat. According to McVey, almost all the references to the PKI uprising during this period were used to justify the Comintern's China policy:

> That the [Indonesian] revolt should occur just at this time, is doubtless to be attributed in no mean degree to the powerful effect produced by the recent events in China. It is the victories of the Canton army, which have strengthened the confidence of the Indonesian people in their power…The Indonesian revolution will be victorious, just as the Chinese revolution will be victorious![8]

According to Semaun, not only did the Indonesian uprising corroborate the soundness of the Comintern's China policy but also went a step further by illustrating the prominence of the communist leadership. The PKI did not operate under the bloc-within scheme like their Chinese counterparts, as there was no comparable nationalist movement in the Indies. Instead, the PKI directly led an uprising in a colonial society where a national bourgeoisie was virtually non-existent.[9]

2. Further investigations and reflections

The Comintern's vehement support for the PKI uprising lasted until a few months later, when all the signs indicated that the revolts were suppressed entirely in both Java and Sumatra. The Comintern finally started to reflect on the Indonesian uprising in a more serious manner by holding meetings and conducting investigations.

In March 1927, Semaun submitted a preliminary analysis of the PKI revolt to the Comintern's National Secretariat for Great Britain and Holland. Distinct from his previous view that the

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[7] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 349.

[8] Semaun, "The Rebellion in the Dutch East Indies," *Inprecorr,* 2 December 1926, p. 1438. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism, op. cit.* p. 350. Interestingly, the PKI's official history of the 1960s talked about the influence of the Chinese revolution in a very different fashion. Instead of giving credit to the Comintern policy, the author put an emphasis on the Indies Chinese, who actually did not play a big role in the Indonesian revolution until much later: *"The surging revolution in China, namely the Northern Expedition of the Revolutionary Army from Canton with the aim of defeating the warlords, exerted impact on the movement in Indonesia through the democratic-minded Chinese people there. The Indies Chinese thereby participated in the revolution and the struggles for independence in Indonesia."* See Partai Komunis Indonesia and Lembaga Sedjarah, *Pemberontakan Nasional Pertama di Indonesia (1926)* (Djakarta: Pembaruan, 1961), 47.

[9] *Protokoll,* 8-9, as cited in Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 350.

uprising succeeded *despite* the absence of a nationalist movement, Semaun ascribed the failure of the insurrection to the strong influence of the ultra-left elements inside the party, which failed to "use the National [sic] Movement in accordance with communist policy." The ultra-left, he criticized, wanted to monopolize everything—"they considered that the Indonesian situation was ripe enough to go right into a communistic form of government without going through the forms of a national independent government first."[10] Additionally, Semaun pointed out that the party lacked sufficient connection with the masses and did not receive enough support from the armed forces, as the revolutionary soldiers had been discharged before the uprising.[11] As the NEI government carried out suppressive measures at an unprecedented scale, the PKI operation had completely come to a halt. Besides calling for the Comintern's continuous support, Semaun stressed that an agent should be sent to Indonesia to rebuild connections among the party members. Semaun suspected that the Comintern instructions had never reached the NEI due to Alimin and Musso's arrests in Singapore.[12] He also learned that Miller, the Comintern agent who was scheduled to go to Java in the middle of 1926, had never left Europe.[13]

In response to Semaun's report, the National Secretariat decided to work on Indonesian issues by forming two small commissions—one was responsible for giving practical instructions to the PKI, the other was expected to conduct a more thorough study of the revolution.[14] The Secretariat adopted Semaun's suggestion to reconnect with the PKI, and made a tentative decision to instruct party members to continue their struggles inside the nationalist movement. Given the magnitude of suppression the PKI suffered since the uprising, it is unlikely if the Comintern still had a working channel to deliver its messages directly to Indonesia; and even harder, to get them implemented on the ground. Instead, the Secretariat's more concrete decision was to work around the problem by relying on the Dutch and British Communist Parties: besides organizing campaigns to stop the persecution of the PKI members, the CPH was expected to send a delegation to conduct a thorough investigation of the cause and development of the revolt in Indonesia; the British Party should also "participate actively in the amnesty campaign in view

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[10] Semaun, "Report of Comrade Semaun to British Secretariat meeting of March 8, 1927, on Indonesian Question" in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 3, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Despite the suspicion, Semaun was unable to verify the information at this point. In the report, he wrote: *"Last year two comrades were here and took with them, when they left, resolutions and instructions on how to reorganize. But up to this time they have not yet arrived in Indonesia, we think they are in prison in Singapore. Whether they still have the documents or not, I do not know."* See Semaun, "Report of Comrade Semaun to British Secretariat meeting of March 8, 1927, on Indonesian Question", *op. cit.,* 1-2.

[13] Semaun obtained the information from Roy, who told him that Miller had been recalled after he arrived in Paris. See Semaun, "Report of Comrade Semaun to British Secretariat meeting of March 8, 1927, on Indonesian Question", *op. cit.* 4.

[14] The action commission consisted of Semaun, Darsono, Reesema and Petrovsky; the research commission consisted of Katayama, Darsono, Murphy, Reesma, Shatskin, Petrov and Reith. See "Minutes of the National Secretariat for Great Britain and Holland Meeting of March 8, 1927," in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 3, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

of the fact that many Indonesian comrades have been arrested by the British at Singapore."[15]

At the end of June, the British Secretariat's study commission had come to the point close enough to finishing its report on the Indonesian Revolution. The commission raised several points to set the tone for the final version of the analysis:

(1) The report should begin with an analysis of the PKI revolt, and the analysis should occupy a big part of the thesis;

(2) To emphasize that the PKI revolt was the first insurrection in the Asiatic countries led by communists. The PKI is the real leader of the Indonesian people;

(3) To point out that the economic and political conditions were favorable for the uprising—there was indeed a revolutionary situation. Although the PKI had made certain technical preparations, their political preparation was insufficient—no slogans, no strikes, and poor connections between urban and rural areas;

(4) Must point out the treacherous roles of the Dutch social democrats and native intellectuals, who were very active in helping the government to suppress the movement.[16] It should be stressed that the CPH was somewhat passive in dealing with the issues. Milder criticisms should also be applied to other communist parties;

(5) To write against the idea that the uprising was due to the Moscow intrigue. Instead, the most important causes should be attributed to starvation, heavy tax burdens, high death rate and the ruthless suppression;

(6) To emphasize the sympathetic stand that the Chinese population took after the insurrection;

(7) To refrain from any concrete suggestions in connection with the calling of a national congress. To only use the slogans for campaign purposes. The slogan of "amnesty" should come first and "withdraw troops" the second;

(8) To give a precise definition of the feudal system and to what extent it exists in Indonesia; must be careful in describing the nature of nationalist organizations;

(9) To emphasize the necessity of rebuilding trade unions and the establishment of peasants'

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[15] The Comintern was informed of Alinin and Musso's arrests but was not clear if there were other PKI members in the British prisons in Malaya. See "Minutes of the National Secretariat for Great Britain and Holland Meeting of March 8, 1927," in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.*

[16] On 9 July, the British Secretariat of the Comintern voted to label Dr. Sutomo, the leader of the Indonesian Study Club, as a traitor for the pro-government speeches he delivered in response to the PKI revolt. Semaun voted against the decision. See"Minutes of Meeting of British Secretariat held July 9th, 1927," in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 3, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

organizations.[17]

The drafting of a new Indonesian resolution, however, turned out to be far more time-consuming than the preliminary report. While the lack of information effectually prevented the Comintern from conducting up-to-day analyses, there were also very different views on fundamental questions such as how to define the nature of the insurrection. David Petrovsky, who led the Anglo-American Secretariat at the time, remarked at a meeting in late July:

> Our information about the events in Indonesia was very inadequate. The materials we relied on were mainly taken from the English and American press. A large part of the articles were on the trials of the arrested [PKI members]. The first question we ask has to be 'what kind of rebellion it was?' Was it just a simple putsch or a more important and deeper movement? The [study] commission is of the opinion that it was something more ominous and deeper than a putsch.[18]

He elaborated that the uprising had its general appeal as a movement against Dutch imperialism, but it lacked concrete slogans to attract workers and peasants. Petrovsky also pointed out that the PKI also committed a fatal mistake by not preparing workers for the uprising, as illustrated by the fact that there was no coordinated strikes or labor movement when the revolt broke out. Moreover, the PKI members apparently lost contact among themselves, which led to three spontaneous insurrections in Batavia, Bantam, and Sumatra consecutively. As each occurrence was weeks apart from each other, the government was able to put down the movement without any difficulty. In sum, Petrovsky was of the opinion that the PKI committed unforgivable errors throughout the whole process. The uprising, therefore, was not an intentionally organized mass movement, but a reckless uprising of the radicals.[19]

Despite the seemingly reasonable analysis, representatives could not agree on several other issues. Pepper and Piatnitsky, for instance, suggested that the Comintern might have exaggerated the leadership role of the PKI. Given the massive chaos throughout the process, there was no reason to believe that the uprising was in control of the PKI. Petrovsky responded by stressing that the poor organization did not necessarily mean the party was not leading the movement. The Indonesian people were indeed under the PKI leadership, which could be verified by many newspaper articles—"the Chinese newspapers said, for example, that [the PKI] was the only party that really entered the movement."[20] Additionally, Vasilyev offered a series of criticisms of the new resolution such as it failed to point out the errors made by the CPH, omitted a crucial part of economic analysis, and contradicted with the previous version, which Alimin and Musso were supposed to bring to the NEI.[21] While some of the points seemed valid, many parts of the

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[17] "Minutes of Meeting of British Secretariat held June 27th, 1927," in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern. *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Folder 3, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[18] "Sitzung des Politsekretarlata vom 29/7/1927--Aktionsprogramm der K.P. Indonesiens (Meeting of the Political Secretariat of 29/7/1927 — Action Program of the PKI)," Folder 5, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Petrovsky and Piatnitsky disagreed with Vasilyev and believed that the two resolutions were consistent. In the meeting, Petrovsky also criticized that Vasilyev did not read the two

discussion showed the Comintern officers' ignorance about the Indonesian situation:

> Vasilyev: Regarding the analysis of the insurrection, too little has been said about the role of the nationalist groups. And after the insurrection, the resolution concluded that they must form a nationalist party, with the character of the Kuomintang. What Kuomintang? You have to be clear by saying what character this party is supposed to have, and give an action program for such a party. Without a precise analysis of the absence of the nationalist elements, the program is useless.
>
> Petrovsky: In the first resolution, nothing had been said of a Kuomintang, but a national mass party consisting of workers and peasants…[in the second resolution], we have given a detailed description of the National Party.[22] We have not spoken of the Kuomintang, but we said the communists must study precisely the question of how this mass organization should be created.[23]

Due to his lack of background knowledge, obviously, Vasilyev was unable to distinguish the Sarekat Rakyat (SR), the mass organization under the PKI leadership, and Sarekat Islam (SI), the nationalist group that the PKI used to be part of during its bloc-within period. When the Comintern was drafting its first resolution for the Indonesia Revolution, the SR was rising while the SI was on the verge of disintegration.[24] After the PKI revolt broke out, however, the SR dissolved whereas the SI experienced a rapid revival as a result of the government efforts to bring nationalist movement under its direct control.[25] The change of situation inevitably caused significant confusion in the Comintern discussions. Conceivably, representatives like Vasilyev had no choice but to refer to something more familiar and comprehensible—in this case, finding "equivalence" in the Chinese Revolution.

It is worth mentioning that in the middle of 1927, the Chinese Revolution was no longer a successful story as it had been a year ago. The conflict between the GMD and CPC escalated after the Canton Coup of 1926, which ultimately lead to a more radical purge of communists in Shanghai on 12 April 1927. The GMD-CPC United Front, for which the Comintern had had very high expectations, finally came to an end as a total disaster. For a few months, the Comintern was still in the hope of restoring the union, as they did similarly for the revival of the Indonesian Revolution. Gradually, however, the International had no choice but to accept the fact that both

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resolutions carefully. See "Sitzung des Politsekretarlata vom 29/7/1927--Aktionsprogramm der K.P. Indonesiens (Meeting of the Political Secretariat of 29/7/1927 — Action Program of the PKI)," Folder 5, ARCH01744, *op. cit.*

[22] Sukarno founded the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) on 4 July 1927, about three weeks before this Comintern meeting took place. It is unlikely that the Comintern representatives were aware of the existence of the new party within such a short period. The National Party that Petrovsky referred to here should be Sarekat Islam.

[23] "Sitzung des Politsekretarlata vom 29/7/1927--Aktionsprogramm der K.P. Indonesiens (Meeting of the Political Secretariat of 29/7/1927 — Action Program of the PKI)," Folder 5, ARCH01744, *op. cit.*

[24] The first resolution was drafted when Alimin and Musso were still in Moscow in the middle of 1926. According to Petrovsky, this resolution was never published due to the outbreak of the PKI revolt and the arrest of the two emissaries. See *ibid.*

[25] This point will be elaborated in the next section

movements were as good as lost.

As arrests persisted in Indonesia, to reconnect with the PKI members appeared to be very difficult for the Comintern at this point. Coincidentally, Alimin and Musso were back in Moscow again. After being detained in Singapore prisons for months, the two PKI members were released on the ground that they did not pose a direct threat to the public order of British territories.[26] Instead of sending them back to the NEI, the British authority offered them the option of going somewhere of their own choice. The two Indonesian communists decided to go to China, and from there they managed to return to the Soviet Union.[27] Very different from their Moscow experience in the previous year, Alimin and Musso found out that their once heavily criticized revolt plan was somewhat justified despite its complete failure: not in the sense that it should not have happened at all, but that the movement should have been better prepared.[28] Now it was the Indonesians' turn to criticize the International for not lending sufficient support. Alimin took advantage of the situation by expressing discontent with the Comintern's lukewarm reaction towards the PKI revolt at the organization's Sixth Congress in August 1927:

> We consider it a serious mistake—that during the uprising which lasted about two months, the Communist International remained inactive. The blame cannot be put on our Dutch Party because our comrades did what they could to support the rebellion. The Communist International ought to have instructed all its sections, especially in Germany, France and America to support the uprising and to make a campaign with demonstrations, through the press, etc., in favor of it. But this has not been done. It is a sad experience of the Communist International and we hope that such a mistake will not occur again.[29]

According to McVey's observation, the Comintern ceased calling for continuing revolutionary activities in Indonesia by the summer of 1927.[30] This is only partly true. In fact, the writing process of the Indonesian resolution dragged on in the ensuing months. Representatives met on a semi-monthly basis, not to talk about continuing the uprising per se, but theoretical matters and new propaganda strategies surrounding the Indonesian issues. In September, for instance, the Anglo-American Secretariat instructed Semaun to write a popular pamphlet to illustrate the Comintern's core decisions in the Malay language, with the hope of reaching the broader audience in Indonesia once the connection has been restored.[31] In the following month, the

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[26] For a detailed discussion as regards to why the British decided to release the two PKI members, see "The Reds in Java," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 7 January 1928, 13.

[27] Alimin left Singapore for Hong Kong and proceeded to Canton, where they were arrested with a group of Chinese and Vietnamese communists by the Chian Kai-shek government. After clarifying that they were not Chinese, they were allowed to continue their journey to Shanghai, where they later found out to be unsafe. They then went to Hankou, where they received instruction to go to Moscow. See Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku" in *Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection*. ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 13-14.

[28] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 350-1.

[29] *Inprecorr*, p. 849. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 353.

[30] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 351.

[31] "Minutes of the Anglo-American Secretariat," in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, 15 September 1927, Folder 4, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History,

Secretariat convened again. The representatives decided that Semaun's pamphlet should be "immediately translated" into English and German so that people in Europe and Asia could learn the lessons on the PKI uprising, the National Revolution Party (SR), and the role of the communists, and so forth.[32] In the same meetings, the Anglo-American Secretariat also leveled criticism against the CPH and the Comintern itself. Both organizations were accused of failing to provide enough support to the Indonesian Revolution and to "popularize" the Indonesian question among their members and the masses.[33]

After six months of delay, the Comintern finally completed its resolution on Indonesia in November 1927.[34] The resolution characterized the Indonesian uprising as a "national-revolutionary movement." Instead of taking credit for the events, the ECCI emphasized that it had "made a very thorough examination" and attributed the insurrection to "the serious economic position of the masses, the impoverishment of the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, and the parallel growth of the communist party and the red trade unions."[35] The resolution was consistent in confirming the leadership role of the PKI and reiterated the Comintern's critique that the revolt lacked serious political and organizational preparation. It is probably not surprising that again, the Comintern juxtaposed the Indonesian uprising with the Chinese Revolution, and described the two as being "the most important events proving that the oppressed masses of the East have already been drawn into the world-wide struggle between capital and labor."[36] The statement also drew up a plan of what the PKI should set out to focus on at the next stage:

> (1)…to rebuild the party as a completely independent organization, even at the cost of the greatest sacrifices.
> (2)…to rebuild the trade unions and to fight for their legalization;
> (3)…to work actively in the national organizations, above all in those for young people.
> (4) Connections must be established with the left-wing labor movement in Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, and above all with the national-revolutionary and workers' movement in China.
> (5)…preparing the masses for a new onslaught on Indonesian [sic] imperialism, and for the fight for an independent Indonesian republic, the communist party must train and organize them at the same time for the struggle for day-to-day demands, such as an

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Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1.

[32] "Meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat," in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, 18 October 1927, Folder 4, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[33] "Minutes of the Anglo-American Secretariat," 15 September 1927, p. 1, and "Meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat," 18 October 1927, Folder 4, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[34] According to Victor Demar's speech at a Comintern meeting in December 1927, the resolution was supposed to be completed around June that year. The resolution, dated November, was finally published in the December issue of *Inprekorr.* See "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat" in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, 29 December 1927, Folder 4, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 8.

[35] "Statement on the Tasks of Indonesian Communists," in *Inprekorr*, 2 December 1927, vii, 119, 2711.

[36] *Ibid.*

> amnesty for political prisoners, withdrawal of the occupation army, the right of association, the eight-hour day, abolition of Dutch as the official language, etc.[37]

3. New situation, old dilemmas

(1) Everything is destroyed

Indeed, the Comintern resolution came out way too late—more than a year after the insurrection's initial outbreak in Java. While the Comintern was in a desperate need of finding reliable channels to deliver the directives, the real problem lied in the PKI's annihilation due to the government's endless suppression. Towards the end of 1927, the Anglo-American Secretariat convened again to discuss the latest situation in Indonesia. Both Semaun and Musso reported at the meeting the grim state of the party:

> The situation in our party is very bad. Nearly all—more than 90%—are in the penitentiary or in prison. From the 10% which [sic] remained they (colonial authorities) have already arrested many again; and besides this, only a few are communists who are active and mostly cannot do anything, isolated from each other.[38]

> I have the information that everything is absolutely destroyed; that some comrades still left [sic], do not know about the existence of a communist group because there are arrests everyday.[39]

According to Semaun, the Dutch authorities were able to carry out prosecutions of the core PKI leaders very efficiently, because they had planted undercover agents (provocateurs) inside the party organization. After an agent named De Jeer got "arrested," the government wiped out the entire Central Committee of the PKI. Additionally, *Sin Po*, an Indies Chinese newspaper known for its sympathetic views towards the Indonesian Revolution, also discovered that the government had deployed an agent to investigate the paper's connection with Moscow and Canton. Although the plot was unveiled and did not lead to any actual damage to the paper, Semaun feared that building connections with the Chinese movement would be even more difficult now due to the government's close surveillance.[40] A PKI leader, who had allegedly spoken to Alimin and Musso in Singapore, made "a serious attempt" to establish a new Central Committee and a party organ in Surabaya. However, again, the authorities soon discovered the organization and arrested all the involved members.[41] As all the information pointed to the fact

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[37] *Ibid.*

[38] The percentage Semaun presented here was by no means accurate, as the party was no longer functional. Instead, this should be his way of describing the magnitude of suppression. See "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, Folder 4, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 4.

[39] Musso, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.* 9.

[40] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.*3-4.

[41] See "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.* 4 & 7.

that the PKI was in a complete defunct mode, Semaun suggested that the priority should be recruiting competent new cadres by establishing a new party from scratch. Re-organizing the old party members would be very difficult, he stated, as the systematic suppression was still going on—conducting an active search for the old people would only lead to an even more disastrous result.[42]

However, the rest of the Secretariat members did not seem to agree with Semaun's proposal. Some believed that based on limited information, the Comintern was not in a position to conclude that the PKI had been destroyed. What the news reports showed were not the annihilation of the party, but the fact that there were still party members waiting for instructions.[43] Similarly, Victor Demar, a Soviet representative, found establishing a new party unnecessary. He suggested that the situation facing the communist party in many countries were far worse than in Indonesia. The PKI played a very significant role in the anti-colonial movement, which had built a good foundation for carrying on the movement for the future. The PKI, therefore, should "continue the traditions."[44]

Semaun complained that in their efforts to crack down the PKI, the Dutch authorities fabricated a narrative, which made virtually no mention of the colony's political disorders and economic grievances. Instead, the narrative ascribed the insurrections to the Russian influence, as if "everything is merely made by the Moscow government…[the NEI government] writes in such a way that men get the impression that our revolutionary movement in Indonesia is foreign."[45] Claiming credit for the PKI uprising was certainly not in the Comintern's best interest since such a move would provide the NEI government with the best excuse to legitimize its suppressions. As mentioned earlier, the Anglo-American Secretariat had decided in its June meeting to dissociate itself from the PKI revolt, and to emphasize instead that the uprising was a movement caused by colonial exploitation and suppression. Now the resolution had come out, the Secretariat found itself in a dilemma between staying consistent with the decision, and publicizing its message in a communist tone to the wider audience across the globe. Musso suggested that the Comintern should be implicit about its involvement in drafting the resolution, but present it as "a result of an international discussion between representatives of Britain, American, and Dutch Communist Parties."[46] By doing so, Musso hoped that the Comintern decisions could be distributed widely through legal channels in the forms of brochure and pamphlets.[47] Joseph Fineberg, a British representative, opposed the idea:

> You want to cover up your tracks and show no connection with the Comintern at all. If so, then I think all the reference to communist parties must be deleted…You cannot at the

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[42] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 5.
[43] "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 11-12
[44] Demar, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 19.
[45] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 5.
[46] Musso, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 8.
[47] *Ibid.*

> same time mention representatives of communist parties and hope to deceive anybody into believing that it is not of the Comintern organ.[48]

Demar weighed in by saying that the Comintern had no intention to make itself irrelevant to Indonesia, "quite the opposite, we want the people to know that the Communist parties are concerned with the Indonesian question."[49] "We must give the impression that communists are trying to make everything legal," Musso added.[50] Such a debate ended fruitlessly, however, not least because the representatives failed to reach an agreement. They also realized that no matter what kind of phrasing they ended up using, there was no machinery whatsoever that the Comintern could rely on to distribute the materials to Indonesia.

(2) Cooperation with the non-cooperation

Despite the party's devastating state, the Anglo-American Secretariat discussed how the remaining communists could continue their anti-colonial struggles in a new wave of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Semaun reported that in the aftermath of the PKI uprising, the NEI government had been trying to make symbolic concessions in hopes of winning over the nationalists. With government supports, the almost defunct Sarekat Islam came back to life under the party's rightwing leadership of Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim.[51] While the communist trade unions were ferociously crushed, the Dutch authorities allowed the reformist unions—primarily those under the influence of the social democrats—to carry on their work as long as they were not involved in politics.[52] As more reforms seemed to be underway, many nationalists started to see cooperation with the government as a more viable path to achieve political goals. Central to the potential reforms was the question of reforming the Volksraad (People's Council), whereby the government promised to grant the council greater legislative power and more significant representation of the natives.[53] However, Semaun criticized the proposal as being a fake concession, as he believed that this so-called reform would be a change in form but not in

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[48] Fineberg, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 9-10.

[49] "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 10-11.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] By this time, the PKI representatives had already started to label the SI leaders Tjokroaminoto and Agus Salim as traitors of the revolution. See Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat," 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 2.

[52] Demar, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 8.

[53] The Volksraad was transformed from a consultative body to a semi-legislative body in 1925, but it was still the governor-general who made the major decisions on behalf of the Dutch government. The representatives were either elected through regional councils or directly appointed by the governor general. Among its 60 members, there were 30 Dutch, 25 natives and five from other races. In 1929, the native membership increased to 30 while the Dutch membership was reduced to 25. The power of the council, however, remained quite limited throughout its existence until the end of the Dutch rule. See S. L. van der Wal, *De Volksraad en de staatkundige ontwikkeling van Nederlands-Indië, een bronnenpublikatie: The People's Council and the political development of the Netherlands-Indies (with a pref., introd. and survey of the documents in English)* (J.B. Wolters, n.d.).

content.[54] Moreover, Semaun warned that joining the Volksraad should never be an option for the communists, and that the PKI should be consistent with the policy it had upheld since the party's inception.[55]

While being skeptical about the government's sincerity to materialize any meaningful reforms, Semaun acknowledged that the changing circumstances would present great opportunities to revitalize the revolution. The PKI's new hope, as Semaun suggested, could be working with the nationalists who refused to cooperate with the government. An important context here is the establishment of the Indonesian National Party (PNI) in July 1927.[56] Unlike its collaborationist counterparts, the PNI set its ultimate goal as achieving independence through non-cooperation. Semaun explained that the PNI mainly comprised of intellectuals, who "boycott everything proposed by the government" and opposed the idea of participating in the Volksraad.[57] Despite the party's revolutionary outlook, Semaun and Musso could not decide if working with the PNI would be beneficial to the PKI.[58] The major concern, as Semaun noted, was the party's split between two groups from the outset: those insisted that the party should remain exclusive to the elites and those intended to reach out to the masses.[59] Unable to predict where the new party was heading for, the two Indonesian representatives asked how the PKI members should react to the emergence of the PNI. In response, the majority of the Secretariat members were of the opinion that Indonesian communists should join hands with the revolutionary nationalists, build secret nucleus to penetrate their organizations, and eventually strengthen the left tendency of the movement—pretty much the old bloc-within strategy with an emphasis on *only* working with the non-cooperative elements.[60]

However, not everyone at the meeting approved such a strategy. Ghulam Ambia Khan Luhani, an Indian member, questioned the effectiveness of the non-cooperation movement by referring to India.

> We had a similar example in India during the last seven-eight years. There was a general

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[54] Semaun was also of the opinion that the Dutch population would not allow this reform to happen by putting pressure on the parliament in the Netherlands. See Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat," 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 2.

[55] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 21.

[56] The founder of the PNI was Sukarno, a member of Sutomo's Study Club at that time who would later become Indonesia's first president. In his report, Semaun said that the PNI was founded in September 1927, which was not true. The correct date is 4 July 1927. The inaccurate information shows that the communication channel between Moscow and the NEI at that time was still very bad. See Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 1-2.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Musso, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.*, 7.

[59] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 3.

[60] "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 11 & 20.

> nationalist movement to not cooperate with the British government in regard to various legislative bodies and these bodies had greater legislative power than the Volksraad in Indonesia…there was a rightwing which broke away with the policy of full-fledged cooperation with the hope of influencing the government and giving publicity to their own nationalist movement. In the course of the last five years this policy of cooperation has been tried (by the rightwing) and today we have seen that this policy of non-cooperation has not had any effect whatever [sic] in strengthening the nationalist movement…the Right had every opportunity to approach the masses but we lost valuable connections by this policy [*sic*]![61]

Fineberg remarked that the non-cooperation in India was a much broader movement than just boycotting the parliament. He criticized Luhani for failing to distinguish institution and tactic in the Indonesian context—the parliament (the Volksraad) is a bourgeois institution, which has no value to the working class; whereas non-cooperation is just a tactic, which should be applied to suit the local situation. The key is, whether the institution could be used to stimulate the revolutionary movement. In the case of the Russian Revolution, as Fineberg pointed out, the similar boycott questions had been frequently discussed: "nobody had any illusions that the Witte Duma would do anything for the masses, but it was used as a means of stimulating the mass movement. Under other circumstances the Bulygin Duma was boycotted."[62] By the same token, William Gallacher and I. Mingulin added that the Comintern resolution was straightforward in opposing any forms of cooperation with the Dutch authorities. The Volksraad in Indonesia is not a parliament, but a part of the government. As fighting against the colonial regime was the main purpose of the Indonesian revolution, they concluded that currently, the Volksraad "does not have the slightest value" and "cannot be used for the masses."[63] Finally, Demar warned that one must be careful in comparing Indonesia to India and Russia, as Indonesia had an institution akin to the Bulygin Duma and a revolutionary situation at the same time. While it is meaningless to partake in a bourgeois institution, the communists should remain active in carrying on the revolution: "we should be absolutely against the nationalist cooperation (with the government). We should work instead for the nationalist movement to non-cooperate [sic]."[64]

In the end, the Secretariat finally reached the consensus to adopt the non-cooperation policy. To facilitate the implementation of the strategy, Semaun reiterated his suggestion to form a new party:

> Five of the committee members of the Party Central Committee are in prison and the one

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[61] *Ibid.*

[62] The First State Duma of the Russian Empire, initially designed as a purely advisory body, was formed under Sergei Witte based on Alexander Bulygin's proposal (the Bulygin Constitution) in response to the 1905 Russian Revolution. Fineberg, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 14-15.

[63] See discussions among Gallacher, Mingulin and Sen Katayama. "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 15-17.

[64] Demar, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,*18.

> who is out was known openly as a nationalist.[65] We have some Communists everywhere. But they are not organized into locals. There are some who are not communists but they have nearly the same line in the national movement as communists working there. Then there are the Left nationalists who are working on the same line. So we have to begin a new party—not that we have to make new party itself, but because it is a very hard work.[66]

Semaun was right in pointing out the hardships. To their dismay, the Comintern representatives would soon realize there was no such thing as a PKI reincarnation, let alone a new alliance between the communists and the non-cooperative nationalists. In fact, Sukarno himself was arrested and imprisoned only a year later for his leadership role in allegedly subversive political activities.[67]

(3) Trotsky is gone—let's embrace permanent revolution

On a separate note, Semaun talked about his plans of translating Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and Stalin's writings on Leninism, which he believed to be essential to educate the PKI cadres in the future. While pointing out the foreseeable difficulties in finding Malay speakers in Moscow, Semaun stressed the necessity of using a simple language (Malay) emphatically—instead of Dutch, which was only accessible for intellectuals—to reach people from all walks of life in the NEI.[68] Of course, the Secretariat was in support of the idea, but the representatives warned that Semaun should be cautious in choosing the right version of Stalin's work:

> Emery: …I suggest comrades get a copy because in this brochure, which was written in '24 or '25, there is a rather weak position taken on the question of permanent revolution. And on the question of Leninism, Stalin says that 'a Leninist is one who has the Russian spirit and uses American methods'.
> Demar: Then it should be Stalin who should look over it.
> Emery: I think he should.
> Other voices: there has been a new edition put out in 1926.[69]

It is worth noting that by the time of the meeting in December 1927, Trotsky had already been expelled from the CPSU and would soon start his exile to Kazakhstan, and later outside of the Soviet Union. Despite Trotsky's defeat, his theory of permanent revolution, rather than Stalin's socialism in one country, seemed to be more applicable to the Indonesian Revolution in the eyes of the Secretariat representatives. After all, the Stalin-Trotsky feud was more of a political battle than a purely theoretical debate. It is ironic that when Trotsky could no longer save the desperate situation, his theory had been proven right in both China and Indonesia towards the end of the

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[65] Semaun did not elaborate who this person was, but he might be referring to Tan Malaka.
[66] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 21.
[67] Brackman, *Indonesian Communism,* 25.
[68] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 6.
[69] "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat", 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 12-13.

so-called "Second Period."[70] Shortly after, the Comintern entered the "Third Period," in which the organization adopted a more militant line from its 9th Enlarged Plenum in 1928 onward.[71] According to the Comintern analysis, capitalism was already on the brink of collapse. As a result, communist parties worldwide must fight more aggressively, not only against the imperialist enemies but also the moderate left who collaborate with the capitalist establishments. Understandably, socialism in one country, which had occupied the center stage of the Stalin-Trotsky feud, became an awkward position to take for the Secretariat members trying to re-ignite the revolution in Indonesia. With no alternative solutions, Semaun stated at the end of the meeting:

> [With regard to] the translation of Comrade Stalin's book, I cannot change anything in this book [*sic*]. I have to translate as it is written, but when there is something there needing changes [*sic*], the Comintern has to propose it. However, I am translating the new edition, checking it with both the German and Russian editions.[72]

Conclusion

In their work on the 1926/27 PKI uprisings, Benda and McVey drew the following conclusion from the careful study of several Dutch documents:

> The situation of the PKI was quite different from that of the only other important Asian communist movement of the time, the Chinese Communist Party. The pressures on the PKI in this period arose from conditions inside Indonesia and not from outside influences; it can thus be studied as a purely Indonesian phenomenon much more easily than can the concurrent history of Chinese Communism, which was so deeply affected by Russo-Chinese relations and the decisions laid down by the Comintern against the background of the feud between Stalin and Trotsky.[73]

By referring to sources from the Comintern itself, this chapter confirms their findings that the role that the agency played in affecting the 1926/27 PKI uprising was very limited due to the long distance, poor communication, and harsh government crackdown. The absence of the PKI's core leaders notwithstanding, a handful of the party members made a desperate decision to revolt

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[70] The "Second Period" refers to the period of capitalist stabilization in the 1920s. Stalin put forward his theory of socialism in one country after Lenin's death in 1924. Echoed with this change, the Comintern's focus switched from organizing immediate world revolution to the defense of the Soviet state. The Second Period also paralleled with the domestic policy change of the USSR from war communism to the New Economic Policy (NEP).

[71] The Third Period lasted until 1935 when anti-fascism became the new focus of the Comintern. See Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz, "Reflections on the Origins of the 'Third Period': Bukharin, the Comintern, and the Political Economy of Weimar Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3 (July 1989): 387–410.

[72] Semaun, "Stenogram of the Anglo-American Secretariat," 29 December 1927, in *Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia*, *op. cit.,* 20-21.

[73] Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), xxx.

in response to the increasingly tightened control of the colonial government. Alimin and Musso went on a mission to Moscow with the aim of circumventing Tan Malaka's disapproval. It was hoped that a Comintern authorization would greatly strengthen the party leadership, and eventually save the crumbling communist organizations. Much to their dismay, the Comintern reacted cautiously and did not sanction the plan. Yet, the insurrection broke out before the Comintern directives could reach its intended audience. Shortly after, the arrest of the two PKI emissaries in Singapore made the Comintern debates throughout 1926 irrelevant to the events' actual development in Indonesia.

In the immediate aftermath of the PKI revolt, the Comintern publicized the Indonesian revolution with a lofty tone. As the movement gradually died out, the International conducted lengthy reflections on the failure of the uprising. The Comintern finally put forward a carefully crafted resolution on Indonesian questions almost a year after the revolt, but it was too late to exert any substantial impact to revive the revolution. As the government carried out suppression at an unprecedented scale, the Comintern could hardly find a channel to deliver its message, let alone trusted individuals to restore the party organizations.

While the Comintern discussions on Indonesia often lost contact with the situation on the ground, they closely associated with several paralleled events during the same period. The ideological debate between Stalin's socialism in one country and Trotsky's permanent revolution shaped the interpretation of the Indonesian situation, especially by comparing it to that of China. As the focal point of the Comintern operations in the Far East, the CPC-GMD United Front served a major frame of reference for analyzing the PKI movement vis-a-vis other nationalist organizations. Conversely, the Comintern also used the outbreak of the PKI uprising to showcase the success of its China policy. When the CPC-GMD alliance was making good progress, the Comintern not only attempted to replicate the success story in Indonesia but also to eventually link the two movements via the Indies Chinese community. However, such a plan was never materialized, not least because the two communist parties suffered tremendous setbacks in 1927.

Although a few PKI members participated in the Comintern meetings, representatives almost always lacked the essential information to conduct a thorough analysis of the Indonesian movement. To make sense of the circumstances on the ground—or perhaps more accurately, to talk the communist talk—many had to constantly refer to "similar cases" in drastically different contexts. As the meetings of the Anglo-American Secretariat were the main venue where the Indonesian questions were discussed, British and Indian representatives played important roles in shaping the Comintern discourse on the Indonesian Revolution—issues such as parliament and the non-cooperation movement were frequently brought up. Similarly, Soviet representatives often compared the NEI political situation to that of Russia during the pre-October-Revolution period. In the wake of the PKI revolt, the Indonesian representatives' attack on collaborative nationalists was in line with the Comintern's policy shift towards a more radical line against the moderate left in the so-called "Third Period." Despite the total defeat of the PKI movement in Indonesia, such a change would have a significant impact on how the PKI fugitives position themselves in response to the rise of the nationalist movement in the following years. From 1928 onward, those stayed close with the Comintern maintained a radical and non-cooperative stance while a new wave of nationalist movement was on the rise. Taking such a position certainly has its trade-offs. As the Dutch colonial regime tightened its political control after the abortive uprisings, the PKI was never able to revive under the so-called "*rust en orde* (peace and order)" over the long 1930s.

Part II: The Origins of Anti-Communist Cooperation in British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, 1925-1927

Introduction

While Western powers were struggling to recover from the massive loss of World War I (WWI), nationalism was on the rise with a clear anti-colonial and anti-imperialist outlook in the colonized and semi-colonized world. Galvanized by the victory of the Russian Revolution, communist parties sprung up in many parts of the globe. These parties quickly established connections with the Communist International (Comintern), the Moscow-based organization that coordinates worldwide revolutions. Western powers saw communism—or more specifically, Bolshevism—as posing unprecedented threats to their global interests, as it seemed to have provided both a coherent ideological weapon and a workable organizational framework to the burgeoning nationalist movements. Communist Parties of China (CPC) and Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, or PKI) experienced dramatic ups and downs during the brief period between 1925 and 1927, in which they both rose to play prominent roles in their respective nationalist revolution, but soon suffered fatal setbacks due to anti-communist suppressions. Comparatively speaking, the political situation was more peaceful in Malaya, but the impact of Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions was discernible in many ways. Chief among them were the discoveries of increasing leftist activities in immigrant communities, which had alarmed British authorities even before communist forces firmly established themselves in the colony.

The rise of anti-imperialist struggles during the 1925-1927 period have received scholarly attention for many decades. The Chinese Revolution, in particular, is a well-studied subject.[1] At a much smaller scale, historians have researched the Indonesian movement from angles such as the PKI history and popular radicalism.[2] Focusing on the rise of ethnicity-based nationalism, a handful of scholars have also studied political movements of Malaya.[3] Additionally, scholarly work frequently mentions Malaya as being embedded in the Chinese and Indonesian communist networks because of the colony's strategic location and immigrant communities' close connections with their places of origin.[4] While historical writings often indicate that there are

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[1] Roland Felber and A.M. Grigoriev, *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s Between Triumph and Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2015); Hans J.van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[2] Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965); Harry Benda and Ruth McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); Shiraishi, Takashi. *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); John Blumberger, *De Communistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* [The Communist Movement in the NEI] (Haarlem: H.D. Willink, 1935).

[3] William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Yong C. F., *The Origins of Malayan Communism* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997).

[4] Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the*

many interactions among political movements of China, British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) around this time,[5] scholars have rarely approached the subject beyond the vaguely articulated "influence" and "networks." A question thus arises as to whether the Chinese and Indonesian communist movements showed any signs of convergence in Malaya under the same Marxist-Leninist banner. Cheah and Belogurova's work suggests that despite some early attempts to cooperate, interactions between Chinese and Indonesia communists were limited and unsuccessful: The main reason is that the two groups had very different nationalist appeals—the membership of communist organizations in Malaya was overwhelmingly Chinese, and PKI members were primarily interested in anti-colonial struggles in Indonesia.[6] Moreover, linguistic barriers also prevented the two parties from forming a meaningful partnership.[7] Convincing as such explanations may sound, they seem to have downplayed the impact of a crucial socio-political context—British authorities were in close cooperation with their Dutch counterparts and had adopted stringent anti-communist measures even before the formal establishment of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).

By juxtaposing China, the NEI, and British Malaya at the same historical moment, this paper explores *why* the British and Dutch authorities came to cooperate in anti-communist suppressions. The question concerning *how* these two governments worked with each other is no less important, but I will leave this discussion in another paper. I argue that due to the rise of communist movement worldwide, especially the concurrent events in China and the NEI between 1925 and 1927, the British authorities adopted strict measures against communism[8]. The British crackdown on leftist movements in Malaya was mainly a preemptive action towards perceived communist threats, rather than a reaction towards the establishment of CPC branches and other MCP predecessors.[9] Anglo-Dutch cooperation was effective in the following years. As a result, the Chinese and Indonesian movements never come close to convergence in Malaya, as the British and Dutch governments managed to keep communist activities in check both within

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Malayan Communist Party : Selected Documents and Discussion (Ithaca, N.Y: SEAP, Southeast Asia Program, 1992); Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities: the Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939". *Journal of Global History*. 9, no. 03 (2014): 447-470.

[5] In this paper, I use the term "Netherlands East Indies," "NEI," and "Indonesia" interchangeably. While "NEI" was official, "Indonesia" was popular in the nationalist discourse of the time.

[6] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 40.

[7] Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities," 448.

[8] The Communist Party of India (CPI) was also in a preliminary forming stage during the same period, which certainly played a role in influencing British authorities' perception of communism in Malaya. However, the Indian influence was much weaker compared to that of China and Indonesia. I will discuss such influence briefly in following sections, but this will not be the main focus of this paper.

[9] The CPC established an overseas branch in Malaya around 1925-26, which gradually transformed into the Nanyang (or South Seas) Communist Party (SSCP) in 1927. As I showed in the previous chapter, the influence of CPC-affiliated organizations was negligible in Malaya during the 1925-27 period. See Kankan Xie, "The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited: New Discoveries from Singapore's Digital Newspaper Archives," in *Chapters on Asia* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2018), 273-274.

and beyond their respective colonies. The extensive British intelligence network in the Far East helped the Dutch authorities to prevent the PKI movement from reviving outside the NEI borders. The MCP also struggled for survival in its early years—not only was it in constant struggles to attract non-Chinese members in Malaya but also failed to expand to Indonesia through the pan-Chinese network. Consequently, the communist movement in the region had little chance to regain its momentum until the outbreak of WWII.

Along the archival grain: watching communism from the eyes of colonial officials

To understand in what context the British and Dutch governments cooperated with each other on anti-communist suppressions, it is essential to explore how colonial authorities' perception of communism evolved between 1925 and 1927. For this purpose, I have consulted colonial archives of both Malaya and Indonesia.

On the Malayan side, the agency in charge of investigating political affairs was the Political Intelligence Bureau (PIB), which produced the confidential *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI)* monthly.[10] The PIB distributed only a small amount of *MBPI* copies among high-ranking officials. On the distribution list of May 1926, for instance, 33 out of 71 recipients were inside of Malaya. Meanwhile, the PIB sent the other 38 copies to British authorities in other places such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Batavia, and Medan.[11] The *MBPI* covers critical political issues across Asia, in which content directly concerning to Malaya accounts for only a small proportion. The bulletin almost always organizes its sections in the following order: (1) Affairs in China; (2) Affairs in the NEI; (3) Affairs in the Hejaz; (4) Affairs in Malaya; (5) Kuo Min Tang (or Guomindang, GMD hereafter) in Malaya; (6) The Communist Center (NEI) in Singapore, and so forth.[12] Writers of *MBPI* reports are usually anonymous "political analysts." In rare cases, however, there were also occasional mentions of Rene Onraet, the director of the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police.[13] While the identities of these analysts remain unknown, Cheah contends that "their work was tremendously important in assisting political authorities to make decisions."[14]

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[10] The PIB was affiliated with the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police, which was formed in 1918. The PIB started to print the *MBPI* from 1922 and ceased to do so in 1930 when the PIB was abolished. The CID changed its name to Special Branch in 1933. See Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 44.

[11] Colonial Office (CO), 273-534, "Distribution List" in *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI)*, 1 May 1926, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 1925-1927, Colonial Office, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.

[12] The six sub-headings mentioned here are the most common ones, which almost always appeared in the Bulletin. Other sections include, but are not limited to: Affairs in Indochina; Soviet Political Activity in the Far East; Affairs in India.

[13] At the end of the February-April 1927 issue of the *MBPI*, there is a statement as follows: "all letters and communications intended for the Director, Political Intelligence Bureau, should in the future be addressed to R. H. Onraet." CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, No. 48, Feb-April 1927, 7.

[14] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 45.

On the Indonesian side, the PIB's Dutch counterpart was *Algemeene Recherche Dienst* (General Investigation Service, ARD), which functioned under the Attorney-General of the NEI's Supreme Court. The ARD started to produce a monthly report named the *Politiek-Politioneel Overzicht (Political Policing Overview,* or *PPO* hereafter*)* in the aftermath of the 1926/27 PKI uprisings.[15] Marked as "top secret" (*zeer geheim*), the *PPO* had a very limited readership. Besides a handful of top-ranking officials in Batavia and The Hague, the ARD only allowed heads of NEI's 32 regions—who were concurrently appointed as heads of the police force—to access the *PPO*. From November 1927, the ARD also sent *PPO* copies to Dutch envoys in important posts such as Beijing, Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong.[16] Unlike the *MBPI*'s broad coverage, the *PPO* primarily concerns with domestic issues in the NEI. The format of *PPO* reports was consistent throughout its period of appearance, which always contained five sections, namely (1) Extremist (Communist) Movement; (2) Nationalist and Mohammedan Movement; (3) Chinese Movement; (4) Native Trade Union Movement; and (5) Movement Abroad. Harry Poeze, who reproduced the *PPO* in a *bronnenpublicatie* (source publication) series in the 1980s, points out that *PPO* reports were "colored by the NEI government's vision on political movements," in which "'dangerous' movements received far more attention than those 'law-abiding' ones."[17] Nevertheless, the *PPO* is valuable sources for studying Indonesian political movements of the late colonial period, as its "ripe and green" information not only records the dry facts of historical events but also reflects the (mis)understanding of the NEI authorities surrounding such issues.[18]

Using colonial archives to study early communist movements can be highly problematic. Information in official documents can be often biased, selective, inaccurate, and incomplete. Sources such as *MBPI* and *PPO* reports tend to treat communist activists as "faceless" enemies and usually reveal very few of their personal details.[19] Due to the relative scarcity of materials produced by the underground parties, however, scholars relied heavily on official documents on the subject while expected to remedy the shortcomings by unearthing "new" sources.[20] In recent years, a growing number of historians have approached the topic from an international perspective. For example, Anna Belogurova and Fujio Hara have reinvestigated the early history of Malayan communism by using Comintern documents.[21] For the PKI history, Rianne Subijanto

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[15] In the first issue of the *PPO*, the Attorney General noted that "My intention is that with such an overview, in which we analyze the most important events and information, should be continued as frequent as once every month." Although he did not give further explanation, the *PPO* is clearly related to the occurrence of the PKI uprisings in November 1926 and January 1927. *PPO* has been reproduced in Harry Poeze, *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië* [Political-Policing Overviews of the Dutch East Indies], vol. 1, (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), vii.

[16] Poeze, *PPO*, vii-viii.

[17] Poeze, *PPO*, xx.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 5.

[20] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 6.

[21] Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities," 447-470; Fujio Hara, *The*

has scrutinized the issue by adopting the lens of the revolutionary press;[22] Klaas Stutje researched the impact of the PKI movement on the Dutch-European stage.[23]

While these discoveries have significantly deepened our understanding of the subject matter, many gaps remain unfilled. One of the crucial aspects is the implications of the early communist movements at the immediate regional level. That is, to explore issues that transcend colonial boundaries while avoiding the convenient assertion that they "belong" to networks such as Chinese diaspora, anti-imperialism, and international communism. In other words, one should study the rise of communism beyond the frameworks of the Malayan or Indonesian history, but situating it in another transnational network—either ethnically or ideologically oriented—can be quite slippery, as networks may often intersect, overlap, and contradict among each other.

In this research, I propose to make sense of the communist movements by studying the anti-communist intelligence network across the British and Dutch governments. Adopting a comparative perspective, revisiting colonial archives shed new light on the subject, which has been confined mainly within the conceptual framework of party histories in previous studies. Specifically, I regard official documents not only as useful materials to study communist movements themselves, but also an indispensable lens, through which one could understand such movements as how colonial officials saw them. Such an approach echoes with what Ann Stoler describes as reading "along the archival grain."[24] In her critical study of Dutch colonial archives, Stoler points out that there was a sense of "epistemic anxieties" among officials, who often got confused in the process of archival production. Under such circumstances, officials usually had no better options but to "generate truths" through subjective views, thoughts, and even imagination. They need to figure out "what kinds of knowledge they needed, what they needed to know, and what they knew they did not."[25] To some extent, epistemic uncertainties—either written or unwritten—can be no less significant than the perceived facts. Such anxieties, as I will illustrate in the following sections, were pervasive among British and Dutch colonial intelligence officers, which played a significant role in shaping their strategies in handling communism.

Malayan Communist Party as Recorded in the Comintern Files (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017).

[22] Rianne Subijanto, "Enlightenment and the Revolutionary Press in Colonial Indonesia," *International Journal of Communication,* 11(2017), 1357–1377.

[23] Klaas Stutje, "To Maintain an Independent Course. Inter-war Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage". *Dutch Crossing*. 39 (3)(2015): 204-220.

[24] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[25] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 3.

Chapter Four: Watching the Indonesian and Chinese Revolutions in Malaya

1. The Indonesian situation

While the British concerned about the political situation of the entire Far East (China in particular), the Dutch authorities' primary focus was the domestic security of the NEI. In March 1927, the *PPO* came into existence in the immediate aftermath of the PKI uprisings in Java and Sumatra.[1] To prevent future rebellions, Dutch intelligence apparatus paid close attention to the PKI-led native communist movements. As a result, the first section of the *PPO* was invariably "extremist (communist) movements" (*extremitische bewegingen*). Although the so-called Chinese movements (*Chinese bewegingen*) in Indonesia was also under the government's close surveillance, the ARD always listed this section below communism and nationalism. The *PPO* often ends with a rather broad summary of political issues outside of the NEI. Labeled as "foreign" (*Buitenland*), the last section often contains discussions of various events in China and Malaya.

Such an arrangement shows that the NEI authorities had different counter-insurgency priorities compared to British counterparts. The main reason is that the Netherlands was a much smaller imperial power with limited strength to further its colonial expansion. The Dutch Empire's core interests in Asia mainly concentrated within the boundaries of the NEI, and it had very few stakes in China. Additionally, the Netherlands did not a suffer heavy loss during WWI thanks to its neutral status. While the British Empire was in decline amid various crises across the globe, it is fair to say that the Dutch position in the world remained mostly the same in the immediate post-WWI years. Although China went through radical changes between 1925 and 1927, what concerned the Dutch the most was whether the Chinese Revolution would expand to Indonesia through the overseas Chinese network.[2] According to the 1930 census, the Indies Chinese population was 1.2 million.[3] Although the number is comparable to that of Chinese in Malaya (1.7 million in 1931), they accounted for only 2% of the total population (60.7 million)—a significantly lower percentage compared to Malaya's 39%.[4] While the Dutch surveillance apparatus did pay attention to the political activities connected to China, dealing with the upsurge of the Indies Chinese movement was hardy the NEI government's primary focus.

By contrast, the rise and fall of Indonesian communism during 1925-27, a predominantly native movement, was far more troublesome in the eyes of the colonial authorities. Although the ARD did not start producing the *PPO* until March 1927, the NEI government had carried out repressive measures against communism long before the PKI uprisings.[5] In fact, scholars have

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[1] The first revolt took place in Java in November 1926 and the second in West Sumatra in January 1927. The NEI government suppressed both insurrections within a few days.

[2] Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië*, LXXXV

[3] Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië*, LXIII.

[4] Evert van Imhoff and Gijs Beets, "A Demographic History of the Indo-Dutch Population, 1930–2001." *Journal of Population Research* 21, no. 1 (2004): 54; Vlieland, *British Malaya, A Report on the 1931 Census*, 38.

[5] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 290-322;

already carefully studied the domestic operations of the NEI police agencies.[6] Moreover, there were also heated discussions of the PKI issues in the public sphere: not only did the NEI press cover the communist movement in great detail, but the print media in Malaya also reported such issues in a timely and elaborative manner.[7] This section is not going to repeat the discussions of how the Dutch authorities reacted to the upsurge of the communist insurgencies in Indonesia. Instead, I will investigate what happened before, during, and after the PKI uprisings from the perspective of colonial officials in Malaya. Additionally, by using *PPO* records, I will illustrate anxieties of the Dutch towards communist activities beyond the NEI borders. Discussions will focus on why Dutch authorities saw the nearby British colonies—especially Singapore—as the hotbed of Indonesian communism, which they had to deal with by cooperating with their Malayan counterparts.

(1) The first period: months leading up to the Java revolt (December 1925—October 1926):
Due to the increasing communist disturbances, the NEI government started to take increasingly stringent measures against the PKI and affiliated organizations starting from the second half of 1925. The government was particularly concerned about the unremitting strikes of workers in shipping, machinery, and sugar plantations, as officials commonly believed that "all the strikes may be traced directly or indirectly to communist instigation."[8] As a result, Dutch authorities carried out crackdowns on PKI organizations in the so-called hotbed cities such as Surabaya, Padang, and Batavia. The repressive measures resulted in the arrest of three important PKI leaders: Darsono, Aliarcham, and Mardjohan. While Darsono managed to obtain the permission to leave the country, the government banished the latter two to New Guinea, a remote territory on the eastern end of the Indonesian Archipelago.[9] The NEI police also arrested the entire editorial staff of two communist newspapers named "Nyala" and "Api" for publishing anti-government articles.[10] The NEI government also enforced regulations to prevent communist organizations from holding public meetings and private gatherings, which forced the PKI to adopt a Soviet-style cell system to continue clandestine operation in smaller groups. Dutch authorities not only banned many PKI-controlled trade unions but also requested business owners to dismiss any employee who showed communist tendencies.[11]

In the meantime, the government also kept a close watch on other forms of political activities, especially those under the banners of Islam and nationalism. From the Dutch perspective,

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[6] Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University), 47-74; Harry Poeze, "Political intelligence in the Netherlands Indies," in *The Late-Colonial State in Indonesia; Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies 1880-1942*, ed. Robert Cribb (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), 229-245.

[7] Xie Kankan, "The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited: New Discoveries from Singapore's Digital Newspaper Archives." *Chapters on Asia*. Singapore: National Library Board, 2018, 277-282.

[8] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 6.

[9] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 226, No. 37, March 1926, 4.

[10] The publications officially ceased to exist on May 1, 2016, as the new press law came into effect. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 7; CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 250, No. 38, April 1926, 5.

[11] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 226, No. 37, March 1926, 4.

boundaries between such movements were usually quite blurry, and some of them were in fact intimately connected to the PKI.[12] In August, for instance, the PIB analyst noted that the Indonesian Study Club (*Indonesische Studieclub*), an educational association founded by nationalist intellectual Raden Soetomo, had decided to consolidate its branches and turn into a well organized political party. Such a move was alarming when Singgih, a young leader of the organization, urged at a meeting that "the colored races to combine themselves against the While peril in Asia."[13] Again in October, Dutch authorities claimed that the Study Club had been trying to unite with other nationalist groups and was getting increasingly inclined towards communism. Singgih openly voiced his discontent with the NEI government by suggesting that the administration had no hope of "regaining the confidence of the people, as confidence in the Dutch administration was lost."[14]

At the end of 1925, the PIB analyst reported that some Chinese took part in a Muslim conference in Djokjakarta, where they spoke as representatives of Confucianism. "The [meeting] was extraordinary in that it was called to allow members of other faiths to express their views," the officer noted with a worrisome tone, "another Chinese gentleman also pleaded for closer cooperation between the native and Chinese sections of the community."[15] Inserting such observations here is rather odd, as the rest of the report primarily concerns with the PKI movement. I suggest that this, in fact, is vividly reflection of colonial officials' anxiety towards the simultaneous rise of communist and Chinese movements.° Although the *MBPI* report does not state explicitly that the conference was related to communism, it indicates a growing tendency, at least in the eyes of colonial officials, that the native movement was going to work closely with the Chinese movement, which was profoundly influenced by political turmoils in China at the time.

What bothered the Dutch authorities the most was the Chinese-Malay press, which allegedly attempted to draw the indigenous population's attention to Chinese affairs by "instill(ing) an anti-imperialist spirit."[16] British intelligence officials spoke highly of their Dutch counterparts for taking repressive measures against the Chinese movement, but they also warned of the danger of the Chinese propaganda through local newspapers:

> The anti-foreign and particularly anti-British feeling aroused amongst the Chinese, in consequence of the events in China, has died down, thanks to the strong attitude of the Dutch Government and the deportation of three members of a vernacular newspaper and the Vice President and Secretary of the Soo Poh Sia Society [Book and Newspaper Reading Society, *Shubaoshe* or 书报社], an offshoot of the Kuo Min Tang [GMD]. The Chinese vernacular press, however, is still indulging in inflammatory articles and the writers are being dealt with according to law.[17]

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[12] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 7.
[13] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 288, No. 42, August 1926, 2.
[14] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 4.
[15] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 7.
[16] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 3.
[17] The Soo Poh Sia first started in Singapore in 1903 as a cultural society where overseas Chinese shared books, organized cultural events, and spread revolutionary thoughts. In subsequent years, it expanded to other parts of Southeast Asia and served as important venues for GMD's propaganda. See Pei Yan, "Haiwai Huaqiao Yu Xinhai Geming Xuanchuan, [Overseas

While anti-communist crackdown was going on in the first half of 1926, the *MBPI* paid particular attention to the radical NEI Chinese press:

> The Chinese Press, more particularly the "Sin Po [News Daily, 新报]," still continues to issue anti-European articles, but the vernacular papers have very little real influence on the public. The 30th May being the anniversary of the firing on the mob in Nanking Road by the Shanghai Police, the "Sin Po" drew attention to the event in a caustic article which went on to accuse Chang Tso Lin [Zhang Zuolin, 张作霖] of prohibiting student demonstration on the anniversary owing to his being blinded by British gold.[18]

In August, the NEI authorities discovered a prospectus for publishing a weekly journal in Romanized Malay, which aimed to foster "closer relations between China and the Overseas Chinese."[19] Similarly in October, the *MBPI* noted that the Ay Kok Thwan (爱国团, or the Patriotic Corps), a Surabaya-based organization, founded a press bureau with the aim of serving the NEI's Chinese-Malay newspapers by providing them translated news from China. The bureau also intended to gather and send Indonesian news to the press in China.[20]

Up until October 1926, the Chinese situation in the NEI was calm despite the GMD's unremitting efforts to collect funds. The *MBPI* reported that many Chinese in East and Mid-Java were active in supporting the Guangzhou Government's Northern Expedition.[21] However, there was no substantial connection between the GMD and the PKI despite their occasional visits to each other. The Chinese activities seemed to be purely of "Chinese outlook," which was not worrisome in the eyes of the colonial government. Some even believed that the Java-born Chinese were more inclined to the colony than to China.[22]

Meanwhile, stringent measures to limit freedom of assembly and expression forced the PKI and the Sarikat Rakyat to go underground. Local branches had no choice but to recruit new members secretly through unusual means. The *MBPI* reported a case, in which the PKI lured hundreds of people to join the party near Batavia. The propaganda was entirely based on a vague promise that an insurgency was about to happen, and that the participation of the army and police forces would ensure the victory. Only those possessing a membership card could claim the benefit of the revolution. However, the PKI suffered a setback in Sumatra, where a large number of communists surrendered after the devastating earthquake in July. People asked for forgiveness of the authorities, as they believed that the natural disaster manifested the wrath of the heaven. Although the government managed to curb subversive propaganda in the rank of armed forces, dissatisfaction with the Dutch rule was so evident in the society that communist doctrines had no problem

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Chinese and the Propaganda for the Xinhai Revolution]" *Zhongguo Shehuikexue Xuebao* [Bulletin of Chinese Social Sciences], December 15, 2011.

[18] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 269, No. 40, June 1926, 2-3.

[19] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 288, No. 42, August 1926, 1.

[20] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 3.

[21] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 288, No. 42, August 1926, 1.

[22] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 3.

reaching sympathetic audience inside the native population.[23]

In September, Andries Cornelis Dirk de Graeff succeeded Dirk Fock as the new Governor-General of the NEI. At his inauguration ceremony, De Graeff proclaimed that he was sympathetic towards "purely national ideas" and he would adopt a benevolent approach to such political movements. As a result, the NEI government was going to carry out suppression only against communism, so that the indigenous population would regain the "lost confidence in the justice of the government." The PIB interpreted De Graeff's speech as a sign that Dutch authorities would soon modify the repressive yet ineffective policy implemented by the Fock administration.[24]

As early as July 1926, seized documents already revealed that PKI members in Batavia had decided to launch a revolt once the party received funds from Moscow. However, PKI leaders outside of NEI strongly opposed the plan by asserting that the time was not ripe for violence and Moscow was unlikely to provide such kind of financial support. Although the authorities suspected that Semaun drafted the document in Moscow, it was Tan Malaka who had written the instructions in the Philippines and passed them on to Alimin. Dated 23 February, Tan Malaka pointed out that the current situation in the NEI was unfavorable for an uprising, which would yield no result but obstacles to impede future struggles. He went on by advocating for greater autonomy for local PKI branches, tentatively moving the party headquarters from Java to Singapore, and holding a conference there as soon as possible. What remained unclear though, was whether Alimin presented such a document to the attendees.[25] At the end of the same report, the *MBPI* printed a speech by Henk Sneevliet, PKI's Dutch founder, at a meeting of the Communist Party of Holland (CPH):

> The party in Holland does not yet fully appreciate the Indian [NEI] movement. They must extend their work in this field. When strikes occur in India [*sic*], and they are soon to be expected, we must strengthen this resistance by sympathetic strikes. The Comintern did well to unite the affairs affecting British and Netherlands India under one leadership. We must listen to the call for strong support, and must remember that all is directed at annihilation of white dominion.[26]

(2) The second period: the two revolts and their immediate aftermath (November 1926–Feb 1927). The communist uprising finally broke out on the night of 12 November 1926. The November issue of the *MBPI* covered the issue in great detail, which occupied two full pages of the five-page bulletin. It reported that the Dutch authorities quickly suppressed most of the rebellions except for the one in Banten, where the uprising was "of a more popular character." The author noted that the majority of the rebels were peasants and coolies who had been "hypnotized" by a small number of communist agitators. The report suggests that while only a handful of communist leaders had been in contact with European communists and therefore, "assimilated some of the doctrines," ordinary members were "entirely ignorant of the articles of the communist faith." Predictably, these people "laid down their arms with alacrity at the command of numerically insignificant bodies of government officials or police."[27] Despite the revolt's limited impact, the Dutch authorities carried

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[23] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 4.
[24] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 298, No. 43, September 1926, 2.
[25] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 286, No. 41, July 1926, 6.
[26] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 286, No. 41, July 1926, 6.
[27] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 3-4.

out a wholesale crackdown on communist organizations by arresting every known communist leader across the colony regardless of whether their connection to the uprising had been authenticated. The *MBPI* author believed that such an action had "a most salutary effect" and by the end of November, the number of the arrested had reached several hundred, within which direct offenders were punished in the first instance.[28]

The *MBPI* also noted that the revolt was premature, as manifested by the fact that although the PKI had an extensive network across the NEI, the uprisings were confined to West Java only. Based on intercepted letters, both Dutch and British authorities seemed to be well aware that there had been conflicting views among PKI leaders. Tan Malaka opposed the Prambanan Decision, as he believed that the party lacked proper preparation and the timing was not ripe to rise against the government. Other PKI leaders in favor of the plan ignored Tan Malaka's warning and launched an ill-organized uprising without reaching a broad consensus among the party leadership. The *MBPI* speculated that such a reckless move could be partly attributed to the change of political climate under the new Governor-General De Graeff, who claimed that he would adopt a more humanitarian approach to deal with native political movements. While people in the colony commonly regarded this shift as a critical departure from the severe repressive measures carried out under the previous administration, communists seized the rare opportunity to act quickly by initiating a rebellion.[29] Finally, the report suggested that the real underlying force was nationalism against European domination:

> Although the outbreak has been completely quelled, and the communist party has received a setback, unless something is done to remove the underlying causes of the revolt it can only be a question of time before a new and stronger nationalist party arises, wise in the knowledge of past defeats and conscious of the immense power which can be exerted by an organized proletariat even if it does not resort to arms for victory.[30]

In the wake of the Java rebellion, Dutch authorities adopted stern measures to prevent similar unrest from repeating in the future. Besides punishing the direct offenders, the government was also quick to set up special tribunals to deal with known communist leaders who had not necessarily taken part in the riot.[31] Many of these suspects were sentenced to banishment in Boven Digul, a penal settlement in New Guinea.[32] The NEI government also decided to establish a more extensive intelligence network, in addition to strengthening the police and military forces. Given the intensified repression, it was doubtful that Governor-General de Graeff was going to keep his promise by gradually introducing more autonomy to the Indies society.[33] While the NEI government was still busy handling thousands of PKI members and affiliates in Java, another bloody riot broke out on the West Coast of Sumatra at the end of December. Besides occupying a railway station and a telegraph office, communist rebels also murdered some local officials and schoolteachers. In return, Dutch authorities killed hundreds of troublemakers to appease the situation.[34]

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[28] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 3.
[29] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 4.
[30] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 4.
[31] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 329, No. 47, Jan 1927, 3.
[32] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 3.
[33] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 329, No. 47, Jan 1927, 3.
[34] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 329, No. 47, Jan 1927, 2.

Meanwhile, intelligence officers in Malaya conducted separate analyses. Although there was ample evidence that the PKI plotted the riots, the British were not content with interpreting the rebellions as merely belong to a homegrown movement. Instead, they were obsessed with connecting the local rebellions—sometimes with unsubstantiated speculations—to international events at the time. For instance, the *MBPI* stated immediately after the Java uprising:

> There can be no doubt that the outbreak was actually organized by the PKI, or Communist Party in Java, as evidenced by the concerted character of the rising, the secrecy with which the plans were laid, and the choice of the birthday of Sun Yat-sen as the day on which the rising was to occur.[35]

It is reasonable to accuse the PKI of launching the uprising, but no evidence suggests that the party deliberately chose to revolt on Sun Yat-sen's birthday. Far-fetched as such a statement may sound in a supposedly credible official document, one cannot help to wonder what made the British intelligence officers think this way. We will remember that at the turn of 1926 and 1927, the communist-influenced GMD Leftwing was in its heyday in China. Having achieved significant military success in the Northern Expedition, the Nationalist Government had just moved its capital from Guangzhou to Wuhan under the leftwing leadership of Wang Jingwei. The Wuhan Government adopted the so-called "revolutionary diplomacy" against Western powers through mass mobilization. As a result, the anti-British sentiment reached a climax towards the end of 1926, which ultimately lead to the British losing two concessions in the midst of anti-imperialist riots.

Although the upsurge of anti-British riots in China happened almost simultaneously with the PKI uprisings in Indonesia, the two movements were not directly connected. It was a sheer coincidence that a series of riots broke out consecutively in the two countries within a relatively short time. Nevertheless, I argue that such a coincidence matters as it shaped how colonial officials perceived the communist menace. In both cases, British and Dutch authorities considered the Soviet Union as the mastermind behind the Chinese and Indonesian revolutions. While Soviet agents such as Mikhail Borodin did play a crucial role in the radicalization of the Nationalist Government in China, it was hardly the case in Indonesia. As I demonstrated in Chapter One and Two, the Comintern influence in Indonesia was negligible, and PKI uprisings took place when the top party leadership was either in prison or exile. While the PKI movement was burgeoning, the GMD was also active in strengthening its influence among the overseas Chinese under the tutelage of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People (San Min Zhuyi, □□□□□□□□), which often combines nationalism with pro-communist and anti-imperialist elements during this period.[36] To a large extent, the concurrent riots further aggravated the fear towards international communism—not only were Asian revolutions connected to the same Comintern network, but the communist parties were now capable of carrying out (presumably) orchestrated actions. Dangerous as the two movements were in their own right, the potential that Chinese and Indonesian revolutionaries might join hands in anti-imperialist struggles was no doubt even more alarming in the eyes of British and Dutch officials.

Despite the similar anxiety towards the rising communist threat, British and Dutch authorities

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[35] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 312, No. 45, November 1926, 4.

[36] Sun Yan-sen's Three Principles of the People are also known as the San-Min Doctrine or Tridemism, which include nationalism, democracy, and the livelihood of the people.

reacted differently, as reflected through their differing priorities in their intelligence documents. While British officials had always been watching political situations in China and Indonesia, their primary concern was the potential penetration of communism in the colony through the Malayan Chinese community. As I will explain in greater detail in the following section, British intelligence organs paid more attention to activities related to Chinese communism rather than the passing-by PKI leaders. By contrast, it was not until the outbreak of the PKI uprisings that the ARD started to distribute the *PPO* among a handful of top NEI officials. The *PPO* reports are organized thematically, which always begin with a section entitled "Extremist (Communist) Movements." Such an arrangement shows that the PKI movement was of the NEI government's primary concern. Although the section on the Chinese movement is also an integral part, discussions mainly focus on the Indies Chinese instead of the political situation in China. Additionally, the coverage of the Chinese movement is also considerably shorter compared to sections on native movements.[37] Dutch authorities might have grave concerns over Chinese nationalism, and it was not the top priority in the immediate aftermath of the PKI revolts. As a consequence, Governor-General de Graeff announced that the NEI government would not prohibit the Indies Chinese from remitting funds to support the revolutionary government in Canton. The Dutch authorities also gave the green light to attend the Military Academy in Whampoa. The school's NEI recruits could travel to China without hindrances, but in so doing, they must renounce their status as Dutch subjects.[38]

(3) The third period: handling new threats after the collapse of the PKI (March 1927–August 1927)
Under the full-scale crackdown of the NEI government, the PKI completely dissolved as a functional organization. In its first few issues, the *PPO* reports that Dutch authorities took serious actions in suppressing PKI remnants throughout the colony. As a result, attempts to resurrect the party leadership invariably failed due to the endless arrests, imprisonment, and banishment. In colonial authorities' intelligence accounts, however, the specter of communism still lingered around. Some PKI branches managed to continue clandestine operations despite the heavy-handed suppressions. Not only was the government unable to completely eradicate existing communist threats, but new organizations also kept springing up across the NEI in the forms of labor unions, study clubs, and religious groups. The government thus suspected that communist members at large might carry out subversive activities through other means, especially under the guise of nationalist and religious movements.[39] Consequently, Batavia ordered regional governments to identify new PKI leaders and update lists for imprisonment.[40]

Ever since the launch of the *PPO*, ARD officials frequently warned that "communist action has not yet come to a standstill and that vigilance is still required."[41] They paid special attention to the rumors about the new PKI uprisings. In its inaugural issue, for instance, the *PPO* reported that PKI remnants were planning to carry out new revolts on May 1. The rumor caused enormous fear among government officials, especially with the subsequent discoveries of firearms and bomb conspiracies in Semarang, Surakarta, Batavia and West Sumatra. Meanwhile, colonial prisons were

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[37] Besides communism, the native movements also include those under the banner of nationalism, religion, trade union, and so forth. See *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February, 1927, 1-18.
[38] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 329, No. 47, Jan 1927, 3.
[39] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February, 1927, 1-5; *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), March, 1927, 19-21; *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), April, 1927, 31-33; *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May, 1927, 47-50.
[40] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February, 1927, 1.
[41] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February, 1927, 5.

also in a state of chaos, as the authorities repeatedly found PKI leaders teaching secret lessons to their fellow inmates. The *PPO* reported a case in a Surabaya prison, where PKI members attempted to escape by overpowering prison guards. In response, the government expedited the process to banish PKI members to Boven-Digul, a prison camp in the remote jungle of New Guinea.[42] Dutch authorities were also extremely anxious about the PKI's revival. The government discovered that the PKI reinstated some of their sub-sections based on the so-called "five-man cell system" with a double-management board at the top. To maintain the secrecy of the clandestine organizations, members' identities were only known within the cells while women served as the nexus between different sub-sections.[43] Through such an arrangement, the new PKI sub-sections were able to carry on propaganda and infiltrate into the government and Dutch companies.

Starting from April 1927, the *PPO* repeatedly suggested that PKI members at large were active in establishing contact with Chinese radicals who "urged natives to no longer follow the orders of the (Dutch) administration."[44] In Solo, the government discovered a Chinese association named Thay Tong Hwee. Under the guise of providing funeral services, the association recruited a large number of natives, who were allegedly former members of the PKI's mass organization Sarekat Rakyat. The Thay Tong Hwee reduced entrance fees to encourage the broader participation of the natives. Dutch authorities considered such an organization dangerous, as its populist outlook was reminiscent of Moealimin, a PKI-influenced Islamic association which instigated a political movement in early 1926.[45] Similarly, in May, the intelligence service of the Batavia police reported that they had unveiled a PKI plan to rebel at the city's annual Pasar Gambir Fair. What was particularly alarming about this plan was that the PKI rebels seemed to have secured support from Chinese radicals.[46]

As there was a growing tendency that two groups would join hands, the Dutch government tightened the surveillance of the Chinese community during this period. In both Java and Sumatra, the police discovered Chinese organizations that displayed "communist characters (*communistisch ka-rakter*)." In Kediri, for instance, a secret society named Kong Sing used the identical insignia of the PKI and SR; In Bengkulu, an association named Djin Sioe Song Soe Hwee not only promoted the unity among the Chinese but also called for further cooperations with native revolutionaries to topple the Dutch rule.[47] The *PPO* accused the Indies Chinese press of adopting an uncooperative attitude towards the authorities' anti-communist actions. From the government's perspective, Chinese newspapers such as the *Perniagaan*, *Sin Po*, and *Sin Yit Po* were undoubtedly the most intractable troublemakers, which suggested the Chinese not to participate in any anti-communist activities because "the communist movement, both in China and the Indies, aims to give freedom to the country and people."[48]

Meanwhile, there were growing rumors that PKI uprisings would break out again in Sumatra, especially in the areas adjacent to the British colony:

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[42] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February 1927, 4.
[43] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), March 1927, 21.
[44] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), April 1927, 32.
[45] Xie Kankan, "The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited", 279.
[46] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 49.
[47] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), April 1927, 43.
[48] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 55-56.

> On the island of Bais (Batu Islands - Tapanoeli Region), it was rumored that an uprising would break out simultaneously with disturbances in Singapore. Some clandestine firearms would be brought from Natal and Aerbangis by boats. Although these messages apparently stand alone, they may not be neglected, not least because successively a number of people arrested in connection with the November riots—those who could not be considered for internment or prosecution—were released from the prisons. These people include, of course, people who are not free of feelings of revenge towards the administration and police. From Bantam, for example, reports were received that some of the released PKI members would be willing to take revenge on the police.[49]

A month later, the Dutch police raided a Hainanese-Chinese association in Tanjung Pinang, Riau Islands, a major town off the coast of Singapore. The government believed that the association belonged to the Communist Youth (CY), which was directly connected to the CPC and GMD leftwing in China. J.A.M Bruineman, the Chief Advisor for Chinese Affairs, summarized the purpose of this organization as striving for "the assimilation of the masses, youth, and the proletariat."[50] Specifically, the organization advocated that the Chinese should join hands with the natives in the continuous struggles against British and Dutch colonialism. A confiscated document spoke highly of the failed PKI revolution and regarded it as an "exceptionally brilliant act in the history of the racial revolution (*Rassenrevolutie*)." Another pamphlet, however, remarked pessimistically but suggested that the Chinese should play a more important role in the anti-colonial struggles in the region:

> Weak peoples in the colonies of the Southern Archipelago and the neighboring countries are unable to start a movement for their independence, so they need a more advanced country [China] that has already achieved success in the revolution to support them and to serve them as their main strength.[51]

The ARD believed that people in charge of such propaganda resided in Singapore, as British authorities discovered identical documents, which could be linked to the colony's illegal Nanyang General Labor Union (NGLU). Although the Riau branch was the first of its kind found in the NEI, documents indicated that such organizations also existed in places such as Palembang and Batavia.[52] Unsurprisingly, British intelligence officials also paid close attention to the similar issues. The May issue of the *MBPI* reported explicitly that the NEI police discovered a vital meeting record, in which delegates discussed actions to be taken against Dutch imperialism and formulated a task to offer active assistance to the native population in their revolutionary struggles.[53]

After investigating the seized documents, the NEI Advisor for Chinese Affairs concluded that a regional Chinese communist organization had been formed in Bangkok, and the organization was expanding rapidly in the entire South Seas (Nanyang) area. Among many seized documents was a publication of the Bangkok-based General School, which was compiled by a certain Lan Tjong

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[49] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), April 1927, 31.

[50] *"Massa-assimilatie, jongelieden-assimilatie en bezitlooze-klasse-assimilatie,"* See *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 57.

[51] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 57.

[52] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 57.

[53] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 341, No. 49, May 1927, 5.

Tjie. The author put forward some suggestions to fight against British and Dutch imperialism, and emphasized that the Chinese should "mingle with the natives in order to generate revolutionary ideas among them."[54] While being extremely cautious of the Chinese movement's recent development, Dutch authorities considered it as primarily a trouble facing their British counterparts:

> [Lan Tjong Tjie] hoped that the organization would grow from 150 to 4000 members in three months. It is worth mentioning, however, that this movement was observed in Singapore among the Hainanese Chinese…this can be regarded as a favorable factor for the NEI, since the number of such 'animals' who settled in this country is small.[55]

While busy dealing with the potential revival of the communist movement through Chinese-native cooperation, the fear that the PKI had infiltrated into the military also caused enormous anxieties among Dutch officials. In July, the government sentenced the PKI leader Soediro to six years of imprisonment for carrying out propaganda in the army, especially among the Menadonese soldiers stationed in Bandung and Semarang. The *PPO* noted that Soediro and his assistants had spent a lot of money in their work, which suggested that they had not only collected money from PKI sympathizers but also received financial assistance from the Comintern. "This is extremely dangerous," the *PPO* report added, "conducting powerful and systematic propaganda in the army is one of the primary goals of the Third International." As a result, Dutch authorities detained more than 70 soldiers for participating in Soediro's work.[56]

Related to the detainment of suspected soldiers, Dutch authorities received intelligence that the PKI's remaining forces would rise again in Batavia and Bandung on July 17. Although the government successfully nipped the movement in the bud, it was disturbing that again, many participants of the aborted rebellion were dismissed Menadonese soldiers. The *MBPI* nicely summarized the frustration of the Dutch government:

> The disaffection of the Menadonese soldiery is a source of anxiety to the government of the NEI, which had heretofore placed implicit trust in their Menadonese and Ambonese Regiments, the rank and file of which, being Christian, are felt to have little in common with the aims of Nationalist and Islamic Java.[57]

Dutch authorities first suspected that a European civil servant named De Jeer reorganized the former soldiers and served as a military advisor to the PKI. De Jeer was particularly suspicious because he was allegedly connected to Ernest Douwes Dekker, a Eurasian nationalist leader known

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[54] "*…in de Zuidzee-eilanden wordt aanbevolen zich te mengen onder Inlanders (Maleiers, Klingen, Javanen, enz.) om bij hen de revolutionnaire ideeen op te wekken.*" In the Southeast Asian context, Keling denotes to people of South Asian (esp. Indian) origin. See *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 58.

[55] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), May 1927, 58.

[56] "*Men heeft deze geheele, uiterst gevaarlijke actie overigens te zien in het licht van de voorschriften der 3e Internationale welke als een der eerste plich-ten der communistische partijen voorop stellen een krachtige syste-matische propaganda in het leger.*". See *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), July 1927, 77.

[57] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 347, No. 51, July 1927, 1.

for his pro-independence agenda.[58] However, the police found out in the following month that despite De Jeer's anti-government attitude, he was not directly connected to the PKI leadership.[59] Moreover, Dutch authorities eventually confirmed that rebellious troops did not exceed 50, which were far fewer than what had been previously speculated. Similarly, there was no concrete evidence substantiating the government's suspicion that Moscow masterminded the July 17 incident.[60]

Although many intelligence reports turned out to be false alarms, the Dutch police conducted a comprehensive house-searching operation against the Perhimpoenan Indonesia (Indonesian Association, PI hereafter) in the Netherlands. Chaired by Mohammad Hatta, the PI was a leftist organization of native NEI students.[61] Semaun, the exiled PKI leader in Moscow, was believed to be the "active spirit" who issued orders to communist members on the ground.[62] Information collected in this raid suggested that the PI had been serving as the communication channel between the Comintern and the communist organizations in the NEI. The Study Club, a society of native intellectuals in Bandung, functioned as the agency receiving commands from Moscow via the PI.[63] Additionally, the Dutch police discovered that Semaun and Hatta had signed an agreement on 5 December 1926, roughly one month after the Java uprising. According to the agreement, the PKI and any reinstated communist organizations would fully support PI's struggles, as long as the latter party would consistently pursue the goal of national independence. Dutch authorities interpreted the agreement as a sign that the PKI had transferred the party's leadership role in the Indonesian revolution to the PI. In other words, as early as the end of 1926, top PKI leaders had already realized that the party would have very slim chance to survive the anti-communist suppressions and that the communist movement could only continue by participating in nationalist struggles for independence from this point onward.[64]

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[58] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 347, No. 51, July 1927, 2.

[59] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), July 1927, 77.

[60] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 347, No. 51, July 1927, 2.

[61] Mohammad Hatta would later become Indonesia's first vice president after independence. The Dutch authorities suspected that Hatta was affiliated with the PKI movement because of his appearance at the Executive Committee of the League against Imperialism in Brussels. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 347, No. 51, July 1927, 2.

[62] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 354, No. 52, Aug 1927, 2.

[63] The Study Club was first established by Raden Soetomo in Surabaya. Raden Soetomo was both a member of the PI while studying in the Netherlands and a founding member of Budi Utomo, the NEI's first political society. The purpose of the Study Club was to provide a common meeting ground for students returned from Europe and local activists. The Bandung Branch was formed in 1925, which consisted prominent figures such as Tjipto Mangunkusumo, Douwes Dekker and Sukarno. See Nationalism and modernist reform Paul Kratoska and Ben Batson, "Nationalism and Modernist Reform," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 268.

[64] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), July 1927, 90.

2. Situation in China

The *MBPI* tells us a great deal about what the colonial state's security concerns were. With rare exceptions, the *MBPI* during the 1925-27 period almost always starts with a section entitled "Affairs in China," which usually occupies more spaces than reports on other areas. Information regarding NEI, French Indochina, and the Middle East usually come in secondary places. Such an arrangement shows that the political situation in China was a major concern of the colonial authorities in Malaya.

Three reasons led to this result:

Firstly, while Britain was struggling to recover from the damage of World War I (WWI), the myriad empire encountered worrisome situations from multiple fronts. The rise of anti-imperialist movements across the colonized world, the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, as well as the rise of Japan and the United States under the Post-WWI Washington Naval Treaty, all posed unprecedented challenges to the British supremacy.[1] The British Empire had a vested interest in China ever since the Opium War in the mid-19th century. However, the Sun Yat-sen-led nationalist movement toppled the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Despite lingering turmoils in the following years, there was a growing demand from the Chinese side to abolish unfair treaties signed between the Western powers and the Qing Court. As one of the biggest beneficiaries of such treaties, the British faced increasing pressures of losing various privileges such as the possession of settlements and control of customs. China's anti-imperialist sentiment reached a climax in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement of 1919[2]. Nationalist leaders managed to mobilize a large number of workers and peasants to join the continuous struggles against foreign powers and their proxy warlords in China. It was also under this backdrop that radical intellectuals founded the CPC in 1921.[3]

Secondly, China's political landscape underwent rapid changes during 1925-1927. To fight for the country's unification, Sun Yat-sen and his Nationalist Party (Guomindang or GMD) established the Guangzhou Military Government in 1921 with the aim of ending the rule of Northern Warlords.[4] From 1923 onward, the Guangzhou Government started to receive

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[1] John Gallagher, "Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire, 1919–1922." Modern Asian Studies 15, no. 3 (1981): 355–56.

[2] The May Fourth started as a student protest against the Chinese Beiyang government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, which allowed Japan to take previously German-controlled territories in China's Shandong province. The protest later turned into a nationwide anti-imperialist movement with broad mass support. See Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 11-12.

[3] Hao Zhidong, "May 4th and June 4th Compared: A Sociological Study of Chinese Social Movements," *Journal of Contemporary China.* 6, no. 14 (1997): 97.

[4] Although the Sun Yat-sen-led Xinhai Revolution managed to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Yuan Shihai, who controlled the military in the North, soon became the provisional president of the Republic of China and the self-declared Emperor of China in 1915. Sun failed several times in his continued struggles against Yuan and was forced to seek asylum overseas. He returned to China in 1917 to fight for China's reunification.

assistance from the Comintern by allowing CPC members to join the GMD individually.[5] Despite Sun's abrupt death in March 1925, the GMD-led National Revolutionary Army (NRA) managed to launch the Northern Expedition a year later. With the NRA's military success, the nationalist government gradually transformed itself from one of many provincial powers into a formidable establishment with nationwide influence. However, due to the growing tensions between the GMD and CPC, and between the left and right factions within the GMD itself, China's political situation remained very unpredictable to foreign observers at that time. Meanwhile, as several anti-foreign incidents broke out in cities newly occupied by the NRA, allegedly under the influence of the Comintern-influenced CPC and the GMD Leftwing, an unprecedented uneasiness arose inside the foreign communities in China. In response, western powers reacted by combining repressive measures (against communist elements) with proactive negotiations (with the GMD Rightwing).[6] With a significant presence in China, the British were particularly worried about the unimaginable consequences of a possible communist takeover of the Chinese Revolution, which would undoubtedly further undermine its interests in the entire Far East.

The third reason has to do with the sheer size of the Chinese community and the rapid increase of new immigrants in British Malaya throughout the 1920s. According to the 1931 Census of British Malaya, the Chinese population was 1.7 million, as compared to 1.2 million in 1921. While the Chinese accounted for 39% of the total population of British Malaya, the percentage in the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang, and Malacca) was almost 60%.[7] The majority of the Chinese population came from Southern provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian, and Hainan[8], which happened to be the strongholds of the nationalist government. Due to frequent exchanges of people, goods, and information between China and Malaya, China's political situation exerted a profound impact on the overseas community. As the nationalist movement continued to surge in China between 1925 and 1927, the Malayan Chinese community responded with extreme enthusiasm by carrying out numerous anti-imperialist strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations.[9] Intelligence sources during this period indicate that the colonial authorities were genuinely concerned about the penetration of Chinese revolutionaries, both nationalists and communists, into the British colony. Consequently, the colonial apparatus established an extensive surveillance network to keep the Chinese movement in check.

In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on the first and second points by dividing the development of the Chinese Revolution during 1925-1927 into three phases. The paper will discuss the third point in greater detail under the Section 5—"Situation in Malaya."

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[5] To receive military assistance, Sun and Adolph Joffe, a Soviet diplomat, signed the Sun-Joffe Manifesto in January 1923.

[6] Lü Fangshang, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian" [Britain's Reinforcement of Shanghai during the Northern Expedition and the Evolution of its China Policy], *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan* [Journal of Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica], Vol. 27, June (1997): 211.

[7] C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya, A Report on the 1931 Census* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1931), 38.

[8] During the early Republic period, Hainan Island was a special region under the administration of the Guangdong Provinces.

[9] Yong C. F., The Origins of Malayan Communism (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997), 75-78.

(1) The first period (1925–June 1926): the growing communist menace

Without a functioning central government, China was deeply divided under the rule of warlords in the early 1920s. To end this situation, nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen and his newly revived party Guomindang (GMD) established the Guangzhou (Canton) Government with a primary goal of fighting for China's reunification. Ever since its inception, the Guangzhou Government had been grappling with securing external support to strengthen its military capacity. After numerous failed attempts to obtain assistance from the West, Sun turned his hope towards the Soviet Union, which was interested in leading anti-imperialist revolutions worldwide under Lenin's leadership. Moscow agreed to help, but the much-needed aids would be contingent upon the GMD forging a close working relationship with the Communist Party of China (CPC).[10] The GMD accepted the offer, which led to the formation of the First GMD-CPC United Front at the beginning of 1924. To make the alliance work, the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern) devised a "bloc-within" strategy for the CPC by directing its members to join the GMD.[11] It was hoped that the small CPC would gain broader support by joining hands with the nationalists, and eventually take over the leadership of the Chinese Revolution from inside. With Soviet assistance, the United Front established the Whampoa Military Academy (WMA, 黄埔军校) in 1924, which aimed to train competent cadets to serve Guangzhou's military force, the National Revolutionary Army (NRA, 国民革命军).

This period also saw the rapid rise of nationalism across the country. Political forces frequently exploit the sentiment by adding anti-imperialist slogans into their propaganda to gain greater mass support. The GMD and CPC were no exceptions—both parties portrayed imperialism, more than anything else, as the origins of China's national crisis since the 19th century and a hindrance for China's future development.[12] Western powers in China were particularly cautious of the rise of the GMD-CPC Alliance, as the combination of radical Chinese nationalism and the Russia-backed international communism would pose an unprecedented threat to the dominance they had enjoyed since the mid-19th century.

A series events took place during the brief 1925-1926 period, which further galvanized the upsurge of the nationalist movement led by the GMD-CPC United Front. On May 30, 1925, the

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[10] Sun Yat-sen singed Sun-Joffe Manifesto with Adolph Joffe in January 1923, in which the two sides expressed the willingness to cooperate, and that the Soviet Union would provide aids to the GMD's revolutionary struggles for national reunification. In exchange, Sun agreed on the establishment of GMD-CPC United Front, allowing CPC members to join the GMD individually. See William L Tung, *Political Institutions of Modern China*. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1972), 92.

[11] The "bloc-within" strategy originated from Indonesia, where PKI members joined the Sarekat Islam (SI) to participate in the proto-nationalist movement while recruiting members to strengthen the communist party. Henk Sneevliet, the founder of the PKI's predecessor ISDV, who later became a Comintern agent to China, was an important advocate of the "bloc-within" strategy in China. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 76-104; and John Riddell, "Fruits and Perils of the 'Bloc Within,'" *John Riddell* (blog), January 15, 2018, accessed 23 May 2018, https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2018/01/15/fruits-and-perils-of-the-bloc-within/.

[12] Wang Jianwei, "The Chinese Interpretation of the Concept of Imperialism in the Anti-Imperialist Context of the 1920s," *Journal of Modern Chinese History,* 6, no. 2 (2012): 167.

British-controlled Shanghai Municipal Police shot Chinese demonstrators to death in the city's International Settlement[13]. Started as a labor dispute, the incident soon developed into a nationwide anti-imperialist movement with the British as a chief target. Following the May Thirtieth Movement was the Shakee Massacre, in which British and French soldiers killed more than 50 Chinese protesters and wounded 170 more in Guangzhou.[14] The shootings triggered the yearlong Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike (省港大罢工). The Soviet-backed Nationalist Government played a central role in leading the anti-British movement, which requested the British to apologize and threatened to attack the Shamian International Settlement. Workers in Hong Kong responded with great enthusiasm. In the first month alone, around 250,000 people left the city, resulting in an economic crisis that significantly hurt the British.[15] In addition to the strike, the Guangzhou Government also organized boycott campaign of British goods. The British reacted forcefully by adopting a carrot and stick approach by sending a fleet to blockade the Guangzhou Harbor while promising to provide preferential loans for the Guangzhou Government, but neither achieved intended results.[16]

Understandably, intelligence officials in Singapore deeply concerned about the anti-British sentiment in China. Towards the end of 1925, for example, the *MBPI* devoted more than half of its space to "Affairs in China."[17] Besides detailed coverage of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike, British intelligence officers also paid close attention to the boycott of British trade and shipping business. Due to the boycott, British vessels were unable to transport people traveling between China and Malaya despite the colony's high demand for Chinese labors. As a result, the Malayan authorities discovered that many Chinese vessels had been engaging in the illicit business by carrying immigrants to Malaya without proper immigration certificates. The Malayan government found it difficult to impose severe punishments on ship owners and illegal immigrants so long as the conditions on board fulfill the minimum requirement stipulated by the colony's Labor Ordinance. The British authorities found themselves in a dilemma: on the one hand, the British consuls in China refused to issue immigration certificates for non-British vessels in order to break the boycott; on the other hand, however, Malaya was in constant demand for Chinese immigrants and the government was unable to enforce the immigration law

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[13] The incident started as a labor dispute between Japanese employers and Chinese employees, in which Japanese supervisors killed a Chinese demonstrator. Students and workers gathered to hold a mass protest in Shanghai's International Settlement on May 30. However, the authorities started shooting the protesters as the crowd flooded into a police station. This incident is often referred to as the "May Thirtieth Movement." See Ku Hung-Ting, "Urban Mass Movement: The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai," *Modern Asian Studies,* 13, no. 2 (1979): 197-216.

[14] Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community Culture and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 4.

[15] The most serious part of the strike ended in 1925. John Carroll, *Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 99-100.

[16] Lü Fangshang, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," [Britain's Reinforcement of Shanghai during the Northern Expedition and the Evolution of its China Policy], *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan* [Journal of Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica], Vol. 27, June (1997): 191.

[17] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, No. 34, December 1925, 1-6; CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, No. 35, January 1926, 1-4.

effectively as many people openly defied it.[18]

While the anti-imperialist movement was unfolding, the growing tension between the GMD and CPC, as well as the intensifying factionalism within the GMD further complicated the situation. Since March 1925, Sun Yat-sen's abrupt death had triggered intense power struggles between his right-hand man Wang Jingwei and young protégé Chiang Kai-shek, who both claimed to be the rightful heir to Sun's ambivalent political legacy. As the leader of the leftwing faction, Wang called for the continuation of the GMD-CPC alliance; Chiang, on the contrary, worried about the Soviet Union's growing influence in China, urged the GMD to cut its ties with the Soviet advisors and put an end to the United Front. In the months following Sun's death, Wang succeeded Sun as the chairman of the Guangzhou Government, but Chiang was appointed the commander-in-chief of the NRA.[19] British authorities in Malaya paid close attention to the rivalry, as such power struggles could lead to distinct political and economic consequences, which would profoundly affect British interests in China and beyond. Having secured support from both the Soviet Union and the CPC, Wang's GMD Leftwing was seemingly on the rise. As a result, British intelligence officials were particularly concerned about a GMD proposal in early 1926—allegedly under the Leftwing influence—to reestablish an overseas branch in Malaya.[20]

Starting from February 1926, however, the power balance between the two factions started to undergo significant changes. At its Second National Convention, the GMD passed a resolution to deny the right of Mikhail Borodin, the Soviet High Commissioner to South China and GMD's political advisor, to vote in party meetings.[21] Chiang Kai-shek strengthened his position in the rivalry a month later by suppressing an alleged coup against him.[22] Upon noticing a series of unusual maneuvers of the SS Zhongshan, the most powerful warship of the Nationalist navy, Chiang declared martial law and utilized his influence over the WMA and NRA to purge communist elements inside the nationalist government.[23] Chiang also managed to send Wang

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[18] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 188, No. 34, December 1925, 2.

[19] Janet Chen and Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China: a Documentary Collection*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 321.

[20] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 196, No. 35, January 1926, 3. The British government banned the GMD Malaya in 1925, but the party remained active in the colony because the ban was not strictly implemented. It was not until 1930 that the Clementi Administration enforce the ban more forcefully, which essentially put the GMD activities to an end. See Yong C. F. and R. B. McKenna, "The Kuomintang Movement in Malaya and Singapore, 1925-30." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 15, no. 1 (1984), 91.

[21] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 201, No. 33, February 1926, 1.

[22] The coup is commonly known as the Zhongshan Incident (中山舰事件), or the Canton Coup.

[23] On March 18 and 19, 1926, the incident started off as a series of unusual maneuvers of the SS Zhongshan, the most powerful warship of the Nationalist navy. The ship's unusual maneuvers aroused Chiang's suspicion, as he believed that Captain Li Zhilong, a known communist, was operating the ship against him on falsified orders from the GMD Leftwing. Chiang was alerted by repeated phone calls to ascertain his schedule from Wang Jingwei's wife Chen Bijun to his second wife Chen Jieru, and from Deng Yanda, the political director of the WMA. Chiang also heard rumors that the Leftwing had been collaborating with communists to plot a coup, and that Li was working with Soviet Advisor Nikolay Kuibyshev to abduct him to Vladivostok. Historians are still debating whether miscommunication caused the unusual maneuvers of the SS

Jingwei to Europe in the aftermath of the incident[24]. Although Chiang later admitted that the Zhongshan Incident was of only "limited and individual matter," he consolidated his power through the purge and significantly undermined the communist efforts to take over the GMD leadership.[25] GMD-CPC United Front started to crumble from this point onward.

British intelligence officials reported the surprising Zhongshan Incident with great joy, as Chiang thoroughly searched the headquarters of the communist-influenced Central Strike Committee and eliminated many powerful dissidents of the GMD Leftwing. Besides, Chiang also forced some twenty Russians, who served as instructors and advisors in the navy and army, to resign from their posts and leave Guangzhou immediately.[26] Despite Chiang's ascendance, it is noteworthy that leftwing leaders such as Wang Jingwei and Hu Hanmin still held important positions in the party and government. Moreover, the return of Borodin to Guangzhou in April and his appointment as the advisor to the GMD's Political Committee showed that the Soviet influence remained unshakable in the Nationalist Government[27]. We should also bear in mind that at this point, the Guangzhou Government was still a regional power alongside the influential warlords in the North. While watching the GMD's internal split closely, the British did not lend support to Chiang simply because of his anti-communist tendency. Instead, the British authorities paid more attention to GMD decisions that would potentially affect their economic interests in China. Among other things, such decisions included the early settlement of the anti-imperialist boycott, as well as the announcement to abolish the oil and other concessions.[28] An intelligence analyst wrote in an uneasy tone that "General Chiang Kai-shek's signature did not appear on the proclamation (to abolish concessions)," indicating that the anti-imperialist sentiment remained dominant in the Guangzhou Government and the GMD Leftwing could still make decisions unfavorable to the British, which were clearly beyond Chiang's control.[29]

(2) The second period (July 1926–March 1927): communist threat at its peak
Under Chiang's leadership, the NRA launched the long-delayed Northern Expedition in July 1926. The NRA branched out into three columns with Chiang himself commanding the central route to take Nanjing; his close ally Bai Chongxi took the eastern route to capture Shanghai; having returned from Europe, Wang Jingwei was in charge of the third column to take Wuhan. The NRA achieved great military success in the following half year, in which they managed to knock down northern warlords one after another.[30] However, the rift between the GMD's two factions widened as the expedition unfolded: in close collaboration with the CPC and Soviet advisors, Wang's leftwing faction declared the establishment of a new nationalist government in Wuhan. The communist influence continued to rise in the Wuhan Government, which adopted an

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Zhongshan or whether it was indeed part of the coup as Chiang claimed. See Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 101-103.

[24] By sending away Wang and his family for a vacation in Europe, Chiang effectually prevented Wang from intervening in his purge of communists in China. See Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Zhou Enlai: a Political Life* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006), 34.

[25] Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China,* 103.

[26] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 224, No. 37, March 1926, 1.

[27] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 239, No. 38, April 1926, 1.

[28] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 252, No. 39, May 1926, 1.

[29] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 252, No. 39, May 1926, 2.

[30] Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 56-59.

increasingly militant approach to foreign policy. Central to this so-called "revolutionary diplomacy" was the strategy to fight against imperial powers, especially the British, through mass mobilization.[31] On December 22, 1926, Soviet advisor Mikhail Borodin put forward the "Five Anti-British Strategies (反英办法五条)," which threatened to take back British-controlled foreign settlements in Chinese cities. With more than 100,000 people participating in an anti-British demonstration in the next few days, the anti-imperialist sentiment culminated at the turn of the year.[32] According to the *MBPI,* the labor unrest against the British was growing, and Chinese authorities often failed to control the situation. As a result, "strikes and street fights became of almost daily occurrence."[33]

Having realized that the upsurge of nationalist movement was too strong a tide to resist, the British authorities in China adopted a flexible strategy by "combining conciliation with firmness." Specifically, they decided to concede some of their privileges when necessary to avoid confrontation with radical Chinese nationalism; meanwhile, the British would not hesitate to take firm actions to defend themselves when it comes to matters concerning their core interests.[34] In doing so, they showed some friendly gestures in hopes of easing the tension. One of the main compromises was the issuance of "The Christmas Memorandum," in which the British advocated, at least on paper, that Western powers should recognize Chinese people's legitimate demands for self-determination and national independence.[35] The British also expressed their willingness to revise unequal treaties through negotiation and to give customs autonomy back to China in the future.[36] However, as the NRA was approaching the Yangtze Delta region, the British government started to engage in serious plannings of sending more troops to Shanghai--its single most important settlement in China.[37]

In January 1927, two severe anti-imperialist riots broke out in China. Thousands of Chinese protesters swarmed into the British Concessions in Wuhan and Jiujiang, where they looted and damaged a large number of foreign properties. The mob forced British troops and civilians to evacuate, which resulted in the British losing two important settlements within a week.[38] Neither

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[31] The anti-British policy was called "Dandu Dui Ying, Fen Er Ji Zhi (单独对英，分而击之)," literally "isolate and fight against the British, divide others and hit them one by one." See Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 190&198.

[32] Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 199.

[33] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 316, No. 46, December, 1926, 1.

[34] Edmund Fung, The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain's South China Policy, 1924-1931 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.

[35] "The Christmas Memorandum" was also known as "The British Proposals to the Powers Concerning China," or "The December Memorandum." See Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 197.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] The British cabinet decided on December 12 to send two battalions of soldiers plus three cruisers to reinforce Shanghai. See Cabinet Minutes, CAB 23/53 and Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 199.

[38] The British lost its Wuhan settlement on January 3, 1927, and the Jiujiang settlement on January 6. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 326, No. 47, January 1927, 3; and Li Enhan, *Beifa Qianhou de Geming Waijiao, 1925-1931* [The Revolutionary Diplomacy before and after the Northern

the GMD nor CPC claimed responsibility for the incidents, but the British suspected that the CPC—probably instructed by Comintern Agent Mikhail Borodin—had intentionally plotted them.[39] Miles Lampson, the British Minister to China, sworn that the British would take back the lost concessions, as they were primarily concerned with the empire's "dignity." He also feared that such incidents would further jeopardize the stability of port cities such as Tianjin and Shanghai; Furthermore, Lampson suggested that there would be unimaginable consequences if such kind of "retreat" happens in Hong Kong, Singapore, and India.[40]

In their negotiation with the Wuhan Government, however, the British eventually decided to accept the fait accompli and gave up the two lost settlements. By making compromises on such "secondary interests," British authorities hoped that they could concentrate their forces on defending Shanghai, which they regarded as their "primary interests" in China.[41] On January 17, 1927, the British cabinet formally decided to deploy an expeditionary army to defend Shanghai. Consisted of 14,000 troops, the deployment was the empire's largest military operation in China since the turn of the century.[42] Lü suggests that the reinforcement has to do with three reasons: first, the British could not afford to lose Shanghai as it did with Wuhan and Jiujiang, as such a major downfall would inevitably lead to a chain reaction in the entire Far East; Second, the British had heavily invested in the city. As of 1927, nearly half of the British investment in China centered in Shanghai[43]; Third, around two-thirds of British nationals in China resided in Shanghai during this period. Considering the sheer size of the population, it would be extremely difficult to organize the evacuation of civilians if the revolutionaries take the city.[44] As a result, not only did the British augment their armed forces in Shanghai, but also requested their foreign allies to do likewise. Nevertheless, the US and Japan reacted with a lukewarm attitude as neither of them regarded the situation particularly alarming that they need to send troops to protect their interest.[45]

Western powers finally decided to join hands with the British in March, as the tension almost escalated to a breaking point during the NRA campaign to capture Nanjing. NRA soldiers, allegedly under the instruction of communist leader Lin Zuhan, looted foreign properties such as consulates, schools, shops, and residence in the city on March 24.[46] Having received distress signals, British and American warships in the Yangtze River started shelling the Nanjing City. Two British, an American, a Japanese, an Italian, and a French died in the incident. On March 26, NRA Commander Cheng Qian finally managed to restore order in the city and prevent his soldiers from

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Expedition] (Taipei: Xingzhengyuan Guokehui Ziliao Zhongxin, 1995), 58-62.

[39] Li Enhan. *Beifa Qianhou de Geming Waijiao, 1925-1931*, 64.

[40] FO 371/12430, Hankou Telegram, 3 January 1927 (F67-7-10); FO Telegram to Beijing, 10 January 1927 (F111-67-10). Also see Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 199.

[41] Li Enhan. *Beifa Qianhou de Geming Waijiao, 1925-1931*, 66.

[42] The army was later renamed as the "Shanghai Defense Force" or "Shaforce." See Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 202 & 206.

[43] FO, 405/252A, 161-62. See Lü "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 203.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Lü "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 119-203.

[46] Lin Zuhan was both a communist and a member of the GMD Central Executive Committee at the time. He was the Head of the Political Department the NRA's 6th Army during the Nanjing Campaign. See Li Enhan. *Beifa Qianhou de Geming Waijiao, 1925-1931*, 77.

carrying out further hostile actions against foreigners. [47]As the turmoil persisted, the *MBPI* noted that "neither the life nor property of foreigners is secure."[48] Consequently, the critical situation forced the British to shut down their consulates in Chengdu, Chongqing, Yichang, and Changsha. Troops and civilians had to evacuate from these cities.[49]

As nationalist sentiment continued to rise, the British felt increasingly threatened by the meddling of leftwing forces (esp. communist) during this period. It was also alarming that the NRA had taken the entire region south of the Yangtze River within a few months. While warlords still held Northern China, the Nationalist Government was shifting from a provincial power to a national one thanks to its successful military campaigns. Although Chiang Kai-shek seemed to have gained significant power in the process, which the British regarded as a positive sign, GMD's internal conflicts and those with the CPC became increasingly intensified.[50] Such a complicated situation left the British with no option but to stay vigilant towards the changing political landscape in China. An *MBPI* report of January 1927 nicely summarized the British concerns during this period:

> During 1926 the general policy of the GMD in China was strongly nationalist, anti-imperialist and therefore of necessity anti-British. It was not definitely communist or Bolshevik and the relations of the GMD with the USSR were to be those of sympathetic friendship rather than assimilation. This policy depended for its success on the support of the working classes, the peasants, and the students and therefore was anti-capitalist.
>
> While the GMD main object was the freeing of China firstly from all "imperialist" domination, the aim of the Left Wing of the party was to bring the revolution which would secure China for the Chinese into line with the world movement inspired by Soviet Russia, for the liberation of oppressed peoples fro the heel of the "imperialists." Such a revolution when successful would lead to the destruction of imperialism and the capitalist class not only in China itself but also in all "colonies and semi-colonies."[51]

(3) The third period (April 1927–August 1927): anti-communist purge and the collapse of the GMD-CPC United Front

In the aftermath of the Nanjing Incident, Chiang accused the CPC and Wang's Wuhan Government of conspiring against his GMD Rightwing by deliberately stirring up anti-foreign sentiment. Feeling deeply threatened, Chiang suspended the Northern Expedition and started taking more radical measures against the leftist elements. On April 12， the GMD Rightwing carried out a full-scale purge (清党) of the communists in Shanghai, where Chiang ordered to arrest and execute hundreds of CPC members and affiliated union workers.[52] 39 members of the GMD Central Committee in Wuhan responded by denouncing Chiang as having betrayed Sun Yat-sen's pro-communist policies. Serious warnings notwithstanding, Chiang ordered to continue arrests and executions across the country. The Shanghai Massacre resulted in the open split between the GMD left and right factions, which was marked by Wuhan's decision to expel Chiang from the GMD

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[47] Li Enhan. *Beifa Qianhou de Geming Waijiao, 1925-1931*, 77.
[48] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 334, No. 48, March 1927, 3.
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 334, No. 48, March 1927, 2.
[51] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 331, No. 47, January 1927, 3.
[52] Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928*, 104

and the subsequent establishment of the Nanjing Nationalist Government on April 18.[53]

The British welcomed Chiang's bloody suppression of communists, which they described in the April issue of the *MBPI* as a positive event:

> By far the most interesting development in the ever-changing politics of China, the split of the GMD has resulted in the Moderates under Chiang Kai-shek retaining their power in Canton (Guangzhou) and establishing themselves at Nanking [Nanjing], while the Extremists remain in power in Hankow [Wuhan] and Wuhu. In Shanghai, Soochow [Suzhou], Haikow [Haikou], Ningpo [Ningbo], Swatow [Shantou] and Foochow [Fuzhou] the conflict between the Moderate and the Communist groups of the Nationalists has resulted in a victory for the Moderate party. It would seem that Chiang Kai-shek has crushed the Extreme Left Party and the Red Labor Unions.[54]

Known as Ninghan Split (宁汉分裂), the rivalry between the two GMD rival governments in Nanjing and Wuhan existed for a brief period. The nationwide anti-communist purge significantly weakened the GMD Leftwing. As many NRA leaders switched their allegiance to Nanjing, the Wuhan Government soon lost its control over large parts of Hunan and Hubei.[55] Meanwhile, the rapid change of Chinese politics also caused the British to shift their policy. For instance, Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, delivered a speech on China at the House of Commons. In this speech, he contended that the Comintern and the Soviet-supported Wuhan Government should be entirely responsible for the Nanjing Incident. As the GMD had already split, the British should stop acknowledging Wuhan's legitimacy and support Chiang's Nanjing Government instead.[56]

Having noticed the critical situation, Moscow put forward a new resolution, in which Stalin proposed waging an "agrarian-peasant revolution" by creating a new army independent from the NRA and restricting the Wuhan Government.[57] Wang regarded such a resolution unacceptable, which would eventually lead to the destruction of the GMD Leftwing. However, feeling the growing pressure from both the CPC and inside the GMD, Wang declared to break up with the communists and expel the CPC members out of the Wuhan Government on July 15.[58] As the Wang

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[53] James Pinckney Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-72* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 109.

[54] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 334, No. 48, April 1927, 3.

[55] Harrison, *The Long March to Power*,110.

[56] Minutes by Chamberlain, April 25, 1927, FO, 371/12479 (F3964-1530-10). Also see Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 219.

[57] The resolution is based on Stalin's speech, entitled *Revolution in China and Tasks of the Comintern*, at the Eighth Plenum of the ECCI on May 24, 1927. See *Bolshevik*, No. 10, May 31, 1927, reproduced in *Works*, Vol. 9, December 1926-July 1927 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954), pp. 288-318.

[58] Inside the CPC, there were also different opinions as to whether the party should accept the Comintern May Resolution. Chen Duxiu and Mikhail Borodin proposed that the CPC staying within the United Front, as they saw the resolution inapplicable to the situation on the ground; CPC members such as Zhou Enlai, Zhang Tailei, and Li Lisan, however, was in favor of the Comintern instruction to rise against the GMD and accused Chen and Borodin as opportunists. The latter group declared to exit the Wuhan Government on July 13. See Shen Zhihua and Yang

Jingwei clique joined the anti-communist purge, the CPC launched an armed uprising in Nanchang on August 1. Shortly after, the Wuhan Government joined forces with Nanjing (known as Ninghan Rapprochement, 宁汉复合). As a result, the GMD-CPC United Front came to a complete end, which marked the beginning of a civil war that would last for a decade. As the direct communist menace gradually came to an end, the British also started to decrease the number of the Shanghai Defense Force from July onward.[59]

Despite this significant setback of Chinese communism, the British intelligence officials remained vigilant towards the ongoing nationalist movement, as they believed that Chiang's Nanjing Government "cannot do without foreign assistance," and that "there is no country outside of Russia to which they [the Nanjing Government] can turn."[60] The *MBPI* noted that although a large number of Soviet agents ostensibly left Wuhan as a result of Chiang's ceaseless anti-communist campaigns, the Nanjing Government also made great efforts to fix bilateral relations with the USSR by communicating its true intentions to Soviet officials. While the GMD believed that suppressing the CPC was essential to restoring order for carrying on the Northern Expedition, the anti-communist purge should not be interpreted as anti-Russia, and "cordial relationship should be maintained and extended between the two governments."[61] The *MBPI* thus concluded with a very positive tone:

> It may be definitely expected, therefore, that communism, as such, will for some to come to take a secondary place in the Soviet activities in China, and that the basis of the expected Sino-Russian *entente* will be manifested in intensification of the policy of undermining the prestige and economic foundations of the Foreign Powers in the Far East.[62]

In the same report, the British analyst warned that anti-foreign propaganda had been "made to appeal to all classes of Chinese" and was "practically universal" in China:

> The Japanese by landing troops in Tsingtao [Qingdao], the USA by sending Marines to Tientsin [Tianjin] and the necessity for fresh measures to protect the legations as the Northern forces retreat further north, have given fresh cause for renewed propaganda. This Moscow inspired propaganda directed from Shanghai, now acknowledged as the headquarters of the China Communist [*sic*] party, deserves special notice.[63]

Kuisong. *Zhong Su Guanxi Shigang: 1917-1991 Nian Zhong Su Guanxi Ruogan Wenti Zai Tantao* [History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991], (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011), 34-38.

[59] WO 191/10, December 1927, "War Diaries and Headquarters Record." Also see Lü, "Beifa Shiqi Yingguo Zengbing Shanghai yu Duihua Waijiao de Yanbian," 222.

[60] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 349, No. 51, July 1927, 3.

[61] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 349, No. 51, July 1927, 2.

[62] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 349, No. 51, July 1927, 3.

[63] *Ibid.*

Chapter Five: Internalizing Communist Treats in Malaya

1. Introduction

Chapter Four analyzes the political situations in China and Indonesia from the end of 1925 to late 1927. Although the Comintern in one way or another "influenced" the two revolutions by placing them under the same communist banner—at least by categorizing them as belonging to the same "Asian Revolution"—they were not connected in the sense that the two movements had closely coordinated with one another. The concurrent Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions were neither the product of the centralized planning of Moscow nor did the two sides effectively communicated with each other in the course of the two-year period. Coincidentally, however, there were many overlaps and parallels between the development of the two revolutions:

The first period, roughly from late 1925 to the second half of 1926, was the time when communist forces were on the rise. Despite the internal conflicts, the Comintern-supported GMD-CPC United Front gained significant strength by taking advantage of the burgeoning nationalist sentiment across China. With its clearly articulated anti-imperialist policy, the leftwing Guangzhou Government and the communist-influenced nationalist movement posed growing threats to British interests in the country. Similarly, the Dutch colonial authorities faced enormous challenges from the PKI and its mass organizations, accusing them of causing serious strikes and frequent disturbances throughout the colony. Although the government adopted stringent measures to suppress the movement, eradicating communist organizations seemed to be extremely difficult as many of them had penetrated into the core of colonial establishments.

The second period spans from the second half of 1926 to first few months of 1927, when the so-called "communist menace" reached its climax in both China and Indonesia. Having launched a successful Northern Expedition, the strength of the nationalist government grew rapidly under Wang Jingwei's leftwing leadership. As anti-imperialist sentiment continued to rise, the British had to abandon two concessions along the Yangtze River when the angry crowds swarmed into the cities of Wuhan and Jiujiang in January 1927. The British were deeply worried, and as a result, they decided to reinforce Shanghai, one of their most heavily invested city in the Far East. In Indonesia, two major PKI uprisings broke out consecutively at the turn of 1926 and 1927. In the immediate aftermath of the revolts, Dutch authorities launched a wholesale crack down on communism through ruthless arrests, detainment, and banishment.

The third period started around April 1927. From this point onward, revolutions in the two countries began to ebb after communist parties suffered significant setbacks. In China, Chiang Kai-shek gained the upper hand in his rivalry with the GMD leftwing and established the new Nanjing Government. The Shanghai Massacre broke out on April 12, 1927, after which the GMD rightwing carried out a radical purge of communists throughout the country. Unable to curb Chiang's nationwide suppression, the Wang Jingwei's rightwing eventually joined Nanjing's anti-communist campaigns. A ten-year civil war between the GMD and CPC started in August. In Indonesia, the PKI and its associated organizations completely dissolved due to Dutch authorities' full-scale crackdown. Despite sporadic attempts to organize new uprisings, efforts to revive the party invariably failed under the government's tight surveillance. However, anti-

colonial struggles continued, primarily by taking the forms of nationalist or religious movements.

Although the Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions were essentially two separate movements, I argue that the coincidences above matter as they significantly shaped how British and Dutch colonial authorities perceived communism as a common threat. The impact of such coincidences was especially evident in British Malaya for two major reasons: on the one hand, the enormous Chinese population—with a large proportion of newcomers—made the government worry that the anti-imperialist sentiment in China would spread to Malaya through the immigrant groups, which would certainly undermine the colony's stability; on the other hand, the geographical proximity with the NEI determined that British authorities share similar security concerns with their Dutch counterparts. The PKI uprisings across the Malacca Straits sounded the alarm for the British, which made them aware that political disturbances must be handled with strict measures. Moreover, the colonial government was anxious about the possibility that Chinese and Indonesian communists would join hands in anti-colonial struggles. Having realized that Malaya provides an ideal environment for such kind of cooperation to happen, the British took preemptive actions to crackdown on communism, which laid an essential foundation for the Anglo-Dutch anti-communist cooperation in the following years.

This chapter examines how the British dealt with revolutionary activities in Malaya from 1925 to 1927. Paralleled with the periodization of the China and NEI sections, I divide the Malayan situation into three phases, namely: (1) keeping neighbors' revolutions at bay (December 1925–November 1926); (2) Handling PKI fugitives and curbing GMD-CPC activities (December 1926–March 1927); and (3) Taking preemptive actions (From April 1927 onwards).

2. Keeping neighbors' revolutions at bay (December 1925–November 1926)

A. Singapore as a PKI center outside of the NEI;

Ever since the PKI's establishment in the early 1920s, party leaders such as Semaun, Darsono, and Tan Malaka frequently traveled to Malaya. Singapore, in particular, served as a crucial meeting place thanks to its strategic location and relatively safe political environment.[1] From the British-controlled port city, PKI members could either sneak back to Indonesia or proceed to other parts of Southeast Asia, China, the Soviet Union and West Europe. For a long time, Indonesian merchants worked as PKI liaisons. Starting from the second half of 1925, the PKI began to face growing pressures as colonial authorities took increasingly stringent measures against communist activities. In response to the tight surveillance in the NEI, PKI leaders often traveled to Singapore and held meetings there.

The PKI's frequent appearance in Singapore caught the attention of British authorities. In addition to reporting on the NEI political situation on a regular basis, the Political Intelligence Bureau (PIB) pointedly added a new section in the *MBPI* titled "Communist Centre in Singapore," where intelligence officials wrote brief analyses on PKI activities in Malaya. In December 1925, the PIB intercepted a letter by Tan Malaka, in which he informed his comrades of his work in progress and asked if there was any particular group in Malaya that was more receptive to communist

[1] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941*, 7. For early PKI activities in Singapore, See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 129.

propaganda.[2] Based on intelligence from other sources, the police believed that Tan Malaka wrote the letter while in Singapore. The PIB traced the address to a Javanese pilgrim broker named Abdul Ghaffar, who had hosted Mohamed Sanoesi, another Javanese communist, at the same place in June 1925.[3]

In a letter dated 6 November 1925, Tan Malaka told his close comrade Boedisojitro that British Malaya was not a promising place for communist propaganda.

> So far not the slightest advantage is to be seen from the work of our dealers (propagandists) at (Singapore) or at (Penang). You may say that they are quite incapable, but in criticizing it must not be forgotten that the proper (indigenous?) inhabitants there, who only form only a minority, are all conservative in their manner of living and thinking, and are petty bourgeois. On the departure of Hadji Moek from (Singapore), his kindness was invoked to make a visit to the FMS [Federated Malay States]. The impressions which he obtained everywhere did not differ from those gained from Singapore and Penang. The section of people which [*sic*] understands (economy) and (politics) are the (Chinese). In the harbors, in buildings, in the trains, and above all in commerce, the (Chinese) are the most prominent. Nonetheless, their Federation is very weak.
>
> You will understand that in these circumstances it is impossible for us to effect a union. The railway personnel and those in establishments connected with the railway are all Kings. In their circles, no beginning has been made to set up any association. There is not a single daily paper in the Straits or FMS that is read by Malays. In brief, if one looks for a movement in the FMS, it is not to be sought from the side of the Malays. It will certainly come from the Chinese and Klings, whatever sort of movement it may be.[4]

Two months later, the PIB confirmed that Tan Malaka had stayed in Penang in January and returned to Chiang Mai thereafter. As local communists suspected that Abdul Ghaffar's place had been compromised, they switched their postal address to a house rented by local Arab named Sheikh Abdullah Dahlan. Through letters this address, the police tracked down Haji Safie and his father Haji Salleh Surati, pilgrim brokers from Semarang, who had housed Semaun in 1922. Meanwhile, the PIB discovered that well-known PKI leaders such as Musso, Winanta, Boedisoejitro, and Soebakat all gathered in Singapore.[5]

In March, the PIB noticed while Winanta and Abdul Ghaffar returned to Java, PKI leader Sutan Perpateh and his associate Haji Amir Abdu arrived in Singapore. PIB sources indicated that the PKI was planning to hold a major conference in the region to launch a major strike in the NEI. Unable to obtain more details, the PIB suspected that the conference might have already taken place.[6]

In April, the PIB spotted both Boedisojitro and Sutan Perpateh in Penang and Singapore. Perpateh

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[2] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 7.
[3] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 200, No. 35, January 1926, 5.
[4] Words in the parentheses are ciphers in the original letter. The police decoded them after having intercepted it. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 3.
[5] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 223, No. 36, February 1926, 7.
[6] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 230, No. 37, March 1926, 5.

stayed with a pilgrim broker. Soebakat resurfaced in Singapore in the same month. PIB informants reported that the PKI was going to establish a Malay newspaper in the British colony. Additionally, Perpateh founded a club for fellow Javanese and Sumatran sojourners in Province Wellesley. It appeared that the PKI members also planned to establish a similar club in Singapore. Boedisojitro was in charge of finding a right place to house such a club. Haji Jaafar, known to be a close friend of Abdul Ghafar, proposed to form a mutual help association.[7] Shortly after, the PIB noticed that Boedisojitro had left Singapore and taken an intentional detour to evade the Dutch surveillance. However, his attempt was unsuccessful. NEI authorities arrested the PKI leader immediately upon his arrival in Ternate.[8]

The PIB paid close attention to monitoring the personal networks of PKI members in and beyond the Malayan borders. In May, Muhammad Yunus, a native from Padang, launched a Malay newspaper entitled "Malaya." Due to his correspondence with Abdul Ghafar, the PIB watched him closely and suspected that he and his publication might possess "communistic leanings."[9] Around the same time, the NEI police captured Sutan Perpateh in Medan.[10] The PIB reported in the following month that before returning to Indonesia, Sutan Perpateh traveled to Kedah and North Perak, where he collected subscriptions from local Malays and Javanese interested in communism.[11] The PIB also noticed that while residing in Saigon, Tan Malaka had sent out guidance through unpublished pieces to his comrades in the NEI. Seized booklets included *Wasiat Kaoem Militair* (The Will of the Militants), *Semangat Moeda* (The Youth Spirit) and *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Towards the Indonesia Republic).[12]

B. GMD activities in Malaya.

Compared to PKI activities, British authorities were more concerned about the Chinese nationalist movement in Malaya, which was thought to be intimately connected to the ongoing revolution in China. We shall remember that the May 30th Movement of 1925, in which the British police shot Chinese protesters to death in Shanghai, triggered a nationwide anti-imperialist movement. To gain mass support, the communist-influenced Guangzhou Government took advantage of the nationalist sentiment and played a leading role in the protracted Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike against the British. As a result, British authorities banned the Malayan branches in July 1925. However, the ban did not lead to the complete demise of the GMD movement in Malaya. Although the government declared in following months that all GMD branches in Malaya had been closed, “the nucleus of its extensive organizational network remained largely intact.”[13] GMD branches continued their activities in Malaya in the forms of reading rooms, night schools, and cultural bodies.[14]

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[7] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 251, No. 38, April 1926, 5.

[8] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 261, No. 39, May 1926, 4.

[9] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 265, No. 39, May 1926, 5.

[10] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 273, No. 40, June 1926, 4.

[11] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 286, No. 41, July 1926, 5.

[12] The original English titles of the three booklets are *Military Guidance, The Modern Spirit* and *Towards the Indonesia Republic* in the *MBPI* report, which is not accurate. I am using my translation here. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, Oct 1926, 3.

[13] C. F. Yong and R. B McKenna. *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990, 84.

[14] C. F Yong and R. B McKenna, “The Kuomintang Movement in Malaya and Singapore, 1912-1925,” *Jsoutasiastud Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1981): 121–123.

As Yong and McKenna point out, four reasons contributed to the revival of GMD activities when the ban was still in place. First, the GMD's Overseas Bureau, a party organ in charge of forming close ties with Chinese communities abroad, persistently valued the GMD activities in Malaya. Under the leadership of the party's leftist members, the Bureau adopted a radical approach to nationalist movements overseas.[15] After the British banned the GMD, The Bureau frequently sent envoys to Malaya to coordinate the clandestine movement. In May 1926, for example, the Bureau facilitated the establishment of the Nanyang General Labour Union (NGLU), the first leftwing trade union in Malaya. Second, early 1926 saw the influx of graduates of the Whampoa Military Academy (WMA), who "happened to be Hainanese by origin and had been influenced by communists." These WMA students became of the backbone in reestablishing GMD branches and disseminating anti-imperialist ideologies. The third factor has to do with the revolutionary situation in China, especially the Northern Expedition. The military campaigns in China stimulated the reemergence of fund-raising campaigns in which GMD networks played a central role. Lastly, the GMD Left formed the so-called "Main School," a central body responsible for organizing trade unions and night schools. The Main School was especially influential in Singapore, where it controlled 16 out of 21 GMD branches. Both British authorities and the moderate Chinese, which mainly consisted of merchants and community leaders of higher social status, saw the Main School as posing enormous threats to Malaya's political stability during the 1925-27 period.[16]

Having realized that the Malayan GMD remained active following the ban, the colonial government adopted a more vigilant attitude towards radical activities of the Chinese. British authorities labeled the Hainanese, more than any other groups, as the chief troublemakers. To discuss such issues, the PIB specifically created a new section in the *MBPI* entitled "Hailam Affairs in Malaya" in 1926. In March, for instance, the PIB reported that the Singapore police raided the Chi Min Night School when a meeting was in progress:

> Forty-one persons, almost exclusively Hailams [Hainanese], were arrested on a charge of being members of an unlawful society and were sentenced to a short term of imprisonment, whilst five of the leaders were sentenced to heavier terms on a further charge of assisting in the management.[17] On the evening of the arrest, another Hailam was arrested at the Lok Khwan Night School whilst delivering a fervid oration on reprisals. It is noteworthy that although all the persons arrested were in possession of revolutionary and communistic songs, no evidence whatever [*sic*] has been found to connect their activities with any of the local strikes in Malaya.[18]

Along with the arrest, the authority discovered a large number of anti-British materials, which

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[15] In early 1926, the head of the Overseas Bureau is Peng Tse-min (or Phang Chaak Man in Cantonese), who was also elected as one of 36 members of the GMD's Central Executive Committee. Before returning to China, Peng was a Manager of the Kuala Lumpur-based newspaper *Yi Khuan Po.* See Yong and McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 84.

[16] Yong and McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 84-86.

[17] The unlawful society here refers to the South Seas Public Bodies Union, which was just established in February 1926. The Union consists of students, labors, and local GMD members. See Yong and McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 84.

[18] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 235, No. 37, March 1926, 6.

called for active protests against the colonial government. Among the five night schools that the PIB identified as being used for "political propaganda detrimental to the interests of the colony," four of them were Hainanese.[19] The arrest of Hainanese activists and the shut down of night schools triggered a series of anti-British demonstrations in following months, which made the authorities even more attentive to Hainanese activities. In April, the *MBPI* reported that 140 Hainanese had left Singapore for China. The PIB regarded their departure as evidence that revolutionary propaganda had a huge impact on the Hainanese working class in Malaya and suspected that these people would eventually join the NRA.[20] In May, the police seized circulars addressed to "overseas Hainanese" in Penang, the message of which seemed to corroborate the suspicion of the PIB. The circulars depicted Hainan as a peaceful island unaffected by the civil war and advocated that Hainanese should return home and participate in the country's development rather than working as foreigners' slaves.[21] Thousands of people left Malaya in the following months, mainly because of the harsh crackdown on Hainanese activities and deteriorating working conditions. While the authorities appeared confident that the majority of the departed workers were former night school attendants, the continuous outflow of the Hainanese population brought about a subtle sense of anxiety. Finally, PIB analysts wrote in a relieving tone after the arrival of a ship full of Hainanese immigrants:

> ...a ship came in from Hong Kong with about four hundred Hailam [Hainanese] on board, the first to arrive for six months. A fair number of these had been in Malaya before. All were reticent as to how they managed to leave Hainan. From this, and from other information, it would appear that affairs in Hainan are not so peaceful as agitators would make out.[22]

Despite Guangzhou's accusation that British authorities mistreated the overseas Chinese, the Malayan government kept taking stringent measures against Hainanese activities.[23] In addition to monitoring the radical movement, the PIB paid particular attention to high-ranking GMD officials who were sent to Malaya and NEI to facilitate the resurrection of GMD organizations.[24] In September, the police raided the Jang Mong Night School on the premises of the outlawed Kok Khwan and Nan Kiau Night Schools. Confiscated documents indicated that not only was the night school connected to the Hainanese leaders arrested in the previous raid, but the site had also been serving as the meeting place for the Head Branch of the GMD in the entire Nanyang region. Based on the correspondence, the police discovered that Hainanese GMD bodies in Malaya were trying to organize all Chinese workers under the NGLU.[25] Again in October, the police intercepted a letter, which showed that the GMD Head Branch had been coordinating closely with various branch and sub-branches across Malaya. While carrying out fundraising campaigns, the party also issued 339 new membership certificates. Additionally, a large amount of Hainanese gathered in Singapore,

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[19] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 235, No. 37, March 1926, 7.
[20] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 246, No. 38, April 1926, 3.
[21] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 262, No. 39, May 1926, 4.
[22] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 276, No. 40, June 1926, 4.
[23] The "Canton Gazette" reported in June that one of the 41 Hainanese arrested in February died in prison due to British authorities' maltreatment. The British reacted by saying that the charge was groundless and that the person died of dysentery in prison. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 280, No. 41, July 1926, 3.
[24] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 294, No. 42, August 1926, 3-4.
[25] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 301, No. 43, September 1926, 4.

where they displayed banners with anti-imperialist slogans and celebrated the NRA's military breakthroughs in the Northern Expedition.[26]

The GMD Head Branch seemed to be very interested in the NEI issues, as the police discovered that the Jang Mong Night School also subscribed newspapers such as the *Sumatra Bin Po* from Medan, the *Si Pin Yat Po* from Surabaya, and the *Kong Seong Po* from Makassar, all of which were identified as GMD organs.[27] However, the *MBPI* reported that the GMD movement in the NEI "gives little cause for anxiety," despite the similar efforts to raise funds and "attempts in the Chinese Malay press to interest the indigenous population in Chinese affairs and instill an anti-imperialist spirit." This is particularly ironic considering such a statement was made in October 1926, one month before the PKI uprising took place in Java. One thing for sure is that British authorities were well aware at this point that interactions between the GMD and PKI movements were quite limited:

> There would appear to be no proof of any substantial connection between the GMD and Javanese communists, although occasional visits have been paid by leaders of the latter party to Canton [Guangzhou]. Chinese activity in the NEI has a purely Chinese outlook and is confined to immigrant Chinese, the few Chinese found associated in anti-government activities being usually Java-born and so inclining rather to Java than to China in their instincts.[28]

3. Handling PKI fugitives and curbing GMD-CPC activities (December 1926–March 1927)

As mentioned above, the PKI uprisings broke out consecutively in Java in November 1926, and Sumatra in January 1927. While Dutch authorities quickly clamped down the poorly organized revolts without difficulties, the impact of the PKI uprisings was profound in the sense that the colonial government carried out a full-scale suppression of the communist movement, which resulted in the complete destruction of the party organizations as thousands of communist suspects were arrested, imprisoned, and banished. To evade the arrest of the NEI government, hundreds of PKI members escaped to the nearby British colony with the intention to revive the movement after the intense situation calms down. Meanwhile, the influence of the communist-influenced GMD Left was at its peak in China at the turn of 1926 and 1927. Having achieved great military success in the Northern Expedition, the nationalist government moved its capital from Guangzhou to Wuhan under Wang Jingwei's leadership. The Wuhan Government took advantage of the nationwide anti-imperialist sentiment and adopted a radical approach to diplomacy, which caused enormous anxieties among British officials at the end of 1926. Consequently, the British government decided to reinforce the defense of Shanghai by sending 14,000 troops from India. China's political situation remained critical from January to March 1927, during which the British lost the concessions in Wuhan and Jiujiang and were forced to leave Nanjing due to the uncontrolled looting of NRA soldiers. Following the upsurge of the Chinese Revolution, GMD branches in Malaya also became increasingly active.

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[26] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 307, No. 44, October 1926, 4-5.
[27] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 301, No. 43, September 1926, 4.
[28] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 306, No. 44, October 1926, 3.

Although not directly related, the concurrent events in China and the NEI exerted a significant impact on British Malaya, especially in terms of shaping the colonial government's view on the communist movements. In addition to making consistent efforts to keep neighbors' revolutions at bay (what they did in the first period), British authorities realized the necessity to take active measures to handle the influx of PKI fugitives and GMD-CPC activists in Malaya. This section discusses two representative issues during this period:

A. Handling PKI fugitives

In an unpublished manuscript dated 1957, Djamaluddin Tamim, a right-hand man of Tan Malaka, points out that more than 100 PKI members managed to escape to Malaya in the wake of the failed uprisings. According to Tamin, Malaya was an ideal destination where the fugitives could easily blend into the local society. Through the PKI network, many of them found jobs at shipping companies while others were introduced to work as religious teachers in the Malay states.[29] Some of the well-off members also proceeded to the Middle East under the guise of Muslim pilgrimage.[30] Tamin has a detailed account of PKI fugitives' experience in his manuscript, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter. This section seeks to address this issue from the perspective of colonial authorities, which primarily focuses on the arrest and release of Alimin and Musso.

We will remember that Alimin and Musso are PKI leaders who traveled to Moscow in hopes of securing Comintern endorsement. After spending a lengthy period in the Soviet Union, they returned to Asia with disappointment, as Moscow had refused to lend its full support for an ill-prepared movement. While in Shanghai, they heard about the outbreak of the Java revolt. Alimin and Musso then proceeded southwards, arrived in Singapore via Canton, Hong Kong, and Bangkok. Through agents planted inside the PKI's Singapore branch, the Malayan police obtained information about the PKI leaders' plan and was well aware of their arrival on 15 December.[31] However, the British decided not to alert the Indonesian communists, which enabled the two to meet Agam Putih, a close friend of Tan Malaka. Due to serious concerns over safety, the two decide to leave the city before they could reconnect with the party apparatus.[32] After that, Alimin and Musso stayed in Kota Tinggi, Johor, where they met Soebakat and another PKI member named Umar Giri.[33] Although Soebakat and Umar soon realized that the meeting place had been compromised, they failed to notify their comrades of the danger in time.[34] The British authorities arrested Alimin and Musso on 18 December with the presence of a Dutch detective.[35] The police discovered the two carrying false GMD passports issued by the Foreign Ministry in Canton; as

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[29] Tamim, Djamaluddin. "Sejarah PKI." [A History of PKI], Unpublished Manuscript, July 1957, in *Archief Komintern-Partai Komunis Indonesia*, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 47-48.

[30] Djamaluddin Tamim, "Sejarah PKI," 57.

[31] Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 346.

[32] Agam Putih is the founder of the PKI branch in Aceh. See Suyono et al, *Lekra dan Geger 1965* [Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia 1965, 2014], ix.

[33] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 346.

[34] Alimin noted that he and Musso were too tired to move immediately after the exhausting long trip, so they decided to stay at a house in the middle of a plantation. See Alimin's autobiography "Riwajat Hidupku [My Life History]," in *Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection*. ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, the Netherlands pp. 13-14.

[35] Alimin, "Riwayat Hidupku," 13.

well as $2500 in US banknotes, which were likely to be the financial assistance that the Comintern provided to the Indonesian Revolution.[36]

Alimin later revealed in his memoir that Agam Putih had become a spy working under both Dutch and British authorities.[37] The defection probably happened as a result of a recent police raid on the Agam Putih's residence at 46 Clyde Street, Singapore. In this operation, the police discovered a large box full of unbound copies of Tan Malaka's writing *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Towards an Indonesia Republic).[38]

The NEI press initially regarded the apprehension of the two PKI leaders as a gratifying result of the Dutch and British governments' joint efforts against communism. As the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* remarked, "the British government, which is experiencing difficulties with communism like us, seems to be ready to take actions."[39] Surprisingly, however, a Singapore court ruled to release Alimin and Musso after three months of detainment. While the British authorities confirmed that the two PKI leaders' had close connections with Moscow, they found no evidence that they had involved in any subversive activities against Malaya.[40] Therefore, based on the colony's existing laws, the court could not send back Alimin and Musso to the NEI simply because of their alleged involvement in a conspiracy against a foreign power.[41] Instead of handing them over to the NEI government, the Singapore court ruled on 19 March 1927 that Alimin and Musso must leave British territories within 48 hours. The two PKI leaders left Singapore immediately and proceeded to China.[42] This time, the NEI side reacted with great disappointment:

> It can be concluded from the release that no terms have been found to remove Alimin and Musso from the Straits. This proves that if they continue to behave as if they are peaceful citizens towards the Straits government, no act of conspiracy against the Dutch Indies or any other foreign authorities can be prevented [in the future]… After this explanation, we do not need to point out any further how regrettable it is that Alimin and Musso could not be extradited.[43]

The PIB was aware of the dissatisfaction of the Dutch side, which considered the presence of the PKI leaders not only threatening to the public security of the NEI but also "constitutes a grave danger to the masses of the country in which they take refuge."[44] But if it was so obvious that releasing Alimin and Musso would irritate the Dutch neighbors, and that Anglo-Dutch cooperation was considered important, what was British authorities' incentive to let go two of the most wanted men in the NEI? "Not involved in subversive activities against Malaya" sounds like a far-fetched

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[36] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 319, No. 46, Dec 1926, 3. Also see McVey, *The rise of Indonesian communism*, 346.
[37] Alimin, "Riwayat Hidupku," 13.
[38] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 319, No. 46, Dec 1926, 3.
[39] "Nederl.-lndië. Alimin en Moeso," *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, December 27, 1926, 1.
[40] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 336, No. 48, Feb-April 1927, 4.
[41] "Occasional Notes," *The Straits Times*, December 15, 1927, 8.
[42] See Alimin, "Riwayat Hidupku," 13; and "Moeso en Alimin," *De Indische Courant*, April 5, 1927, 1.
[43] "Alimin en Moeso in Vrijheid [Alimin and Musso in freedom]," *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, March 21, 1927.
[44] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 336, No. 48, Feb-April 1927, 4.

excuse, because if this was the case, why would the Straits police arrest the two Indonesian communists in the first place and detain them for three months? Why did the two PKI leaders choose to go to China? Neither official documents nor Malayan newspapers offered an explicit explanation, but a possible reason could be that the British authorities had made a deal with at least one of the two PKI leaders so that the latter would feed them with valuable information from China. In August 1927, the *MBPI* reported that Alimin had sent the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) a 31-page magazine named the "Pan-Pacific Workers," an official organ of the Comintern-sponsored Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS).[45] Chaired by American communist Earl Browder, the PPTUS was established in Hankou in May 1927 with the purpose of coordinating labor movements across countries around the Pacific such as China, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States. The publication that the British police received appeared to be the magazine's inaugural issue, in which Musso contributed an opinion piece entitled "Indonesia and the Chinese Revolution." The article states that:

> Both China and Indonesia are victims of the same dark forces of reaction and exploitation. The enemy is the same; in both countries, tens of millions of people are suffering from imperialism, oppression and inhuman exploitation, suppressing all liberation and revolutionary labor and peasant movements. The task of both Chinese and Indonesian people is therefore clearly to fight jointly against the common enemy to the end.[46]

However, Djamaluddin Tamin's manuscript offered a more nuanced explanation. As Tamin recalled, he and a handful of other PKI fugitives in Singapore wanted to hold a meeting to discuss plans to revive the fragmented party upon Alimin and Musso's release. While Tamin met Alimin briefly on the first night after the latter's release, Alimin refused to stay in Singapore any longer and decided to proceed to Guangzhou or Moscow as soon as possible. The reason for Alimin's departure, as Tamin suggested, is that Alimin was well aware that he had committed a huge mistake by deliberately not conveying Tan Malaka's *Thesis* (opposing the uprisings) to PKI members in Indonesia. Similarly, Tamin criticized Musso's insistence on carrying out the Prambanan Decision (to revolt against the Dutch). Musso rejected the allegation and accused Tamin as Tan Malaka's servile follower:

> It seems Brother Djam (Djamaluddin) only wants to ingratiate himself with Tan Malaka because they are both from Minangkabau. Didn't I also make a huge sacrifice to the [revolutionary] struggles? I got arrested and banished right after getting married—I have not even got the chance to kiss my wife![47]

Tamin described Musso's words as "most disgusting, low-minded, and contemptible," which showed Musso's undisguised intention to defend himself and his intimate friend Alimin.[48] The strife created a deep rupture within the remaining PKI leadership. As a result, Alimin and Musso

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[45] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 352, No. 52, August 1927, 1.

[46] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 352, No. 52, August 1927, 1.

[47] "*Rupanja bung Djam itu, hanja mau memenangkan Tan Malaka sadja, karena sama-sama anak Minangkabau!! Bukan kah saja/Musso djuga memberikan pengorbanan jang sebesar-besarnja kepada perdjuangan, sehingga saja, baru sadja kawin dan belum sempat mentjium istri saja, sudah ditangkap dan dibuang??*" See Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sejarah PKI," 52.

[48] "*Paling keji, rendah dan hina,*" See Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sejarah PKI," 53.

left Singapore for China on 24 March 1927.[49]

B. Curbing the GMD-CPC movement

As China's political situation continued to intensify, British authorities further tightened the surveillance of GMD-CPC activities in Malaya. Towards the end of 1926, for example, the police made several arrests of Hainanese propagandists for possessing GMD materials, including Marxist literature and periodicals from China. Additionally, the authorities intercepted a letter from Peng Tze-min, the Director of the GMD Overseas Bureau, who requested party members in Singapore to consolidate the loosely organized sub-branches under a unified body.[50]

While the *MBPI* 's December issue retained a relatively plain narrative style similar to that of the First Period (December 1925–November 1926), a drastic change was discernible in January 1927 when the PIB included a thorough analysis of the GMD movement in Malaya. For the first time, the Malayan section occupied more than half of the six-page bulletin, which examined in detail the recent development of the Chinese Revolution and its implication for the British colony. This report suggested that under the influence of the GMD Leftwing, the party's Central Executive Committee established a South Seas (Nanyang) Head Branch in Guangzhou. The Head Branch aimed to coordinate the nationalist movement in British Malaya, Sarawak, Siam and the NEI. As the British banned the Malayan GMD in 1925, the party's new tasks concentrated on three major areas: (1) secretly re-organize GMD sub-branches; (2) collect funds for various special projects, and (3) carry out anti-imperialist propaganda. Once again, the PIB pointed out that the Hainanese, many of whom worked as servants in Malaya, were particularly prone to the GMD influences. Hainanese night schools, which had been established for teaching the national language, functioned as centers disseminating leftist ideologies and the cover for the remaining GMD sub-branches:

> The danger of the spread of subversive propaganda through these night schools is shown by the documents seized which prove that the schools were being used to spread not only the political principles of the GMD but anti-British and anti-capitalist propaganda combined with direct communist teaching.[51]

The report concluded with a rather harsh tone, which vividly reflected the British government's vigilant attitude towards GMD activities in Malaya:"While it is possible that the 'moderate' GMD may be purely nationalist in aim in China itself, in Malaya it is definitely anti-British and anti-capitalist.[52] " As a result, the government adopted tough measures against leftist activities. In February, for example, the police raided the Ping Min (Pheng Man) Night School in Kuala Lumpur, where they noticed the existence of the so-called "Main School." Unlike regular night schools, the Main School was, in fact, a circle of political agitators—primarily of Hainanese origin—whose chief objective was to organize the working class through "subversive propaganda" under the Overseas Chinese Union. Among the most important findings was a detailed list of Main School members in Singapore, through which the police were able to track down many leftwing propagandists in subsequent operations. The PIB further reported that Main School activities were not limited to Singapore only, as its members also appeared to be keenly interested in the Javanese

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[49] Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sejarah PKI," 53.

[50] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 318, No. 46, December 1926, 2.

[51] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 331, No. 47, January 1927, 6.

[52] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 331, No. 47, January 1927, 6.

Revolution A confiscated meeting report suggested that the Main School group had "discussed with so much energy the Javanese Communist outbreak."[53]

On 12 March 1927, a severe anti-British riot broke out in Singapore. The riot, commonly referred to as the Kreta Ayer Incident, originated from a memorial service at the Happy Valley Amusement Park with the aim of commemorating Sun Yat-sen's death. Organized by GMD moderates, mostly Cantonese and Fujianese (Hokkien) by origin, the memorial service began peacefully as intended. However, the gathering turned unruly when 2,000 leftwing night school teachers and students—allegedly all Hainanese—arrived and at the scene. After giving inflammatory speeches and distributing anti-British pamphlets in the crowd, the Hainanese group marched towards the Kreta Ayer area, where they quarreled with employees of the trolley-bus service who accused the protesters of blocking the traffic. The tension escalated as a bus drove into the crowd under the direction of a British superintendent, which caused a chaotic confrontation between the two sides. To restore order, the police fired into the protesters, resulting in six people losing their lives.[54] As a consequence of the incident, GMD supporters launched a boycott campaign against the British-owned Singapore Traction Company, which gained considerable success as many Chinese responded to the call with enthusiasm.[55] After a thorough investigation, British authorities concluded that the Kreta Ayer Incident was "largely due to the spirit prevailing amongst Hainanese who acted on definite instructions from the Main School," and Hainanese agitators should also be held responsible for the boycott:

> …it is curious and dangerous for up to now all available information has pointed to the Hainanese section alone being responsible for revolutionary and subversive propaganda in Malaya. It is now definitely known that the Hainanese have met with some success in their efforts to unite the Cantonese, Fujianese, and Teochews in an organized system of pickets along the tramway routes to intimidate Chinese using these vehicles.[56]

The short-term effect of the Incident, as Yong and McKenna suggest, is that the British authorities further hastened the crackdown on the GMD Left. In late April, the police raided two GMD branches, where they discovered a large number of propaganda materials and printing machines. By comparing these documents to those seized in previous operations, the PIB came to believe that the nature of GMD propaganda had become increasingly radical due to the influence of the Chinese Revolution:

> At the beginning this propaganda was nationalist and revolutionary, but gradually as the political situation in Guangzhou changed and the GMD Left gained the upper hand it became definitely communist in tone. The literature circulated by the agitators was more often the extreme labor propaganda of the "Strategy of Strikes," the communistic propaganda of the "Guide Weekly" the organ of the Communist Party (CP) and of the "China Youth" the organ of the Communist Youth (CY), than the political and nationalist

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[53] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 337, No. 48, Feb-April 1927, 7. Similar discussions could also be found in CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 4.

[54] "The Kreta Ayer affair," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 19 March 1927, 11.

[55] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 337, No. 48, Feb-April 1927, 4-7. Also see C. F. Yong and R. B McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 88-89.

[56] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 3-5.

propaganda of the GMD.

> It became however apparent that there were in Malaya a group of Hainanese agitators moving from night school to night school and using them as temporary headquarters for the spread of propaganda, which, always anti-British and nationalist, became eventually labor and communist: this propaganda was derived from the Red Labor Union of Guangzhou and afterwards Hankou [Wuhan].[57]

The group that the PIB referred to was the Main School, the members of which worked closely with night schools, labor unions, and sub-branches of the GMD Left in disseminating subversive propaganda throughout the Malay Archipelago. While making persistent efforts to mobilize the Chinese, the group also planned to attract Malays, Javanese and Tamils to join anti-colonial struggles in the long run.[58]

It is interesting to note that the PIB suspended the distribution of the *MBPI* between February and April 1927. The bulletin resumed in May, and the Malayan section became the primary focus, where the PIB reviewed the local political issues meticulously.[59] This is a drastic departure from previous issues, in which British intelligence officials paid more attention to political situations elsewhere such as China and the NEI. Malaya's political turmoils during this period may explain the temporary suspension and noticeable change in style. It is possible that the British police was too busy handling Chinese extremists, to the extent that they no longer regarded Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions as of their immediate and primary concerns. In any case, the British attitude towards communism underwent a fundamental change in the wake of the PKI uprising in Java to GMD-CPC split in China—the communist menace was no longer just neighbors' troubles but what they could now experience in Malaya by themselves.

4. Taking preemptive actions (From April 1927 onwards)

April 1927 is a critical watershed in the history of Chinese Revolution. Having gained the upper hand in his rivalry with Wang Jingwei's GMD Leftwing, Chiang Kai-shek decided to take radical actions against the CPC and leftist elements in the party. First started in Shanghai on 12 April, Chiang's anti-communist campaign soon developed into a nationwide purge aimed to eradicate CPC influence in the national revolution. Despite the initial protest of the GMD Left, Chiang significantly strengthened his position as the paramount leader of the nationalist movement in the following months. While the Shanghai Massacre triggered the temporary split of the two nationalist governments (Nanjing under Chiang and Wuhan under Wang, commonly known as Ninghan Split), the nationwide purge brought about the complete breakaway of the CPC and eventually, the two parties' ten-year confrontation. At the same time, the PKI movement died out in Indonesia under the colonial government's full-scale suppression. While taking stringent measures to prevent the PKI's revival, Dutch authorities also closely monitored political movements in the names of nationalism, religion, and labor/trade union. Consequently, the NEI political atmosphere remained intense although "there was hardly any systematic development of

[57] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 4.
[58] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 4.
[59] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 341, No. 49, May 1927, 4-7.

communist activities."[60]

The effect of the Ninghan Split was noticeable in Malaya, especially in the aftermath of the Kreta Ayer Incident, which further intensified the conflicts between the leftwing Main School and the GMD moderates. Similar to the changing politics in China, the schism caused the leftists' gradual breakaway from GMD altogether, which eventually led to the establishment of the Communist Youth in December 1927 and the Nanyang Provisional Commission of the CPC in January 1928.[61] Meanwhile, Dutch authorities noticed that many PKI members had escaped to Malaya, which made their domestically focused crackdown insufficient to eradicate communist threats entirely. From the British perspective, the Singapore-based GMD Leftwing showed a growing tendency of expanding organizations to NEI territories. Such a background prompted the two colonial governments to take joint actions against radical movements. This section discusses the split of Malayan GMD forces and the start of Anglo-Dutch anti-communist cooperation in 1927:

(1). The split of GMD forces

The section above mentioned that the PIB discovered the Main School, a group of Hainanese agitators who worked closely with night schools, labor unions, and GMD sub-branches in spreading anti-imperialist propaganda. With few exceptions, members of the Main Schools also played leading roles in the Nanyang General Labor Union (NGLU), which functioned as the hub of an extensive network of labor unions across British Malaya, Sarawak, Siam and the NEI. All these organizations, as the PIB believed, were established for the same purpose—"to work for the spreading of communist ideas amongst the Chinese."[62]

In the meantime, the authorities noticed that the Ninghan Split was gradually taking effect in Malaya:

> The split in the GMD reported in last month's Bulletin, has resulted on the one hand the wholesale executions and expulsions of communists in China, more especially in Canton, and on the other by a good deal of counter-propaganda against "Reactionaries" as the "Right" is called by the "Left" GMD.
>
> One of the chief dangers locally is the possibility of dispersed students and extremist elements taking refuge in Malaya where the split is well defined. The Hainanese are as a body of "Left": the petty shopkeepers and propertied class "Right": both parties are first and foremost, Nationalists, so that if esteem for or fear of the British Government stops open expression of anti-foreign feeling, the fear of their own countrymen and their method far outweighs their reliance on local Government protection. The resultant apathy is well marked.[63]

As a result of the ongoing anti-communist purge, Chiang Kai-shek supporters took over the China General Labor Union in Guangzhou and started to repudiate communist-influenced labor unions. Shortly after, the Malayan police intercepted letters addressed to NGLU branches, which requested

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[60] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), April, 1927, 32.

[61] C. F. Yong and R. B McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 88-89.

[62] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 4.

[63] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 3.

them to report the names of their leftwing leaders, primarily of Hainanese origin so that they would be punished when they return to China. The PIB was thus of the opinion that the split of GMD organizations in Malaya corresponded to the GMD-CPC Split in China.[64]

In July 1927, the *MBPI* reported that the GMD-CPC split had further widened, as the Nanjing Government continued to carry out large-scale arrests of political opponents by labeling them as "communists." Among the most wanted by the GMD Rightwing were a group of leftists formerly working overseas, including Peng Tze-min, who had served as the Director of the GMD Overseas Bureau.[65] Additionally, the Nanjing Government also requested GMD branches in the Nanyang area to cooperate in the anti-communist suppression and hoped that the party would regain the legal status in Malaya and the NEI. The PIB noticed while the GMD Moderates (Rightwing) currently controlled the Nanyang Head Branch, this group remained "absolutely dormant," as they "took no steps to combat (the communists and GMD Left) nor do they show any desire to organize against it." However, the report went on with a positive tone that the GMD Left had been significantly weakened in Malaya due to the British crackdown on the Main School. Based on seized documents, the PIB concluded that the Main School-directed GMD Left "is definitely communist," which used all sorts of organizations to cover its communist cells. To substantiate the claim, the PIB quoted the writing of Phua Lit Hui, an arrested Main School leader, as the evidence. He wrote:

> We must understand we are communist. In Fuzhou, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Amoy (Xiamen), the organization of our school has been smashed…here we must reorganize our General Labor Union: if the British Government does not give us satisfaction (concerning the Kreta Ayer Incident of 12 March) then our next step will be a strike…the GMD is now very powerful: we must therefore organize on its lines. If members are arrested by imperialists we should use the name of the GMD and get the nationalist government to protest.[66]

Coincidentally, Phua's proposal looked "practically identical" with secret Comintern strategies, which had been recently revealed through the house search of the Soviet Legation in Beijing.[67] The PIB thus suspected that the Main School was also connected to Moscow. Unfortunately, Phua's plan came too late. While the relentless crackdown on night schools and labor unions dealt a crushing blow to GMD leftwing organizations in Malaya, the GMD Public Security Bureau also closed the NGLU's Guangzhou office at the end of May. By August, the British government claimed that both the Main School and GMD Left had significantly weakened due to the double effect of Chiang's anti-communist purge in China and the authorities' repressive measures in

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64 CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 340, No. 49, May 1927, 5.

65 Besides Peng Tze-min, the Nanjing Government also ordered to arrest Hui Chiu Tun, Wong Cho Kwong, Hui So Wan, Tung Fong Seng, Liu Kung Lai, Cheung Hong Seng, Li Pak Chheung, and Chin Tau Kwong. All these people above were accused of being communists and had worked in, or originally from, the Nanyang area. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 351, No. 51, July 1927, 4.

66 CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 351, No. 51, July 1927, 5.

67 Influenced by Chiang Kai-shek's nationwide anti-communist purge, Northern warlord Zhang Zuolin ordered to raid the Soviet Consulate in Beijing as a gesture to show his support for Chiang's campaigns. See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 339, No. 49, May 1927, 2; and CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 351, No. 51, July 1927, 5.

Malaya.[68] taken by colonial authorities.

(2). The beginning of Anglo-Dutch cooperation.
While the British decision to release Alimin and Musso deeply disappointed their Dutch counterparts, two major reasons prompted the two governments to establish closer counter-insurgency cooperations: (1) Chinese leftwing organizations expanded to the NEI through the GMD network. As a result, Dutch authorities soon discovered Chinese-involved communist activities across the colony and suspected that they are related to Singapore-based leftwing organizations such as the NGLU;[69] (2) PKI members kept coming to Malaya, either to take refuge in local communities or proceed to other places. Consequently, the two colonial governments maintained constant vigilance towards the possible revival of the Indonesian communist organizations.

As mentioned in an early section, many PKI members flocked to the nearby British territories to evade the arrest of the NEI police. While the majority of them get settled in Malaya without much difficulty thanks to abundant job opportunities, a small fraction of the communist fugitives only stayed in the British colony for a very brief period and soon embarked on a pilgrimage journey to Mecca. The number of Muslims pilgrims reached a record high in 1927 since the end of World War I with more than 220,000 people arrived in Muna according to British statistics.[70] Due to the lack of direct NEI ships, however, many Indonesians had to take a short journey to Singapore first, where they could proceed to Jeddah by British vessels.[71] Such a situation provided PKI members a favorable condition to escape, as they could easily sneak into the crowd while pretend to be pilgrims when leaving the NEI. Upon arrival in Singapore, they could reconnect to the communist network through pilgrim brokers who often also worked as PKI liaisons. According to Djamaluddin Tamin, hundreds of PKI members managed to escape to Singapore, but only those coming from well-off backgrounds could afford the trip to the Middle East. While many of the fugitives harbored the genuine religious beliefs to go on hajj, Tamin took the opportunity to "arm" them with Tan Malaka's communist writings such as *Wasiat Kaoem Militair* (The Will of the Militants), *Semangat Moeda* (The Youth Spirit) and *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Towards an Indonesia Republic).[72]

Unsurprisingly, British and Dutch authorities soon noticed this unusual movement. As early as March 1927, the *PPO* already warned in its inaugural issue that PKI members had left West Sumatra for the Middle East under the guise of pilgrimage.[73] However, it was not until June that both the *MBPI* and *PPO* reported the arrest of six Indonesian communists for carrying out communist propaganda and trying to establish a newspaper in Mecca. With the assistance of King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, British and Dutch authorities in Mecca discovered the connection between the arrested PKI members and two Islamic organizations: the Sjeich Bond Indonesia (Indonesian Society of Sheikhs, or SBI), a pilgrim brokers association; and the Perserikatan Islam

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[68] C. F. Yong and R. B McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949*, 88-89. Also see CO 273-537-28053, Enclosure No. 1 to Straits Despatch on 31 August 1927, 14.
[69] See Section 4 "situation in the NEI" CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 341, No. 49, May 1927, 5.
[70] CO 273-535-5 "Pilgrim to Mecca and Medina" in the Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 17 October 1927.
[71] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 345, No. 50, June 1927, 5.
[72] Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sejarah PKI," 57-58.
[73] *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), January-February 1927, 5.

Indonesia (Islamic Association of Indonesia, or PII), whose leadership consisted entirely of communists. While the PII's primary goal was to recruit new members among the pilgrims, the SBI worked actively behind the scene and was in charge of raising funds for PII activities. Additionally, the two organizations also had a long-term plan to send activists back to Indonesia and re-establish a communist organization under the PII's religious cover. The PII was particularly interested in attracting the "Kyais" (religious teachers the Javanese society) to join their organization, as the "Kyais" were thought to be "great recruiters of pilgrims" and thus "would not arouse suspicion."[74] The two organizations shared a common leader named Mahdar, an absconding PKI activist who participated in the Java uprising in November 1926 and was allegedly in close contact with Alimin, Semaun, and Tan Malaka. Another prominent figure was Djanan Taib, a graduate of the Azhar University in Cairo who worked as the PII's religious instructor and was found in close contact with Mahdar regarding a potential sale of firearms. However, local authorities failed to track down the two leaders and eventually agreed to extradite the six arrested PKI members to the NEI.[75] British and Dutch governments closely corresponded with each other throughout the process, which involved joint efforts of numerous diplomats, intelligence services, and colonial officials from across vastly different geographical regions. Such cooperation illustrated not only the two sides' serious concerns over the lingering communist menace but also the shared intention to crush communism by going far beyond their respective colonial borders.

It was also during this period that British authorities started to keep a more watchful eye on NEI nationalist leaders. In September 1927, for instance, the PIB reported in a detailed manner that Agus Salim, a prominent Sarekat Islam (SI) leader and vocal critic of Dutch colonialism, was found passing through Malaya. The report on Salim occupied a full page in the *MBPI*, which was unusual as Salim was not part of any communist organizations and used to criticize the SI's association with the PKI openly. However, the PIB maintained a vigilant attitude towards Salim due to his involvement in the Pan-Islamic Movement and his fierce criticism of British policies in India.[76] Based on information from NEI sources, British authorities also suspected that Salim had sympathetic towards communism as he had recently met Soviet representatives during his visit in Mecca.[77] Moreover, Salim seemed to have a persistent interest in expanding SI organizations to Malaya. Unable to tell what Salim's real intention was, the PIB concluded the report with an ambivalent comment: "Haji Agus Slim said that he would visit Malaya and was especially interested in the State of Johore…where it will be remembered Alimin and Musso and their followers had established places of refuge."[78] Strange as this note may sound, it is evident that Dutch and British colonial authorities now shared the same anxiety—communist movements, if not handled properly, would revive under the covers of religion or nationalism.

Consequently, Dutch and British authorities, together with other colonial governments in the

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[74] CO 273-535-5 "Communism in the Hejaz" in the Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 25 July 1927.

[75] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 345, No. 50, June 1927, 5; and *PPO,* Part I (1927-28), June 1927, 72-73.

[76] Salim contended that the NEI should not follow the Non-cooperation or Civil disobedience strategy of British India and suggested that people like Tagore formed a "worthless opposition" favoring British policy and primarily concerned with "theoretical idealism." See CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 360, No. 53, September 1927, 2.

[77] CO 273-535-5 "Communism in the Hejaz" in the Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 25 July 1927.

[78] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 360, No. 53, September 1927, 2.

region, started to engage in anti-communist cooperations in a much broader sense. One of the most important goals was to track down exiled communist leaders such as Tan Malaka, who was well-known in the intelligence circle not only because of his high profile as a Comintern representative, but also the reputation that he had repeatedly escaped arrests. As mentioned above, Tan Malaka caught the attention of British authorities as he frequently passed through British Malaya during 1925-27. Although the PIB was well aware that a PKI headquarter existed in Singapore, and that Tan Malaka was a major part of it, they were never able to confirm the PKI leader's whereabouts until he had already left the colony.[79] Similarly, the NEI government also requested the US authorities to cooperate, as intelligence sources suggested that Tan Malaka had been residing in the Philippines. The local government immediately carried out an active search of the PKI leader upon receiving the message, but soon realized that he had left for other places.[80]

Meanwhile, it has become increasingly clear to PKI leaders that Singapore was no longer suitable for taking refuge due to the intensified political climate. Instead, Tan Malaka, Subakat, and Djamaluddin Tamin decided to gather in Bangkok in May 1927, where they were hosted by a group of renowned Muslim leaders from West Sumatra. After a careful review of the current situation, the three PKI leaders reached the consensus that the party had practically collapsed in the immediate aftermath of the two aborted uprisings. To carry on revolutionary struggles, the PKI must reinstate itself as a party of cadres (*Partai Kader/Kern,* a path that the party pursued from 1920 to 1924), rather than a mass organization—a huge mistake that the party committed between 1924 and 1927. Moreover, the three PKI leaders fiercely criticized the ultraleftist Sarjono-Budisutjitro-Alimin group for implementing the ill-devised Prambanan Decision, which brought about the complete destruction of the communist party and affiliated organizations. Under such a backdrop, the three PKI leaders declared the establishment of the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI) on 2 June 1927.[81] Whether PARI emerged as the continuation of the PKI or signified Tan Malaka's break from communism remains "a matter of great controversy." As Helen Jervis points out, Tan Malaka only talked about PARI scarcely in his autobiography *From Jail to Jail,* and his other accounts on the PARI history was often contradictory and ambiguous. It is certain, however, that the party remained a small propaganda group and only played a limited role in anti-colonial struggles due to the ongoing anti-communist suppression.[82]

Tan Malaka returned to the Philippines under the pseudonym Hasan Gozali in August 1927. While residing in Manila, he had opportunities to reconnect with his old friends, including intellectuals from local universities and editors of the newspaper *El Debate*. The police spotted the PKI leader not long after his arrival and arrested him without much difficulty. However, Tan Malaka gained sympathy from nationalist newspapers and the Philippine legislature, led by Senator Manual Quezon, who demanded the government to ensure the PKI leader's right to seek asylum. Manila workers and university students also collaborated to support Quezon's policy. Under domestic pressures, the Philippine authorities decided to depict Tan Malaka's arrest as a simple case that he breached the colony's laws on immigration by using a false American passport. The deportation

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[79] For reports about Tan Malaka's appearances in Malaya, see CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, 7; CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 200, No. 35, January 1926, 5; CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 319, No. 46, Dec 1926, 3.

[80] The Philippine government first received the message from the US Consul-General in Singapore in January. Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, Vol. 1, 268-269.

[81] Djamaluddin Tamin, "Sejarah PKI," 59-61.

[82] Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, Vol. 1, lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

took effect on August 23. Instead of handing him over to the Dutch, the government allowed Tan Malaka to board a Filipino ship to Xiamen (Amoy), China without passing through major Dutch and British territories. Although the British police waited to arrest the PKI leader at the city's British Concession, he narrowly escaped once again with the help of the crew members and their Chinese friends.[83] The *MBPI* reported in a rather solemn tone that Tan Malaka intended to return to the Philippines in the future if he could circumvent the immigration laws.[84]

The release of Alimin and Musso triggered further repercussions in the second half of 1927 when Percival Philips, a famous American journalist, published a series of commentaries in the British newspaper *Daily Mail*. Philips criticized the Malayan government for their poor handling of the case, which severely damaged the good working relationship with their NEI counterparts. In addition to reiterating the danger of the PKI movement to Malaya, Philips urged the British authorities to take stringent measures against communism by cooperating with the Dutch, as the two governments shared "identical interests, same problems and are confronted with the same danger."[85] Philips further suggested that the Malayan government should learn from their Dutch neighbors in counter-insurgency tactics, media control practices, and banishing dangerous propagandists.[86] The British Parliament responded quickly by introducing a new Banishment Ordinance, in which the phrase "conducive to the public good" would enjoy a much broader interpretation, and consequently, "Indonesian communists would be seen as dangerous to Malaya as they were to Java and Sumatra."[87] The rectification of the Banishment Ordinance marked a significant step forward in the Anglo-Dutch anti-communist cooperation, as it fixed a major legal loophole that impedes extradition of arrested PKI members back to Indonesia. From this point onwards, the Dutch colonial government could count on the extensive British intelligence network to monitor the exiled PKI members beyond the NEI borders. As I will elaborate in following chapters, the impact of such cooperation was profound, which kept the region's anti-colonial movements constantly in check in the following years.

Conclusion

By comparing the political situations in China, the NEI, and British Malaya during 1925-27, this chapter demonstrates that although the Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions were essentially two

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[83] Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, "Arrest and Deportation" *From Jail to Jail*, Vol. 1, 139-151.

[84] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 360, No. 53, September 1927, 2.

[85] *"While the present state of the communist movement in the Netherlands Indies gives no particular cause for alarm, its future is regarded with undisguised anxiety... An important feature of the anti-communist policy of the (Dutch) government is close cooperation with the authorities of the Straits Settlements... "Our interests are identical with yours," a high official of the government here said to me, "We have the same problems and are confronted with the same danger."* See "Playthings of the reds," *The Straits Times*, 31 December 1927, 9.

[86] "To Bolshevise Asia," The Straits Times, 27 December 1927, 9.

[87] "Communists and the Straits," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 7 December 1927, 10. For a more detailed discussion of the Singapore press, see my other article: Kankan Xie, "The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited: New Discoveries from Singapore's Digital Newspaper Archives," in *Chapters on Asia* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2018), 267–94.

separate movements, the concurrent events shaped British and Dutch colonial authorities' views on Asian politics, especially the broadly defined communist movement. Due to the geographical proximity and the existence of the large diaspora community, the Chinese and Indonesian Revolutions exerted a significant impact on British Malaya, prompting the colonial government to take tough measures against incoming communist activists and the colony's early leftwing movements. The NEI and Malayan authorities' shared concerns over the communist menace served as an important foundation for the Anglo-Dutch counter-insurgency cooperation, which effectively curtailed the development of the region's anti-colonial struggles in the following years. There are three major observations in this research:

First, the different arrangement of the *MBPI* and *PPO* suggests that the two colonial governments had distinct counter-insurgency priorities: the British concerned about the political situation of the entire Far East, whereas the Dutch primarily focused on the domestic stability of the NEI. Specifically, the British officials paid special attention to China for two reasons: (1) The British Empire had heavily invested in China, but its supremacy was significantly challenged after WWI; (2) China's political landscape underwent rapid change during 1925-27. While the upsurge of Chinese nationalism posed unprecedented threats to British interests, the internal conflicts within the GMD-CPC Alliance further complicated the situation. The tension caused enormous anxieties among colonial officials in Malaya, as they worried that communism would penetrate into the colony through the vast Chinese population. By comparison, the Netherlands was a much smaller colonial power with very few stakes in China. From 1925 through 1927, the predominantly native-led PKI movement was far more worrisome than the nationalist movement of the Indies Chinese. As a result, the NEI authorities had carried out a harsh crackdown on communism long before the two uprisings broke out. However, the PKI revolts further intensified the situation, which ultimately led to the Dutch authorities' full-scale suppression of communist movement both within and beyond its colonial borders.

Second, communist movements experienced dramatic ups and downs in both China and Indonesia during the 1925-1927 period. Coincidentally, with the establishment of the Wuhan Government and the outbreak of two PKI uprisings, the influence of leftwing forces (the GMD Left, CPC, and PKI) culminated at the turn of 1926 and 1927. Although no evidence indicates that Chinese and Indonesian revolutionaries had intentionally coordinated with each other, the coincidence played an indispensable role in shaping the perception of colonial officials by making them believe that communism was a common threat facing the colonial powers. With this shared interests, British and Dutch authorities found common ground to cooperate in intelligence sharing and anti-communist suppressions. As a result, Malayan and the NEI governments managed to keep communist activities in check both within and beyond their respective colonies.

Third, the British crackdown on the leftist movement in Malaya during 1925-27 was largely a preemptive action towards perceived communist threats, rather than a reaction towards activities of any formal communist party. Due to the disturbances in China and the NEI, British authorities adopted a vigilant attitude towards the penetration of leftwing organizations long before communist forces firmly established themselves in the colony. The Malayan government was particularly cautious of two groups: the first was Hainanese propagandists working for the GMD Left's Malayan branches; the other was PKI fugitives who passed through Malaya in the aftermath of the failed revolts. With success in raiding Hainanese night schools and banning leftwing labor unions, the British managed to nip the embryonic Chinese communist movement

in the bud. Consequently, the CPC-influenced Main School had to break away from the GMD altogether and reestablish itself as independent communist organizations such as the Nanyang Communist Party and its successor MCP. Both parties struggled desperately to survive in their initial years due to the colony's oppressive environment. Additionally, exiled PKI leaders found no chance to revive the movement under the close surveillance and extensive intelligence network of two colonial states. Despite sporadic attempts to reinstate the party or to operate under the covers of nationalist or religious organizations, communist groups ceased to play a significant role in Indonesia's anti-colonial struggles in the remainder of the colonial era. The PKI was only able to regain its prominence in Indonesian politics until the end of WWII.

Part III: The Split of the PKI and the Fugitive Networks

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) carried out two unsuccessful revolts at the turn of 1926 and 1927. The Netherlands East Indies (NEI) government quickly suppressed the PKI uprisings. The revolts themselves were insignificant events, or in PKI leader's own words, the two revolts were just "*putsch kecil*," or literally "small putsch."[1] However, such incidents were significant in the sense that they provided the NEI authorities ideal justification for carrying out full-scale suppressions of the PKI and affiliated organizations. The NEI police put down the riots within a few weeks and arrested nearly 13,000 communist suspects. Jails across the NEI were instantly full. Additionally, Dutch authorities identified a large number of PKI members who could not be easily convicted under the existing law. The government thus decided to deal with these communists was to isolate them from the society so that they would no longer be able to carry out propaganda. As a result, Dutch authorities used extrajudicial power on an unprecedented scale and banished 1,308 people to Boven Digul, a penal colony in the remote jungle of Dutch New Guinea.[2]

The NEI authorities' full-scale suppression dealt a crushing blow to the PKI. The party lost its entire leadership in the NEI due to the ceaseless arrest, imprisonment, and banishment. However, it is unfair to say that the PKI movement was completely dead in the months following the unsuccessful revolts. While the party dissolved in Indonesia as a result of the crackdown, hundreds of PKI members managed to escape to nearby British Malaya. Moreover, the party leadership in exile—although just a handful of individuals—remained largely intact. Despite escalating pressures, the PKI liaison office in Singapore was still operating under Tan Malaka's inner circle. Alimin and Musso were on their way to join the Singapore group from Moscow. Semaun and Darsono stayed in Europe, where they sought to influence the Dutch government by working with the Communist Party of Holland (CPH) and Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, Dutch and British colonial authorities had not formed a close working relationship to fight communism yet at this point. A question thus arises as to whether the PKI leadership overseas had taken the opportunity to reinstate the party. If it was the case, then, why were such attempts unsuccessful?

Existing literature commonly attributes the PKI's failure to the ruthless suppression of the NEI government, and suggests that communism ceased to play a crucial role in Indonesian politics

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[1] Tamin, Djamaluddin. "Sejarah PKI." [A History of PKI], Unpublished Manuscript, July 1957, 54.

[2] NEI authorities arrested 13,000 people in the immediate aftermath of the PKI revolts. The government put 5000 more in preventive detention, of which 4,500 were sentenced to imprisonment after the trial. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 353; J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De communistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935), 111. For the NEI Governor General's justification to use extrajudicial power, see "Legal position of communist organizations in Netherlands East Indies," letter from the Attorney General (Dyufjes) to Consul-General J. Crosby, 3 May 1927, in Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 273/535, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.

until its revival after World War II (WWII).[3] While such observations reflect the truth from an Indonesian perspective, they downplayed the fact that many PKI fugitives outside of the colony carried on underground struggles in various forms throughout the remainder of the colonial era.[4] In the meantime, however, it is also inaccurate to say that the PKI turned into a clandestine party from 1927 onward. Due to the heated debates over who should be responsible for the poorly organized uprisings, and consequently, the party's disintegration, PKI fugitives split into many small factions. While all these factions claimed to be legitimate successors of the PKI, there was no central party leadership to speak of. At least three PKI factions coexisted outside of the NEI with limited interactions among each other. The Tan Malaka group formed the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI). While distancing themselves from the Comintern-sanctioned International Communism, the PARI group operated mostly in neighboring countries of the NEI and sought to infiltrate into the NEI through various religious and nationalist networks. By contrast, Alimin and Musso traveled back to Moscow via China after British authorities released them in Singapore. The two studied at the International Lenin School (ILS) for two and a half years where they received systematic training in communist theories and gained prestige as new Indonesian representatives at the Comintern. Finally, Semaun and Darsono engaged in troubled cooperation with the CPH and Indonesian students in the Netherland. Despite their efforts to save the situation, the two gradually retreated from the front line of communist struggles for different reasons.

This part explores the split of the PKI and how each of these groups carried out clandestine struggles in the aftermath of the 1926/27 uprisings. For this purpose, the most important sources I have consulted are PKI leaders' writings, including published and unpublished memoirs, essays, and personal correspondence. While such materials contain valuable details, the narratives are often contradictory to each other due to different stances the individuals take. Therefore, it is also necessary to cross-check sources such as intelligence sources, official documents, and newspaper articles. I argue although PKI fugitives played a limited role in shaking the foundation of the Dutch colonial rule, the polarization of the party leadership took Indonesian communism into drastically different directions, which exerted a crucial and lasting impact on Indonesian politics. While only a handful of PKI leaders continued their struggles within the framework of International Communism, others broke away with the Comintern altogether by adopting a more nationalistic approach to anti-colonial struggles. Although communism subsided inside the NEI under the government's full-scale suppression, PKI fugitives managed to carry out clandestine activities overseas and influence the country's nationalist movement through non-communist networks. When the PKI regained its prominence in Indonesia's national revolution of the post-WWII period, the split remained central to the debate over the legitimacy of the new party leadership.

Part III consists of four chapters. Chapter 6 demonstrates how the split took place in the immediate aftermath of the PKI uprisings. Chapters 7-9 are location-based, examining the struggles of each faction between 1927 and 1942. Chapter 7 focuses on the Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI), a small party network operated in Southeast Asia, which carried out

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[3] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism,* 353-354; Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), xviii; George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 86-87.

[4] Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, no. 63 (1997): 1–3.

clandestine activities by working closely with Indonesian nationalists. Chapter 8 traces the activities of the Alimin-Musso group, which stayed mostly in the Soviet Union and China until the end of the war, but became the de facto leaders of the new PKI in the national revolution; Chapter 9 discusses struggles of Indonesian communists in West Europe, who, despite attempts to influence Indonesian politics in the metropole, gradually retreated from the front line of anti-colonial struggles due to political predicament and personal reasons.

Chapter Six: The Escape and Split

Apart from the colonial authorities' anti-communist suppression, a crucial factor contributing to the failure of the PKI movement was the party's internal conflicts. As McVey suggests, at least three centers claimed authority over PKI by the end of September 1926, or one month before the Java uprising: a revolutionary committee in Batavia in favor of the uprising, the Tan Malaka's liaison office in Singapore that opposed it, and the nominal PKI headquarter in Bandung, which had clearly lost its control over party branches and was unable to lead the movement effectively.[1] While such an observation rightly describes the PKI's fragmentation before the insurrections, it oversimplifies tensions within the party as if people naturally fell into the three location-based groups. As individuals held drastically different opinions towards the uprisings, and interactions among these groups had not been completely cut off, I argue that before the revolts broke out, the PKI was in a state of disorganization rather than a clearly marked split caused by disagreement of party policies. The real split, as I will show below, happened as a gradual process. While the rift emerged in late 1925, the tension escalated in the months leading up to the uprisings and finally reached its critical point after party members started to reflect on the failure in the aftermath of the event.

1. The Prambanan Decision

Headed by Sardjono, an ultra-leftist group took over the PKI leadership in December 1925. The situation facing the party was critical, as NEI authorities significantly constrained party activities by tightening the control over the press and public assembly. In response to the growing pressure, the Sardjono clique met near the city of Solo and decided to carry out uprisings against the Dutch around June 1926. Commonly known as the Prambanan Decision, the controversial plan was devised without the sanction of top PKI leaders in exile, who had been deported due to their involvement in previous communist activities. The Sardjono group almost immediately informed Tan Malaka, the Indonesian representative of the Communist International (Comintern) resided in Manila. However, Tan Malaka strongly opposed the Prambanan Decision, pointing out that the political and economic conditions were not ripe for such uprisings, and that such a reckless move would yield no result but the party's destruction.[2]

Due to the increasingly oppressive measures taken by the NEI government, PKI leaders such as Sardjono, Sugono, and Budisutjitro gathered to discuss plans of the upcoming uprising in Singapore in early 1926. The group also sent Alimin, a diehard supporter of the Prambanan Decision, to Manila to hopes of obtaining Tan Malaka's authorization. Once again, Tan Malaka

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[1] Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 334.

[2] Tan Malaka provided five reasons why the situation was not ripe for an uprising: (1) there was no revolutionary situation in Indonesia; (2) the PKI's level of discipline was low; (3) Indonesian people were not under the PKI's leadership; (4) there was no concert demands for an uprising; (5) imperialist powers had been united with each other to fight communism. See Hok Gie Soe, *Orang-orang di persimpangan kiri jalan: kisah pemberontakan Madiun September 1948* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2017), 10.

voiced his disapproval, but he was unable to join the PKI members in Singapore due to health issues. So eager to carry out the plan to revolt, Alimin deliberately concealed Tan Malaka's opinion after he had returned to Singapore. In mid-March, 1927, Alimin and Musso left Singapore for Moscow with the intention to override Tan Malaka's opposition by securing the sanction directly from the Comintern. Alimin informed Tan Malaka that no more PKI meetings would be held in Singapore and that he had gone to Moscow two months later. It was not until this point that Tan Malaka realized that Alimin had been deceiving him, so he decided to find out what had happened by himself. When Tan Malaka finally arrived in Singapore in June 1926, what he heard corroborated his suspicion. Worse still, while Alimin and Musso were still in Moscow seeking permissions, the rest of the PKI leadership had returned to Indonesia to prepare for the uprising. Tan Malaka immediately called in Subakat and Suprodjo in hopes of preventing the uprisings from happening.[3] Tan Malaka also managed to convince Djamaluddin Tamin, a former religious teacher from West Sumatra who would later become one of Tan Malaka's closest comrades, that the political situation was indeed not ripe for a reckless revolution. Not only did Tan Malaka believe that the plan to revolt must be revoked, but the PKI should also restore discipline and prioritize reorganizing its ranks.[4]

While the Tan Malaka group tried hard to prevent the uprising, the Sardjono group met again in June. Although only four units (Batavia, Bantam, Priangan, and South Sumatra) suggested that they were ready, almost all branches were in favor of an uprising in the near future. The meeting thus confirmed that the party would postpone the action for a few months but was definitely going to implement the Prambanan Decision even if it would result in the party's destruction.[5] Many PKI members held the desperate perception that if they do not rise against the Dutch, the party would soon collapse under Dutch suppressions. Although the PKI headquarters in Bandung gradually came to accept Tan Malaka's argument, it lost control over many party branches in Java and Sumatra. PKI sections in Java's northern coastal towns of Tegal, Tjirebon, and Pekalongan were particularly eager to start a revolt. Unable to secure the approval of the Bandung headquarters, leaders of these branches threatened to act independently. With members' enthusiasm for an imminent revolution, the Batavia branch joined their coastal counterparts by establishing the Committee of Supporters of the Indonesian Revolution (*Komite Penggalang Republik Indonesia*) in late September. Operating without the knowledge of the Bandung headquarters, the Committee planned to persuade party sections in Java and Sumatra into joining the uprising. Although party branches reacted very differently towards the message, the Batavia committee convened again at the end of October and started the long-delayed uprising on the night of November 12. Having realized the existence of the Batavia committee, the Singapore center and Bandung headquarters made final attempts to stop the plan. However, such efforts were way too late to avert the suicidal revolt. The first insurrection broke out in West Java on the night of 12/13 November, followed by the second in West Sumatra on 1 January 1927. The NEI government crushed both rebellions within a few days.[6]

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[3] Subakat was an editor of the PKI newspaper *Api* and had escaped to Malaya in early 1925 and lived in Johor under the guise of a plantation worker. Suprodjo came to was the PKI's vice chairman in 1926 and came to Singapore at Tan Malaka's request. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 231, 478, 484.

[4] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 330.

[5] Tamin, Djamaluddin. "Sejarah PKI." [A History of PKI], Unpublished Manuscript, July 1957, 54. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 328-329.

[6] For more details about preparations for the revolt, see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian*

As mentioned in Part I, Alimin and Musso betrayed Tan Malaka in Moscow again. In a series of Comintern meetings, the two claimed that Tan Malaka had been deliberately delaying the implementation of the Prambanan Decision, and thus sabotaging the Indonesian Revolution. To their dismay, the Comintern refused to support the revolt plan and expressed similar concerns (that the situation was not ripe and that the party lacked necessary preparation in many respects).[7] It is noteworthy, however, that the Comintern opinion did not have any substantial impact on the PKI uprisings in the end. The first revolt broke out in Java when Alimin and Musso were still on their way back from Moscow; and by the time the second revolt took place in Silungkang, West Sumatra, the British authorities in Malaya had already arrested the two PKI emissaries. Before their arrest, Alimin and Musso met a PKI liaison in Singapore named Agam Putih. In their brief meeting, the two handed Agam Putih a Comintern document that shows Moscow's opposition. This document, as I will discuss in Chapter 10, served as a key document in the establishment of Tan Malaka's PARI.

2. The escape

As NEI authorities carried out a full-scale crackdown on communism in the immediate aftermath of the Java revolt, more than 10,000 communist suspects were arrested within a few weeks. Meanwhile, many PKI members managed to escape to nearby British territories, especially the harbor city Singapore. After the abortive revolt in Silungkang, West Sumatra, even more members arrived. However, the British colony was not entirely safe. As early as 1925, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Straits Settlements Police already noticed the existence of the PKI liaison office in Singapore and paid particular attention to the activities of important individuals and their local networks.[8] The British authorities were also cautious of the youths of the Sumatra Thawalib, a West Sumatra-based Islamic modernist institution at which Djamaluddin Tamin used to teach. Many students of the Thawalib joined the PKI in 1925 and frequently came to Malaya.[9] After the PKI revolt broke out in Java, the Straits Settlements government paid even more attention to the issue per request of the NEI government.[10] The Singapore press not only reported the events in the NEI in detail but also discussed how Singapore served as a safe haven for PKI activities, and the influx of the PKI fugitives.[11]

Communism, 329–346; For details about the revolts in Java and Sumatra, see the translation of the Governor General's report in Harry J Benda and Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-1927 in Indonesia: Key Documents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1960), 1-18.

[7] For Alimin and Musso's experience in Moscow, see my discussions in Part I

[8] CO, 273-534, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence (MBPI)*, 195, No. 34, December 1925, in Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 1925-1927, Colonial Office, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK, 7.

[9] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 49.

[10] CO, 273-535, "NEI Governor-General A. C. Graeff's letter to Laurence Guillemard, Governor-General of the Straits Settlements," December 29, 1926, in Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, Colonial Office, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.

[11] "Java communists," *The Straits Times*, January 7, 1927, 9. Also see Kankan Xie, "The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt Revisited: New Discoveries from Singapore's Digital Newspaper Archives," in *Chapters on Asia* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2018),

According to Djamaluddin Tamin, hundreds PKI members had escaped to Singapore by early January 1927. While a small fraction of well-off members took the opportunity by going directly on a pilgrimage trip to Mecca, the majority decided to stay in Malaya. Tamin urged those who wanted to settle in Malaya to look for jobs as quickly as possible so that the fugitives could not only secure sources of income but also evade the surveillance of the CID. As PKI members from Java were generally more used to labor work, Tamin helped them find accommodations at sailors' dormitories. Not long after living in such places, PKI fugitives could quickly start working as sailors, coxswains, or cooks. By contrast, Thawalib students from Sumatra were not so eager to work as laborers, as they had only received religious training in schools. Tamin thus contacted Muslim ulamas in his personal network across Malaya and asked each of them to host one or two Thawalib students. The ulamas were generally happy to accept these students, as the Malay states were in constant demands for religious teachers and the coming of Sumatran youths fulfilled the need.[12]

Out of hundreds of PKI members who escaped to Malaya, Tamin named only ten fugitives who were truly capable of carrying on anti-colonial struggles.[13] As anti-communist suppression culminated in the wake of two revolts, it had become increasingly difficult to maintain communication with party members back in Indonesia and the only way left was through the network of seamen.

> Lodging houses, agents, and sailors...dozens of doors are available in the city of Singapore—they all open day and night, guarantee accommodation, food, and drinks, and pay every day—as long as someone really wants to become a sailor, either on large ships traveling around the world or small ships that only sail around Asia, India, Indonesia, and Australia.[14]

Becoming seamen was particularly beneficial to the core PKI fugitives in Singapore, for they could not only evade surveillance by hiding in the highly mobile community but also keep maintaining contact with party members scattered in different places. Among the ten capable youths that Tamin identified, Djamaluddin Ibrahim, Tenek Aljasin, and Maswar Madjid managed to stay in the job for a long time and enjoyed relative freedom as the Dutch and British authorities gradually ceased to pay much attention to their activities. Mardjono, Suroso, and Suwarno, by contrast, quitted after their first seafaring trip to Australia due to hardships in the journey.[15] Tamin stayed closely with the seaman group for much of his time in Singapore and became a sailor himself in 1930. I will elaborate on his seaman experience in the next chapter on PARI.

286–288.

[12] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 48.

[13] These ten people include: Djamaluddin Ibrahim alias Rahman, Tenek alias Aljasin and Arief Siregar from West Sumatra; Maswar Madjid from South Sumatra; Tje Mamat alias Mansur from Bantam; Kasim alias Atang from Priangan/Ciamis; Agam Putih alias Mahmud from North Sumatra/Aceh; and Mardjono alias Djohan, Suroso alias Agus, and Suwarno alias Achmad from Central Java. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 57.

[14] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 57.

[15] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 57-58.

The PKI network in Malaya, which had been established before the uprisings, played a critical role in facilitating the fugitives' escape and settlement. Apart from Djamaluddin Tamin, PKI leaders such as Tan Malaka, Subakat, Umar Giri, and Agam Putih all resided in Singapore or surrounding areas when the uprising broke out in Java. However, the increasingly tightened monitoring of the British authorities significantly constrained the group's capacity to help the incoming PKI members. In September 1926, the PKI leaders left their hideout in Geylang Serai, one of Singapore's major Malay settlement, to evade surveillance.[16] As a result, the PKI leaders were separated from each other when a large amount of Indonesian communists arrived in the city.[17] The Singapore-based PKI leaders could only provide ad hoc help to the incoming fugitives on an individual basis rather than as an organized group.

Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that the PKI network in Malaya stretched far beyond the PKI members. Many non-PKI members served as the party's local contacts and offered invaluable assistance to the party's activities in this period. In *Sejarah PKI*, Tamin featured a crucial person named Pak Said, a retiree who had served the CID for 23 years. Although Said was illiterate, he was knowledgeable about the operation of the Straits Settlements Police. While hosting Tamin at his house, which Tamin regarded as his safest hideout in Singapore, Said frequently shared with the Indonesian communist various information about the CID, including names and addresses of important CID figures such as chief inspectors Balwant Singh and Prithvi Chand. Moreover, Said was instrumental in showing the PKI leader potential dangers facing the party. It was through Said that Tamin learned that the British police had shown great interests in acting against PKI members, especially those from Sumatra, since 1925.[18]

3. Alimin and Musso's arrest

As Takashi Shiraishi noted, the informal Anglo-Dutch anti-communist cooperation had started before the PKI uprising. In July 1926, the Straits Settlements government agreed that the *Algemene Recherche Diest* (ARD, or General Investigation Service), the intelligence service of the NEI police, to sent two spies, Soekandar and Soerosoedikdo, to monitor PKI activities in Singapore. The two successfully infiltrated into the PKI's local network by pretending to be fugitives from Yogyakarta.[19] Although Soekandar and Soerosoedikdo managed to report to the ARD about the PKI's internal conflict and the possible rebellion, Subakat soon exposed their identity in September.[20] Having confirmed that Singapore functioned as a PKI center, the NEI

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[16] In September, Subakat exposed the identity of two NEI spies who penetrated the PKI network in Singapore by pretending to be fugitives from Java. Knowing that the party's hideout might have been compromised, the leaders decided to leave. See Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," in *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson* (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 67.

[17] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 47.

[18] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 49-50.

[19] Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," in *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson* (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 67-68.

[20] Anne L Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast*

Attorney-General proposed to establish an intelligence unit in the city in October, but the plan was not materialized before the PKI uprisings. The Straits Settlements administration finally accepted the proposal from the Dutch side after revolts broke out in Java. In a "strictly personal and confident report," the Straits Settlements police chief stated:

> Our policy at the present moment is to prevent any known Javanese communist from landing in Malaya. Unfortunately…we are only able to recognize two or three leaders, so that if the blockade is to be made effective it would be necessary of the Government of the Netherlands East Indies to send over unofficially at least two men, one for Singapore and one for Penang, who could board vessels coming from Java and Sumatra, etc., and warn the police of the presence of extremist leaders or well-known communists.[21]

The NEI government sent Marinus Visbeen, the assistant commissioner of the Batavia City Police, together with two native detectives, to Singapore in early December. Visbeen's primary task was to track down PKI leaders who had involved in the planning of the November revolts. In Singapore, Visbeen developed a close working relationship with his British counterparts such as Rene Onraet, the CID chief, and Harold Fairburn, the Inspector-General of the SS police. Such personal connections, as Shiraishi points out, played a significant role in the two colonies anti-communist cooperation in the subsequent years.[22]

We will remember that Alimin and Musso were on their way back from Moscow when the PKI revolt broke out in Java. On December 1, the two PKI leaders sent a telegram from Bangkok, informing Saleh Suhani, a local contact, of their impending arrival in Singapore. What Alimin and Musso did not know, however, was that Suhani had betrayed them and forwarded the information to the CID. Tamin learned about the betrayal from his host Said, but was unable to warn Alimin and Musso as CID agents were waiting at the train station when the two arrived on December 18. To Tamin's surprise, the police did not arrest the two PKI leaders immediately, probably because the CID did not want to alert other Indonesian communists in the city. Alimin and Musso met party member Agam Putih briefly in the city and then proceeded to Kota Tinggi, Johore, where they joined Subakat, who had been hiding under the guise of a rubber plantation worker. Upon meeting the two, Subakat suspected that Alimin and Musso might have been followed, so he urged the two to escape with him. However, Alimin and Musso refused to do so as they were "too tired." Without much difficulty, CID agents tracked down the two at Subakat's cottage in the middle of a rubber plantation.[23] Three days later, Visbeen heard about Alimin and Musso's arrest from the police chief of Johore and confirmed the two PKI leaders' identity after meeting them in person at the police station.[24] British authorities soon transferred Alimin and

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Asia, 1919-1941 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 31.

[21] "wd. Consul Generaal (Klein Molekamp) aan Gouverneur Generaal (de Graeff), Singapore," November 25, 1926, Mr. 12x/1927, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 47, as quoted in Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," 68.

[22] Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," 68.

[23] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 46.

[24] Assistant police commissioner of the Netherlands Indies (Visbeen) to director, ARD, December 22, 1926, Mr. 9x/1927, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën:

Musso to Singapore. While in prison, the two PKI leaders were not completely cut off from party members outside. With the assistance of Pak Said, Tamin was able to exchange letters with Alimin and Musso via a Malay prison guard. The two also managed to hire a famous lawyer from Ceylon, who facilitated the communication throughout their detainment.[25]

In his 1957 memoir, Tamin attributes Alimin and Musso's arrest to their "carelessness, recklessness, and stupidity (*kecerobohan, kesembronoan, dan kebodohan*)," which caused enormous anxieties among PKI members in Singapore. Shortly after the arrest, the CID raided party member Ki Fadlullah Suhaimi's residence on Jeddah Street and confiscated 500 hundred copies of *Massa Actie* (Mass Action) written by Tan Malaka. The party's liaison office in Geylang Serai was also compromised around the same time. All these incidences indicated that the city had become too dangerous a place for PKI leaders. As a result, the party leadership decided to abandon Singapore as their home base, at least temporarily, and to operate in places far from each other. Towards the end of 1926, Tamin was the only PKI leader who still stayed in Singapore to help receive the incoming PKI fugitives. At his insistence, Subakat and Tan Malaka left the British colony for Siam.[26]

The British held Alimin and Musso without trial for three months. During this period, Dutch authorities repeatedly requested that the two PKI leaders be extradited to the NEI for their involvement in the Java revolt. However, the government could neither formally arrest Alimin and Musso on the strength of the banishment act nor directly deport them unless there was clear evidence that they broke the law of the Straits Settlements. In March 1927, Alimin and Musso were brought to a special court in Singapore. By a close vote of 4-3, the Executive Council eventually decided to release the two PKI leaders on the ground that they posed no direct threats to the peace and order of the British colony.[27] Laurence Guillemard, the Governor-General of the Straits Settlements, regretted that he was bounded by the existing law and acknowledged that "the banishment of Alimin and Musso would have been difficult to defend."[28] Guillemard then sent a private letter to his Dutch counterpart A. C. D. de Graeff, reiterating his goodwill of continued cooperation with the NEI government in countering communism. Such a promise notwithstanding, the decision to release Alimin and Musso deeply disappointed many Dutch officials. J. Crosby, the British Consul-General to Batavia, reported to the Foreign Office in London in April 1927:

> Disappointment is not unnaturally felt in official circles here at the turn which events have taken. Whilst recognizing the Government of the Straits Settlements had no alternative but to comply with the stipulations of the law in this instance, most of my friends among the official class express regret that, at such a time of danger as the

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Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 47, as quoted in Foster, *Projections of Power*, 32. According to Alimin's account in 1954, however, the CID arrest Musso and him in the presence of Visbeen, which is contradictory to Visbeen's record and might be wrong, See Alimin, *Riwajat Hidupku,* 1954, 13, in Partai Komunis Indonesia Collection, ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

[25] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 51.

[26] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 47.

[27] Foster, *Projections of Power*, 32.

[28] "Governor-General of the SS (Guillemard) to the Colonial Office," 30 April 1927, in W5243, file 12697, FO 371, as quoted in Foster, *Projections of Power*, 32-33.

present, no means can be found of arranging for mutual surrender between ourselves and the Dutch of political undesirables.

I find regret generally expressed...that the law of the Straits Settlements should be found lacking in the necessary provisions to ensure the mutual surrender of propagandists whose efforts, although specifically directed against Dutch rule alone, are none the less calculated to undermine by implication the established forms of Government in adjacent countries. The Dutch officials with whom I have thus spoken voiced their regret in the friendliest and most courteous fashion, but they all of them [*sic*] stressed the necessity for the adoption by ourselves and the Dutch of common measures for the averting of a common peril.[29]

While it is clear that the NEI government was unsatisfied with the British's poor handling of the case, what had happened on the ground was even more interesting than what high-level officials recorded in their correspondence. Rene Onraet, the CID chief who was in charge of the arrest and investigation of the case, had positive memories of Alimin and sympathized his struggles. In his memoir *Singapore: A Police Background*, Onraet noted:

They [Alimin and Musso] admitted, with what truth it was at the time hard to say, that their communist activities were against the Dutch only and their connection to Moscow was for the sole purpose of liberating their country from Dutch rule...Conditions in Malaya did not breed such men as these. A stance mixture of generous impulse and ruthless hate animated them, and their very intelligence made them extremely dangerous to their enemies. Very interesting men they were, perhaps a little boastful with information on subjects wherein we had some knowledge, but never volunteering anything on subjects that were not mentioned. One of them, after his release at Singapore and arrival in China, sent me the first copy of a magazine issued by the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. We did not know very much about this organization at the time. It turned out to be connected with the Far Eastern Bureau [of the Comintern].

Mas Alimin, I believe, send the pamphlet to put me one jump ahead of the Dutch CID [*sic*]. He told me they were very rude! Personal hatred as well as ideological antagonism was the result. I never found bluster paid with such men--Alimin, a polished linguist and experienced traveler, reacted best to decent treatment.[30]

As mentioned in Part II, British authorities were more worried about the penetration of Chinese communists in Malaya at the time. Knowing that Alimin and Musso were planning to go to China, it is thus probable that the CID might have made a deal with the two PKI leaders so that they could help with collecting intelligence about activities of Chinese communism.

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[29] "Consul-General Batavia (Crosby)'s No. 47 Secret of April 14th, 1927" in CO 273/535, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.

[30] René Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (Dorothy Crisp & Co.: London, 1947), 110. Also see Boon Kheng Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party: Selected Documents and Discussion* (Ithaca, N.Y: SEAP, Southeast Asia Program, 1992), 10. For Onraet's discussion on the pamphlet, see CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 352, No. 52, August 1927, 1.

4. The split

Tamin and Alimin had conflicting narratives surrounding the release. According to Alimin, British authorities released them on 18 March 1927 and asked the two to leave British territories within 48 hours. Knowing that returning to the NEI was not an option, Alimin and Musso chose to proceed to Guangzhou where the Comintern-influenced nationalist government could provide them with necessary assistance. The two left Singapore almost immediately, and the British and Dutch police witnessed their departure at the harbor.[31]

Tamin's account, by contrast, provided more nuanced details and was, therefore, more convincing. Upon the release of Alimin and Musso, Tamin intended to organize a conference among PKI leaders in Singapore so that the remaining party leadership could reflect on the failure of the PKI revolts and discuss how to carry on the revolution. Although Tamin managed to meet Alimin and Musso separately shortly after their release, However, the conference was not materialized. Alimin handed Tamin 70 dollars and invited him to go to Guangzhou or Moscow together, where they could take a good rest (*berishtirahat*). Tamin rejected Alimin's offer outright, as he believed that PKI fugitives' priority was to reorganize the party and reinstate the Indonesian Revolution. After that, Tamin also approached Musso in hopes that Musso would persuade Alimin to change his idea. Musso did come to meet Tamin and other PKI members at Said's house, but the meeting turned into a fierce argument. Tamin forced Musso to read Tan Malaka's *Thesis* and claimed that the destruction of the PKI could have been avoided if Alimin had delivered the message to PKI leaders who gathered in Singapore in early 1926. Tamin went on by saying that Alimin was ashamed of facing PKI members because he knew that he had committed a huge mistake. In response, Musso defended Alimin and himself by accusing Tamin of "wanting to ingratiate himself with Tan Malaka because they are both from Minangkabau."[32] Tamin recorded his intense quarrel with Musso in detail and labeled Musso as "the most despicable" person. On 24 March 1927, Alimin and Musso left Singapore for China without noticing any of the PKI members.

The quarrel in Singapore further deepened the rupture within the party leadership, which eventually led to the irreversible split of PKI fugitives. Unlike the split before the revolt, which was directly caused by party leaders' different opinions on the controversial Prambanan Decision, the new split concentrated on two set of issues. First, as reflected by the bitter argument between Tamin and the Alimin-Musso group, PKI fugitives could not agree on who should be held accountable for the PKI's destruction. Secondly, PKI members failed to reach a consensus on how to carry on anti-colonial struggles, as most of the party leaders were either in jail or exile at this point. Although there was still a slim hope that those evaded the arrest could reorganize outside of the NEI, the new split made the prospect of rekindling the Indonesian Revolution under the PKI banner highly unlikely.

After leaving Singapore, Alimin and Musso arrived in Guangzhou, China, where they stayed at a dormitory of Vietnamese students of the National Sun Yat-sen University and connected to the

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[31] Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 13.

[32] "*Rupanja bung Djam itu, hanja mau memenangkan Tan Malaka sadja, karena sama-sama anak Minangkabau!!* " See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 52.

local network of the Communist Party of China (CPC).[33] The two PKI leaders also met Subakat, who had no idea about the quarrel in Singapore. Tan Malaka sent Subakat to Guangzhou in January 1927 to establish direct contact with Comintern advisors such as Mikhail Borodin and Vasily Blyukher. Tan Malaka also hoped that Subakat could gain more working experience by observing the Chinese communist movement.[34] We will remember that the political situation in China underwent rapid changes after the Shanghai Massacre of April 12, 1927.[35] Following the bloody suppression of CPC members in Shanghai, the GMD (Nationalist Party of China, or *Guomindang*) Rightwing launched a nationwide anti-communist purge under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership. The anti-communist campaign soon spread to Guangzhou and shortly after, troops of the GMD Rightwing arrested Alimin, Musso, and Subakat together with 3000 CPC members for carrying out rebellions against the Nanjing Nationalist Government.[36] The three almost got killed in the incident, as a group of former students of the Moscow-based Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) betrayed the party to forces of the GMD Rightwing by claiming that they were Comintern propagandists.[37] Fortunately, GMD authorities released the three PKI leaders after having confirmed that they were not Chinese nationals. The three then proceeded to Shanghai with the aim of connecting to the Comintern office in the city's International Settlement. However, as the political environment remained intense in the aftermath of the Shanghai Massacre, the three PKI leaders parted their ways. Subakat decided to continue his work with Tan Malaka by returning to Southeast Asia;[38] Alimin and Musso went to Wuhan, which was at that time still controlled by the GMD Leftwing and communist forces.[39] Although the separation between Subakat and the Alimin-Musso group was far less dramatic compared to what happened in Singapore, the split of the PKI leadership became an established fact from the point they parted company in Shanghai. As Subakat joined Tan Malaka and Tamin in Bangkok, the direct contact between Alimin-Musso group and those still in Southeast Asia was completely cut off.

While in Wuhan, Alimin and Musso attended the inaugural meeting of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS), a Comintern-sanctioned trade union chaired by American communist Earl Browder. As mentioned above, Alimin sent Rene Onraet, the CID chief of the Straits Settlements, the first volume of the PPTUS' official publication "Pan-Pacific Worker" in July 1927. The reason for doing this, as Onraet suggested, was that Alimin personal hatred was

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[33] Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 13.

[34] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 58.

[35] The Shanghai Massacre took place in Shanghai on 12 April 1927. The Rightwing of the Nationalist Party (GMD) arrested and executed hundreds of members and affiliates of the Communist Party of China (CPC). For more detail, see discussions in Part II.

[36] In his narrative, Tamin confused Chiang's anti-communist purge in the aftermath of the Shanghai Massacre for the Canton Uprising, which happened at the end of 1927. He attributed the GMD arrest of communist members in Guangzhou to the uprising and praised it as a heroic action. He also compared the Canton Uprising to the one led by the Sardjono-Budisutjitro group of the PKI and believed that the difference between the two uprisings was like "sky and earth (*bedanya sebagai bedanya bumi dengan langit*)." See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 58.

[37] In his narrative, Alimin did not mention that the GMD forces arrested them with Subakat. By contrast, Tamin gave a more convincing account by detailing Subakat's activities in Guangzhou. See Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 13 and Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 58.

[38] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 58.

[39] Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 13-14.

only against the Dutch and therefore wanted to give British intelligence officers an edge over their Dutch counterparts. The editorial preface of this 31-page booklet emphasized the significance of the Chinese Revolution and advocated that oppressed people around the Pacific should lend their support for the struggle of the Chinese masses. The booklet published an article by Musso entitled "Indonesia and the Chinese Revolution," in which he stated that peoples of China and Indonesia suffered from oppression and exploitation of the same "dark forces." The Indonesian communist thus called for joint actions by the Chinese and Indonesian masses to fight the common imperialist enemies to the end.[40] Shortly after, Alimin and Musso received instructions from the Comintern and left Wuhan for Moscow, where they would study at the International Lenin School (ILS) in the following few years.[41]

[40] CO, 273-534, *MBPI*, 352, No. 52, August 1927, 1.

[41] In his memoir, Alimin claimed that he and Musso received a telegram from the Comintern, asking them to attend the Organization's Sixth Congress, which was in fact held in 1928. He also recalled that representatives at the Congress stand in silent tribute to PKI member Ali Acham, who passed away in Boven Digul in 1933. While Alimin and Musso's experience at the ILS was verifiable in other sources, many details in Alimin's memoir were inaccurate. See Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 14.

Chapter Seven: Partai Republik Indonesia

1. PARI: a PKI reincarnation?

After parted company with Alimin and Musso in Shanghai, Subakat joined Tan Malaka and Djamaluddin Tamin in Bangkok in May 1927. There are several reasons for choosing Bangkok as the new hideout. Besides the fact that Siam was relatively safe because it was not a Western colony, Tan Malaka and Djamaluddin Tamin also knew many people in the city through their West Sumatran network.[1] From his Sumatra Thawalib connections, Tamin heard that two ulama, Sjech Taher and Sjech Ahmad Wahab, lived in the city and were sympathetic toward anti-colonial struggles. Without much difficulty, Tamin contacted to Sjech Taher first, who introduced him to Sjech Ahmad Wahab, a leader of 20,000 Wahhabi Muslims in Bangkok and ran several Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) in the city. Sjech Ahmad Wahab arranged accommodation for Tamin and Subakat, but the two decided not to connect him to Tan Malaka for safety concerns.

In Bangkok, the three PKI fugitives finally got the chance to reflect on the PKI's failure and to analyze the situation they are facing. They concluded that as of January 1927, the NEI government had utterly crushed the PKI movement in the wake of the abortive revolts. According to Tamin, a Comintern document was crucial in the three PKI leaders' discussion. Alimin brought this document from Moscow and handed it to Agam Putih before his arrest in Malaya. The document confirmed that the Comintern regarded the Prambanan Decision as a big mistake and opposed to carrying out the suicidal revolt. The document also reaffirmed Tan Malaka's leadership role as a Comintern representative. Finally, the document showed that only the Trotskyists supported the Prambanan Decision to make a revolution, but the Stalin group, which had more influence over the Comintern, opposed the plan.[2] The most crucial outcomes of the discussion were two documents, a manifesto by Tan Malaka and a statute by Subakat, based on which the three PKI fugitives declared the establishment of the *Partai Republik Indonesia* (PARI) on 1 June 1927.

NEI authorities seized the two key documents when they arrested Subakat in Bangkok in 1929 with the help of the Siamese government. The original 1927 version of the manifesto does not seem to be available anymore. What remains in Dutch archives is a summary of its 1929 version produced by Tan Malaka in Amoy and brought back to Indonesia by Mardjono, a PARI member

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[1] According to Tamin, there were five famous religious teachers in Bangkok at that time. They are 1. Hadji Abdullah Ahmad from Padang; 2. Hadji Abdul Karim Amarullah alias Hadji Rassul from Manindjau; 3. Sjech Hadji Mohammad Djamil alias Sjech Djambek from Bukit Tinggi; 4. Sjech Hadji Thaher Djalaluddin Al-Azhari alias Sjech Taher from Empat Angkat, Bukit Tinggi, and 5. Sjech Hadji Achmad Chatib alias Sjech Ahmad Wahab. The first three are known for their pro-Dutch stance. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 59.

[2] Tamin wrote his memoir in 1957 and the PKI leadership at that time accused Tan Malaka of being a Trotskyist. It is highly possible, therefore, that Tamim emphasized this point to defend PARI and Tan Malaka by pointing out that they were not. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 60.

who visited Tan Malaka in China in the same year. A Dutch intelligence officer then summarized the 30-page document in 9.5 pages, in which he noted that Tan Malaka added in this version analyses of the world communist movement based on the English translation of Leon Trotsky's *The Real Situation in Russia* by Max Eastman.[3] As Helen Jarvis noted, the book included a document Trotsky presented at a meeting of the All-Union Communist Party in September 1927, and the English version was not published in New York and London until 1928. Therefore, it is unlikely that Tan Malaka's original draft talked much about the international situation in the way he did 1929.[4] However, the summary does shed important light on the PARI group's stance on the PKI's weaknesses and the failures of the 1926/27 uprisings.

First, the manifesto was addressed to "supporters of the Comintern in Indonesia" and pointed out that the issue of the greatest significance was that the Indonesian people should accept the "inglorious collapse" of the PKI. The manifesto stated that the collapse of the PKI was not caused by one but many reasons. Chief among them was that the party was not sufficiently disciplined. Despite its popularity among the masses, the PKI "fulfilled not the most elementary criteria of a communist party." While the party accepted people from all walks of life, it was not "organizationally a homogeneous machine," as many sections remained independent from each other. Additionally, qualified leaders were too few in comparison with Indonesia's 60 million population, and only a tiny proportion of workers were organized under unions. The PKI also significantly underrated Dutch imperialism, and the revolts they carried out was "not equal to a revolution; not even to a general strike."[5] Furthermore, the manifesto indicated that the more fundamental problem was deeply rooted in "the psychology of the people," who had "misplaced hopes" for assistance from outside. Indonesian people still believed in "*Ratu Adil* (Just Queen) and *Mahdi,"* who would restore justice and order in times of hardships. In a way, the PKI riots of 1926/27 were "in essence a copy of those in Aceh and Jambi, only on a smaller scale. The same in Bantam, but there too they thought they had joined a communist revolution." Related to this point, Tan Malaka discussed in detail the "indifference and ignorance" of the Comintern. Specifically, he criticized the bureaucratic leadership of Moscow, who only care about the interests of Russia:

> With examples from Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria, it demonstrated that the Moscow leadership has failed for other countries. The entire Third International is built up in the Russian interest, and young Eastern leaders, in particular, will be inclined to go over to worship and to lose their independence, with the result that they will lack contact with their own masses, who have different impulses from the Russian people.[6]

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[3] Leon Trotsky and translated by Max Eastman, *The Real Situation in Russia*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928).

[4] Helen Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI): Was It "the Sole Golden Bridge to the Republic of Indonesia"?* (Townsville, Old., Australia: James Cook University, 1981), 5.

[5] "Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 446x/1936, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 145. Reproduced in Appendix 2 in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 1-6. Also see Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, no. 63 (1997): 31.

[6] "Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 446x/1936, NNA.

It is also noteworthy that by the time of PARI's establishment in June 1927, the Comintern's China policy had turned out to be a total failure as a result of Chiang Kai-shek nationwide anti-communist purge in the aftermath of the Shanghai Massacre. Although it is unclear whether Tan Malaka wrote his criticism in the original draft of the PARI manifesto or added the lines to the new version after having witnessed the political situation in China by himself, his point to break away from the Comintern was well articulated:

> Following China's example, Stalin would send his Borodins, Van Gelens, Cheka, military and other innumerable advisers to a revolutionary 'Indonesia.' The third International would have nothing to say in the choice of the individuals, and everything would remain secret from this body. They consider that it would be in the interests of imperialism, and not in the interest of the Indies if Stalin made himself master of an eventual revolutionary movement in the Netherlands-Indies.[7]

Therefore, the PARI trio decided not to reinstate the PKI, as it would entail "serious drawbacks" if people keep relating the new party to Moscow.[8] Instead, Tan Malaka pointed out the urgent need to establish a new party in "a truly 'Indonesian' interests":

> A soviet, naturally completely adjusted to local conditions, is, in the opinion of the writers, not only conceivable but would be the best form of government for Indonesia, taking into account its cultural and economic development…The people of the Indies have enough to do without waiting around for the conclusion to the fight between Stalin and Trotsky. They have their own pressing problems that require a solution. PARI is a revolutionary-workers instrument that tries to deal with these problems on the basis of its own insight.[9]

Finally, the manifesto concluded by stating that the PARI group wished to remain internationalists, but held different views from the Comintern regarding how to achieve the ultimate goals. "Not from above to below, but the reverse," Tan Malaka noted.[10]

PARI's statutes by Subakat is available in full in colonial archives with paralleled Dutch and Indonesian texts. While the tone was similar to Tan Malaka's manifesto, the statutes made no mention of the PKI and international communist movements at all. It claimed that PARI "is independent and free from leadership or influenced by any other party or force, either within or outside of Indonesia." The statutes set PARI's objective as:

> [To] achieve full and complete independence for Indonesia as soon as possible, and thereafter to establish a Federal Republic of Indonesia on principles that accord with the country's economic, social and political conditions, with the customs and character of its inhabitants, and which, furthermore, are designed to advance the physical and mental

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[7] "Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 446x/1936, NNA, as quoted in Appendix 2 in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 3.
[8] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 30.
[9] "Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 446x/1936, NNA, as quoted in Appendix 2 in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 4.
[10] "Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 446x/1936, NNA, as quoted in Appendix 2 in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 10.

well-being of the Indonesian people.[11]

Despite the well-formulated statements, Helen Jervis suggests that "the exact nature of PARI, and what its founders intended it to be are shrouded in confusion."[12] While many historians regard PARI as a complete break from international communism because it acted independently from the Comintern, others see it a reincarnation of the destructed PKI, which retained continuities in many aspects of communist ideology and organizational strategies. In Tan Malaka's memoir *From Jail to Jail*, he did not talk much about PARI. A crucial reason for this was that when he wrote the memoir in prison around 1947, Tan Malaka was still engaged in heated debates with leaders of the reestablished PKI over the legitimacy of the party leadership.[13] It is likely that Tan Malaka deliberately avoided this topic so that his rivals could not use the narrative against him by claiming that PARI was not communist. Instead, he provided a rather vague statement:

> Now, twenty years later, the results of the actions taken in Bangkok by the three of us are clear to all. We wanted to see continuity in the Indonesian peoples' and workers' movement through a time of great difficulty. We felt that this continuity could best be ensured first by relying on own strength and secondly by marching independently but on a parallel course with the international proletarian movement—*getrennt marschieren, vereint schlagen* (march separately but strike together). We feel that the content and form of the situation and the struggles of 1945-1947 confirm in large part the position we took then, but it is not yet the time to reveal in detail the role played by PARI from its founding in July [*sic*] 1927 until now (July 1947).[14]

Such a statement implies that PARI operated on its own and was independent of the Comintern-sanctioned international communism. In his 1946 writing of *Thesis*, however, Tan Malaka gave a more nuanced description of the party's objective in response to new PKI leaders who accused PARI of a Trotskyist group:

> Party names are not so important and are easy to change as long as the contents remain. The Russian Communist Party itself has changed names three times! The important thing is [to retain] the revolutionary essence at every level and situation of struggle. Do not engage in counterrevolutionary actions, provocations, or opportunism. Marxism is not a

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[11] "Statuten der Partij Republik Indonesia (PARI), " Mailrapport 446x/1936, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 145. Reproduced in Appendix 1 in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 1.

[12] Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 3.

[13] In May 1946, a committee of the reinstated PKI decided to hand over the party leadership to the 1926 generation. Sardjono, the PKI chairman in 1926 and a major advocate of the Prambanan Decision, took over the control of the party. According to Tamin, Sardjono and Achmad Sumadi sabotaged the goodwill of this committee and excluded 75 former leaders of the PKI during the 1920-26 period from the new PKI. Alimin and Musso later joined the group after they returned to Indonesia. As a result, the PARI group was essentially alienated from the new PKI. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 56.

[14] Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 141-2.

> dogma or a study of memorization, but a guideline for class struggles. And it is a method of dialectical materialism that must be carried out in accordance with the time and place. Since 20 years ago, PARI has possessed the quality of Marxist philosophy with Leninist tactics. [PARI] is heading towards national and social revolutions, and towards a socialist and communist societies throughout the world.[15]

Compared to the rather ambivalent position described in Tan Malaka's memoir, the statement in *Thesis* showed that the leadership intended that PARI remains a Marxist-Leninist party in essence, but carry on Indonesia's national and social revolutions on its own terms. He went on by providing four reasons why PARI had to be established in the way it was: First, the majority of the PKI leaders had been either jailed or banished to Boven Digoel in the aftermath of the two abortive revolts. While reflecting on the failure of the PKI movement was necessary, using the old name was not conducive to the correction of past mistakes. Second, PKI fugitives outside of Indonesia lost contact with those inside the colony, and it was difficult to revive the party under the harsh government suppression. Meanwhile, due to the PKI's popularity with the masses, many people attempted to continue the PKI movement under the same name. The PARI group saw these people as lacking a basic understanding of communist principles, and their actions were nothing but dangerous provocation. Third, the PKI was so popular to the extent that it led to widespread fanaticism, especially among illiterate people. Such fanaticism towards communism and Russia, as Tan Malaka suggested, was reminiscent of the groundless belief in the past rebellions of Sumatra that Turkey would send warships to help Indonesian Muslims. Therefore, using the name of the PKI tends to reinforce people's unrealistic expectation that the Comintern would step in to help the Indonesian revolution and will "push revolutionaries to the brink of opportunism, fascism or putsch." Finally, Tan Malaka reiterated that the Comintern had appointed him as a representative of what he called the "Aslia" region, which encompasses continents and islands across East Asia and Oceania (Australia). While Aslia countries shared many similarities in terms of "environment, ethnicity, economy, and psychology," the common imperialist enemies, headed by the British with Singapore as their "center for trade and strategy," further strengthened the unity of this region. Tan Malaka thus believed that peoples of Aslia should pursue the common interests by going on an international "proletarian revolutionary" path. "One should not wait for gold to fall from the sky," he emphasized, "we should keep our eyes while walking on this rough field."[16]

Despite Tan Malaka's efforts to establish PARI as a sort of "independent" communist party, the lack of clarity in PARI's nature became one of his greatest political weaknesses.[17] After the PKI reemerged as a major political force in the post-WWII national revolution, Tan Malaka's opponents, now leaders of the new PKI, launched fierce attacks on him by branding him as a "Trotskyist." The group accused Tan Malaka of sabotaging the Indonesian revolution by rejecting the Prambanan Decision, trying to stop the revolts, and establishing PARI, which

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[15] Tan Malaka, "Tuduhan Trotskyisme," *Thesis* (Djakarta: Moerba, 1946). Online version: Tan Malaka, "Thesis," accessed August 17, 2018, https://www.marxists.org/indonesia/archive/malaka/1946-Thesis.htm.

[16] Tan Malaka, "Kesimpulan," *Thesis* (Djakarta: Moerba, 1946). Online version: Tan Malaka, "Thesis," accessed August 17, 2018, https://www.marxists.org/indonesia/archive/malaka/1946-Thesis.htm.

[17] Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 10.

operated completely outside the purview of the Comintern.[18] Sakirman, who worked with Tan Malaka in his Struggle Front (*Persatuan Perjuangan*) in early 1946 and joined the PKI shortly after, wrote a booklet entitled *Menindjau Perdjoeangan PARI* (Reviewing PARI's struggles) in 1947. In this booklet, he claimed that PARI members should be regarded as "enemies of Soviet Russia," because the party had "opposed the Comintern's line of struggle and organization," "fraudulently used the name 'communist,'" and their "ideals and the course of struggle are in contradiction to Marxism-Leninism."[19] Besides Sakirman, chief among the accusers were Alimin and Musso, who had held personal grudges against Tan Malaka since 1926. In response to Tan Malaka's 1946 *Thesis*, Alimin published his *Analysis* in 1947, in which he defended his position in the 1926-1927 revolts and reiterated the "Trotskyist" accusation. I will discuss the Tan Malaka-Alimin debate in greater detail in Chapter 11, but we should first bear in mind that PKI members' verbal attacks on PARI emerged mostly in the late 1940s, which were more closely associated with the politics in period of Indonesia's national revolution rather than what PARI really was in the 1920s and 30s. Therefore, it is necessary to first investigate PARI's operation in the years following its establishment.

2. Active penetration

Tamin pointed out in his memoir that despite the collapse of the PKI, leftwing forces in Indonesia had not yet entirely lost their hope in carrying out continuous struggles against the Dutch government around the time of PARI's establishment. As authorities kept carrying out radical crackdowns on the PKI and affiliated organizations, news concerning communist activities was still all over the press in mid-1927. Although PKI members were not necessarily the ones who plotted the conspiracies, some of the news were encouraging from the perspective of PKI fugitives, as such news suggested that the momentum of the PKI movement had not completely died out. For example, Tamin learned that the NEI government unearthed a conspiracy by former soldiers who intended to organize a rebellion in West Java in July 1927. Although the government later found out that the PKI was not involved in the incident, they arrested many nationalist leaders such as Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, Sukarno's political mentor, who allegedly lent the soldiers moral and material support. Dr. Tjipto received similar treatment as the PKI leaders during the period and was banished to the Banda Islands in East Indonesia. What was more exciting than the abortive uprising was the establishment of Sukarno's Indonesian National Association (*Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia*, PNI) on 4 July 1927.[20] Sukarno, who would rise to become Indonesia's first president twenty years later, claimed that the PNI would adopt a non-cooperative approach in its struggles for independence. The three PARI founders in Bangkok were delighted to hear about the news, which reminded Tan Malaka that Sukarno had sent him a letter and asked for guidance a year ago. The trio thus came to realize that PARI could use the PNI as a viable channel to influence Indonesia's nationalist movement. Tan Malaka reacted immediately by writing an article entitled *PARI dan Kaum Intelektuil Indonesia* (PARI and the Intellectuals of Indonesia), which became one of PARI's

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[18] Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 85.

[19] Sakirman, *Menindjau perdjoeangan PARI* (Jakarta: Soeara Lasjkar, 1947), 3, as quoted in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 4.

[20] The Indonesian National Association changed its name to the Indonesian National Party in May 1928.

most important policy statements. Although no copies of the document seem to be available today, we can only get a general idea from Tamin's summary:

> I. Suggestions to Sukarno and all the intellectuals: please join hands with us so that all the patriots and fighters could achieve Indonesia's 100% independence. The primary objective of the Party Republic of Indonesia (PARI) is to establish a 100% Republic of Indonesia, be it in political, economic, or social domains;
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> II. Books such as *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Towards the Republic of Indonesia), which had entered Indonesia in mid-1924, *De Jonge Geest* or *Semangat Muda* (Youth Spirit), in mid-1925, and *Massa Actie* (Mass Actions), at the end of 1926, should become guidance for intellectuals. Hopefully, they could also become the guidance for workers, farmers, youths, and national economic development in the fields of society, arts, culture, and education. Intellectuals will come to realize that patriots and fighters are living among the masses and will lead them to achieve the sacred ideals of independence;
>
> III. Try to work with religious, socialist, and other nationalist groups as much as possible;
>
> IV. Wake up and take over workers', farmers', and youths' movements. Try our best to approach the masses and unite them under organizations in which their leaders hold true leadership roles.[21]

PARI's three founders elected themselves as members of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), in which Tan Malaka served as the chairman, Subakat as the secretary, and Tamin as the commissioner. The PARI leadership decided to part ways shortly after its establishment and to run the party from different locations. Subakat remained in Bangkok for two years. Although it is unclear what Subakat's specific job was, he maintained close contact with Tan Malaka until his arrest in 1929. Tan Malaka left Bangkok for Manila, but the Filipino government arrested him within just a few days per request of NEI authorities. Under the pressure of colony's sympathetic nationalist leaders, however, the Filipino government deported Tan Malaka to Amoy, where he would stay until 1929. Living far away from the rest of party members, Tan Malaka worked more like a theoretician than the party chairman, as he was mostly busy with writing articles rather than directing PARI activities.[22] I will elaborate Tan Malaka's experience in a later section, but for now, it is important to bear in mind that Tamin played a more crucial role in the daily operation of PARI in the following years. Tamin returned to Singapore in August 1927 and started his job almost immediately by relying on the old PKI network.[23]

There were obvious advantages to choosing Singapore as the base for PARI's operation. First, PKI activities left relatively good foundation in the city. As PKI fugitives kept coming to Singapore after the two failed revolts, Tamin could work with many reliable disciples; Additionally, there was an extensive Indonesian network in Singapore. Not only could PKI

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[21] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 62.

[22] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 31-2.

[23] H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid.* (Place of publication not identified: Brill, 1976), 360.

fugitives evade surveillance by hiding inside the Indonesian community, but also ask for assistance such as accommodation and employment; Moreover, Singapore was close to Indonesia. While penetrating back to Indonesia was always an option, PARI activists also frequently used their personal networks to distribute propaganda materials;[24] Furthermore, Singapore was an important hub for the Muslim pilgrimage. Many Indonesians passed by Singapore on their way to, and back from, Mecca. Tamin noted that many of Tan Malaka's books would "*naik haji"* (literally to rise to Haji, made the pilgrimage to Mecca) first before entering Indonesia. Finally, Singapore is a port city with abundant opportunities to work as seamen. Many PKI fugitives took refuge at seamen's dormitories when they first arrived in the city and soon became sailors and mechanics themselves through fellow countrymen's introduction. Tamin's disciples Kandur and Djamaluddin Ibrahim, for example, took advantage of their seaman jobs and frequently helped to smuggle PARI publications to Indonesia. Tan Malaka's *Semangat Muda* and *Massa Actie* seemed to have enjoyed an extensive readership to the extent that many PNI-affiliated intellectuals quoted his words in their speeches and writings. Tamin was also pleased to find out that some Surabaya-based newspapers often cite articles and sentences from PARI documents.[25]

Running PARI from Singapore also has its downside. The Straits Settlements authorities tightened their surveillance against communist activities in 1927. The shift of British policy was closely related to political events in China and Indonesia at the time: The ongoing nationalist revolution in China polarized the politics of the Malayan Chinese. Under the influence of leftwing forces, the colony saw a rapid rise of anti-British sentiment during the 1926-27 period. A violent clash between supporters of the GMD Leftwing and the police, or the so-called Kreta Ayer Incident, broke out in March 1927, which led to the death of six people and protracted protests in following months[26]. Meanwhile, the two abortive PKI uprisings prompted the NEI government to call for closer international cooperation in policing communist activities. Due to geographical proximity and the fact that Singapore had been serving as PKI overseas center, Dutch and British authorities gradually came to the consensus that anti-communist cooperation was of great significance. Although the British handling of the Alimin-Musso case was somewhat disappointing from the Dutch perspective, the two governments regarded communism as a common threat and expressed their willingness deepen the cooperation.[27] Moreover, police officials of the two sides established a close working relationship with each other, which laid a good foundation for the two governments' cross-border policing in subsequent years.[28] As a result, PARI faced much heavier pressures from the British surveillance compared to the PKI.

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[24] For example, PARI smuggled its first batch of Tan Malaka's writing to Indonesia through Siti Djuriah, sister of Maswar Madjid. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 63.
[25] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 63.
[26] See my discussion in Chapter 8.
[27] See my discussion in Chapter 9 and "Consul-General Batavia (Crosby)'s No. 47 Secret of April 14th, 1927" in CO 273/535, National Archives of Britain, Kew, UK.
[28] For instance, M. Visbeen, assistant commissioner of the Batavian police, came to Malaya in December 1926 and stayed there until July 1927. During his stay in the Malaya, he formed close ties with his British counterparts such as Fairburn, the inspector general, and Rene Onraet, the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). See Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order," 68.

To evade the British surveillance, Tamin and his followers relied on the seaman network. As mentioned earlier, Tamin had helped many PKI fugitives find accommodations and jobs by connecting them to Indonesian sailors in Singapore. By taking up the seaman jobs, not only could the PKI fugitives make modest livings, but also enjoy some other benefits for the party operation. Colonial authorities certainly did not pay much attention to the activities of such a marginal group. Even if they had the intention to do so, keeping track of seamen's whereabouts was extremely difficult, as the highly mobile group were often away from the city for work and sailors frequently switch from one ship to another. For PARI's operation, seamen played several crucial roles: First, they were central to the dissemination of books and other propaganda materials. Tamin and his disciples mostly printed Tan Malaka's writings in Singapore in large volume and sent them back to Indonesia through the secretive channels of seamen. Kandur and Djamaluddin Ibrahim were two of the most active PARI couriers who often smuggled books to Indonesia alternately. While Kandur went back and forth between Singapore and Sumatra, Djamaluddin Ibrahim frequently traveled between Batavia, Singapore, Pekan Baru, and Padang.[29] Secondly, PARI relied on the seamen to approach leaders of nationalist groups such as Sukarno, Singgih, and Dr. Soetomo.[30] A common tactic was to connect with local branches of the PNI and recruit potential members for PARI activities[31]. Moreover, the seamen network was essential to maintain contact among PARI members dispersed in different locations. PARI activists considered postal services insecure as colonial authorities often intercept letters. Therefore, the party often delivered messages through the seamen network, both inside Indonesia and beyond, by concealing letters and documents inside newspapers.[32] However, suitable couriers were not always available, and Tamin had to figure out other methods to keep in contact with Tan Malaka. Tamin thus sent several batches of young PARI activists to China in hopes that they could reconnect with the party chairman while gaining knowledge and experience. For instance, Tamin sent Mardjono and Arief Siregar to Amoy in 1927. Djamaluddin Ibrahim and Sarosan went on the same journey a year later.[33] When Tamin sensed danger in Singapore in 1928, he had to move from one lodging house to another but almost always stayed his seaman friends. In August 1930, Tamin started to work as a seaman himself on board the "Darvel" of the Singapore-Zamboanga-Mindanao line. While the ship ran aground near Sandakan, British Borneo, Tamin took the opportunity to enter the city, where he managed to re-establish contact with Tan Malaka.[34]

As time passed by, some of the PARI members became well-established in Singapore. Umar Giri, for instance, opened a cigarette shop in Singapore's Geylang area together with his

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29 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 64.
30 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 68. Also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 34.
31 Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 14.
32 "De Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI)," Mailrapport 509x/1931, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 95. Also see Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI),* 13-14.
33 According to Tamin, he initially only wanted to send Djamaluddin Ibrahim to Amoy and asked him not to reveal the plan to anyone due to the high cost. However, Sarosan heard about the plan and insisted on joining the trip. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 64.
34 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 69-70.

comrades Subandi and Djamaluddin Ibrahim. By selling smuggled cigarettes and cigars from Indonesia, the business significantly improved the financial situation of the party. Towards the end of 1928, most party members had secured higher income by taking stable jobs or running private businesses. In addition to sustaining their daily lives, PARI members could now contribute a good amount of money to the party's operation and even provide financial assistance to Tan Malaka in China.[35] A major drawback of having more established lives in Singapore, as Tamin pointed out, was that some PARI activists gradually lost their desire to get involved in dangerous activities as they did not want to give up their comfortable lives in the city. While PARI members kept sending books and newsletters to Indonesia, Tamin thought some of them were no longer passionate and confident about continuous struggles against Dutch colonialism.[36]

Indolence of these members aside, PARI did manage to send activists back to Indonesia in hopes of influencing nationalist movements there. Mardjono and Sarosan were the most active among PKI fugitives who successfully penetrated into Indonesia while maintaining close contact with the Singapore head office. Mardjono and Sarosan had known each other in Semarang, where they were both active in the PKI-affiliated Indonesian Scout Organization.[37] In May 1926, Mardjono and Sarosan moved to Banjarmasin, where he worked for the local newspaper *Borneo Post*. After the PKI revolts, they escaped to Singapore and worked at the Al Ikwan Press owned an Arab entrepreneur named Said Djen Alsagaff. The two PKI fugitives met Tamin and joined PARI in Singapore. Between late 1927 and early 1928, Mardjono and Sarosan went to Amoy successively, where they received training from Tan Malaka. Mardjono returned to Banjarmasin in early 1928, followed by Sarosan who worked briefly as a sailor on the Singapore-Australian line.[38] While teaching at a private school run by his old comrade Moenandar, Mardjono established a PARI liaison office, through which he maintained close contact with Singapore under the guise of a local postman.[39]

While Mardjono was busy re-establishing the liaison office in Banjarmasin, Sarosan went to Java around April 1928. Through the introduction of Soedarmo, Mardjono's brother and a NIS (Netherlands Indies Railway Company, *Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij*) clerk,

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35 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 67.

36 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 68.

37 Mardjono was Tan Malaka's student at the People's School (*Sekolah Rakyat*) in Semarang, which was established in 1921 to train party members. With its great success, the school expanded to many other places in the NEI. The "People's School" is also known's as Tan Malaka's School. See Helen Jarvis, "Tan Malaka: Revolutionary or Renegade?," *Critical Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 1987): 42. Sarosan graduated from a Dutch Native School in Purworejo and worked for PKI organ *Sinar Hindia*. Subsequently, he became a student nurse at the Semarang Central Hospital, where he participated in strikes and lost his job. He then joined the PKI organ *API* under Subakat's leadership. See Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 35.

38 "Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, Proces Verbaal," July 1930, Mailrapport. 509x/1931, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 95. Also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 35-36.

39 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 67.

Sarosan got in touch with Danoewirjo, an NIS conductor and a former member of the PKI-affiliated VSTP (Association of Railway and Tram Workers, *Vereniging van Spoor-en Tramwegpersoneel*) who was still active in trade unionism. Danoewirjo then joined PARI and introduced Sarosan to his NIS coworkers such as Soetedjo and Tjokrosoebono, both from Cepu, and Ngadimin from Semarang. As Shiraishi noted, there were obvious advantages for conducting propaganda among railway workers. Before the 1926-27 PKI revolts, the VSTP was one of the most potent and best-organized trade unions under the communist leadership with seventy-seven branches and 8,293 members by November 1925.[40] Although the VSTP suffered destruction in the government's wholesale clamp-down on communism, many workers still had the hope to revive the militant trade union movement and were willing to carry out propaganda for PARI among their "old friends."[41] According to Tamin, the group carried out successful campaigns in Central and East Java, and mobilized 350 railway workers within the first three months.[42]

Around the same time, Soenarjo, an editor of the Malay newspaper *Indonesia Baroe* (New Indonesia), co-founded the Indonesian Workers' Union (*Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia,* or SKBI) in Surabaya in July 1928. For obvious reasons, forming a labor union under the old communist banner was not only unwise but also infeasible, as the NEI authorities could easily relate such attempts to the revival of the communist movement. The co-founders thus claimed that the SKBI was under the nationalist leadership and positioned the organization as continuing the work of the PKI-influenced *Persarikatan Kaoem Buruh* (*Workers' Union,* PKB) without carrying out political activities. What was peculiar about the SKBI, however, was that its leadership comprised almost entirely of former members of the PKI and affiliated organizations. Soenarjo had a long career in the Indonesian Revolution and was active in the communist mass organization *Sarekat Rakyat* (SR), the PKI-influenced chauffeurs' union in Surabaya, and the machine shop workers' union in Malang before working as an editor of the leftwing newspaper *Sinar Indonesia* (Ray of Indonesia, formerly *Indonesia Baroe*). Besides Soenarjo, the first SKBI chairman Soedjiman and his successor Marsoedi, secretary Hadji Mohamad Abas, commissioner of the central committee Goenardjo were invariably former PKI members, whom the ARD had been watching closely even before the establishment of the union.[43] As a result, the government paid close attention to the SKBI's operation from the outset by planting numerous spies into the

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[40] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 13.

[41] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36.

[42] Tamin attributed the success of the propaganda campaign to Mardjono, who was at that time still in Banjarmasin. Tamin's recollection is contradictory to the official records based on the police interrogations with PARI activists. The official records showed that it was Sarosan who recruited the railway workers through Danoewirjo. Mardjono came to Java in March 1929. See "Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, Proces Verbaal," July 1930, Mailrapport. 509x/1931, Nationaal Archief; and Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36.

[43] Marsoedi, for example, had been placed under close surveillance in Surabaya since 1927 and was frequently mentioned as the leader of the communist publication *Sinar Indonesia* by the authorities in their political surveys. The police arrested in November 1926 following the failed PKI revolt in West Java and released him as he provided useful information which led to the arrests of "several PKI leaders who had eluded the police till that moment." Marsoedi was arrested again in 1927 for breaking press regulations and was released shortly after the SKBI's establishment. See Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 11.

organization. In September 1928, the SKBI elected Marsoedi as the new chairman and reshuffled the union's organizational structure by which the central committee decided to establish separate sub-committees for railway workers, printers, dockers, coachmen, and others. However, SKBI activities were far from successful under Marsoedi's leadership. Nationalist groups such as the PNI and Study Club showed no interests in cooperating with the SKBI and considered the union's leadership, as retold by Van der Plas, the Governor-General's Adviser for Native Affairs, as "shady figures" and "agent provocateurs, at least spies":

> Their communist past, the action first in *Sinar Indonesia,* later in *Indonesia Bersatoe,* and then in the SKBI, do not tally with the impunity they seem to enjoy, people say. "If they are bona fide communists," people told me, "we should be crazy to let them take us in a tow and it does not make any sense at all that the government, which sent so many hundreds to Digoel, does nothing against them or they are spies—as we believe—but then we are not so damn as they think."[44]

While keep placing the SKBI under rigorous surveillance, the government was not in a rush to crack down on the SKBI. With enough spies planted in the SKBI, officials were well informed about the union's actions and believed that they should wait for the right moment to use the SKBI as a bait to destroy all the militant trade unions, a potential central body for trade unionism, and the PNI all at once.[45] The government's deliberate inaction notwithstanding, the SKBI had limited success in expanding its influence, as reflected by its halted public rallies and training programs, the suspension of its organ *Sendjata Indonesia* (Indonesian Weapons) due to financial constraints, and members' widespread complaint of Marsoedi's leadership.[46] The SKBI, too, was interested in gaining support from railway workers, as many of them had fresh memories of the VSTP and were still eager to revive the trade union movement. Marsoedi approached the same group of activists such as Danoewirjo and Ngadimin, whom Sarosan had recruited into PARI, and asked them if they would like to work for the SKBI. Shiraishi points out that although Dutch intelligence records show that the SKBI carried out propaganda in a number of places across Central and East Java in late 1928 and early 1929, some of these activities might have been under the tutelage of PARI. In early 1929, Soenarjo fell out with Marsoedi and moved to Banjarmasin, where he joined Mardjono and Moenandar and became a PARI propagandist.[47]

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[44] "Nota van Ch. O. van der Plas (td. wd. adviseur voor inlandse zaken) April 1929," 207-212, as quoted in Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 12.

[45] As Shiraishi noted, three factors contributed to the government's patience in handling the SKBI: 1. The government wanted to wait and see if the SKBI was going to become more militant; 2. The SKBI was in the middle of the competition between Indonesian nationalists and the Sarekat Islam over the dominance in influencing the trade union movement; and 3. As the PNI put growing emphasis on trade unionism, the government wanted to see if the SKBI and the PNI-led movement would converge. See Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 12-15.

[46] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 15.

[47] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 35-36.

3. Endless arrests

PARI operation encountered various difficulties from its outset. Chief among the hardships, as mentioned earlier, was the tightened police surveillance from both Dutch and British authorities. Having confirmed the existence of the PARI network in Singapore, the Straits Settlements Police (CID-SS) arrested PARI propagandist Maswar Madjid in September 1928. Maswar Madjid came to Singapore from South Sumatra in the wake of failed PKI revolts. After working as a seaman for more than a year, Maswar Madjid got a job at Barmer Export, a German company in Singapore where Tan Malaka used to work in 1926. With the extra income, Maswar Madjid rented a house on Joo Chiat Road of Singapore, which soon turned into a major PARI liaison office. From this office, PARI activists kept receiving Tan Malaka's writings—usually hidden in Chinese newspapers—from Amoy and smuggled them back to Indonesia. The CID confiscated numerous PARI documents in Maswar Madjid's arrest, which showed that the Singapore group had been in close contact with addresses in Amoy and Bangkok. However, it was not clear to the CID at this point whether these addresses belonged to Tan Malaka and Subakat, because they all used pseudonyms in their correspondence. Djamaluddin Tamin and Umar Giri narrowly escaped the arrest, as they had noticed that CID agents were searching Maswar Madjid's house.[48] The Straits Settlements authorities detained Maswar Madjid for five months and handed him to their Dutch counterparts in February 1929. The NEI government banished him to Boven Digul in October of the same year. Although Maswar Madjid did not reveal much about the PARI network, both Dutch and British authorities obtained critical information to conduct further investigations.[49]

From Maswar Madjid's arrest, the ARD learned that the PARI activists in Singapore had been corresponding with someone named Eaquire Lawson with an address in Amoy, China.[50] The Attorney-General's Office (*hoofdparket*) contacted the Dutch consul in Amoy, who, with the help of the French police in the city, identified Eaquire Lawson as Tan Malaka. The Dutch consul also discovered that Tan Malaka had been receiving mails from someone working at a Bangkok-based Danish trading company called Viggo-Lund. The *hoofdparket* then requested the Dutch consul in Siam to look into the address, and he soon learned that an Indonesian named Mohamad Zain worked there. With a photo of Mohamad Zain sent by the Dutch diplomat, intelligence officers in Batavia soon realized that Mohamad Zain was in fact Subakat. The NEI authorities started to negotiate with the Siamese government in April 1929 and recommended that the PKI fugitive be arrested and extradited to Indonesia.[51] Finally, in September, the ARD sent two agents to Bangkok, where they confirmed that Mohamad Zain was indeed Subakat.[52] The Siamese

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48 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 66-67.

49 Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 33.

50 The address is "Eaquire Lawson, c/o Pit Sang Dispensary, Chan Chuang, Amoy." "Brief consul-generaal Shanghai aan GG," 14 November 1928, in Mailrapport 1142x/28, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 67. Also see Poeze, *Tan Malaka,* 396.

51 Poeze, *Tan Malaka,* 396-7.

52 According to Tamin, an Indonesian religious teacher named Haji Djalaluddin betrayed Subakat in Bangkok and provided his information to the Dutch consul there. See Tamin,

authorities arrested him on October 8 and seized many important PARI documents in the home search, including the party's manifesto and statutes. After holding the PARI co-founder for two months, the Siamese government handed over Subakat together with the documents to the NEI authorities in December 1929.[53]

By studying the seized documents, the ARD learned for the first time the existence of the PARI network, which had been founded in Bangkok two years ago. Attorney-General R.J.M. Verheijen wrote a letter to Governor-General De Graeff right away, in which he reiterated his previous concern over a group of people who "participated in the action (uprising) of the PKI, went overseas and dare not return to this country (Indonesia)." He went on by pointing out that these people continued to work closely with each other from abroad and try to spread seeds of Bolshevism through illegal channels to plot against the Dutch government. While the discovery of PARI substantiated Verheijen's suspicion, he was struck by the fact that the seemingly extensive network operated secretly under a Central Executive Committee (CEC) consisting of only three people. Besides Subakat, the ARD believed that Tan Malaka and Alimin were the other two central figures in the PARI leadership. Identified themselves as "*Kongsi Tiga* (Company of Three)," the triumvirate was also in frequent contact with a group of revolutionaries under a wide variety of pseudonyms such as Kan, Jozeph, Mandar, Marwal, Ogiri & Co., which the police found difficult to decipher. The ARD only managed to associate a handful of pseudonyms to the three CEC members: Subakat used Ma, Matheus, Masin alternately; Alimin (who was actually Tamin) was often called Boediman; and Tan Malaka was sometimes referred to as Nadir or Coby.[54]

After scrutiny of PARI leaders' correspondence, the ARD concluded that PARI "had done practically nothing," as activists had not firmly established the organization in Indonesia yet. The ARD found it particularly alarming, however, that PARI was actively seeking cooperation with Indonesia's nationalist groups. Tan Malaka wrote a letter to prominent Indonesian nationalist leaders such as Sukarno, Singgih, and Dr. Soetomo in May 1929. In this letter, he commented critically on the "root causes of the inglorious collapse of the once so influential Communist Party of Indonesia," and expressed his plan to achieve "a new sort of [political] configuration, organization, and politics, in which the old mistakes can be avoided and with which our goal [of independence] will be attainable in full speed with minimum time losses." Tan Malaka ended the letter by advocating close cooperation among nationalists to fight against Dutch colonialism:

> Since our party operates underground, cooperation is difficult to achieve. However, it is not impossible, especially if there is a mutual need or sympathy for that. We believe from our side that we can do much in the interests of the nationalist movement, and therefore in our own interests, especially in its "Asian-Politics," since we have men in the Party who have or could have direct contact with nationalist leaders in China, India and North Indonesia—the Philippines. The nationalist gentlemen can also do something for us

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"Sedjarah PKI," 69.

[53] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 33.

[54] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 312.

> without deviating from their own principles while supporting the general interests of Indonesians. But before making concrete proposals, which should be better communicated through a possible oral discussion, we must first hear from the nationalists—whether they are willing to cooperate with us.
>
> Before we have this answer, however, we wish in the name of our Party to express our most sincere revolutionary wishes that Indonesian Nationalism will accomplish within a short time what is expected of him by virtue of his right, essence, and purpose. May this finally soon come true: that the emergence of modern Nationalism will signify the beginning of the end of the Dutch rule.[55]

Such vehement advocation notwithstanding, PARI's plan to reach out to nationalist leaders turned out to be far less fruitful than the leaders expected. In fact, PARI did not even succeed in organizing a conference of its members. Confiscated documents showed that the party initially planned to hold a meeting on September 15, possibly in Singapore, which would include six representatives from Java, three from Sumatra, and one from the outer islands of the NEI. However, according to Tan Malaka's letter dated June 19, "Rambutan," the person in charge of the Sumatran section, encountered difficulties in finding suitable people to attend the conference. Tan Malaka noted that PARI should not expect too much about this "Rambutan," as the police always followed him. By studying other documents, the ARD speculated that "Rambutan" was the pseudonym of Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, an Indonesian student leader who had been involved in Indonesian nationalist politics while studying in the Netherlands and stayed in Russia for roughly two years since 1925, before moving back to Indonesia at the end of 1927.[56] Although it was debatable whether Iwa should be regarded as a true communist, as he later claimed that what he learned in Russia was "repugnant," there was little doubt that his student activism and Moscow past caught the special attention of the Dutch authorities ever since he set foot on the Indonesian soil. After closely watching Iwa's activities for almost a year, the NEI police arrested him in Medan on July 26, 1929. In a letter dated August 10, Tamin stated that only two PARI members could come to Singapore to attend the conference due to the arrest of Iwa. However, such a conference was never materialized.[57] As Shiraishi points out, although the ARD was probably correct in speculating that "Rambutan" was Iwa, it does not necessarily mean that he had been deeply involved in PARI activities as other members. Given his reputation in the nationalist circle and the fact that he spent time in Moscow, it is possible that Tamin had contacted him in hopes of expanding the PARI network to Sumatra, but his arrest in July just

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[55] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 313.

[56] I will discuss Iwa Koesoema Soemantri's story in greater detail in a later chapter based on his autobiography *Sang Pejuang dalam gejolak sejarah: otobiografi Prof. Mr. R.H. Iwa Kusuma Sumantri*. (Bandung: Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan, Universitas Padjadjaran: Satya Historika, 2002). For his activities and police actions around this period, also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 17-30.

[57] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 314.

forced Tamin to drop the plan.[58]

It is important to note that the successive arrests of Iwa and Subakat coincided with the NEI authorities' clampdown on the SKBI. As mentioned above, the government was well informed of SKBI activities and had been waiting for the right moment to eradicate the organization together with other militant trade unions all at once. In July 1929, the NEI authorities finally decided to take actions when the police obtained a letter from a spy they had planted in the suspicious organization. The letter shows that the SKBI was in contact with the Comintern-influenced League against Imperialism in Brussels and that the Secretariat of the League had decided to accept the SKBI as a member. The ARD soon learned from the Dutch Intelligence Service that it was Indonesian leftwing activists in The Hague, Roestam Effendi and Ticoalu Pandean, who had helped establish the connection between the SKBI and the League.[59] While the government had generally been taking a "wait-and-see" attitude towards the rather unsuccessful SKBI activities in the colony up to this point, the SKBI's affiliation with a front organization of international communism was not something they could tolerate. The Attorney-General's Office (*hoofdparket*) thus ordered a thorough house search of SKBI branches and arrested hundreds of SKBI members across Java. Although the majority of the arrested SKBI activists were soon released, the government decided to punish the leaders by banishing them to Boven Digul, including chairman Marsoedi, Goenardjo (commissioner of the executive committee), Ahija Soeparti (chairman of the branch for rail workers), Sadino Martopoespito (propagandist and batik trader), Soemokasdiro (propagandist and former station clerk), and Moeljono (propagandist from Yogyakarta).[60]

The police crackdown on the SKBI also destabilized the PARI network. The government had marked Soenarjo, who now worked closely with key PARI activists such as Mardjono and Sarosan, as an SKBI propagandist since a long time ago. While Dutch authorities carried out large-scale arrests of SKBI members in Java, the police also detained Soenarjo and Mardjono briefly in Banjarmasin in July 1929 due to Soenarjo's past involvement in the organization. Upon their release, the two fled to Singapore and Sarosan joined the group soon after.[61] In September, Tamin sent Mardjono and Sarosan to Amoy, where they stayed with Tan Malaka for a month. Mardjono went back to Banjarmasin in November; whereas Sarosan returned to Singapore and stayed with Tamin and Soenarjo until the end of the year.[62]

Interestingly, up until this point, Soenarjo seemed to be the only person deeply involved in both the SKBI and PARI, Iwa and Alimin (who was, in fact, Tamin) hardly knew each other, and the PARI group had fallen out with Alimin and Musso after the PKI's unsuccessful uprisings. From

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[58] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 34.

[59] "Procureur Generaal aan Gouverneur Generaal, August 27, 1929," Mailrapport. 812x/1929, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 74.

[60] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 16.

[61] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 314.

[62] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36.

the perspective of the *hoofdparket,* however, the SKBI, PARI, Iwa, Alimin, and Musso were all connected.[63] By studying documents seized from Subakat's arrest, Verheijen noticed that two names, "Jono" and "Nar," frequently appeared in the correspondence of PARI leaders. Probably influenced by his fresh memory of the recent crackdown on the SKBI, Verheijen speculated that "Jono" and "Nar" were associated with both organizations:

> According to a letter from Boediman (Alimin) [reads Tamin] of 31 August, these people ["Jono" and "Nar"] arrived in the "Pangkalan" in the third week of August,[64] because Alimin [Tamin] says: "they have left the helmsman in connection with the es-ka-be-i disease (SKBI case),[65] which Nar himself was involved." "Jono" and "Nar" have reported to Alimin regarding the measures taken against the *Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia* (SKBI). Based on this writing, it can thus be established that "Jono" and "Nar" knew where Alimin [Tamin] was staying and they had been staying in touch with each other and that the two left this country [Indonesia] for "Pangkalan" after the police operation of July 26th. I suppose that "Jono" is Sediono and "Nar" refers to Soenarjo, who both participated in SKBI activities in Surabaya.[66]

While Verheijen was right in supposing "Nar" as Soenarjo, obviously he had no idea that Soenarjo had fallen out with his SKBI comrades and left for Banjarmasin to join the PARI group. "Jono" was, in fact, Mardjono, who played a key role in PARI activities in Indonesia, but was not a member of the SKBI. Verheijen failed to understand what Tamin meant by "left the helmsman in connection with the es-ka-be-i disease, which Nar himself was involved," which suggested that PARI members wanted to stay away from the SKBI incident that Soenarjo had *previously* involved. Verheijen's speculation did not just stop there, as he regarded Alimin as the key figure in the PARI network, through which both the SKBI and Iwa were connected:

> In summary, based on the documents, I suggest that preliminary contact exist: (a) between the two SKBI members on Java and Alimin (Partai Republik Indonesia), and (b) between "Rambutan" on Sumatra and Alimin. Keeping this in mind, I also thought of another related issue: shortly after the establishment of the SKBI in Surabaya, the industrial center for sugar companies, propaganda was also carried out to establish the SKBI in Medan, the cultural center of Sumatra's East Coast and where Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri lives. Obviously, it meant to become a unitary workers' union in the

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63 "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 314-315. Also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 34.

64 The NEI government was aware that "Jono" and "Nar" left Indonesia but did not know that they went to Singapore. Verheijen's reported that the two went to some sort of "Pangkalan" (base), but speculated that it was a port in British Borneo.

65 "Helmsman" probably refers to Moenandar, who was running the PARI liaison office in Banjarmasin under cover of a private school teacher while Mardjono and Soenarjo went away.

66 "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 314.

region. In this regard, we always suspect that Iwa Koesoema Soemantri has a guiding hand in it.

The now revealed connections with Alimin (Partai Republik Indonesia) may not be surprising. The investigation that has been carried out will be continued in this direction, and Mr. Koesoema Soemantri has to be interrogated about this as soon as we need. Needless to say that it is unnecessary to wait until the approval of his (Iwa's) internment because an eventual hearing of Koesoema Soemantri will only establish the case that the contact between the "Partai Republik Indonesia" and this country [Indonesia] is completely possible. However, in a frequently mentioned letter of 3 December, I wrote about Mr. Koesoema Soemantri and Alimin (and Musso), as well as the so-called Singapore Center. I noted that it would not surprise me if it turned out that those concerned individuals had also been informed of the establishment of PARI. Although nothing is known with absolute certainty at the moment, I have found enough reasons to urge your Excellency again: [we should] intern Mr. Koesoema Soemantri in a remote place in the Netherlands Indies to provide as much security as possible, so that he can no longer maintain contact with foreign countries.[67]

The ARD's investigation of Iwa's case continued till March 7, 1930, when the Council of the Netherlands Indies (*Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië*) finally met to deliberate his internment. As Shiraishi has noted, the central piece of incriminating evidence was not Iwa's political activities on the East Coast of Sumatra. Instead, what the NEI government found particularly problematic it was Iwa's involvement in student activism in the Netherlands and his two-year stay in Moscow, which made officials like Verheijen tend to believe that Iwa was indeed a communist.[68] We are not going to delve into details of Iwa's European years here yet, but suffice it to say that by putting Iwa into an imagined network he did not belong to, Dutch officials invented a fictive communist world that encompassed PARI, the SKBI, and various other leftwing forces. On March 22, Governor-General De Graeff eventually ordered Iwa's banishment to Banda Neira, and he left for his exile in June. Iwa was not banished to Digoel as other communists because he was considered an "intellectual."[69]

While handling Iwa, Dutch authorities were undoubtedly under pressure to take quick actions, as the case coincided with the rise of other anti-colonial activities, which were in one way or another all connected from the perspective of the Dutch authorities. On December 1929, for instance, the police arrested Sukarno, along with three other PNI leaders Gatot Mangkupraja, Maskun Supriadinata, and Supriadinata, for their attempts to overthrow the Dutch government.[70]

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[67] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 315.

[68] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 26.

[69] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 30.

[70] Tamin points out that PARI suffered huge losses in 1929/30 due to the arrests of not only the PARI members but also nationalist leaders whom PARI inspired. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 70. Also see Mavis Rose, *Indonesia Free: A Political Biography of Mohammad Hatta* (Equinox Publishing, 2010), 94.

Meanwhile, Verheijen noticed Tan Malaka had warned his disciples in a letter: "no doubt the 'cheese' (Dutch authorities) knew about the actions of the lawyer on Sumatra's East Coast," by which Verheijen suggested that the arrest of Iwa might have alerted PARI members.[71] Almost around the same time, the police investigated the case of Subakat, who had just been extradited to the NEI from Siam. However, Visbeen, the Batavian police chief, acquired very little information other than what he already knew in his interrogation of Subakat. Subakat told Visbeen that "Boediman" was Bakri, but he did not reveal that Bakri's true identity was Tamin. Additionally, Subakat said that Alimin was not involved in PARI, but again, Visbeen did not believe him. Subakat committed suicide in prison on February 2, 1930.[72]

Despite the strict punishment imposed on the arrested leaders, PARI activists made more attempts to expand their organizations. At the turn of 1929 and 1930, Soenarjo and Sarosan left Singapore for Java: Soenarjo took up an editorial job at *Soeara Oemoem,* a newspaper published by Dr. Soetomo's Study Club in Surabaya; Sarosan joined his old recruits Danoewirjo and Tjokrosoebono in Central Java trying to revitalize the trade union movement, especially among the rail workers. Deeply terrified by the arrests of SKBI members in 1929, however, rail workers were no longer keen to carry out propaganda for PARI.[73] Worse still, an unexpected affair took place, which created an irremediable rupture among the key PARI activists: in mid-1930, Sarosan committed adultery with Tjokrosoebono's wife, but Tjokrosoebono caught them shortly after and threatened to kill Sarosan. Although Danoewirjo tried to salvage the situation by giving Sarosan some money and let him go away, Sarosan surrendered himself to a police *wedana* named Ramelan in fear of Tjokrosoebono's retaliation on July 10. In his interrogation, Sarosan revealed to Ramelan the identity of PARI activists in Central and East Java, as well as the existence of the PARI network, which stretched far beyond the NEI borders.[74]

Sarosan's betrayal resulted in the arrest of PARI activists across the NEI by August 1930: Sarosan and Danoewirjo in Solo, Mardjono and Moenandar in Bandjermasin, Soenarjo in Soerabaja, Soetedjo in Cepu, Ngadimin in Wonogiri, R. Moerdomo in Kediri, Soedarmo in Bojonegoro, and Soewarjo in Semarang. While the government charged all of them of carrying out propaganda and actions for an illegal organization to overthrow the government, they found no evidence that Moerdomo, Soedarmo, and Soewarjo had participated in PARI. The authorities thus detained the seven ringleaders and conducted lengthy investigations into their alleged involvement in clandestine activities.[75]

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[71] Tan Malaka's original words were in Indonesian: "*Adakah orang jang bisa sangsi „bahwa cheese tidak tahoe perboeatan itoe 'lawyer de Langkawi Timoer'*." Verheijen quoted the original and gave a Dutch translation "*zou iemand nog kunnen betwijfelen dat 'cheese' (het Hollandsch Gezag) van de handelingen van dien advocaat ter Sumatra's Oostkust op de hoogte is?,*" indicating that PARI members were extremely vigilant, and that the government should not take any risk to tolerate the kind of connection Iwa had with PARI.

[72] Proces Verbaal (Soebakat), 13 Jan 1930, Verbaal. 6 Aug 1930 B18, as quoted in Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 34.

[73] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36-37.

[74] See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 68; and Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36-37.

[75] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur - generaal (De Graeff)," 21 March 1931, No. 794/A.P, geh. eig. Afschrift. Mr. 1931 no. 509 geh. in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van*

Arresting and prosecuting the activists was easy, apparently, but it took the government so much longer than expected to figure out what PARI's true nature was. In March 1931, Verheijen was only able to send the Governor-General his second report about PARI, which he had promised at the end of 1929.[76] The report shows that the *hoofdparket* finally realized that Tan Malaka and Subakat co-founded PARI in Bangkok in 1927 with Djamaluddin Tamin, instead of Alimin as they had firmly believed previously. The "secrecy" (*geheim*, italicized in the original text) that PARI managed to keep deeply surprised the *hoofdparket*, which he believed was Tan Malaka's primary principle to prevent his nascent organization from getting crushed by the government. Verheijen expressed his serious concerns in the report:

> It is striking that the members of PARI's Central Executive Committee (CEC) are not located in one place. Even if we arrest one of the leaders, there is no need for them to fear the simultaneous arrest of the others, so that there was a good chance that the leadership would not be compromised and the actions could be continued. With great circumspection, they have managed to make contact with the NEI and also in this respect, they have taken all sorts of measures to prevent the party from being discovered in this colony. They used codes in the correspondence, while the names of the propagandists and confidants were disguised with pseudonyms.[77]

Moreover, Verheijen pointed out that the investigation had become increasingly difficult due to the appointment of the "chief agents" (*hoofdagenten*) and their assistant "propagandists" (*propagan-disten*). Under such a system, although the government could still discover PARI activities from time to time, the damage that police operations brought to the party was quite minimal. Verheijen concluded that Tamin was PARI's chief agent for Sumatra and speculated that Iwa might have been his assistant in charge of the island's east coast, although he was still not able to provide any substantial evidence. Meanwhile, Verheijen finally realized that the "Jono" he mentioned in the first report was not Sediono but Mardjono, who secretly led PARI operations in Java as the chief agent from Banjarmasin with great precaution, while Sarosan worked as his assistant. As Shiraishi points out, the so-called "chief agent-propagandist" system probably only existed in Verheijen's imagination, as Tamin mentioned neither the terms nor the kind of working relationship in his memoir. To a large extent, the Dutch policing apparatus projected its own organizational structure to their understanding of PARI's, and believed that "PARI had a structure that was isomorphic with itself, albeit far smaller."[78] While such an

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de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië, 547.

[76] Verheijen made the promise when he was investigating Iwa's case. See "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan Gouverneur-Generaal (De Graeff)," 17 December 1929, No. 2518/A.P. zr. gch. cig. Vb. 6 aug. 1930 Ir, MIS in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 316.

[77] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur - generaal (De Graeff)," 21 March 1931, No. 794/A.P, geh. eig. Afschrift. Mr. 1931 no. 509 geh. in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 548-9.

[78] To illustrate his point, Shiraishi draws between Tan Malaka and the ARD Chief Van der Most, between Tamin and Visbeen, and between Sarosan and Ramelan, a native police *wedana* in Solo to whom Sarosan surrendered himself. See Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 37.

explanation may sound a little far-fetched, it reflects a key feature of how PARI was organized on the ground—a communist cell system that Tan Malaka often proposed in his writings.[79] Ngadimin confessed in his interrogation that Sarosan told him about the establishment of a new party in Banjarmasin, which aimed to expand in Java by forming a new cell system. Each cell consists of six members and is divided into two branches. While branch A has only one member, branch B usually comprises of five, who receive direct instructions from member A but may not know each other. Members of branch B are not supposed to contact anyone other than member A, not even the executives in Banjarmasin and abroad. The main task for these cells is to expand by joining other organizations in hopes of taking over the leadership in the event of mass action. However, Sarosan never said anything about what the members were supposed to do once they had formed cells in other organizations, as the moment for mass action had not arrived yet.[80]

Despite the successful crackdown, Verheijen warned that the PARI movement had not been completely put off, as many people involved were still at large. Even worse, Sarosan managed to escape from Batavia's Central Civil Hospital (*Centrale Burgerlijke Ziekeninrichting*) while receiving temporary treatment and was nowhere to find by the time Verheijen wrote his report. The ARD thus suspected that Sarosan might have already fled overseas and notified PARI leaders of the suppression of the party organization in Indonesia. As Verheijen pointed out, although PARI had not yet gained substantial support, its agents were diligent in making contact and recruit members, which could lead to severe consequences. Therefore, similar to his suggestion regarding Iwa's case, Verheijen recommended that the Governor-General should be tough by prosecuting the concerned PARI activists. Sarosan, in particular, should be re-arrested immediately and put in penal prison Struiswijk to receive further interrogations. Due to the secrecy of PARI's cell system, Dutch authorities had all the reasons to believe that their clampdown on the party network in Central and East Java only touched upon the tip of the iceberg. What they did not know, however, was that they had overestimated PARI's influence from the outset and that they had captured all the Java-based PARI activists in one haul following Sarosan's betrayal. It did not take long for the government to track down the PARI fugitive. Shortly after, the Governor-General ordered the internment of Sarosan, together with his other six comrades, to Boven Digoel.[81]

4. The NEI-Malaya connections

With the arrest of Subakat in Bangkok on October 8, 1929, PARI triumvirate, the "*Kongsi Tiga*," lost an indispensable pillar. With respect to the party's division of labor, Subakat's role might not be as significant as his two comrades—he was neither a gifted theorist as Tan Malaka, who

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79 Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, xcix

80 "Proces Verbaal (Ngadimin)," 9 August 1930, Mailrapport 509x/1931, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 95. Also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 38.

81 "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur - generaal (De Graeff)," 21 March 1931, No. 794/A.P, geh. eig. Afschrift. Mr. 1931 no. 509 geh. in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 547. Also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 36-37.

drafted most of the important party documents, nor a well-rounded executive as Djamaluddin Tamin, who almost single-handedly rebuilt a party network from the shambles of the PKI. However, Subakat's contribution was by no means trivial, for his post in Bangkok functioned as a secret hub connecting Tan Malaka, PARI's chief strategist in China and Tamin, the chief activist overseeing the party's operation across the NEI and British Malaya. As mentioned earlier, due to the increasingly stringent measures taken by both Dutch and British authorities, Tan Malaka would usually mail his writings to Bangkok in wrapped newspapers, which would be subsequently brought to Tamin and his disciples via trusted seamen traveling along the Singapore-Bangkok route. Without the presence of colonial states, Siam was—at least presumably—safer than Malaya and Indonesia, but Subakat's arrest and ultimate extradition seemed to suggest otherwise. PARI members had apparently underestimated the capability of the NEI government. Colonial intelligence and policing apparatuses could easily extend their arms to foreign lands through international cooperation. Additionally, Subakat's hideout in Bangkok acted as a sort of repository where crucial party literature was stored. With the seizure of the Subakat's archives, many PARI secrets also got exposed.

According to Tamin, it was Hadji Djalaluddin, a famous Bangkok-based Islamic teacher from Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra who sold out Subakat to the Siamese and NEI authorities. PARI activists in Singapore felt the impact of Subakat's arrest almost immediately, as Hadji Djalaluddin attempted to help Dutch officials make more arrests in Singapore by contacting people he knew in the PARI network. Having noticed the Hadji's intention, Tamin and his followers managed to conceal themselves temporarily from police surveillance, but they knew that the space in Singapore had become increasingly "tight and difficult (*sempit dan sulit*)." PARI members sensed the growing pressure from all sides, especially after hearing the crackdown on the SKBI in mid-1929, followed by the arrests of Iwa Koesoema Soemantri in July, Subakat in October, and Sukarno and his PNI co-founders in December. Exactly as Tamin put it, 1929 was a year when PARI and anti-colonial struggles suffered "heavy and crushing blows (*pukulan-pukulan yang dahsyat berat benar-benar*)."[82] 1930 turned out to be no better. In February 1930, PARI members heard that Subakat killed himself in the Glodok Prison of Batavia. Six months later, Dutch authorities crushed the PARI network in Central and East Java due to Sarosan's betrayal. From the interrogation of PARI activists, the ARD learned that most of the party documents entered Indonesia from Singapore through Mardjono, Soenarjo, and Sarosan.[83] Singapore once again became the thorn in the side of the NEI government, and they could only expect to pull it out by establishing a closer working relationship with the British authorities across the Malacca Strait.

(1). Deepened policing cooperation: the Batavia-Singapore axis

As Shiraishi points out, the Dutch-British policing cooperation improved significantly following the arrest of PARI activists in Central and East Java.[84] Compared to the ad hoc working-together of police departments in the wake of the PKI uprisings, which aimed to arrest and extradite

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[82] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 70.

[83] "Procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff)," 21 March 1931, No. 794/A.P, geh. eig. Afschrift. Mr. 1931 no. 509 geh. in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië*, 549.

[84] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 38.

Alimin and Musso, the working relationship reached a more systematic level in 1930 with a greater goal of countering communism as a common threat facing the two colonies. While what happened to the SKBI, PARI and PNI might have played a role in precipitating the cooperation, it would not be materialized so smoothly without the coincidental visit of Cecil Clementi, Governor of the Straits Settlements, to Java at the invitation of his NEI Governor-General De Graeff between August 27 and September 2, 1930. The purpose of this visit was to discuss various issues that concerned both sides, including rubber and tin production, establishing a wireless connection and airmail route, regulation of pilgrim ships, and most importantly, strengthening the cooperation in harnessing political movements of both the Chinese and native populations.[85] In De Graeff's word, British Malaya and the NEI had been close neighbors who "have so many mutual interests and need each other's goodwill in so many matters," and "nothing can be more helpful in promoting this goodwill than a personal acquaintance and understanding."[86]

As discussed in Part II, British Malaya and the NEI governments shared similar concerns over the colonies' political stability with different priorities: The Dutch authorities were busy handling native movements under the banner of communism, nationalism, and religion; Whereas the major threat facing the British colony was the increase of nationalist and communist activities within the Chinese community, which was closely associated with the shifting political situation in China. However, neither the Chinese nor the native movements limited themselves within just one colony, not to mention that the Chinese-native dichotomy imposed by the colonial states was severely problematic.[87] While the PARI operation provides us a perfect example of what a native movement was capable of doing, there were numerous signs Chinese movement—often centered in Malay—expanding to the NEI through the extensive Chinese network.[88] Moreover, Dutch and British authorities started to discover more cases where Chinese and native activists sought to join hands with each other to fight the colonial rule.[89] Such cases deserve separate discussions with greater details, but my point here is just to lay out the background in which Clementi's visit took place.

Before the meeting of the two governors, De Graeff's general secretary asked Attorney-General

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[85] Acting Consul-General (H. Fitzmaurice)'s report on the visit of the Governor of the Straits Settlements to Batavia, 3 September 1930,

[86] "Sir Cecil Clementi's Visit to Java," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Adviser*, September 3, 1930.

[87] For example, British authorities commonly used the term "Malay" when referring to Indonesian sojourners, while Chinese immigrants remained Chinese even if they had lived in the colony for generations.

[88] One of the best examples is that the NEI intelligence authorities dedicated a whole section of their monthly report *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten (PPO)* to Chinese affairs entitled "China en de Chinese beweging (China and the Chinese movement)." See Harry A. Poeze, eds., *Politiek-politioneele overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië: bronnenpublikatie* (Dordrecht: Foris Publ, 1983).

[89] For example, CID officials reported on discovered propaganda materials translated from Chinese to Romanized Malay in April 1930. See Rene Onraet, "A Report Showing the Connection between Chinese and Non-Chinese concerned in Communist Activities in Malaya." 1 April 1930, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 273/561.

R. J. M. Verheijen for suggestions about possible subjects that the Governor-General could discuss with his British counterpart. Verheijen, who was most likely in the middle of investigating the PARI affairs, replied in a personal letter dated 26 July 1930:

> Despite the appreciation we have for the cooperation with the Straits authorities in exchanging information about communist agitation and agitators, it seems that this cooperation is often purely incidental in nature...in particular, the Dutch Consulate General in Singapore does not seem to occupy the same position or experience the same treatment as what the British have here in the NEI. As a result, the British are better informed about this colony than we do for the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements…Especially for the security of Sumatra and islands located in the western parts of the NEI, a right attitude towards the interaction is absolutely needed by [establishing] connections with, and [finding] possibilities on, the "opposite side of the coast (*overwal*)" nearby.[90]

Indeed, Verheijen had all the reasons to cast doubt on the effectiveness of "purely incidental" cooperation they had been having with the British authorities, especially after learning that PARI activists in Java belonged to an extensive network, and that "communist leaders" were still plotting new actions against the Dutch government from British territories as they did for the PKI uprisings four years ago. On Verheijen's suggestion, De Graeff discussed the issue of communism at his meeting with Clementi on August 28. The two agreed on the principal point that the NEI and British Malaya should "maintain the closest possible liaison" on communism. Built on that, they specified that the two sides' responsible authorities, especially the police departments and offices in charge of Chinese affairs, should establish direct contact with each other. Furthermore, the two governors decided that officials from concerned authorities should meet on a regular basis to exchange views and information.[91] The NEI government appeared to be more active than the British in pushing the agreement forward. On 16 September, less than two week's after Clementi's departure, De Graeff sent a follow-up letter to his British counterpart, proposing that the two governments should take concrete steps to strengthen the cooperation against communist agitation. Specifically, the Dutch side believed that intelligence officers of the two sides should exchange:

> (1) Photographs and descriptions of suspected agitators;
> (2) Communist manifestos, posters, and handbills, if necessary in photographic reproduction;
> (3) Copies of important reports and sentences concerning commu-nist agitation and of important communist correspondence in pho-tographic reproduction;
> (4) Information about plans for extremist action in [each other's] ter-ritories.

While all these matters should be communicated through the intermediaries of each

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[90] Persoonlijke brief van procureur-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan de algemeen secretaris, 26 July 1930, No 2x. Afschrift, Verbaal, 1 November 1930, letter I 24 in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië,* 486.

[91] "Governor's (C. Clementi) report to the Colonial Secretary (Passfield Corner)," 5 September 1930, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 273/565.

government's consul-general, De Graeff emphasized that point (4) "should be given with all possible diligence." He urged Clementi to implement such arrangements as quickly as possible by putting the concerned officials into direct contact: the NEI Attorney-General Verheijen corresponding with the SS Inspector-General Harold Fairburn; and the NEI Advisor for Chinese Affairs (*Adviseur voor Chineesche Zaken*) H. Mouw corresponding with the SS Secretary of Chinese Affairs A. M. Goodman.[92] Mouw left Batavia for Singapore almost immediately after De Graeff sent out the letter to discuss with the British authorities "the many matters of common interest, which affect Chinese settlers in British and Dutch colonies and their descendants born out of China." Only a few weeks later, Verheijen's deputy, Advocate-General G. Vonk embarked on the same journey with the purpose of "maintaining a close liaison for dealing with communists or other revolutionary disorders, and of exchanging views and information on this and other kindred subjects."[93]

Vonk stayed in Singapore from 10 to 17 October. While there, he enjoyed what he called "very special, almost cordial confidentiality (*zeer bijzondere, welhaast hartelijke vertrouwelijkheid*)" in his discussions with his British counterparts on joint efforts to fight against communism and other insurgencies. Besides receiving a large number of bundles and documents concerning various political affairs in Malaya, Vonk also exchanged views on policing nationalist movements in a broader context with Inspector-General Fairburn, who shared secret documents from the British Indian Intelligence Bureau with his Dutch guest. Understandably, Vonk was impressed, as he noted:

> I really appreciate this kind of goodwill, since I could obtain from these reports a surprising understanding of the difficulties to police a predominantly nationalist-defiant movement. In more than one respect, we can draw parallels between the development of political affairs in British India and the possible evolution of the nationalist movement in the NEI. There are good reasons to suspect that extreme nationalists of the NEI will be inclined to turn to the British-Indian ways of insurrection. Given the current circumstance, knowledge concerning revolutionary movements in foreign colonies is of great value to the insight of the *Hoofdparket*. Therefore, on behalf of the Attorney-General, I requested them to provide as much secret information as possible on British India.

More importantly, Vonk explicitly communicated the Dutch government's primary security concern to the British authorities:

> I paid particular attention to the activities against the NEI government, which are suspected of coming from the Javanese [*sic*] communists Semaun, Darsono, Alimin, Tan Malaka, Musso and others, who are employed by the Comintern in Shanghai, Hong Kong

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92 "Gouvemeur-generaal (De Graeff) aan gouverneur van de Straits Settlements (sir Cecil Clementi)," 16 September 1930, No 2x. Afschrift, Verbaal, 1 November 1930, letter I 24 in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië,* 486.

93 Acting Consul-General (H. Fitzmaurice)'s report on the results of the visit of Sir Cecil Clementi to Java, 29 September 1930, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 273/565.

> or elsewhere in China. It is extremely important if the British authorities in Singapore could get ready to request their police organizations elsewhere to help defend this specific NEI interest. They immediately promised to pay attention to it and take actions. Such a promise will open extraordinary possibilities.

Vonk's visit to Singapore led to the drafting a crucial document entitled "Arrangements for the exchange of information regarding communist and subversive matters and for the maintenance of liaison between the Dutch authorities in the NEI and the British authorities in the Straits Settlements." However, Vonk insisted that the document to be kept confidential and other branches of the NEI government—except the Office for Chinese Affairs—should remain unaware of such arrangements, of which De Graeff quickly approved.[94]

(2). Forced "merantau": the Minangkabau network

As Tamin recalled, he could feel that the atmosphere in Singapore had turned even more intense shortly after the Dutch clampdown on the Mardjono-Soenarjo group in July 1930. Batavian Police chief Visbeen went back to Singapore in August and reconnected with his counterparts of the Strait Settlements police such as the Inspector-General Harold Fairburn, CID chief Rene Onraet, and Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand, whom Visbeen had cooperated with when he came to Singapore for the arrest of Alimin and Musso in 1927.[95] The Singapore police looked so busy that Pak Said, a retired CID officer who had been protecting PKI fugitives in the dark since the uprisings, advised Tamin to be careful although he did not even know what happened in Java.[96] So intense as the atmosphere was for the PARI members in Singapore, Tamin came to realize that the city was no longer an ideal place to hide. With the introduction of a bosun friend named Karim, Tamin became a seaman himself on board the "Darvel" of the Singapore-Mindanao-Zamboanga line in August 1930[97]. From this point onward, heightened policing measures in both the NEI and British Malaya forced Tamin and many of his PARI followers to move from place to place, switched from job to job, and as a result, frequently came into—and lost—contact with each other.

Many of the PARI activists happened to be of Minangkabau origin, an area centered in the residency of Sumatra's West Coast, which consists of two regions: *darek,* the inner highland, and *rantau,* the coast frontiers. Perhaps no better term could better describe PARI members' unstable life and wandering around than the idea of "*merantau,*" an essential cultural tradition in the

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[94] Rapport advocaat-generaal (G. Vonk) over besprekingen met engelse autoriteiten te Singapore van 10-17 Okt. 1930, 18 October 1930, Ongenummerd, Afschrift, Mailrapport, 1930 no. 1035 geheim, in Kwantes, *De Ontewikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in the Nederlandsch-Indië,* 488.

[95] For Visbeen's previous visit, see my discussion in the previous chapter and Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," 68.

[96] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 68.

[97] In his memoir, Tamin recalled that he started his job as a seaman in Aug 1929, but it does match the arrest of PARI members in Java, which happened in July 1930. Tamin's recollection of the date was most likely wrong. His starting time should be August 1930. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 69.

matriarchal society of Minangkabau.[98] A rite of passage, a young male needs to "*merantau,*" or go out of his home village and the Minangkabau World (*Alam Minangkabau*), in pursuit of his career, knowledge, and experience. Either pursuing a specific goal or simply wondering around, *merantau* is critical in the making and breaking of a man. As Taufik Abdullah puts it, "*merantau* is, according to *adat* philosophy, one way to fulfill that Principal Law which charges the individual to 'subject himself' to the largeness of the world."[99] While wandering the world, *anak perantau* (youths who *merantau*) stayed connected through their Minangkabau bonds, got introduced to one another, offered timely assistance, and kept lives going despite various hardships. The PKI fugitives' first *merantau* happened in the aftermath the 1926/27 uprisings when the NEI government's wholesale crackdown forced them to leave the Dutch colony. However, PKI fugitives probably did not feel much of a difference in Malaya from the *Alam*, as the extensive Minangkabau network offered enormous help to get them settled in the Malay States and Straits Settlements. Now with the British implementing more stringent measures against them, Tamin and his PARI followers were pressured to have their second *merantau*—this time around, they had to be mostly on their own.

In the beginning, Tamin's life was not easy on board the "Darvel." As an Islamic school-trained intellectual with a thin and frail body, Tamin admitted that he was not used to the kind of heavy manual labor in his new job. Considering the political situation in both the NEI and British Malaya, however, Tamin realized that there were no better alternatives that allowed him to evade surveillance while maintaining effective control over the PARI headquarters in Singapore. Towards the end of 1930, the "Darvel" ran aground on a small island off the coast of Sandakan, British North Borneo. As the tide gradually ebbed, the ship got stuck on the island's sandbank for three months. Knowing the ship was not going to leave anytime soon, Tamin went into the Sandakan City and stayed with a Buginese couple who ran a rice shop there. During his time there, Tamin managed to maintain his correspondence with PARI activists such as Djamaluddin Ibrahim and Umar Giri, whom Tamin deputized to run the party in his absence. Meanwhile, Tamin also tried to contact Tan Malaka by sending letters to addresses in Manila, Amoy, and Shanghai. To his surprise, he soon received the party chairman's reply, telling Tamin that he had moved to Shanghai as his hideout in Amoy was compromised. The two PARI leaders finally re-established direct contact with each other more than a year after Subakat's arrest.[100] Tamin left Sandakan with the "Darvel" after the ship got stuck there for three months.

Upon his arrival in Singapore, Tamin received a letter from Daja bin Joesoef alias Alyasin, a PKI fugitive from West Sumatra who had been staying in Negeri Sembilan since 1927. Negeri Sembilan is known as a unique Malay state of Minangkabau tradition, which has been maintaining close ties with the Minangkabau homeland in West Sumatra ever since early settlers

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98 Tsuyoshi Kato, "Rantau Pariaman: The World of Minangkabau Coastal Merchants in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (1980): 730.

99 Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927-1933)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1971), 20. Also see Mrazek's discussion of Tan Malaka's *merantau* in Rudolf Mrázek, "Tan Malaka: A Political Personality's Structure of Experience," *Indonesia*, no. 14 (1972): 1–48.

100 Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 68-71.

began migrating to the area in the 16th century.[101] Daja told Tamin that he had to leave his family behind because Abdullah bin Hadji Isa, a new CID officer at the Federated Malay States (FMS), had spotted him and revealed his PKI identity. As a result, Negeri Sembilan's local rulers rejected his petition to take refuge in the area. Daja thus begged Tamin to help him escape to Singapore so that he could become a seaman himself. However, Tamin noticed that Singapore had become increasingly dangerous for PARI activists, as the CID seemed to be making extra efforts to track him down. Tamin described his situation in a rather pessimistic tone: "Singapore does not seem to allow me to set foot on its land anymore. In a matter of a few days, I will certainly be forced to leave my traveling home in the ocean. And I will land at a place that I cannot determine and answer now."[102]

Moreover, PARI was hitting dead ends in all directions. According to Tamin's observation, the CID had tightened the surveillance of postal services between Singapore and Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Amoy and Hong Kong. Although it could be the rising nationalist and communist activities of the Malayan Chinese that contributed to the change, PARI activists were forced to send their letters to Tan Malaka from cities such as Kuala Lumpur or Ipoh via seamen and merchants. Similarly, Tan Malaka would send his replies to a Hainanese coffee in Sandakan so that Tamin could pick them up when passing by the city. Tamin never mentioned to what extent such methods had helped PARI to overcome the hurdles, but we could imagine that the party operation must be very difficult during this period, as Tamin felt that the party had encountered "obstacles here and hindrances there, as well as the omnipresent surveillance since 1930." Besides external pressures imposed by colonial authorities, PARI was in a constant shortage of manpower and the arrest in Java just further exacerbated the situation. On the Sumatran side, the Singapore headquarters lost contact with many of its previous activists. Kandur, who had been very active in smuggling PARI literature to Sumatra after the PKI uprisings, ceased to report to Tamin and seemed to be hiding from the Singapore group in Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra. Tamin suspected that Kandur chose to cut his ties with PARI on purpose. From his perspective, Kandur could have contacted PARI members in Singapore easily if he intended to do so, as numerous Bukit Tinggi merchants came to Singapore every day. By contrast, Tamin's right-hand man Djamaluddin Ibrahim remained active and was ready to penetrate back to Indonesia anytime. Given the circumstances, however, Tamin decided not to do it because he felt that the PARI could not afford to lose any more members and that the party must wait until opportunities present themselves.[103]

Tamin switched to another ship, the "Kistna," of the Singapore-Bangkok line in early 1931. The trip frequency of the "Kistna" was almost identical to that of the "Darvel," namely three round trips every two months. The main difference is that the "Darvel" of the Singapore-Mindanao-Zamboanga line stops many times along the coast of the British North Borneo; whereas the "Kistna" provides the direct connection between Singapore and Bangkok, a city where Tamin sought to reconnect to the West Sumatran network that Subakat had left behind. Tamin managed to meet Sjech Ahmad Wahab, the Islamic leader who had hosted Subakat before his arrest. Sjech

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[101] Michael G. Peletz, "Comparative Perspectives on Kinship and Cultural Identity in Negeri Sembilan," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 9, no. 1 (1994): 2.
[102] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 71.
[103] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 72.

Ahmad Wahab invited Tamin to stay in Bangkok, but Tamin turned down the offer and decided to return to Singapore to lead the PARI movement. Upon his landing in Singapore in July 1931, Tamin noticed that a CID inspector named Gulam Ali was actively searching for him. Once again, he narrowly escaped the arrest but realized that even a seaman job would not guarantee his safety anymore.[104]

One of the very few options left was to hide in the Malayan hinterland. Tamin's first destination was neither Johor, the Malay state adjacent to Singapore, nor Negeri Sembilan, where he could easily dive into the Minangkabau community. Instead, he chose to go to Selangor to seek refuge with a group of Muslim scholars, with whom Tamin had befriended when he wandered around (*mengelilingi*) Malaya for the first time under the guise of a journalist in early 1926. These Muslim scholars belonged to the *Angkat Tua* (Old Forces), or the so-called *Alim Ulama dan Tjerdik Pandai* (literally, wise and knowledgeable Muslim intellectuals), who followed the Kaum Muda Movement of West Sumatra.[105] Tamin's *Alim Ulama* friend, Hadji Abbas, and Djafar Ali, an officer of the Kuala Lumpur's Electricity Bureau, hosted him in Rawang, Selangor. Tamin's *Alim Ulama* friends then introduced him to the more renowned intellectuals, the *Tjendikiawan* (pundit) group. Initially, Tamin was hesitant about getting too close to the *Tjendekiawans*, as he thought many of these people were "politically illiterate," and generally harbored a "pro-British, anti-politics, and anti-communist" attitude. Tamin's perception of the group gradually changed after meeting a *Tjendekiawan* named Mohammad Jassin Abdullah, who expressed to Tamin his worries about British colonialism and hopes for Malaya's independence, but Tamin regretted that Mohammad Jassin Abdullah died at a very young age. Another *Tjendekiawan,* Hadji Abdul Madjid, a senior police officer, saved Tamin accidentally at the end of August. Outside of his police job, Abdul Madjid had close personal ties with Tamin's two hosts: he was Djafar Ali's uncle and had been a friend of Hadji Abbas since school years. When a group of Singapore-based CID officials came to hunt down Tamin in Selangor, Abdul Madjid leaked the information to Djafar Ali and Hadji Abbas unintentionally. Upon hearing about the search, the two hosts urged Tamin to leave Malaya as quickly as possible.[106]

Tamin left Selangor immediately but decided to try his luck in Ulu Beranang, Negeri Sembilan, where he had personally visited in back 1926 and where he sent Daja bin Joesoef to in 1927. As Tamin anticipated, PKI fugitive Daja had left, but many villagers still remembered him and treated him with great respect.[107] During his 3-month stay between September and December 1931, Tamin cultivated a close relationship with residents by teaching Qur'an and contributing to communal work. Due to safety concerns, Tamin initially planned to interact only with a small circle of trusted people, but many villagers ended up getting acquainted with him and recognized him as a religious teacher from Sumatra. Instructed by his superiors in Singapore, police officer

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[104] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 73.

[105] The Kaum Muda Movement was started by a group of the Middle East-educated Islamic scholars influenced by the Pan-Islamic Movement. The main participants of the Kaum Muda Movement are students of two Islamic school systems: Thawalib, where Tamin used to teach, and Dinijah. For more details about the movement, see Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*.

[106] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 74-76.

[107] As Tamin noted, villagers addressed him "*tuan,*" an honorific title for senior officials or intellectuals. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 77.

Abdul Madjid kept searching for Tamin in the area. He even came to Ulu Beranang himself to see if there was anyone suspicious. To Tamin's surprise, some of the village chiefs happened to be Abdul Madjid's remote relatives, who could have exposed Tamin if they knew his true identity. Fortunately, Tamin soon found out that such worries were unnecessary, as Abdul Madjid concluded his search hastily without any further investigations.[108]

Towards the end of 1931, Tamin received some good news from Singapore: PARI activists Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef had secured a job at an oil well of the Dutch Colonial Petroleum Corporation (*Nederlandsch Koloniale Petroleum Maatschappij*, NKPM) in Sungai Gerong, South Sumatra[109]. Meanwhile, the Singapore headquarters started to send PARI literature to Batavia and West Sumatra again; More importantly, a few people expressed their interests in joining PARI, which would potentially ameliorate the party's cadre shortage. Among the most eager candidates was Ahmad Padang alias Djaus, Dawood, or Davidson, an Indonesian-European from Tapanuli, North Sumatra, who had been working and living with PARI members in Singapore for five to six years. Tamin regretted that PARI members had excluded him from the party for many years, not because of his capability or character but skin color.[110] From Tamin's perspective, Djaus was an activist with great potential as he was not only a trustworthy person with proven records, but also an experienced mechanic (which would allow him to find good jobs), and was fluent in Dutch and English, as well as dialects of the Minangkabau and Mandailing regions. Djaus's recruitment was in stark contrast with how Tamin had rejected Limin, a PKI fugitive from Silungkang, West Sumatra when Tamin was still working as a seaman. Tamin remembered that Limin had arrived in Singapore shortly after the 1926/27 uprisings, but he believed that people like Limin only cared about their own safety and had very shallow understandings of political theories and practices, which made them unqualified to join PARI's struggles.[111] Although Tamin did not elaborate how he evaluated one's "understanding" and how he came to different conclusions, he apparently had his standards for who should be allowed into the PARI inner circle—he needed to be the one who dictates the process, even if he was not always available while the party was in constant personnel shortage[112].

Tamin thus went back to Singapore in December 1931 to work on what he had left behind. Indeed, PARI saw some positive changes after Tamin's return. Concerning the external environment, Sukarno's recent release seemed to have reactivated the revolutionary atmosphere

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[108] *Ibid*.

[109] Arief Siregar first got a clerk job at NKPM around April 1930. After working there for seven months, he wrote a letter to Singapore, asking Tamin to send him an assistant. That happened to be the time when Tamin received Daja bin Joesoef's letter from Negeri Sembilan, asking him to find him a job in Singapore. Tamin then sent Daja to Sungai Gerong to help Arief Siregar. The two had met in Singapore before. See Proces Verbaal (Mohamad Arief Siregar), 6 October 1932, Mailrapport 963x/1933; also see Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 40.

[110] Tamin speculated that Djaus might have been abandoned by his European father when he was young, it was completely understandable that Djaus could not tell his place and date of birth. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 78.

[111] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 72 & 78.

[112] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 72-76.

in Java and Sumatra.[113] Enthusiasm for Indonesia's independence was burgeoning among intellectuals, workers, and the general public. As a result, demands for PARI literature increased rapidly. As regards the party operation, Tamin and his followers were in a much better position than a year ago. With the money he saved from his modest life in the Malay States, and from his new job at a timber mill, Tamin managed to send Djaus to receive Tan Malaka's training in Shanghai in February 1932. In March, Tamin met his old Thawalib friend Adam Galo visiting from Padang Panjang. After a lengthy conversation, Tamin convinced Adam Galo that his revolutionary course was not "anti-religion and anti-God," but aimed at Indonesia's full independence. Adam Galo promised to support PARI's struggles by helping the distribution of PARI literature in Indonesia, sending cadres to Singapore for training, and connecting PARI to the West Sumatran network of the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (*Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia*, PSII).

Starting from May, Tamin noticed that the police was following him again. Tamin suspected that Salim Sutan Malinggang, a PKI fugitive whom Tamin helped to settle down in Kota Tinggi, informed the CID of his return to Singapore.[114] As he had experienced many times before, Tamin was well aware that Singapore was not safe. However, he decided not to leave the city this time, as the momentum he had been hoping for the PARI movement was just picking up—he had to be in Singapore to hold the absolute control over the party. Tamin's key strategy to evade the police surveillance was to keep moving from one place to another. According to Tamin, he had six to seven hideouts in Singapore and the safest being CID retiree Pak Said's house, where he also stored numerous books and PARI documents. Tamin learned a lesson the hard way in April 1931, when PARI activist Umar Giri, who had been running a cigarette shop in Singapore to support the party's operation, got arrested in the nearby Indonesian town of Tanjung Uban on Bintan Island. Umar Giri's arrest not only cost PARI a primary source of income, but also his house, an important place where PARI members frequently met and where they produced most propaganda materials. As the police surveillance became more noticeable, Tamin stopped going to Pak Said's place from June 1932 onward. He felt that the CID could arrest him anytime but first, he wanted to ensure the archives were safe.

Safety concerns aside, PARI was making unusual progress around mid-1932. Kandur, the PARI propagandist who had been hiding in West Sumatra for about three years, reemerged in Singapore in July with some good news. He reported to Tamin that he had gone to Batavia, where he got in contact with nationalist leaders of Minangkabau origin such as Mohammad Yamin and Assaat Datuk Mudo.[115] Then, he returned to West Sumatra and established connections with PSII leaders such as Djalaluddin Thaib and Gani Sjarif. Tamin reacted to Kandur's report with excitement, as he saw great potentials to cooperate with the PSII through

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[113] Sukarno was sentenced to four years of imprisonment in 1930 but was released early on 31 December 1931 due to the pressure of liberals in both the NEI and Netherlands.

[114] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 39.

[115] Mohammad Yamin was born in Sawahlunto, West Sumatra and was a well-known poet. He later became a career politician, who played a key role in drafting Indonesia's first constitution in 1945. Assaat Datuk Mudo was born in Agam, West Sumatra. He was the Provisional President of the Yogjakarta-based Republic Indonesia between December 1949 and August 1950 and later led a rebellion against Sukarno in Sumatra in the late 1950s.

the Minangkabau network. Tamin's plan became even more promising a month later, when Adam Galo carried out his March promise and sent Lutan Sutan Basa and Lutan Madjid to Singapore for cadre training. Tamin encouraged the two to "plant PARI's seeds (*menanam benih PARI*)" within the PSII and recruit new cadres among Thawalib students. After going through all sorts of hardships since Subakat's arrest in 1929, PARI finally saw a viable path to reestablish itself back in Indonesia—they could certainly start from the Minangkabau network of West Sumatra. Almost at the same time, Tamin heard that Mohammad Hatta, Indonesia's future vice president, was about to return to Indonesia via Singapore. A Minangkabau himself, Hatta by then had already made his fame by leading the *Perhimpoenan Indonesia* (Indonesian Union), a progressive student nationalist movement in the Netherlands. While PARI activists were all thrilled at the prospect of meeting the renowned nationalist leader, Tamin worried that Hatta's every single move would be under the watchful eye of the CID. With a presentiment of trouble ahead, Tamin eventually gave up the idea of meeting Hatta in Singapore.[116]

With PARI activities going so well on the one hand, and pressures of the CID surveillance—and potentially arrest—getting so intense on the other, Tamin finally made up his mind to go back to Indonesia. He bought a ship ticket and was set leave for Batavia on 15 September 1932. Two days before his departure, however, Tamin's worst hunch came true as CID Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand broke into his hideout and arrested him. In addition to Tamin, the police also arrested twelve other men, including Lutan Sutan Basa and Lutan Madjid, who were caught red-handed producing propaganda materials. Subsequently, Chand conducted a thorough search of the premises and seized many incriminating documents. On 17 September, Tamin was brought to the court, which charged him and his comrades with organizing an illegal political party intended to rebel against the British government. Tamin protested by going on a hunger strike, claiming that he had never formed any political organization against the British. The hunger strike earned Tamin an opportunity to talk to the new CID Director Arthur Harold Dickinson, who, according to Tamin, showed great sympathy towards Tamin's struggles and appeared very impressed that Tamin was able to run the organization without the assistance of Moscow.[117] Tamin and his comrades were brought to the court again two days later. This time, although the court dropped the previous charges of forming an illegal party against the British, they rearrested eight PARI activists under a new law passed in 1931: foreign politicians establishing political parties in British territories are subject to imprisonment or repatriation to their places of origin. On 22 September 1932, British authorities handed over Tamin and his followers to Dutch police officers from Indonesia, who then brought Tamin back to Batavia for further investigations.[118]

Tamin's arrest in Singapore was just the prelude to a much larger coordinated police operation against the *perantaus* of the PARI network. As mentioned earlier, Arief Siregar had been working as a clerk at the NKPM in Sungai Gerong, South Sumatra since April 1930; Daja bin Joesoef joined him seven months later, but was in Batavia at the time of Tamin's arrest.[119] By

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[116] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 79-83.

[117] Dickinson assumed the position of CID director in February 1932. Prior to this, he was the Chief Police Officer in Malacca. See "Mr. A. H. Dickinson," The Straits Times, 5 February 1932, 12.

[118] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 84-87.

[119] Shiraishi has conducted an intensive study of Arief Siregar's activity and his connections to

investigating the documents seized from the arrest, the CID learned that Tamin had been in close contact with the two activists. The CID immediately notified their ARD counterparts in Java and Sumatra, who subsequently captured the two activists on the same day, along with PARI literature and photographs in their possession.[120] Dutch authorities then conducted a lengthy investigation into Tamin and his two disciples and finally banished them to Boven Digoel in August 1933 as they did to other communist suspects before.[121] Such a series of arrests shows that by 1932, the Dutch-British policing cooperation reached an unprecedented level, which completely paralyzed PARI's clandestine network. The ad hoc cooperation we see in Alimin and Musso's arrest in 1927 gradually evolved into a multi-layered system in the case of PARI, which included greater gubernatorial consensus, smoother institutional communication, more effective intelligence sharing, and closer personal ties among concerned officials. However, it is noteworthy that such kind of cooperation was not just limited to the colonial governments of the NEI and British Malaya. Nor did the PARI network operate only on the two sides of the Strait of Malacca. As I will illustrate in the next section, the very existence of Tan Malaka outside of the two colonies extended the meaning of PARI's *perantau* network, which further complicated how the pan-East Asia policing network would operate in countering it.

5. Tan Malaka: a perantau in solitude

We have been following PARI's ups and downs mostly from Tamin's perspective since the beginning of the chapter. From Tamin's narrative, we know that Tan Malaka acted as the party chairman and chief strategist, while Tamin was the one who played a more significant role in the party's operation. We also know that Tamin never met Tan Malaka again after PARI's establishment in 1927. Based in Singapore, Tamin built a clandestine party network almost single-handedly by relying on the networks of PKI fugitives and overseas Minangabaus. By contrast, Tan Malaka stayed outside of the region the whole time and did not seem to be leading the PARI movement. He rarely involved in PARI activities on the ground, except that he kept drafting party documents, contributing articles to the party organ *Obor* (Torch), corresponding with Subakat and Tamin, and occasionally, training visiting PARI activists from Singapore. In the meantime, however, Tan Malaka loomed large in the eyes of both his followers and enemies. Not only was Tan Malaka a legendary guru for Indonesian revolutionaries, but also an enormous threat to colonial authorities across East and Southeast Asia: He was a polyglot with dozens of pseudonyms, an experienced propagandist with worldwide connections, a cunning enemy with unmatched ability to evade surveillance and arrest, and most important of all, a dangerous communist leader with the (supposed) backing of the Communist International. Suffice it to say that despite Tan Malaka's limited participation in PARI's ground-level operation, it is impossible to understand how the party worked fully—and how the colonial authorities reacted to it—without also looking into Tan Malaka's life experience during this period.

Tamin and Daja based on Arief's interrogation record, which shows that the two activists made very little progress in expanding PARI's influence among nationalist groups. See Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 38-44.

[120] The ARD also tracked down Kandur in June 1933 by using the information they obtained from the Arief and Daja's arrest.

[121] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 84-87.

The most detailed accounts of Tan Malaka's activities between 1927 and 1932 are his autobiography *Dari Penjara ke Penjara* (From Jail to Jail), written in 1947-48, and translated/annotated by Helen Jarvis in 1991;[122] and Harry Poeze's Dutch-language monograph *Tan Malaka: Strijder voor Indonesië's Vrijheid* (Tan Malaka: Worrier for Indonesia's Freedom) published in 1976.[123] As discussed earlier (section 1), Tan Malaka only wrote about PARI in *From Jail to Jail* in passing by saying that "We [Tan Malaka, Subakat, and Tamin] wanted to see continuity in the Indonesian peoples' and workers' movement through a time of great difficulty," and that "it is not yet the time to reveal in detail the role played by PARI from its founding in July 1927 until now (July 1947)."[124] Such vague statements could be largely attributed to Tan Malaka's ongoing debate over the legitimacy of reestablished PKI leadership around 1947, and he was probably worried that the narrative—that PARI was not a communist party—would be used against him.[125] Unfortunately, readers would never be able to see detailed accounts of the PARI movement from Tan Malaka's perspective, as he died at the end of the Indonesian National Revolution in 1949, only one year after the publication of his autobiography.[126] Moreover, as both Poeze and Jarvis point out, there is a giant lacuna the end of autobiography's Volume I (late 1929) and the beginning of Volume II (mid 1932), namely during Tan Malaka's stay in China, which overlaps the period when PARI was most active in the NEI and British Malaya.[127] Poeze suggests that such an omission was deliberate, as Tan Malaka seemed to have reached a rapprochement with Alimin, his estranged PKI comrade, who was working for the Comintern's Far East Bureau in Shanghai around 1931.[128] Poeze backed his claim by presenting a piece of evidence found from Dutch archives, a PPTUS (the Comintern-sanctioned Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat) report dated 9 June 1931, which states that an agent named "Dirdja" (Alimin) confirmed a certain "Tomalakka" (Tan Malaka) lived in Shanghai but was in poor health.[129] The PPTUS then paid for Tomalakka's treatment and decided to send him to Burma and India, however, such a plan was never materialized due to the mass arrest of Comintern agents in Shanghai around the same time.[130] Tan Malaka had all the reasons to cover up his

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[122] Tan Malaka and Helen Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1-2 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991).

[123] H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid.* (Place of publication not identified: Brill, 1976).

[124] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 141-142.

[125] See my discussion in section 1, "PARI as PKI reincarnation."

[126] For details about Tan Malaka's struggles during the National Revolution in the 1940s, see Harry A. Poeze, *Verguisd en vergeten: Tan Malaka, de linkse beweging en de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945 - 1949.* Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

[127] Helen Jarvis, "Tan Malaka: Revolutionary or Renegade?," *Critical Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 1987): 50. And Poeze, *Tan Malaka,* 415-417.

[128] The report will be discussed in greater detail below. Rapport Dirdja (Alimin) aan Alex, 9 June 1931, bijlage brief consul-generaal Sjanghai aan PG, 29 Aug 1931 in Mailrapport l005x/31, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 98.

[129] The report will be discussed in greater detail below. Rapport Dirdja (Alimin?) aan Alex, 9 June 1931, bijlage brief consul-generaal Sjanghai aan PG, 29 Aug 1931 in Mailrapport l005x/31, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 98.

[130] The mass arrest here refers to the arrest of Jakob Rudnik alias Hilaire Noulens and other

contacts with Alimin after they fell out again in the 1940s, and indeed, neither of them mentioned the Shanghai meeting in their memoirs.[131] Understandably, it was probably unwise for Tan Malaka to state around 1947 that the PARI movement was independent of the Comintern while he changed his attitude in 1931, as such contradictory statements would put him in a very disadvantageous position in the ongoing dispute with the reinstated PKI led by his old foes, and consequently, undermine his legitimacy in leading Indonesian radicals in the National Revolution for Independence.

Poeze names his chapter on Tan Malaka's life experience between 1927 and 1932 "The action of PARI (*De Actie van de PARI*)," but Tan Malaka's involvement in the party activities was very limited. He lived far away from the rest of the party network and only maintained intermittent correspondence with Subakat and Tamin; He struggled with poverty and poor health while facing the constant dangers of surveillance and arrest; He became increasingly isolated as PARI members got arrested in the NEI, Siam and British Malaya one after another. As Mrázek rightly points out, Tan Malaka's PARI years were a period of isolation, but it was also during this period that Tan Malaka's *rantau* (going out and wandering around) reached a climax.[132] As I discussed in the section above, although Tamin and his followers were forced to go *merantau*—moving from one place to another and living unstable lives—they remained close to each other and stay connected to the *Alam*, the Minangkabau World. Tan Malaka's *rantau*, by contrast, was an arduous journey in solitude, in which he fully exposed himself to the outside world while his ties with the *Alam* were completely cut off. Mrázek suggests that such an experience allowed Tan Malaka to achieve a "synthesis" of ideas, which not only gave his exile life its *raison d'être*, but also provided him with a unique perspective to critically scrutinize the qualities of both the *Alam* (Indonesia) and the world around it. Eventually, Tan Malaka's *rantau* organized his thinking and writing "into a full-fledged philosophical system."[133] Therefore, the lacuna Tan Malaka left in his memoir was by no means insignificant. Quite the opposite, 1927 to 1932 played an indispensable role in the formation of Tan Malaka's thought on Indonesia's struggles for independence precisely because of his *rantau.* In a way, Tan Malaka lived a life during this period not necessarily focusing on the PARI movement, but his *rantau*: constant travels, seeking refuge, escaping police arrests, gaining and losing contacts, and perhaps most importantly, as he called it—moving "from jail to jail."

Tan Malaka's PARI years started with his arrest by the American authorities in the Philippines shortly after the party's establishment in 1927; Following the mass arrest of Tamin and his followers in Singapore, Tan Malaka's connection with PARI was totally broken due to his arrest by the British police in Hong Kong in 1932. Although he was free for about five years between the two imprisonments, he lived an unstable life in China and was constantly hunted by the

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Comintern representatives in Shanghai in 1931. See Christopher Baxter, "The Secret Intelligence Service and China: The Case of Hilaire Noulens, 1923–1932," in *Britain in Global Politics Volume 1*, ed. Christopher Baxter, Michael L. Dockrill, and Keith Hamilton (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 132–52; and Frederick S. Litten, "The Noulens Affair," *The China Quarterly* 138 (June 1994): 492-512.

[131] For Alimin's memoir, see Alimin, "Riwajat Hidupku," 1954, ARCH01033, International Institute of Social History.

[132] Rudolf Mrázek, "Tan Malaka: A Political Personality's Structure of Experience," *Indonesia*, no. 14 (1972): 13.

[133] Mrázek, "Tan Malaka," 13-14.

British, Dutch, and Chinese nationalist authorities there. As Tan Malaka put it, he felt that the police was chasing him like "a cat playing with a mouse (*seperti kucing mempermainkan tikus*)," and only in prisons could he retrieve a sense of peace and security, and receive warm revolutionary greetings "Hidup Indonesia Merdeka [Long Live Independent Indonesia]!"[134] This section aims to make sense of Tan Malaka's *rantau* between 1927 and 1933 by comparing his two imprisonments and life in exile. From such comparisons, we can tell that stages of Tan Malaka's *rantau* experience correspond to how imperial powers adopted drastically different methods in handling his case, although ostensibly they all recognized Tan Malaka as a common threat.

(1). The Philippines: too great a threat to handle

A few weeks after the establishment of PARI, the three co-founders bid farewell to each other in Bangkok. As mentioned earlier, Subakat remained in the city working for a Danish trading company named Viggo-Lund; Tamin returned to Singapore to build a party network from scratch; Tan Malaka went back to the Philippines, a paradise with burgeoning nationalist movement and a place where he thought he could continue his work while recuperating from poor health. Tan Malaka was especially confident about his *good false passport* under the name of Hasan Gozali, which he obtained a year ago with the help of his Filipino nationalist friends.[135] Indeed, Tan Malaka entered Manila without much difficulty at the beginning of August 1927. He soon reconnected to his old contacts in the city, including Mariano and Apollinario de los Santos, the latter of which being the director of Manila University, and Francisco Varona, an editor of the newspaper *El Debate*, to which Tan Malaka frequently contributed articles. Only a few days later, however, the local constabulary arrested Tan Malaka and immediately brought him into a lengthy interrogation. From his cross-examination with the police, Tan Malaka learned that the Philippine authorities only knew that he had entered the Philippines under the previous pseudonym Elias Fuentes but had no idea about his new passport. Additionally, the constabulary was aware that Tan Malaka had been working for *El Debate,* but could not tell precisely what law he or his articles had violated. Tan Malaka thus concluded that the NEI government had sent out requests for assistance to American counterparts.

Tan Malaka's suspicion was correct. As early as January 1927, the Philippine authorities had already received a request to track down the Indonesian communist leader. However, this request did not come directly from the NEI authorities, but the US consul-general in Singapore Addison Southard. We will remember that at the turn of 1926 and 1927, Singapore was exactly where many buzzes going on about Indonesian communism: It was rumored that PKI leaders plotted the two uprisings—took place in November 1926 and January 1927 successively—in Singapore; The NEI government called for closer cooperation with their British counterparts and sent Batavian police assistant commissioner Visbeen to Singapore to handle PKI fugitives; The Straits Settlements Police arrested Alimin and Musso in December 1926, and the Dutch officials were still thrilled at the prospect of their extradition.[136] While the Dutch and British authorities were

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[134] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 47; Tan Malaka, *Madilog : Materialisme, Dialektika, Logika* (Jakarta: Terbitan Widjaya, 1951), 15; Also see Mrázek, "Tan Malaka," 12.

[135] According to Tan Malaka, the papers and stamps of the passport were all authentic, and it was false in the sense that its under the pseudonym Hasan Gozali. He did not reveal who exactly helped him in securing the passport, but indicated it was someone prominent. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 137.

[136] See my discussion in Part II.

busy working with each other to deal with the communist threat, it was not surprising at all that Southard felt the need for US participation, especially after he learned in Singapore that the most wanted Indonesian communist leader might have been living in the Philippines. In his report to the governor-general of the Philippines, Southard noted:

> The Netherlands East Indies government [is], of course, most eager to obtain possession of the person of Tan Malaka…While it is believed that the Philippine Government would find legal or other difficulties in arresting Tan Malaka the local police have most confidentially asked if I would inquire whether your government would or could find some means of causing Tan Malaka to leave the Philippines. If he should happen to travel on a vessel sailing for British Malaya or the Netherlands East Indies, or even for Hong Kong, and prompt warning be given the local authorities, it is probable that the ambition of the Dutch Colonial authorities to obtain custody of Tan Malaka would shortly fructify.[137]

Following Southard's inquiry from Singapore, Bremer, the Dutch consul-general in Manila also requested the Philippine government to track down Tan Malaka and put him under surveillance.[138] The Philippine authorities turned out to be very responsive and immediately started an active search of the Indonesian communist leader. On March 10, the secretary to the government-general replied to Southard with a report attached, stating that the police had obtained information from several informants. While the informants had no problem recognizing Tan Malaka's photographs, they pointed out that he might have already left the Philippines. The secretary promised to Southard that if they could find Tan Malaka again, they would deport him and notify concerned parties of his possible destinations.[139] In stark contrast to the close coordination among officials in Southeast Asia, communication in Washington did not seem to be as smooth. In June 1927, J. H. van Royen, the Dutch Minister to America, tried to press the issue of Tan Malaka's exile to the US government. After receiving the message, the US Secretary of War Dwight B. Davis replied with regret that his department would not engage in surveillance of foreign individuals during peacetime. However, Davis attached a separate note to the front of the letter, stating that he had "informally" forwarded the request to the Military Intelligence Division, which would inform the Philippine authorities via the Bureau of Insular Affairs. It is interesting to note that the Military Intelligence Division had already received the same request back in March 1927 from the Department of State, while the Philippine government had been

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[137] Southard probably obtained this message from the British police who were investigating Alimin and Musso's case, as he mentioned that the two were Tan Malaka's "right-hand men." See US Consul General (Addison Southard) to the Governor-General of the Philippines, 31 January 1927, State Department Records, Confidential Despatch No. 94 from U.S. Consul in Singapore, enclosure with 856d.00B/8, US National Archives. Also see Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, 268-269.

[138] Procureur-generaal (Duyfjes) aan consul-generaal te Manila (Bremer), 7 February 1927, in Mailrapport 200x/27, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 41.

[139] Secretary to governor-general of the Philippines (C.W. Franks.) to consul general to Singapore (Southard), 10 March 1927, in 856d00B/Central Files, Record Group 59, US National Archives; Also see Anne L Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 35.

searching for Tan Malaka for five months since Southard's report from Singapore.[140]

Tan Malaka's Filipino friends soon came to his rescue and hired him a lawyer named Jose Abad Santos, who accused the police of arresting his client without a warrant. After keeping him in prison for only three days, the Philippine authorities agreed to release Tan Malaka on bail but decided to charge him with illegal entry. Meanwhile, Tan Malaka's arrest attracted much attention from the local press. Pro-government newspapers such as the *Manila Daily Bulletin* covered Tan Malaka's case in detail, depicting him as a dangerous Bolshevik agitator trying to spread communist propaganda in the Philippines and therefore should not be tolerated:

> A man who has a long record as a troublemaker and who entered the country illegally is not desirable material for a leader of a patriot's parade…The claim that he is entitled to a waiver of legal regulation and protection as a political refugee is thinner than a twilight shadow. A man who steals, lies, or deceives his way into a country is not entitled to an exemption of the law merely because he once was deported from another country and uses his deportation record as a basis for a claim he is a political refugee.[141]

To make the stories more sensational, the paper printed Tan Malaka's interrogation at the Bureau of Customs with exaggerated statements about his connection with Moscow alongside commenting on his impressive language abilities and the long list of aliases.[142] By contrast, the nationalist newspapers expressed opposite views. Tan Malaka's friend Apollinario de los Santos, the director of Manila University, told the press that he knew Tan Malaka as "an amiable fellow, devoted to the cause of his country. His only crime, if any, is that of being a patriot, and he is a nationalist of the first order, but never a Bolshevik." In the same vein, Varona described him as a "worker for his country's emancipation and the progress and liberty of his race," and stated "that the Bolshevik allegation is a flimsy excuse. No facts were cited at the hearing which can prove clearly, that he is a Bolshevik agent, a 'Red' propagandist."[143] On the same day, a commentator voiced his sympathy even more explicitly in *The Tribune* and advocated to treat Tan Malaka as a political refugee:

> The Javanese nationalist leader, Tan Malaka, looms today in the mind of every Filipino full-length as a patriot, and perhaps in time, if fate should be unkind to him, a martyr to the cause of the freedom of his native land. He has come to live among us avowedly a political refugee. He crime against the government in control of his country is that he seeks to emancipate his own people. That he admits in full sincerity and without any empty or arresting poses. Honor be to him.[144]

The divergence in media coverage also reflected the split in opinions between the Philippine colonial authorities and Filipino nationalists. With the backing of the acting governor-general Eugene A. Gilmore, the constabulary insisted that Tan Malaka had violated the immigration law and therefore must be ordered to leave. The other side, led by the prominent nationalist leaders of

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[140] Foster, *Projections of Power*, 35.

[141] *Manila Daily Mail*, 17 August 1927, as quoted in Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, 272-273.

[142] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 367-368.

[143] *Philippine Herald*, 16 August 1927; Also see Poeze, *Tan Malak*, 364 & 371.

[144] *The Tribune*, 16 August 1927; Also see Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 372.

the Philippine Senate Manuel Quezon, was of the opinion that Tan Malaka should be treated as a political refugee, who has all the rights to seek asylum in the Philippines and stay as long as he desires.[145] Quezon compared Tan Malaka to political refugees such as Sun Yat-sen and De Valera, describing him "as a leader of the Nationalist movement in his country as in others, he simply represents the prevalent thirst for liberty and justice among subject peoples."[146] The Senate eventually voted to collect 3000 Pesos to support Tan Malaka under Quezon's leadership. While the pro-American press kept publishing articles to discredit Tan Malaka by relating his arrest to his proven communist past, many progressive groups sided with the legislature and advocated that the government should grant him asylum. First started from Manila University, students in the capital city rallied to defend Tan Malaka's right to stay and called for wider support for the independence movement of Indonesia, the Philippines' "sister nation." Workers of Manila soon followed suit under the leadership of the Legionario de Trabajo (Trade Union Federation), who decided to hold a mass gathering to raise funds and press the government to protect Tan Malaka's right of asylum.[147]

Realizing that Tan Malaka's arrest had instigated unexpected public uproar across the colony, which would potentially further stimulate the rise of Filipino nationalist sentiment against the US, the Philippine authorities decided to take preemptive actions to halt the movement. Acting Governor-General Gilmore called Tan Malaka's lawyer Jose Abad Santos on the eve of trial, proposing that Tan Malaka could leave on board a Filipino-owned ship, the *Susana*, to Amoy, China. Gilmore explained that this might be a better option than other ships because the *Susana* was not going to pass through any British and Dutch-owned harbors, which would lower Tan Malaka's risks of getting rearrested. Gilmore also threatened that should Tan Malaka turn down this offer, many prominent figures, especially those helping him in getting the false passport, would be dragged down. After weighing the consequences, Tan Malaka was pressured to accept the deportation and left Manila quietly on 23 August 1923.[148] However, leaving with a Filipino ship to China did not guarantee Tan Malaka's safety. The Philippine authorities informed Bremer, the Dutch consul-general in Manila, of Tan Malaka's destination immediately after his departure. The same message was also sent to US consuls in Batavia and Singapore, who then forwarded the information to their Dutch and British counterparts. The Dutch consul in Amoy was awaiting Tan Malaka in the harbor when the ship arrived, but once again, Tan Malaka narrowly escaped the arrest by jumping onto another ship with the help of the crew.[149]

As Foster points out, there are two striking things in the US handling of Tan Malaka in the Philippines. The first is that compared to the close relationship between the Dutch and British, the US government had not established the same kind of formal cooperation with colonial

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[145] Manuel Quezon served as the president of the Senate until he became the president of the Commonwealth of Philippines in 1935.

[146] *Manila Daily Bulletin,* 16 August 1927; Also see Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 273.

[147] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 148-149.

[148] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 149-151.

[149] Procureur-generaal (Duyfjes) aan Gouvemeur-generaal (De Graeff), 24 August 1927, in Mailrapport l053x/27; Consul-generaal te Zuid-China aan Gouvemeur-generaal (De Graeff), 21 September 1927, in Mailrapport l216x/27, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 52 & 53. Also see Foster, *Projections of Power*, 36.

authorities nearby. It was relatively low-level officials, rather than the establishment in Washington, that initiated the ad hoc cooperation and carried out the actions to track down, arrest, and deport Tan Malaka. Probably influenced by the intense atmosphere in Singapore, the US consul-general Southard decided to participate in the anti-communist cooperation himself by sending inquiries to Manila. Upon receiving such requests, the Philippine authorities reacted promptly despite Washington's formal position that the US government did not engage in the surveillance of foreign individuals during peacetime.[150] While US authorities in Washington and Southeast Asia failed to reach a consensus on how to deal with foreign communists, officials in Southeast Asia had their problems coordinating with each other. Following Tan Malaka's arrest, the governor general's office bragged to the local press that they had received the information from Singapore, which genuinely infuriated Southard. In a report dated 24 August 1927, Southard complained to the secretary of state Frank Kellogg:

> The divulgence by the Philippine authorities of this strictly confidential information, and the connection of this office with the matter, is very embarrassing. It will distinctly handicap this office in maintaining the efficiency and thoroughness of its system for the collection of political intelligence...[the press will] likely focus an undesirable degree of Malayan Communist interest on us...We may thereby be subjected to the potentially malignant attention of the various Javanese and Chinese gunmen who occasionally pass through Singapore.[151]

Kellogg then brought the issue to the attention of the secretary of war, Dwight Davis, who investigated the revelation. The governor general's office eventually apologized and admitted that they had not foreseen the consequences. Southard's informal participation in the cooperation of intelligence exchange thus received Washington's implicit recognition.[152]

Secondly, in order to keep the looming threat of international communism out of the colony, the Philippine authorities did not seem to hesitate to subvert the principles of justice. They searched for Tan Malaka for months without a warrant, held him in prison for three days before charging him with illegal entry, offered to deport him on the eve of his trial, and broke the promise by notifying Dutch officials immediately after his departure. As Foster puts it, US authorities realized that Tan Malaka was "too great a threat to the political order of the Philippines," and that his continuous presence would do more harms to the colony's stability than the criticism the government would receive for failing to follow legal procedures.[153] In other words, the US authorities were interested in joining the informal intelligence exchanges with neighboring colonial powers, but their willingness to cooperate would only go so far as their perceived threats remained manageable. When the issue turned too intractable, they would adopt unjustifiable yet effective approaches to keeping the danger at bay. Tan Malaka's arrest in Manila resonated with the rising Filipino nationalist sentiment and sparked the mass protests that the authorities could not tolerate. The government knew that the longer they held the well-known communist leader,

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[150] Foster, *Projections of Power*, 36-37.

[151] Consulate General in Singapore (Southard) to Secretary of State (Kellogg), 24 August 1927, 856 D.00B/18, US National Archives, as quoted in Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 362-363.

[152] Secretary to the General General Manila (C.W. Franks) to Consulate General in Singapore (Southard), 6 September 1927, file 800S-Singapore-1927, Record Group 84, 856 D.00B.22, US National Archives. Also see Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 362-363; Foster, *Projections of Power*, 37.

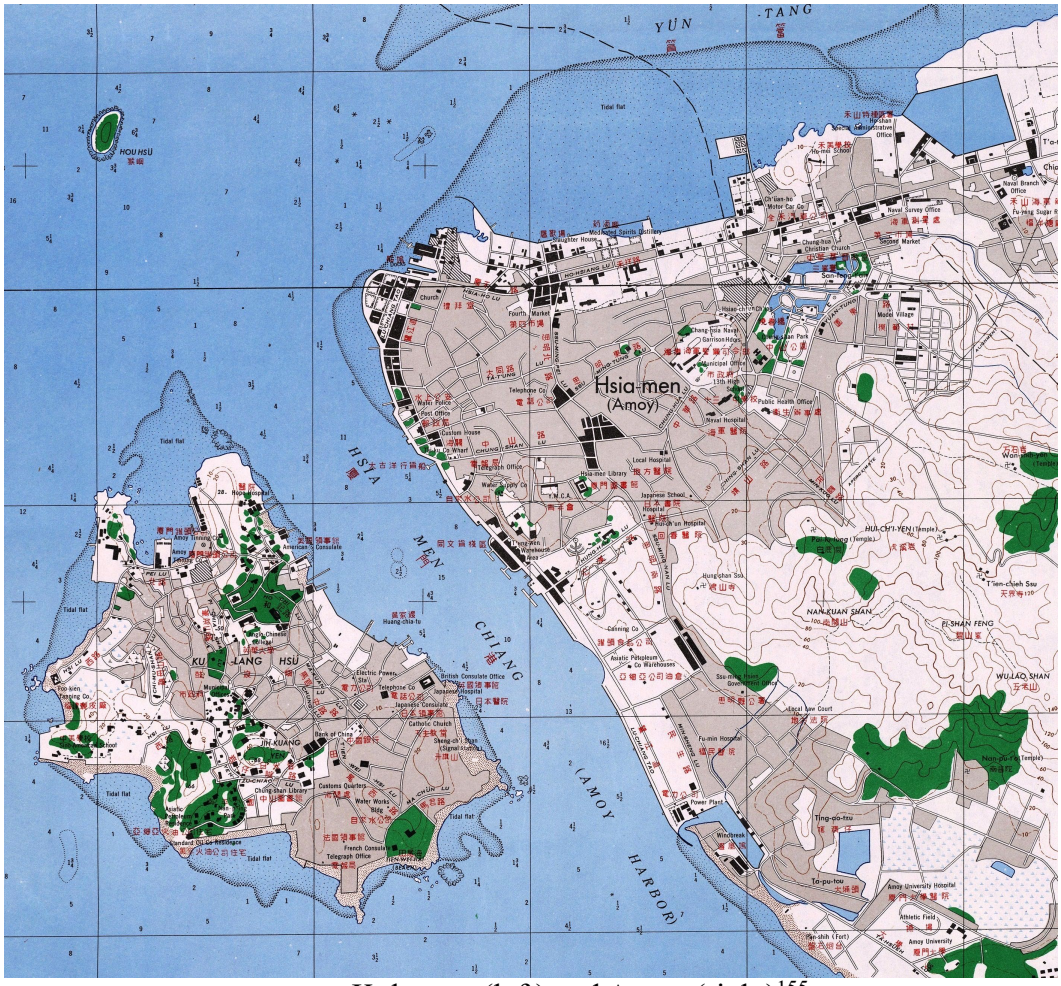
[153] Also in Foster, *Projections of Power*, 37.

the greater pressure they would face from all sides, which would outweigh the benefits they gained from the anti-communist cooperation. Understandably, secret deportation, rather than a just trial, ended up becoming the ultimate solution to the problem.

(2): China: the meaning of international settlements

As mentioned above, Tan Malaka managed to escape the arrest again with the help of the crew aboard the *Susana* after arriving in Amoy, China. Mysterious as this might sound, his escape deserves some further elaborations. Before departure, Vicente Madrigal, the owner of the *Susana* and the nationalist newspaper *Philippine Herald*, went to the Manila harbor to bid farewell to Tan Malaka and instructed Roco, the captain, to protect this very special passenger. When the ship was approaching Amoy, the captain sensed something very unusual: A NEI ship named *Tjisalak* sailed alongside the *Susana* with a few officers standing on the deck, but there were no other passengers. As one of the officers was using a telescope to observe their ship, the captain turned alerted and asked Tan Malaka to stay inside. Shortly after, three policemen from the nearby Kulangsu Island boarded the *Susana* and started to search for Tan Malaka cabin by cabin. The search failed to meet the intended result, however, as the group inspected all rooms but the last one where Tan Malaka was hiding. As soon as the policemen left, Roco made a quick arrangement for Tan Malaka by sending him over to a Chinese ship nearby, the operator of which happened to be the captain's friend. Although the US consul general came on board the *Susana* only a few minutes later, followed by the head of Amoy customs from Britain for the same purposes, Tan Malaka was able to secure himself in the Chinese ship in the next two days before getting settled in the city of Amoy.[154]

[154] The US consul general in Amoy at that time was John R. Putnam and the head of Amoy customs was A. L. M. C. Pichon. Foreigners had been having the full control over the Chinese customs since 1861. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 154-156 & 279.



Kulangsu (left) and Amoy (right)[155]

Before moving further, it is necessary to explain what it meant to be in the very particular kind of environment in Amoy at that time. What people commonly knew about Amoy in the first half of the 20th century consisted of two parts: the downtown located on the main island of Amoy and the Kulangsu (Gulangyu) Island off the coast; and it took only five minutes to cross the harbor between them by ferry. By 1927, while the nationalist government governed Amoy like most of the other Chinese cities, Kulangsu had been an international settlement since 1902. The island had its own government, the Kulangsu Municipal Council (KMC), and the police department, which was jointly controlled by nine countries, including Britain, France, America, and the Netherlands. Although Kulangsu is only about two kilo square in area, thirteen countries established consulates on the islands.[156] After receiving detailed information about Tan Malaka's deportation, the KMC voted to arrest him and hand him over to Dutch officers aboard the

[155] "Naval War in China," accessed October 30, 2018, http://www.combinedfleet.com/Amoy_t.htm.

[156] For more details about Kulangsu's international settlement, see P. W Pitcher and He Bingzhong, 厦门纵横: 一个中国首批开埠城市的史事 = *In and about Amoy: some historical and other facts connected with one of the first open ports in China* (厦门: 厦门大学出版社, 2009).

Tjisalak, with the aim of eventually bringing him back to Java. However, not only was the Kulangsu police unsuccessful in intercepting Tan Malaka upon arrival but also failed in tracking him down in their subsequent undercover searches in the Chinese part of the city. A rumor thus arose—and even became widespread in Indonesia—that Tan Malaka had jumped into the sea and drowned himself in the Amoy Harbor when the international police were about to arrest him.[157]

The situation gradually calmed down as time went by. Tan Malaka managed to find a safe place to stay in Amoy with the help of Captain Roco's Chinese friend. Following this line, Tan Malaka then befriended with his landlord Tan Ching Hua alias Ka-it and a Filipino-Chinese named Francisco Tan Quan alias Ki-Koq, both offered him invaluable help during his years in China. Despite their support, Tan Malaka constantly worried that his identity could be easily exposed in Amoy's international environment. Therefore, he moved with Ki-Koq to a remote village called Sionching, where he felt that he could recuperate from illness while studying the conditions of China's rural side.[158] Tan Malaka admitted that villagers there treated him well, but his life was by no means pleasant due to the poor living conditions and language barriers. Despite being a long-time *perantau* in different parts of the world, Tan Malaka described his time in China's countryside as a period of misery and complete isolation:

> It was true that I was accustomed to living in isolation, alone in a strange place. After all, I came from a society of real wanderers and fro the time I was young had been separated from my parents. Nevertheless, living in the midst of a Chinese village, particularly in the winter when the cold wind howled, had quite an impact on me. I am convinced that even the most cheerful of exiles to Digul would not long have been able to stand such isolation. At least at Digul they were near comrades in the struggle who shared the same ideology, outlook, hopes, and language. These are all crucial to the life of a human being as a social animal. In all these things I was far apart from the inhabitants of Sionching village.[159]

Tan Malaka left the village when Ki-Koq's entire family migrated to the Philippines. Although Tan Malaka did not state how long exactly he had stayed in Siongchin, he should have already returned to Amoy by the end of 1927. As illustrated in previous sections, Tan Malaka had reestablished correspondence with Subakat and Tamin, kept drafting party documents, writing articles for PARI organs, and training young cadres from late 1927 onward, which would have been impossible if he were to remain in the village.[160] For about two years, he managed to work continuously as the chief party strategist while living thousands of miles away from the rest of the PARI network. Nevertheless, his activities were not entirely unnoticed during this period. In January 1928, the Shanghai Municipal Police informed the Dutch consul general that their colleagues in Amoy had discovered traces of Tan Malaka in the city. To their dismay, the Kulangsu police reported back a few days later that they failed to track him down because "the local Chinese authorities [were] not interested [in cooperating]."[161] The Dutch consul in Amoy

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[157] False reports about Tan Malaka's death during this period, see Jarvis' examples: Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 158 & 279.

[158] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 159-162.

[159] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 1, 167-168.

[160] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 396.

[161] Dutch Consul General in Shanghai (Jan van den Berg) to the Director of Criminal

reported in November 1928 that the city's international police had intercepted mails between a suspicious person named Eaquire Lawson and a certain Mohamad Zain in Bangkok. Combined with the information concerning PARI activist Maswar Madjid's recent arrest in Singapore, Dutch authorities concluded that Eaquire Lawson was Tan Malaka and that he was still in Amoy.[162] While efforts to hunt down Tan Malaka remained unfruitful, the Dutch consul in Bangkok managed to track down Mohamad Zain, who turned out to be Subakat.[163] The rest of the story is all clear—the Siamese government arrested Subakat in October 1929 and handed him over to the NEI government two months later; Subakat committed to suicide in prison in February 1930[164].

Subakat's arrest paralyzed the communication of the PARI network. Having realized that Amoy was too dangerous a place to stay, Tan Malaka moved to Shanghai in late 1929.[165] During this period, Tan Malaka's connection with his PARI followers was cut entirely until Tamin reestablished the intermittent contact with him at the end of 1930. Due to the giant lacuna in his autobiography, we know very little about his life in Shanghai between 1929 and 1932. Poeze suggests that such an omission was intentional and there were certain things that Tan Malaka did not want to talk about when he was writing the memoir around 1946-47.[166] As mentioned above, Tan Malaka seemed to have reached a rapprochement with Alimin, his estranged PKI comrade who was working for the Comintern-sanctioned PPTUS in Shanghai at that time. For some reason, however, the two fell out again, and Tan Malaka decided to remain silent about his Shanghai experience during Indonesia's National Revolution (1945-49) so that the narratives would not be used against him. While the controversies of the 1940s deserve further investigations, our discussion here will only seek to illustrate what happened to Tan Malaka in Shanghai.

For Tan Malaka, Shanghai had many advantages over Amoy. First of all, Shanghai was a much

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Investigation Department(Aiers), 10 January 1928, in Shanghai Municipal Police File, 7864, Box 107 16W4 12/9/F, 6952663, Record Group 263, US National Archives.

[162] The address is "Eaquire Lawson, c/o Pit Sang Dispensary, Chan Chuang, Amoy." "Brief consul-generaal Shanghai aan GG," November 14, 1928 in Mailrapport 1142x/28, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 67. Also see Poeze, *Tan Malaka,* 396. Also see Harry A. Poeze, ed., *Politiek-politioneele overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië: bronnenpublikatie*. *1: 1927 - 1928*, n.d, 463.

[163] Tamin mentioned that Tan Malaka had to retreat to inland again in September 1928 because his hideout in Amoy was compromised. Tamin's recollection of the date might be inaccurate. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 60.

[164] For details about Subakat's arrest in Bangkok, see my discussion in the section "Endless arrest."

[165] According to Tamin, Tan Malaka left Amoy for Shanghai in late 1929, but no other sources could verify the date. Tamin also claimed that he reestablished his contact with Tan Malaka at the end of 1929 when he was working as a seaman aboard the Darvel. The recollection might be wrong because he started the job in August 1930. In any case, it is possible that Tan Malaka moved to Shanghai in 1929 but was not in contact with PARI until a year later. See Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 64.

[166] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 414.

bigger city with approximately three million people by 1930.[167] As a modern metropolis, there was a larger international community—around 60,000 foreign residents—in Shanghai than anywhere else in China.[168] The chance of getting noticed, let alone arrested, was much lower. Secondly, the city was well connected to the outside world through its modern communication systems. Besides reliable radio, cable, and postal services, there were numerous international and local banks across the city, making it easy to send and receive remittances across the border. With its strategic location and convenient transportation, Shanghai offered unparalleled accessibility to people traveling from inland and overseas.[169] Additionally, one did not need to possess a passport or visa to visit Shanghai around this period, which means that people were free to come and go without restrictions.[170] Thirdly, the city of Shanghai consisted of three parts, the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese Municipality. While each division had its own government and police department, people enjoyed the full freedom of movement from one district to another. The division of municipalities and the existence of similar police territories thus created numerous obstacles and gray zones in policing the extremely cosmopolitan city.[171] As Wakeman points out, it was extremely challenging to "keep the peace" (*bao'an*) in Shanghai from a police perspective for eight reasons:

> (1) the city's position as a great entrepôt; (2) its openness of communications; (3) the complexity of human affairs in the city; (4) industrial expansion; (5) labor agitation; (6) the presence of the International Settlement spread across the middle of the city; (7) the presence of communists; and (8) the existence of "reactionary elements" (*fandongfenzi*) living within the asylum of the foreign concessions.[172]

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[167] *Cambridge Sentinel*, Volume XXVI, Number 35, 30 August 1930

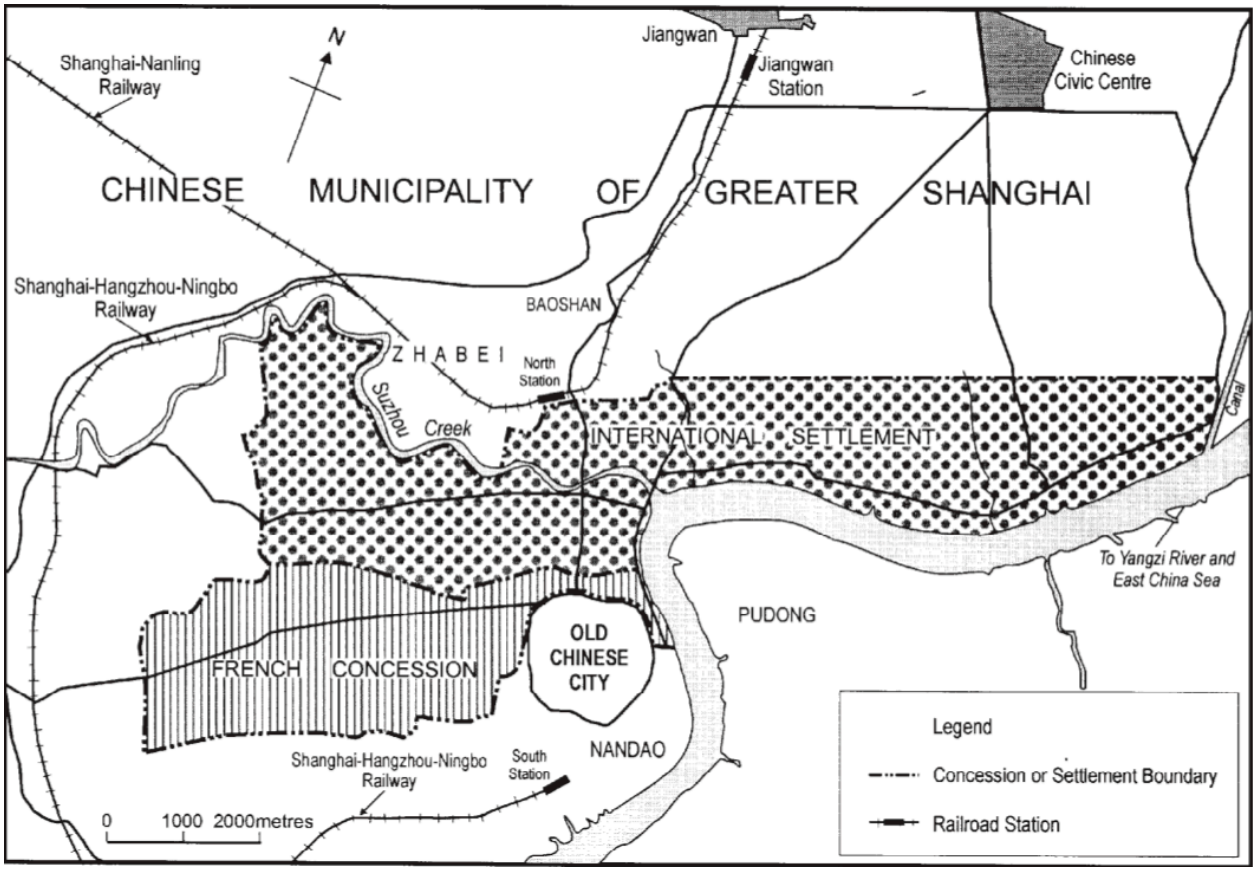
[168] According to the 1930 census, Shanghai's total population was 2,927,858, out of which 58,607 were foreigners. See Henry J Lethbridge, *All about Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook* (Hong Kong: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 36.

[169] Takeshi Onimaru, "Shanghai Connection: The Construction and Collapse of the Comintern Network in East and Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (April 2016): 120.

[170] Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai* (London: John Murray, 2002), 2.

[171] Onimaru, "Shanghai Connection," 120.

[172] Frederic E Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 8.



Division of municipalities in Shanghai in the 1930s[173]

For the same reasons, however, Shanghai was an appealing paradise for both Chinese and foreign revolutionaries. The Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded in the French Concession in 1921. Despite the nationwide anti-communist purge in 1927, the CPC Central Committee remained in Shanghai until 1933. In 1926, The Comintern established its Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) in Shanghai with the aim of supervising communist movements in China, Japan, Korea, French Indochina, British Malaya, and the NEI. To ensure safety, the FEB rented several offices and apartments across the city to host agents and couriers traveling between Moscow, Berlin, and Shanghai.[174] Following the FEB, the Red International of Labor Union (Profintern) also established its regional organization, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS), in the city in 1927. Most of the FEB and PPTUS staff members were Westerners. The reason behind was the fact that citizens of 14 countries could exercise extraterritorial rights and privileges in Shanghai.[175] As a result, the FEB and PPTUS agents could enjoy better legal protection in case of arrest.[176] While maintaining close communication with the Comintern

[173] Abidin Kusno, "From City to City: Tan Malaka, Shanghai and the Politics of Geographical Imagining," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24, no. 3 (November 1, 2003): 331.
[174] Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*, 146.
[175] The fourteen countries include: Britain, the United States, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. See Lethbridge, *All about Shanghai,* 22.
[176] Onimaru, "Shanghai Connection," 118.

headquarters, the FEB and PPTUS were in charge of making contact with communist movements throughout the Far East. To achieve this goal, the Comintern would dispatch agents—usually experienced polyglots or Asian students who had studied at the International Lenin School (ILS) in Moscow—to Shanghai before sending them further to make contact with communist organizations in the region. To establish connections in Southeast Asia, the two bodies also take advantage of the existing CPC network among the overseas Chinese.[177] Additionally, the FEB and PPTUS provided financial assistance to communist organizations across the Far East and disbursed 1,375,000 francs (Gold $55,000) per year in reichsmarks, gold dollars, Mexican dollars, and yen.[178]

After studying at the ILS for three years, Alimin, the PKI fugitive who had fallen out with Tan Malaka in 1927, arrived in Shanghai under the pseudonym Dirdja in 1930.[179] Working for the PPTUS, his main task, albeit unrealistic, was to help reestablish connections with the Indonesian revolutionary movement.[180] Meanwhile, Tan Malaka's life was not easy in the city, as he always struggled with poverty and illness. It is unclear in what circumstance the Tan Malaka and Alimin crossed paths in Shanghai,[181] but a PPTUS report dated 9 June 1931 recorded their meeting:

> It is evident that Tomalakka [Tan Malaka] was found and is now living here, physically in a awful condition, due to the difficult circumstances under which he has lived in the last few years. At the FEB we agreed that he would stay here for a while and go to see the doctor. Meanwhile, he could read the material that we provide him, so that he would become familiar with our work, and then go to the South Seas with the aim of establishing connections with the NEI and British India. He works simultaneously for the FEB and us (PPTUS). As of today, our share of the costs for his medical treatment, his food, and his clothes have reached 250 Mexican dollars. On our part, we asked for a budget plan for his work in the South Seas. He and Dirdja (Alimin) have finished work, and the budget amounts to approximately 750 gold dollars for an entire year of work. This would be all the expenses, including trips to Bombay, Calcutta, etc. It seems to us that he is the best comrade available to make those connections for us. Since he also works for the FEB at the same time, the costs can be shared [between the FEB and PPTUS]. It seems that the expenses are quite small considering the useful work he will

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177 Onimaru, "Shanghai Connection," 121-122.

178 "Noulens Case" analyses--Communist activities in China, Federated Malay States, etc., 7 March 1932, in Shanghai Municipal Police File, 2527/45 , Box 20 16W4 12/8/C, 6952663, Record Group 263, US National Archives; Also see Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*, 146.

179 The exact date for Alimin's arrival in Shanghai is unclear. According to Ruth McVey's interview with him in 1959, Alimin stayed at the ILS for three years after the Comintern's Sixth Congress of 1928. Therefore, his arrival in Shanghai should be around 1930-1931. See Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 202, 437.

180 "Noulens Case" analyses--Communist activities in China, Federated Malay States, etc., 7 March 1932, in Shanghai Municipal Police File, 2527/45 , Box 20 16W4 12/8/C, 6952663, Record Group 263, US National Archives.

181 Alimin claimed in an interview that the Comintern instructed him to find Tan Malaka in Shanghai and gauge his political view. See Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 414, 444.

> doing for us. We have already written to the Comintern about this matter, and we hope to get an answer soon because Tomamalakka [Tan Malaka] will be ready to leave in a week or two.[182]

There is some very crucial information here: Not only did the Comintern find Tan Malaka in Shanghai, but also managed to persuade him to work for them; Or *vice versa*, he made contact with Comintern agents and asked for assistance. He also devised a budget with Alimin to establish connections in India—the job itself was no easy task, not to mention planning it with his old foe. Indeed, Tan Malaka had some reservations. He told Alimin that he had lost contact with all the Indonesian comrades but did not say anything about PARI. Nor did he inform Tamin of his contact with the Comintern in Shanghai; No evidence, either Tamin's writings or confiscated documents, suggests that he ever heard about this.[183] Nevertheless, Tan Malaka earned the trust of the Comintern agents in Shanghai, who were willing to support his trip with a large sum of money and firmly believed that he was "the best comrade available (*de beste makker die beschikbaar is*)." It is unclear though, whether Tan Malaka agreed to do so because he had reached a rapprochement with Alimin and the Comintern, or simply doing it in exchange for the much-needed money and medical treatment. In any case, Tan Malaka accepted the job and called it in his autobiography "the obligation I had to discharge in India."[184]

However, the arrangement did not work out as planned. On 1 June 1931, just a few days before the PPTUS report was drafted, the Straits Settlements police (CID-SS) arrested French Comintern agent Joseph Ducroux alias Serge Lefranc, together with 15 other Chinese communist suspects, in Singapore. From this arrest, the CID discovered an address book, which showed that Ducroux had been in close contact the FEB in China.[185] The CID immediately notified their counterparts in Shanghai and Hong Kong. After only five days, the British police arrested the renowned Vietnamese communist leader Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) in Hong Kong.[186] Meanwhile, The British-led Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) conducted a thorough search of Comintern agents following the lead, which resulted in the arrest of several senior Comintern agents on 15 June 1931. Among the arrested were the chief of the FEB known as Hilaire Noulens (Yakov Rudnik) and his "wife" M. Motte (Tatyana Moiseenko), who had been staying in seven separate homes, receiving mails from eight post office boxes, and working secretly under different names.[187] Together with the arrest, the SMP confiscated numerous documents

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[182] The report will be discussed in greater detail below. Rapport Dirdja (Alimin) aan Alex, 9 June 1931, bijlage brief consul-generaal Sjanghai aan PG, 29 Aug 1931 in Mailrapport l005x/31, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 98, as quoted in Dutch in Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 416.

[183] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 416.

[184] This is Tan Malaka's only reference to the Comintern assignment in his autobiography. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 30.

[185] For details about Ducroux's arrest, see Laurent Metzger, "Joseph Ducroux, a French Agent of the Comintern in Singapore (1931-1932)," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 69, no. 1 (270) (1996): 1–20.

[186] Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years; 1919-1941* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 191-195.

[187] Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*, 146; For more details about the Noulens affair, see Litten, Frederick S. "The Noulens Affair." *The China Quarterly*, no. 138 (1994): 492–512.

concerning Comintern operations in China and its connections to communist movements across East and Southeast Asia. While Tan Malaka and Alimin managed to escape from the mass arrest, the FEB and PPTUS network in the Far East was paralyzed.[188] As a result, Tan Malaka had to abort, or at least postpone, the original plan although he was "ready to leave in a week or two." The SMP took nine months to investigate the files and finally produced an intensive analysis of the "Noulens Case" in March 1932. According to this report, the Comintern indeed devised a plan for Tan Malaka before Noulens's arrest:

> A letter from the FEB to the Comintern, dated May 1931, shows that steps were being taken to establish Tan Malaka, the Javanese communist and Dirdja [Alimin] at Rangoon for the purpose of forming a liaison station linking up India with Indonesia, and that the service of Musso were being obtained from Moscow to advise the Bureau at Shanghai generally on Malayan and Indonesian affairs and to maintain the liaison with Rangoon. The very fast, too, of Ducroux's trip to Hong Kong, Indochina, and Malaya seems to show that the problems presented by this whole tract were to be tackled and new life and order infused into the communist movements there.[189]

The report suggests that the Comintern planned to put three alienated former PKI leaders to work with each other again with a rather ambitious goal of connecting communist movements in India, Malaya, and the NEI. While Tan Malaka and Alimin were to be dispatched to Burma to establish a new liaison office, Musso would come to Shanghai to facilitate the communication between the Comintern and revolutionary activities in the "South." With the collapse of the Comintern network in Shanghai, Tan Malaka had to set aside the assignment, but British authorities throughout the region documented his contact with the organization. For instance, a British intelligence officer in Straits Settlements noted in November 1932 that "[From Noulens's papers, Tan Malaka] is clearly proved to have been in the pay of Moscow, and to have been offered in 1931 and to have accepted the duty of proceeding to Burma with Alimin (Dirdja in Noulens's papers); from there to foment colonial revolution in the South Seas."[190]

After the incident, Tan Malaka stayed in Zhabei, one of Shanghai's Chinese districts, for more than a year under the guise of a Filipino named Ossario. While staying with a Chinese family, he received PARI activist Djaus from Singapore and trained him for seven months. In January 1932, a military conflict between China and Japan broke out in Shanghai, and Tan Malaka was forced

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[188] For example, the incident caused further arrests of 30 communist suspects in Japan; the connection between the Malayan Communist Party and Comintern broke off completely. See Onimaru, "Shanghai Connection," 129; Yong, C. F. *The Origins of Malayan Communism*. Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997, 164.

[189] "Noulens Case" analyses--Communist activities in China, Federated Malay States, etc., 7 March 1932, in Shanghai Municipal Police File, 2527/45 , Box 20 16W4 12/8/C, 6952663, Record Group 263, US National Archives.

[190] Malay and Indonesian Communists: Supplement No. 5 of 1948 to Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal, issued with PIJ No. 11/48, 15 June 1948, Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 537/3752, reproduced in Cheah, Boon Kheng. *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party: Selected Documents and Discusssion*. Ithaca, N.Y: SEAP, Southeast Asia Program, 1992, 137.

to move around the city to take shelter.[191] He lost virtually all the personal belongings in the looting of the conflict's aftermath and decided to leave Shanghai for good. Tan Malaka managed to obtain a new passport through bribery and finally boarded a ship to Hong Kong in early October.[192]

(3). Hong Kong: testing the limits of the British Empire

The objective of Tan Malaka's trip, of course, was not just to escape from the war. He had secured a visa to Burma in Shanghai and was going to fulfill his "obligation" to the Comintern by establishing contact in the British colony and going to India afterward.[193] Upon arriving in Hong Kong, his first stop, on 10 October, Tan Malaka met Djaus who had left Shanghai shortly before him. What Tan Malaka did not know, however, was that the secret police in Hong Kong had spotted his disciple due to the arrest of Djamaluddin Tamin in Singapore about a month ago. The CID-SS discovered in this arrest a letter from Djaus with his return address and forwarded the information to their colleagues in Hong Kong.[194] Tan Malaka noticed that two policemen were tailing him after he concluded his appointment with Djaus, but it was already too late—the police captured the two men separately on the same night.

Similar to his experience in Manila, the police arrested Tan Malaka without a warrant and treated him violently at the beginning, which made him suspect that the Hong Kong authorities were going after Djaus instead of him. Indeed, the police attitude changed dramatically after CID-SS Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand, who had studied photographs of Indonesian communist leaders for years in Singapore, identified the person in front of him as Tan Malaka. While awaiting more senior officers to handle the case, Chand repeatedly apologized for the maltreatment Tan Malaka had received. While Tan Malaka believed that "hit first, apologize later" was a typically British way of handling opponents, such a shift suggests that the arrest of Tan Malaka—the most wanted Indonesian communist leader—was unexpected.[195] Nevertheless, knowing Tan Malaka would be a difficult enemy to deal with, the authorities denied his request for a defense lawyer. Not only did the police keep Tan Malaka and Djaus apart throughout their detention, but also cut off their contact with the outside world completely. As I will demonstrate below, such an unusual practice had to do with the protracted trial of Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh during the same period.

The Hong Kong authorities started to investigate Tan Malaka's case almost immediately after his arrest. Officials of the Hong Kong government connected him to local communist activities and insisted that he "had absolutely attended a trade union congress in Australia in 1925."[196] In

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[191] The military conflict is known as the January 28 Incident, which lasted from January to March.

[192] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 30-31.

[193] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 30, 36

[194] According to Tan Malaka, he and Djaus were arrested in Hong Kong in connection with Tamin's arrest in Singapore and he learned about this during his interrogation with the British police. Djaus shared the same belief and made such a claim during his interview with Jarvis in 1972. However, Tamin denied the connection and believed that Tan Malaka and Djaus had been traced from Shanghai. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 43, 47; Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 80.

[195] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 34-37.

[196] *De Tribune*, 11 April 1933, as quoted in Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 423.

addition to interrogations conducted by the British, Tan Malaka was also confronted by foreign consuls who charged him with leading revolutionary movements of their respective colony. The American consul asked him about the establishment of the Communist Party in the Philippines; the French claimed that he had involved in revolutionary movements in Indochina; the Dutch sought to verify numerous stories about his connections with the PKI.[197] Even a Chinese consul representing the Guangdong Provincial Government came to identify Tan Malaka as a person of Chinese descent and demanded that he should be handed over to the authorities in Southern China.[198] Without up-to-date knowledge about the government's position on communism, Tan Malaka decided not to take the risk claiming he was.[199]

In response to the endless interrogations by representatives of Western powers, which Tan Malaka termed as "imperialist solidarity," he kept repeating what was already well known to the public such as his membership in the PKI, his banishment from the NEI, and his career in journalism.[200] He also decided to demonstrate his solidarity with revolutionaries in these colonies by denying his connections with them whenever possible. Ho Chi Minh was among the individuals from whom Tan Malaka intentionally dissociated for this purpose, although he had known Ho from their time together in Moscow and Canton.[201] Tan Malaka's imprisonment coincided with the ongoing trial of Ho Chi Minh, which had lasted since Ho's arrest in June 1931. While the two communist leaders were in Hong Kong at the same time, they received very different treatments. I argue that the Hong Kong authorities learned many lessons in dealing with Ho's case, and therefore decided to adopt a different strategy to handle Tan Malaka:

When Ho was arrested, the British police found incriminating documents on the spot showing Ho had been associated with international communism, but could not prove that he had violated any law in Hong Kong. As a result, the British could not deport Ho to Indochina unless there was

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197 *De Tribune*, 11 April 1933, as quoted in Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 423; Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 40; Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right" gedateerd februari 1933, 14 September 1933, in Verbaal lt. E, reproduced in H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid*. ('s-Gravenhage: Brill, 1976), 571.

198 There happens to be a Chinese family name "陈" spelled as "Tan" in Hokkien dialect, which is very common in Chinese communities in southern China and Southeast Asia. Due to the misconception, many people in the Sinophone world still mistakenly translate Tan Malaka's name as "陈马六甲" instead of the correct "丹马六甲". China's citizenship law during the Republic period followed the principle of *jus sanguines* (right of blood), so anyone with Chinese blood would be recognized as Chinese citizen regardless birthplace (with complications in the NEI). However, Tan Malaka noted that he was a Minangkabau native and did not have any Chinese lineage, therefore should not be categorized as Chinese by any standard. See Donald Earl Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900-1958* (Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program,Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1961), 14-15.

199 Although the Guangdong Government enjoyed greater autonomy from the central nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek, its attitude towards communism was ambiguous. Tan Malaka's suspicion was very reasonable. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 39, 217;

200 Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 423.

201 Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 40.

evidence showing that Ho had committed "extraditable crime."[202] Arranged by the International Red Aid organization, a group of highly competent lawyers stepped in Ho's case in July 1931. Led by Hong Kong solicitor Frank Loseby, the group opposed the idea of putting Ho on a ship to Shanghai by arguing that such deportation would be the same as extradition to Indochina: Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Tung Mau, who had been recently deported to Shanghai, was rearrested in the city's French Concession and sent back to Vietnam. Instead, the defense lawyers demanded that Ho to be granted the right to choose his destination and leave Hong Kong secretly; if this were not possible, they would "attack the proceedings in every possible manner and by every known step."[203] When the deportation was finally about to take place in late August 1931, Ho's solicitors accused the Hong Kong authorities of "abusing executive power" and brought the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, which would take more than a year to prepare for the hearing.[204] Although the defendant agreed to withdraw the appeal and accept the Hong Kong government's new terms for deportation on 27 June 1932, Ho had been receiving treatment for his TB infection at a hospital since the end of 1931—probably also as a strategy to stall for time.[205] The Colonial Office regarded Ho as "one of the worst agitators who was put into the bag in the roundup following Lefranc [Ducroux] seizure," and insisted that Ho should be handed over to the French.[206] Despite such intention, Ho's case dragged on, and no sign seemed to suggest that he was leaving when Tan Malaka was in prison around October-November 1932.

From the British perspective, Tan Malaka, too, belonged to the same network of communist agitators associated with the FEB and PPTUS, which had been well studied following Ho and Noulens's arrest. Ho's deportation was particularly difficult to effectuate because he received not only the skillful legal assistance but also the international publicity owing to the concurrent worldwide rescue movement demanding Noulens's release. According to Tan Malaka, the police responded in fear when he threatened to go on hunger strike protesting his maltreatment:

> At that time China and all its treaty ports were shaken by the hunger strike of the Russian communist Noulens, who was protesting his arrest and treatment. This was what those British officials were afraid of. British colonialism had a bad enough name everywhere its talons were sunk; it had no need of a hunger strike by me to worsen that situation.[207]

As Tan Malaka's case resembled Ho's in many ways, it is understandable why the Hong Kong authorities were not in favor of going through a similar legal process, which gave Ho

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[202] Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years; 1919-1941* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 192.

[203] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh,* 193.

[204] Dennis J. Duncanson, "Ho-Chi-Minh in Hong Kong, 1931-32," *The China Quarterly*, no. 57 (1974): 96.

[205] While Quinn-Judge suggests that Ho suffered a severe TB infection, Duncanson believes that Ho's illness was not that serious and was instructed by the Comintern not to escape, Duncanson, "Ho-Chi-Minh in Hong Kong, 1931-32." 96-97; Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh,* 193.

[206] Nguyen ai Quoc: request for extradition to Indo-China by French authorities, 1931-32, Colonial Office (CO) 129/535/3, 7 as quoted by Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh,* 193.

[207] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 43-44.

considerable publicity while generating very little intended result over an extended period. Worse still, the press portrayed a positive image of Ho, who spoke English in court without a translator while demonstrating his sincere nationalist aspirations.[208] Consequently, the Hong Kong authorities denied Tan Malaka's request for a defense lawyer and separated him from the outside world, although he must be well aware of what had been going on with his comrade long before he came into the same city.

On 20 October, Tan Malaka's investigation reached a climax when he was brought to a police court in the presence of British officials from Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, and Nanjing. According to Tan Malaka, he experienced the worst kind of cross-examination at this court.[209] The principle interrogator was a representative from the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP), whom Tan Malaka did not know but was presumably an experienced officer who had participated in the investigation of the FEB and PPTUS. Senior officers of the Straits Settlement Police also attended the interrogation, including the Superintendent and ex-CID Director Rene Onraet, the incumbent CID Director Arthur Harold Dickinson, and the CID Chief Inspector Prithvi Chand.[210] Onraet and Chand played critical roles in the arrest of Ducroux a year earlier and were well known in the circle of PKI fugitives; Tan Malaka recognized the two immediately. Formerly stationed in Malacca, Dickinson just assumed the position of CID Director in February 1932 but was the central figure behind the arrest of Tamin in September.[211] All three officers had been working closely with their colleagues in Hong Kong in handling Ho Chi Minh. Appointing the SMP officer as the principle cross-examiner contains some very crucial information here. While those from Singapore might be more familiar with Tan Malaka's information given they had been following him for years, the British authorities appeared more concerned with Tan Malaka's recent association with the Comintern organizations in Shanghai, rather than his connections with PARI and Tamin.[212] As Tan Malaka was traveling with a visa stamp for Burma, which corroborated with the information found in Noulens's papers, the SMP officer charged Tan Malaka with carrying out communist propaganda in three British territories—Malaya, Burma, and eventually India.[213]

Additionally, the officer claimed that the handwritten notes seized in Tan Malaka's arrest suggested that he was involved in various actions endangering the British Empire.[214] Tan Malaka denied such allegations by saying that he was on his way to Bangkok, where he would meet PARI members and decide whether they should take direct actions against the NEI government.

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[208] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh,* 193.

[209] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right" gedateerd februari 1933, 14 September 1933, in Verbaal lt. E, reproduced in H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid*. ('s-Gravenhage: Brill, 1976), 571.

[210] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 40.

[211] See my discussion in the last section and "Mr. A. H. Dickinson," *The Straits Times*, 5 February 1932, 12.

[212] Even in his letter dated June 1974, Dickinson remembered Tan Malaka as "one of the leading agents together with Ho Chi Minh and Mr. and Mrs. Noulens stationed in Shanghai as many others." See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 219.

[213] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 571.

[214] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 36, 42.

A British report dated November 1932 as follows:

> Tan Malaka insisted that he was interested solely in the development of PARI, a purely nationalist body aiming at the organization of the Javanese and Sumatran proletariat with the ultimate object of driving the Dutch from the NEI. He denied absolutely his connection with any subversive movements directed against the British. He denied absolutely the incriminating evidence found in the Noulens's papers in which he is clearly proved to have been in the pay of Moscow…In the face of this, his admission in regard to PARI must be incomplete. It is impossible that the successful launching of the program of PARI under the direction of an internationalist of the caliber of Tan Malaka could leave Malaya, Siam, Indochina, the Philippines and possibly Burma unaffected. No direct proof has yet been obtained in the recent investigation of his present activities that Tan Malaka has been assisted by Moscow; but the overwhelming evidence of his history, past and present, extending over a period of ten years, leaves little doubt that his visit south must have been connected with plans of wider import [*sic*] than the alleged localized aims of PARI, the leaders of which, it should be remembered, were recruited from the surviving leaders of the old Partai Komunis Indonesia which engineered the 1926 rebellion in Java.
>
> If we accept, as indeed we must, the existence of Moscow's policy of colonial revolution in this part of the world, the arrest of Tan Malaka constitutes a heavy blow struck against the policy and in defense of the Imperial Powers in the South Seas.[215]

Projecting Ho Chi Minh's role in the Comintern to Tan Malaka, British police officers could hardly believe that PARI was independent of Moscow, especially considering it had been operating under the leadership of—albeit only symbolically—a highly experienced agent with proven records in international communism. Although Tan Malaka called such reasoning as "making an elephant out of a mosquito," his ambiguous relationship with the Comintern, coupled with the successive arrests of Ducroux, Ho, and Noulens, had indeed further complicated the British understanding of PARI's nature. Moreover, the arrests took place in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai; and Tan Malaka's supposed destinations were Burma and India. These places were either British colonies or treaty port under the direct British influence and were all critical to British interests in the Far East. Putting them together, perhaps it was nearly impossible for Tan Malaka to make a case that his activities were not anti-British. Tan Malaka noticed that British officials were deeply obsessed with safeguarding the British Empire. They knew about Tan Malaka's connections with revolutionaries in many different countries, but "the ones important to [them] were those struggling to overthrow what was dear to the heart of all British imperialist: *the British Empire where the sun never set.*"[216] According to Tan Malaka, he could feel the sympathy of British officers: Chand apologized to him repeatedly for the maltreatment at the beginning of the arrest; Hong Kong police's assistant superintendent T. Murphy regretted that Tan Malaka had to be transferred sometimes to the poorly maintained cells

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[215] Malay and Indonesian Communists: Supplement No. 5 of 1948 to Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal, issued with PIJ No. 11/48, 15 June 1948, Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 537/3752

[216] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 36, 42.

for Chinese prisoners;[217] Onraet and Dickinson talked to him softly and provided him with good food.[218] Nevertheless, the officers had to go "against their personal wishes to execute the order from the 'invisible' power as existed in any imperialistic [*sic*] governed country."[219] In a half-joking manner, the SMP officer even rejected the possibility of deporting Tan Malaka to Jamaica in Central America, as it would be "too dangerous for the British Empire."[220]

The Dutch consul general in Hong Kong notified Batavia of Tan Malaka's arrest on 14 October and pointed out that in a follow-up telegram that extradition would be difficult to achieve.[221] Once again, the NEI government sent Marinus Visbeen, now working for the Attorney General's Office, who had just concluded the extradition of Tamin and his PARI followers from Singapore in late September. Visbeen was no stranger in the business, as he had been maintaining a close working relationship with his CID counterparts in the Straits Settlements since the PKI 1926/27 uprisings. He arrived in Hong Kong on 27 October and was allowed to talk to Tan Malaka two days later.[222] Requested by Tan Malaka, the interrogation was conducted in English in the presence of British officers. However, Visbeen failed to obtain any useful information, as Tan Malaka refused to answer his questions.[223] He also tried to press the Hong Kong government for extradition, but similar to what French official experienced in Ho Chi Minh's case, Visbeen could not present any case that Tan Malaka had committed any "extraditable crime" in Hong Kong.[224] The outcome was in stark contrast with Tamin's case, in which British authorities found incriminating evidence that Tamin had been running an illegal political organization in British territory.[225] This law was not applicable to Tan Malaka's case in Hong Kong, and Visbeen's request for extradition met no result.

Probably inspired by Ho Chi Minh's appeal to the Privy Council, Tan Malaka still harbored the

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[217] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 36, 45.

[218] Onraet wrote about his encounter with Tan Malaka in his memoir as follows: "On another page [of the diary] is a call from the Netherlands Consul General about the extradition of certain Netherlands Indies natives--scholarly Mr. Daniels so anxious to present the police with a cup to be called 'Tan Malacca Cup' to commemorate the gratitude of his government for our having rounded up that great Javanese revolutionary. I went to identify TM when he was in goal. There was no pretense in his gratitude to me for seeing that he was allowed the ministrations of a Moslem barber and a good plate of curry and rice.'when the roles are reversed,' he said, 'I will remember your courtesy!'" See René Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (Dorothy Crisp & Co.: London, 1947), 149; Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 41.

[219] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 571.

[220] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 36, 42.

[221] Brief consul-generaal Hong Kong aan Procureur-generaal, 2 November 1932, mailrapport l151x/32 in Verbaal, 27 January 1933, letter N 1. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheime Mailrapporten, serie AA, nummer toegang 2.10.36.06, inventarisnummer 119; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 426.

[222] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 48.

[223] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 426.

[224] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 571.; Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 49-50.

[225] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 84-87.

slim hope that the British authorities would adhere to its "democratic principles" if he could bring his case to the attention of the British parliament. From what he learned about Sun Yat-sen and Thai King Rama VII's exiles, Tan Malaka believed that the British had the long tradition of accepting political refugees and refusing requests for extradition irrespective of skin color.[226] Keeping this in mind, Tan Malaka managed to send out telegrams via his Chinese cellmate to two British leftist politicians, George Lansbury of the Socialist Party and James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party, who he thought would be most likely sympathetic to him. Tan Malaka's telegram reads:

> Third deportation threatens me. First 1922 from Indonesia. Second 1927 from Philippines. Health very poor. Re-arrest and deportation possibly wherever I go. Hope for interventions by English workers.[227]

The message did reach Maxton, who asked a question about Tan Malaka's arrest in the parliament in March 1933, but such assistance was too little too late.[228] Tan Malaka gradually realized that seeking asylum was not an option, as the Hong Kong government wanted to get rid of him as soon as possible and was ready to deport him to anywhere in the world but British territories.[229]

In November 1932, the Hong Kong authorities started to ask Tan Malaka about his preferred destination for deportation. Tan Malaka's first choice was the Philippines, but the US consul general in Hong Kong rejected his request. He then proposed to go to Japan or South America, and soon received the same negative response as if these governments acted "in accordance with a 'secret' agreement toward certain [revolutionaries]."[230] Tan Malaka then asked about the possibility of going to the Netherlands, where he had deposited money and would not have any problem finding a job. He argued that although the NEI governor-general banished him from the NEI in 1922, he was never banished from the Netherlands. However, the Dutch government denied the request on the ground that Tan Malaka had lost his Dutch citizenship, as he had failed to contact any government representative in the past five years.[231] Tan Malaka believed that such

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[226] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 44.

[227] The original Dutch text reads: "*Derde verbanning dreigt mij. Eerst 1922 van Indonesia. Tweede 1927 van de Philippijnen. Gezondheid zeer zwak. Her-arrestatie en verbanning mogelijk waar ik ook ga. Hoop op tussenkomst Engelse arbeiders*," which was published in *De Tribune*, 11 April 1933, reproduced in Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 426. My translation is slightly different from Jarvis's. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 223 (note 36).

[228] Tan Malaka thought the telegram played a role in pressing the Hong Kong government not to keep him in detention any longer, but it was not the case. Maxton did not ask the question until March 1933 but Tan Malaka had left by the end of November 1932. See Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 47.

[229] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 571.

[230] Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 426; Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right" gedateerd februari 1933, 14 September 1933, in Verbaal lt. E, reproduced in H. A Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid*. ('s-Gravenhage: Brill, 1976), 571-572.

[231] Tan Malaka sent his request to the consul general in Hong Kong on 18 November and was informed of the decision a week later. During this period, the NEI governor-general expressed

a decision was purely political, as "any charge against me would be made public and I would be allowed to defend myself, as Holland is a democratic country."[232] At one point, the British agreed to send him to Europe on a French ship, but Tan Malaka rejected the offer and reminded British officials that a French ship changed its course in 1929 to facilitate the extradition of Subakat from Siam to Java via Singapore. He insisted that if he were to be sent off to Europe, the British must let him board a British ship and guarantee his safety at the destination. Tan Malaka finally agreed to leave for Shanghai aboard a French ship towards the end of November. He was well aware that the ship would dock in Shanghai's French Concession and officials there would not have the slightest hesitation to hand him over to the NEI government, but he knew that the ship would call at many ports along the Chinese coast before reaching its final destination, which would be his best opportunity to escape.[233] After 45 days of imprisonment, Tan Malaka finally left Hong Kong on 25 November.

By the end of 1932, Tan Malaka had been deported three times by three different colonial powers, and there are some similarities in the three cases. In 1922, the NEI governor-general exercised his extraordinary powers (*Exorbitante Rechten*) to remove Tan Malaka from the colony without a trial, as he was considered "dangerous to the public order."[234] In 1927, the acting governor-general of the Philippines ordered to deport Tan Malaka on the eve of his public trial and notified the Dutch authorities of his destination. In 1932, the governor of Hong Kong, too, issued a summary deportation order without a trial. While the NEI authorities tried every possible way to bring him back to the colony, the US and British authorities subverted principles of justice to keep the communist threat at bay. Both governments arrested Tan Malaka without a warrant, held him in prison without charging him with a crime, denied his right to seek asylum, and deported him with "tricks and deceptions (that he would be safe)".[235] Additionally, Tan Malaka believed that the two colonial powers broke the Anglo-Saxon tradition for justice not just because he was suspected of being a communist, but a colored and stateless communist. He pointed out that many white intellectuals could get away with charges of communism easily, particularly in China and Southeast Asian colonies, where they enjoyed the right of extraterritoriality.[236]

Meanwhile, there were noticeable differences. While in Manila, Tan Malaka maintained close contact with the outside world through his defense lawyer and friends. He received enormous attention in the local press and was supported by the Filipino masses. It was precisely the sympathy he gained from the masses that forced the US authorities to issue the deportation order hurriedly—Tan Malaka was too great a threat to be kept in the Philippines. By contrast, Tan

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his opposition to the request to the Ministry of Colony in The Hague by referring to the citizenship issue and the decision was sent back to the consul general in Hong Kong. See Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 426;

[232] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 571. Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 226 (note 50).

[233] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 50-52.

[234] Brief van Tan Malaka aan de "China League for Civil Right," 568. Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 51.

[235] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 53-54.

[236] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 55.

Malaka's imprisonment in Hong Kong was in complete solitude. The British denied his request for a defense lawyer and deliberately cut off his contact with the outside world. He was surrounded by consuls from different countries and British police officers from different parts of Asia. Although he did not constitute any tangible threat to Hong Kong per se, his perceived mobility and extensive global connections would pose an unimaginable threat to neighboring colonies and the British Empire in particular—Tan Malaka must be kept in Hong Kong to prevent him from creating further damages to the "Imperial Powers in the South Seas."[237]

6. Aftermath and implication

Tan Malaka left Hong Kong on board a ship to Shanghai. With the help of a Chinese student, Tan Malaka slipped away in Amoy once again from the British officer escorting him.[238] After this miraculous escape, Tan Malaka retreated to an inland Fujianese village called Iwe, where he would spend the next three years hiding from surveillance while recuperating slowly from poor health. Tan Malaka lived alone and lost contact with the outside world between 1932 and 1935. As he recalled:

> After I was arrested in Hong Kong at the end of 1932 (for the third time), all of my comrades were arrested in Singapore and banished to Digul. My contact with friends and comrades everywhere was totally broken. I tried several times to reconnect to Indonesian people in Singapore, but all of my attempts failed.[239]

Tan Malaka returned to Amoy in early 1936, but the PARI network had collapsed due to the mass arrest of Tamin and his followers: The British authorities arrested them in Singapore in September 1932 and handed them over to the NEI government in the same month. The Dutch authorities conducted a thorough investigation into Tamin's case in Batavia, and finally interned him, together with his disciples Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef, to Digul in August 1933. Tamin would stay in Digul until WWII before the Dutch government transferred them to Australia due to the Japanese invasion. PARI activities did not come to a complete end, however, as younger activists such as Djaus and Sukarni carried on the work, but not necessarily under the name of PARI. While some achieved political success by attaining influential positions in legal youth groups, more would be arrested and banished to Digul in the following years just like the party veterans.[240]

As Shiraishi points out, PARI was a small revolutionary party that had never succeeded in establishing a significant presence in Indonesian nationalist politics. It was a network of Tan

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[237] Malay and Indonesian Communists: Supplement No. 5 of 1948 to Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal, issued with PIJ No. 11/48, 15 June 1948, Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence, Colonial Office (CO) 537/3752

[238] Tan Malaka and Jarvis, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 2, 55-60.

[239] Tan Malaka, *Madilog: Materialisme, Dialektika, Logika* (Jakarta: Terbitan Widjaya, 1951), 12.

[240] George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003), 85-86.

Malaka's disciples, akin to a group of "commissioned traveling salesmen," whose main task was to distribute his writings. While the hope was to educate thousands and millions of competent followers so that Indonesia's independence would be more attainable, Tan Malaka and his right-hand man Tamin only managed to train no more than thirty of them. As a result, the actual threat it posed to the colonial order was minimal.[241] From a policing perspective, however, PARI was not insignificant at all as it was the closest reincarnation of the PKI, which had posed an enormous threat to the colony's *rust en orde* (peace and order) by plotting rebellions against the Dutch government while maintaining close ties with international communism. The NEI authorities thus had sufficient reasons to carry on mass arrest, imprisonment, and internment against anything that was reminiscent of the PKI. More importantly, as the party network operated mostly outside of the NEI borders, domestic policing appeared insufficient to tame the seemingly ever-growing communist beast. The fear thus boosted the demand for joint efforts among colonial powers to tackle the "red menace." The disappearance of Tan Malaka, Indonesia's most capable and legendary communist leader, further intensified such anxiety. As Tamin puts it:

> In the British intelligence circle in India and all over the British colonies, Tan Malaka has indeed become a great specter. They were always worried, always suspicious, that Tan Malaka might have been in India already. They were not able to find any trace of Tan Malaka ever since he vanished at the Amoy Port in November 1932. Maybe Tan Malaka is in India, maybe in Iran, maybe in Egypt, maybe in Rangoon, maybe in Malaya…For this reason, the Dutch and British intelligence services needed closer cooperation.[242]

The tone may sound exaggerating, but the essence of the message is clear: the collapse of the PARI network in 1932 did not mark the end of the policing cooperation between colonial powers. Quite the opposite, the episode drew the partnership closer. The CID-SS Director Arthur H. Dickinson, who had just finished handling Tamin's extradition and Tan Malaka's deportation, visited Batavia in early 1933 with the purpose of strengthening the cooperation between the British and Dutch intelligence services.[243] In the following March, the Governor of Hong Kong William Peel proposed to amend the colony's Deportation Ordinance. He stated that the "very notorious" communists such as Ho Chi Minh and Tan Malaka had not committed any extraditable crime and could not be deported to their own countries. Peel argued that it was no longer "possible to consider red communist agitators and political offenders against their own country only—the class to which British law has traditionally afforded asylum. 'Red communism' has become a matter of international concern."[244] The amendment was subsequently approved in London.[245] As Foster rightly suggests, officials from Dutch, British,

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[241] Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," 43-45

[242] Tamin, "Sedjarah PKI," 89-90.

[243] Letter of consul general in Batavia, 1 March 1933, Foreign Office (FO) 371/17403/W 3745/66; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 433.

[244] Deportations, 1933, in Treaty Department and successors: General Correspondence from 1906, Foreign Office (FO) 372/2913/02762 as quoted in Jarvis, *Partai Republik Indonesia (PARI)*, 50.

[245] Deportations, 1933, in Treaty Department and successors: General Correspondence from 1906, Foreign Office (FO) 372/2913/303; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 433.

French, and American colonies in the region all shared the similar concerns, and it was precisely such consensus that drew the four colonial powers closer than ever before. The common perception thus further strengthened the political cooperation, which would persist throughout the interwar period and eventually into the cold war.[246]

[246] Foster, *Projections of Power*, 41.

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Appendix I:

The Netherlands East Indies 1926 Communist Revolt in the Eyes of the Singapore Press

> […] In the Dutch East Indies, the demeanour of the native towards the European has passed by successive stages from an almost abject deference to a thinly veiled hostility. The Dutch colonists are accordingly anxious and restive about the ultimate outcome of the present 'ethical' policy.[1] Knowledge of the natives' history encourages the colonists in the view that the extreme plasticity of the native character renders outside influences particularly powerful in Java, and that it will prove disastrous if the Government stands weakly aside in the presence of subversive agitation.[2]

1. Introduction

On 7 October 1926, *The Singapore Free Press* (SFP), a popular English-language newspaper in the Straits Settlements, reprinted a long opinion piece from London's *The Times*. Entitled "Dutch Policy in Java: Propaganda and the Native", the article discussed the ongoing "communist disturbances" in the nearby Netherlands East Indies (NEI). As a keen observer, the anonymous author reviewed in great detail the history of the Archipelago and analysed various immigrant groups in colonial society at that time. He pointed out that people in the NEI were open to foreign influences, which provided radical movements — such as Chinese anti-imperialism and Arabian Islamicism — with fertile grounds in which to grow.

As the Dutch gradually lost their prestige in the natives' eyes by "perpetrating acts of injustice and, often, uncontrolled violence," extremist ideologies such as communism gained significant support from the indigenous population.[3] The author indicated that communist propagandists had

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[1] The Ethical Policy was adopted at the outset of the 20th century with the goal of taking moral responsibility for Dutch subjects. The policy emphasizes on improving living conditions, creating more opportunities for education and giving more autonomy and greater political rights to the native population. Despite the progress, the policy was often criticised for being too costly and pushing change too rapidly. The Ethical Policy virtually ceased to exist in the 1930s due to the double effect of the Great Depression and the burgeoning Indonesian nationalist movement.

[2] Dutch Policy in Java. (1926, October 7). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[3] To illustrate his point, the author used two examples. The first was the construction of the road in Java, which cost 8,000 lives; the second is the "1923 Tangerang incident", in which the

successfully worked their way into schools, trade unions, government departments and military units. With the growing impudence of the local press and the increase in disruptive activities, it was evident that extremism had experienced a rapid upsurge in recent years. The article ended by exhorting the Dutch to take sterner measures to curb this dangerous communist agitation.[4]

Printed alongside advertisements on the newspaper's page six, the opinion piece probably did not receive the attention it deserved despite its persuasive analysis and alarmist warnings. A month later, a major communist revolt broke out in Batavia, followed by similar uprisings in Bantam and West Sumatra. How could a journalist — presumably — have made such an accurate prediction a month in advance while the Dutch colonial administration seemed caught unprepared when the uprising happened? Why did SFP print this article, or rather, why did political issues in the NEI even matter to the newspaper readers in British Malaya?

Through NewspaperSG, a digital newspaper database developed and managed by the National Library Board (NLB) of Singapore, this paper aims to add more nuanced views to the understanding of the 1926/27 communist insurrections in the NEI, especially their broader impact on Malaya. This paper argues that partially because of the extensive public discussions surrounding the NEI insurrections, as well as important lessons learned from their Dutch counterparts, the British administration's anti-communist measures predated the formal establishment of Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1930. As a result of the British authorities' effective surveillance and policing work, the MCP struggled for its survival from its inception and never had a real chance to pose serious threats to the colonial regime before World War II (WWII).

A few scholars have studied the history of early communist movements in the NEI and British Malaya.[5] Ruth McVey's *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (1965) is by far the most comprehensive account of the origins of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) until its disintegration in 1927. Using both Dutch and Indonesian materials, McVey has produced a very detailed analysis of the 1926/27 revolts and the government's systematic suppression of them. 1927 is a convenient ending point in McVey's narrative because the PKI was forced underground and would not play a significant role in Indonesian politics until many years later. Yong Ching Fatt's *The Origins of Malayan Communism* (1997) investigates the movement on the British side of the Malacca Straits. With his mastery of both English and Chinese sources, Yong traces the Chinese roots of the early communist organisations in Malaya. Both McVey and Yong briefly mention the communist movements of the "other side" in their respective works.

Cheah Boon Kheng (1992) took an important step forward by conducting preliminary research into the links between the two movements. Besides an essay-length summary of these connections, Cheah also reproduced a number of documents that illustrate the MCP's Indonesian connections in the early years of the organisation's establishment (1930), which could serve as important

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authorities failed to handle an armed insurrection effectively due to their indecision. He concluded that the Dutch swung from one extreme to another, which undermined their prestige. See Dutch policy in Java. (1926, October 7). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[4] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 7 Oct 1926, p. 6.

[5] There are a number of other scholars who have conducted research on the NEI or Malayan communist movements in later periods. In this article, I regard early communist movements as movements before WWII.

signposts for further exploration. Despite his interesting findings regarding the communists' networks across the British and Dutch colonies, Cheah's work does not grapple with the wider socio-political impacts of these early movements beyond the limited connections of individuals, which left a gap for further studies.

Many historians consider the PKI uprisings as important precursors of Indonesia's nationalist movement, which ultimately led to the country's independence (Kahin 2003, 83-86; Shiraishi 1990, 339).[6] When it comes to the actual course of events, however, existing narratives tend to describe the abortive revolts as ill-prepared, poorly organised and easily suppressed — and consequently, of limited impact in shaking the foundation of the Dutch colonial regime.[7] It is also commonly understood that in the aftermath of the rebellions, Dutch authorities dealt a crushing blow to the PKI and its associated organisations by carrying out large-scale arrests, imprisonments, executions and banishments. Beyond these facts, however, very little attention has been paid to the deeper meanings that the revolt revealed. As the following sections will demonstrate, the movement created enormous anxiety in the NEI, which forced the Dutch colonial government to act with a strong hand. Moreover, with frequent exchanges of information and personnel across the Malacca Straits, the NEI uprisings also generated considerable uneasiness in British Malaya.

2. More than a source: NewspaperSG as a method

Due to communist organisations' illegal status in both the NEI and British Malaya, and the fact that many documents did not survive WWII and the post-independence era that followed, historians have lacked a large source base to understand early communist movements in the region.[8] For this reason, newspapers can serve as valuable sources and make up for the shortage of original party documents. Moreover, they also add more nuanced views to the one-sided narratives that solely based on official documents of the colonial archives. Paradoxically, newspapers' massive information can also impede the efficiency of historical research. Researchers often need to spend excessively long time in information haystacks to find a useful needle.

First launched in March 2009, the digital newspaper archive NewspaperSG presents new possibilities in approaching historical issues in Singapore and the surrounding areas. With its Optical Character Recognition (OCR) feature, scholars can now perform keyword searches to locate desired content in 43 newspapers published in Singapore between 1831 and 2006.[9] For this

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[6] Kahin, G. M. T. (2003). *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia*. Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University; Shiraishi, T. (1990). *An age in motion: Popular radicalism in Java, 1912-1926*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

[7] McVey, R. T. (1965). *The rise of Indonesian communism*, (p. xi). New York: Cornell University Press.

[8] Cheah, B. K. (1992). *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party: selected documents and discussion,* (p. 6). Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University

[9] Quoted from an unpublished NLB document on NewspaperSG. There are 43 newspaper titles available with the OCR feature as of 15 May 2017. In addition to searchable content, there are

paper, newspapers used include SFP*, The Straits Times* (ST)*, Malaya Tribune* (MT) and *Malayan Saturday Post* (MSP) in English, as well as popular Chinese newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* (or *Nanyang Business Daily*).[10] The Singapore press received their information from various sources such as *Reuters*, its Dutch counterpart *Aneta* and local NEI newspapers in multiple languages. ST and SFP also hired their own correspondents, who regularly wrote reports for the papers' special NEI columns entitled "The Week in Java", "Java Notes", and "Java Press Cables".[11]

In addition to the ease of access to the vast amount of information, digital archives have a lot more to offer than traditional newspapers in many other regards. For instance, NewspaperSG allows researchers to keep track of events' developments in a way more akin to how original readers would have received those messages: breaking news was sometimes based on rumours and invalidated reports from other sources; reliable details were often not revealed until much later. With frequent repetitions, corrections, validations, negations, and more often than not, contradictions in a series of news reports, a reader's perception of a certain event could be very different to its reality. Similarly, how readers digest news can be influenced by what they read in conjunction with the news itself. In other words, as far as readers' impressions were concerned, the textual context in which the news was reported probably played no less significant a role than the larger socio-political context in which the event actually took place. While such nuances are very difficult to scrutinise by flipping through traditional newspapers, researchers are able to make better sense of complex issues by tracing the progression of time and capturing historical moments in the virtual pages of digital archives.

Furthermore, digital newspaper archives open the door for scholars to conduct quantitative textual analysis in addition to the content-focused "close reading".[12] The latest version of NewspaperSG has a simple yet powerful analytic tool called "Search Term Visualiser," through which researchers are able to grasp the changing trends of word use in Singapore media during the selected period. The following section includes a few graphs generated from NewspaperSG and illustrates how the Singapore press responded to communist movements in the mid-1920s in general and the 1926 NEI communist revolt in particular.

Despite the numerous advantages of using digital newspaper archives, one should be aware of its shortcomings. For example, the current OCR technology is far from perfect. Closely associated with the present state of the original newspapers (or microfilms), the outcome of digitisation may vary considerably. Even the most advanced digital scanner cannot guarantee the quality of the digitised materials. The latest version of NewspaperSG has fairly good coverage of English

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also seven unsearchable "page view only" newspapers. For latest information, visit http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/

[10] Due to NewspaperSG's limited OCR accuracy in the Chinese language, I did not include *Nanyang Siang Pau* in this paper. Singapore's first independent Malay-language daily *Warta Malaya* did not emerge until 1930, which was after the time period of this paper.

[11] The author consulted *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press* from 1925 to 1930 for this research.

[12] Research methods in digital humanities have been undergoing rapid development in recent years. With the help of various tools, skilled researchers can now perform very sophisticated quantitative textual analyses. For this paper, however, I have primarily focused on the content and used the quantitative method to supplement my textual analysis. For this purpose, I used NewspaperSG's built-in Search Term Visualiser when statistics were involved.

sources with a relatively high level of OCR accuracy. Searches in other languages, however, still requires further optimisation due to greater technical challenges to performing OCR for non-romanised characters. As a result, one should be conscious of the risk of basing their analysis primarily on a handful of English-language newspapers published in an extremely heterogeneous colonial society. ST, for example, enjoyed the reputation of being Malaya's leading newspaper. Popular only among the English-educated elites, however, it had a readership of only around 6,000 to 7,000 towards the end of the 1920s.[13] This is a low number when compared to Singapore's total population — around 400,000 — at the time.[14] For this reason, this research should be supplemented with other materials.

3. Making Sense of the Numbers

People commonly associate the origins of communist activity in British Malaya with the ethnic Chinese community and political influences from Mainland China. Such an association is likely derived from the fact that the membership of the MCP was predominantly Chinese. Although the MCP was not formally established until 1930, Yong Ching Fatt suggested that Chinese communists had been operating in British Malaya as early as 1921.[15] Due to contradictions in different sources, the exact founding dates of Malaya's early communist organisations are difficult to pinpoint. It is generally agreed that the Communist Party of China (CPC) established an overseas branch in British Malaya around 1925 to 1926. The CPC branch gradually transformed into the Nanyang (or South Seas) Communist Party (SSCP) in 1927 with the goal of expanding to all parts of the Nanyang area.[16] Following this timeline, one would expect an upsurge in the coverage of local communist activities in Singapore's print media from 1925 onwards. The search results on NewspaperSG, on the contrary, shows a rather complex situation:

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[13] Turnbull, C. M. (1995). *Dateline Singapore: 150 years of The Straits Times*, (pp. 80-81). Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.

[14] According to the 1931 Census, Singapore's total population was 445,778. While Europeans and Eurasians numbered 6,584 and 6,043 respectively, the number of other ethnic groups were much larger: 340,645 Chinese; 43,424 Malays; 41,848 Indians and 7,234 Others. Although the English-speaking population was not limited to the Europeans and Eurasians, it is problematic to equate views expressed by the English press to public opinions. The readership of Chinese newspapers was comparable to, if not greater than, that of the English papers. 林任君. [Lin, R. J.] (1993). 我们的七十年, 1923-1993 [Our 70 years: history of leading Chinese newspapers in Singapore], (pp. 57-58). 新加坡 : 新加坡报业控股华文报集团. For a brief summary of the 1931 Census, see The 1931 Census of Singapore. (1931, May 29). The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG

[15] Yong, C. F. (1997). *The origins of Malayan communism*, (pp. 41-89). Singapore: South Seas Society. The Communist Party of China was established on 1 July 1921. Given the fact that the CPC itself would still have been in its early stages of formation, it is doubtful whether the propaganda was actually carried out under the banner of communism in Malaya in the early years of the 1920s.

[16] Cheah, 1992, pp. 13-14.

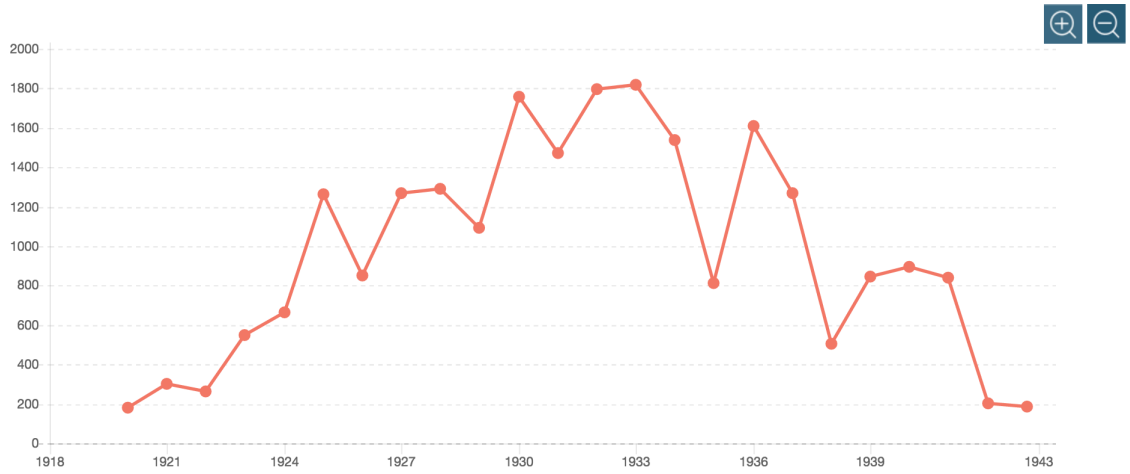

Fig. 1: Keywords: communist(s) OR communism[17]

The results of keyword search terms "'communist(s)' OR 'communism'" (Fig. 1) indicate that there was indeed a steady growth (of the use of the terms) that started from 1920. The sudden increase in 1925 is also consistent with the alleged establishment of the early communist organisations in Malaya. However, when consulted, the relevant newspaper articles were mostly concerned with communist movements outside of British Malaya. Throughout the 1920s, the SSCP was only mentioned twice in 1928 and once in 1929. Similarly, there were no results for organisations such as the CPC's Nanyang Provisional Committee, South Seas Branch Committee, South Seas General Labor Union and only one result for the Communist Youth League.[18] Although it is possible that errors could have distorted the results due to translation or other technical issues, the difference is negligible. The results indicate that early communist organisations had a very limited impact in the public sphere of British Malaya prior to the 1930s.

What contributed to the surge of communism-related discussions in Singapore newspapers in 1925? Since communist activities in the NEI were frequently mentioned in the mid-1920s, probably because of the PKI revolt, the keyword search terms "'communist(s)' AND 'Java'" are used (Fig. 2).[19]

[17] Search Term Visualiser, NewspaperSG, accessed February 14, 2017, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Visualiser?keyword=communist OR communists OR communism &NPT=&CTA=&DF=01/01/1920&DT=31/12/1943

[18] Yong and Cheah discussed these organisations in their work and verified their existence by referring to various sources, including official records in the colonial archives.

[19] Singapore newspapers frequently used Java (rather than Dutch/Netherlands East Indies) to refer to the Dutch colony as it was the economic and political centre. Java was also where news agencies and correspondents dispatched their reports about the NEI. Therefore, I used Java instead of NEI in the search.

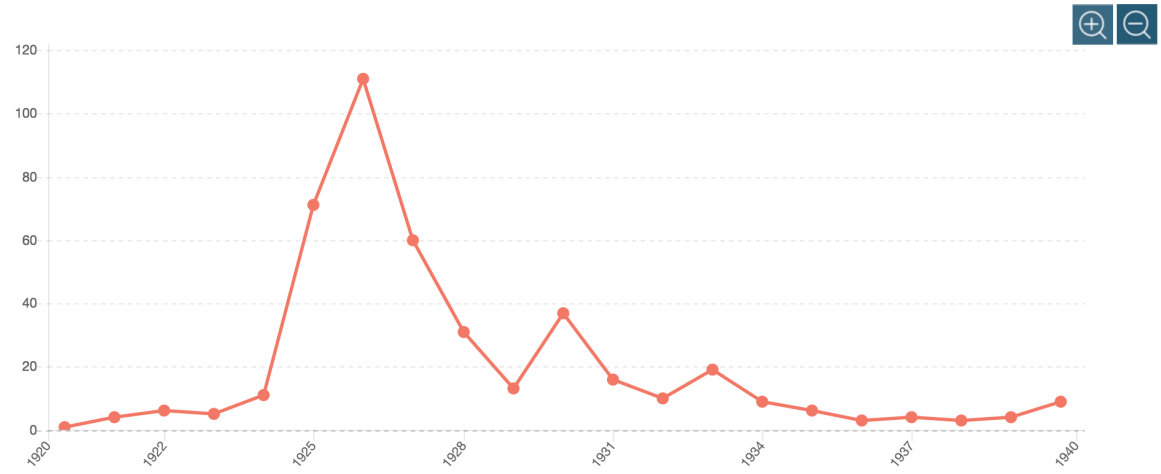

Fig. 2: Keywords: communist(s) AND Java[20]

From Fig. 2 it is evident that discussions about NEI communist activities surged in 1925 and peaked in 1926. Articles that contained both terms "communist(s)" and "Java" grew by 545.5 percent from 14 in 1924 to 71 in 1925. Is it possible that the media in Singapore coincidentally increased the coverage of Java and communism as two separate events? In other words, was the Singapore press actually concerned about communist activities *in* Java from 1925 to 1927? We can rule out this possibility by searching "Java" alone (Fig. 3).

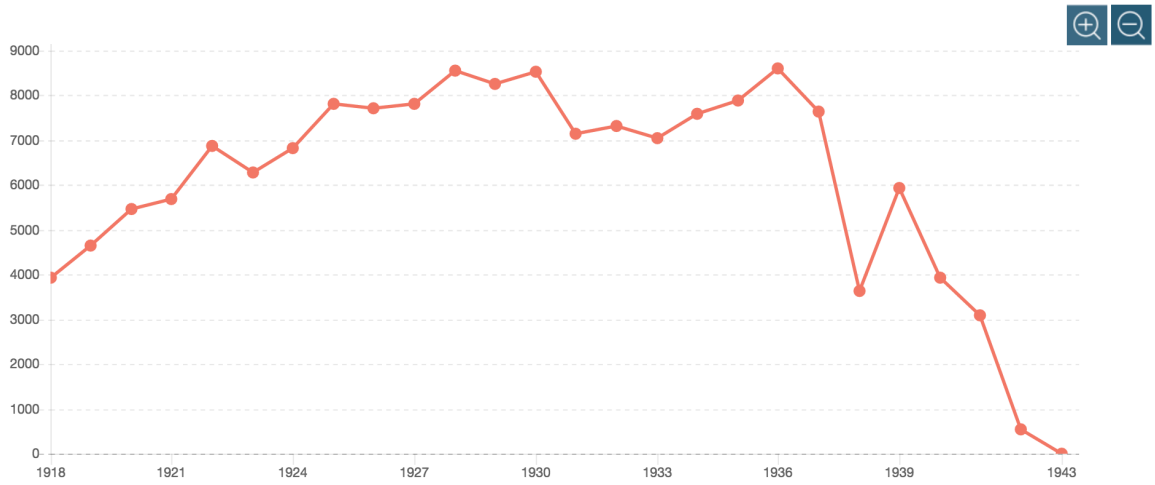

Fig. 3: Keywords: Java[21]

Fig. 3 shows that the term "Java" saw an overall 14.5 percent growth from 6,819 in 1924 to 7,808

[20] Search Term Visualiser, NewspaperSG, accessed January 11, 2017, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Visualiser?keyword=communist java&NPT=&CTA=&DF=01/01/1918&DT=01/01/1943

[21] Search Term Visualiser, NewspaperSG, accessed January 11, 2017, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Visualiser?keyword=Java&NPT=&CTA=&DF=01/01/1918&DT=01/01/1943

in 1925 — a steady increase for sure, but certainly not as sharp as the terms "'communist(s)' and 'Java.'" Understandably, while the volume of Java-related articles remained constant in the next two years, news reports on communism in Java reached its peak in 1926 and remained high in 1927 due to the PKI insurrections. The media's growing general interests aside, it is clear that the communist movement in the NEI had already attracted significant attention a year prior to the outbreak of the revolt.

To better understand the impact of the 1926/27 revolt in British Malaya, we can compare the search results of the terms "'communist(s)' & 'Java'" and "'communist(s)' & 'China'" (Fig. 4). This chart shows that overall, communist activities in China (broadly defined) exerted far greater influence in British Malaya than their Indonesian counterparts over the years, with the only exception being 1926, presumably due to the PKI revolt. Starting from 1927, however, while China's influence fluctuated (at a relatively high level) over the years, the impact of the NEI communist movement became significantly weaker.

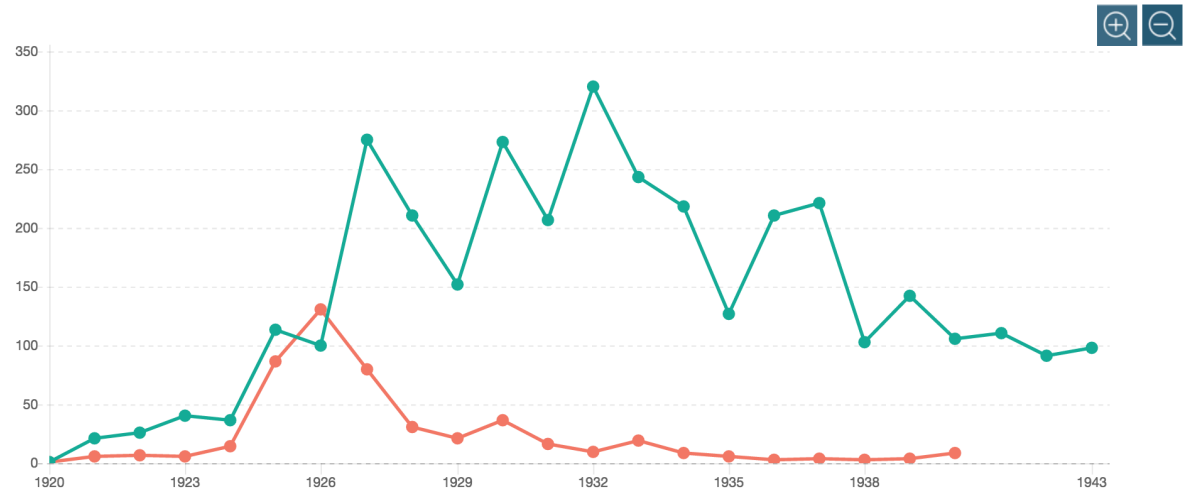

Fig. 4: Keywords: communist(s) AND Java (red) vs. communist(s) AND China (green)[22]

Technically speaking, this is a highly problematic comparison, which is due to the inherent shortcomings of digital newspaper archives mentioned earlier. When performing a search with multiple words (Figs. 2 and 4), a lot of "noise", such as inappropriate text encoding or extraction, may interfere with the desired outcome. For example, some of the search results in Fig. 4 could refer to "China" in one report and "communist(s)" in a different report, but the two reports are somehow interpreted as being in the same newspaper article. It is possible that although both reports are unrelated, such an article might still pop up in a keyword search.

Hence, while NewspaperSG's "Search Term Visualiser" is a useful tool in illustrating general trends of word use, it is insufficient to tell a full story. But by performing a basic keyword search, we can draw the preliminary conclusion that the mention of NEI communist activities in the

[22] Search Term Visualiser, NewspaperSG, accessed April 11, 2017, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Visualiser?keyword=communist java OR communists java|communist china OR communists china&NPT=&CTA=&DF=01/01/1920&DT=31/12/1943&itemChanges=communist java or communists java,communist china or communists china

Singapore press rapidly increased in 1925 and peaked in 1926, which could be associated with the PKI uprisings. The intensive media coverage on NEI communism preceded the rise of the largely Chinese-influenced local communist organisations in British Malaya. To better understand the impact of the PKI revolt on the Malaya, it is worthwhile to delve deeper into the actual content of the newspaper articles.

4. The 1926 PKI revolt through the eyes of the Singapore media

Precursor

The situation of the NEI in the first half of 1925 was generally peaceful except for sporadic clashes between the police and alleged communist agitators. The NEI colonial authorities managed to arrest a number of communist leaders for their roles in organising strikes, holding meetings and delivering "seditious speeches." The police's crackdown on communist activities was effective in major hotbed cities such as Bandung, Surabaya and Padang.[23]

From the second half of 1925, there were frequent news reports in the Singapore press concerning Chinese disturbances in Medan, bomb threats across Java, labour disputes in Surabaya and various forms of the Islamic movement.[24] These incidents hardly caused the government any serious consequences. There was also no solid evidence suggesting that the PKI was behind all these disturbances. The extremists often operated without coherent party leadership, but their activities were so ubiquitous and unpredictable that fear inevitably arose among government officials and the public. For example, at the end of October 1925, the Singapore press reported several seemingly unrelated acts of unrest that took place in various locations across Java and Sumatra. Some of these events appeared to be labour disputes and some were intertwined with politically sensitive groups such as Chinese coolies, Arabian intellectuals and rebel Acehnese. Without concrete proof, the authorities and media both conveniently attributed the widespread disturbances to communist agitation:

> The strike agitation in Surabaya continues…there are rumours of impending difficulties with the harbour coolies, although the Surabaya press declares that the [coolies have] declined to answer the call of communist leaders.[25]

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[23] *See* Java sensation. (1925, January 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 9; Communism in Java. (1925, February 2). *The Strait Times*, p. 9: The week in Java: Communism in Bandoeng. (1925, February 7). *The Straits Times,* p. 9.

[24] For Chinese disturbances *see* The week in Java: The Chinese agitation. (1925, July 21). *The Straits Times*, p. 10; Bomb threats across Java, *see* Java Press Cables. (1925, November 3). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 16; Labour disputes in Surabaya, *see* Java Press Cables: Strike in a Machine Factory; Ice Factory Strike. (1925, November 28). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 7; Islamic movement, *see* Wireless telegram: Miscellaneous. (1926, January 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 9; Wireless telegram: Native communists sentenced. (1926, January 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[25] The original text was confusing and did not give further details. It is unclear what the call of the communist leaders was and why the coolies declined to answer. It is clear, however, that the authorities suspected that the communists were behind the strike, although not all the coolies

> The Arabian journalist Alfothak, editor of the Arabian paper *Alwivak*, which has communist tendencies, is to be deported.[26]
>
> The strike among the workers of the Tegal Proa Co. was a result of the discharge of six of their number [sic] who had communist tendencies.[27]

Consequently, the colonial authorities adopted stringent anti-communist measures. On top of carrying out numerous crackdowns, the government promised to imprison or banish communist leaders.[28] Not only did the authorities forbid the PKI and its associated trade unions from holding meetings, but they also kept a tight rein on the local press.[29] The police captured several editors of non-European newspapers for their alleged communist tendencies and for publishing anti-government articles. Besides the Arabian journalist, Al-fothak, mentioned earlier, other arrests included Lauw Giok Lam, an editor of the Malay-Chinese daily *Keng Po* in Batavia, and Gondojoewono, an editor of a native paper named *Njala*.[30] The authorities also seized the Bandung-based Chinese newspaper *Sin Bin* for merely reprinting an article that had previously appeared in communist publication *Soerapati*.[31]

In their attempts to "check communist agitation," the government issued rigid restrictions on the freedom of assembly among employees in heavily PKI-influenced industries such as shipping, railway and sugar throughout the NEI.[32] From March to May 1926, there were at least four instances where the Singapore press reported that the government punished both civil and military personnel for their involvement in PKI activities. The communist suspects were either demoted or fired.[33]

Such measures notwithstanding, communist disturbances were frequently reported across the NEI. While the PKI and its affiliated trade unions were under strict surveillance, alleged communist propaganda was carried out by local Muslim organisations such as Perserikatan Kommunist Islam

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actually followed the PKI instructions. *See* Arab conflict. (1925, October 31). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[26] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 31 Oct 1925, p. 7.

[27] Bomb threats across Java, *see* Java Press Cables. (1925, November 3). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[28] The week in Java: The strikes in Sourabaya. (1925, December 10). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[29] Java note: Important political measures taken against communists. (1925, December 8). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[30] Java notes: The Communist movement. (1925, September 22). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[31] Java press cables: Chinese paper seized. (1925, December 22). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[32] Untitled. (1926, January 27). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[33] *See* Java Press Cables: Communists arrests. (1926, March 29). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 14; Java press cables: Communists in the army. (1926, April 13). *The Singapore Free Press,* p. 7; Java notes: The Communists. (1926, May 12). *The Singapore Free Press,* p. 7; Java Press Cables: Communist arrested. *The Singapore Free Press,* p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

(Islamic Communist Association). The colonial government discovered similar movements in Padang, West Sumatra and Makassar, South Celebes.[34] The most serious unrest of this sort broke out in mid-February 1926 when approximately 2,000 natives gathered in Solo under the auspices of a Muslim communist organisation called Moalimin:

> It was clearly evident that this crowd of Javanese were confirmed communists and every one of them carried a small red flag with the insignia of Moscow on it. The so-called religious society Moalimin preached to its members with considerable zeal the continuance of the holy war against the Christians and also communistic ideals which were not in accordance with the Koran.[35]

While continuous arrests did not seem to eradicate communist disturbances as expected, the authorities' frequent policing drew considerable scepticism from the public. Local media questioned the government's credibility in labelling people's expressions of discontent as being exclusively communist-influenced. Repeated police statements notwithstanding, the so-called communist agitators were rarely brought to trial. With the almost constant lack of convincing information, the government's attempts to fully crackdown on communist activities encountered an enormous crisis of legitimacy in mid-1926, when large-scale unrest broke out on Telo Island off the coast of West Sumatra. As an ST correspondent wrote:

> Without wishing to be over-critical, the fact remains that there is, in regards [sic] the communist activities in the Netherlands Indies, a deplorable absence of well-proved and reliable statements on the part of the authorities, which is not what one would expect in enlightened times.[36]

Worsening matters was the death of Hadji Misbach, the well-known "Red Haji" who had made his name combining communist propaganda with Islamic doctrine. He had died of black fever around the same period during his banishment in Manokwari, New Guinea. His death triggered wide public discourse regarding the government's inhumane treatment of dissidents. Some European newspapers even paid tribute to Hadji Misbach for the great sacrifices he made for his political views. The same ST commentator remarked:

> …one might well ask if the government has been very wise by creating in this way a martyr in the eyes of certain groups of the population. Would it not have been better policy to have facilitated the agitator's departure from the colony?[37]

In the meantime, alleged communist plots kept popping up across the Archipelago.[38] Although

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[34] *See* Islamic movement, *see* Wireless telegram: Miscellaneous. (1926, January 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 9; and Wireless telegram: Native communists sentenced. (1926, January 30). *The Straits* Times, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[35] Wireless telegrams: Communism in Solo. (1926, February 23). *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[36] Java notes. (1926, June 8). *The Straits Times,* p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[37] *The Straits Times*, 8 Jun 1926, p. 12.

[38] From July to September 1926, colonial authorities uncovered a number of so-called communist plots: in Sabang, *see* Java notes: A plot at Sabang. (1926, July 13). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; in

many of these plots turned out to be insignificant, with colonial authorities usually putting down such unrest without much difficulty, the seemingly ubiquitous communist activities created enormous fear in the public. In September 1926, for example, ST recounted an anecdote at the annual Gambir Fair in Batavia:

> A few days before the opening there were rumours current that communists were to attempt bomb outrages and that the police had made several arrests. These stories, however, seem frightfully overdone, and find their origin in the fact that recently two natives were killed by an accidental explosion of what was said to be a bomb…The European community has a tendency to show at certain times an exaggerated nervousness, the reports in the newspapers are not seldom fundamentally incorrect, and to obtain reliable information from the police is extremely difficult.[39]

As a result, the tension brought about widespread discontent towards the head of the colonial government, Governor-General Dirk Fock. According to the SFP correspondent, Fock's autocratic yet ineffective handling of political disturbances made him very unpopular. Articles in the local press criticised the Fock administration for failing to listen to the legitimate demands of the native population. Andries de Graeff arrived in Batavia as the NEI's new Governor-General in September 1926. In his very first speech before the members of the Volksraad (the People's Council for the NEI), de Graeff explained that he would try to deal with communism differently:

> As regards the communist movement [de Graeff] was of the opinion that the solution of this problem should not be sought in force of arms, although when necessary he would not hesitate to make use of some, but in his opinion there was much to be done in connection with the obtaining of closer cooperation with the native officials and this would be his aim.[40]

In the months leading up to the PKI revolt in November 1926, the Singapore press published many perceptive critiques of the political situation in the NEI. The insightful analysis presented at the beginning of this paper was by no means unique in Malayan newspapers at the time. For instance, in January 1926 an ST correspondent cast doubt on the Dutch colonial government's claim that the labour dispute in Surabaya was due exclusively to communist agitation:

> …notwithstanding the activities of the police against the so-called communists, anti-Dutch agitation continues amongst the semi-intellectual as well as the intellectual classes of the population. It is noticeable that neither in the People's Council (Volksraad) nor in many of the local councils, the native intellectuals are represented, and in some instances one might well speak of decided non-cooperation on their part.[41]

Tegal, *see* Java notes: The riot at Tegal. (1926, August 10). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; in Bantam, *see* Java notes: Unrest in Bantam. (1926, August 24). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[39] The week in Java. (1926, September 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 13. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[40] Java notes: The arrival of the new Governor. (1926, September 14). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[41] The week in Java. (1926, January 9). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

In March, the same newspaper questioned the long-term effectiveness of the wholesale crackdown of the communist movement. The correspondent suggested that while relying on armed measures to deal with disturbances, the government failed to see native issues in "their right proportions." In other words, the endless raids and arrests merely scratched the surface of the problem, which would never lead to the desired results if the government failed to address the significant issues facing the vast native population.[42] In September, the SFP published another lengthy article analysing the contradiction of the increasingly centralised rule of the Dutch colonial government and the growing demand for "decentralisation," namely seeking greater autonomy for the native population under the Ethical Policy. The article astutely pointed out that the NEI communists were very good at exploiting the political situation:

> Communistic and revolutionary propaganda, especially if conducted by Hajis, the natural leaders of Moslem opinion, and the teachings of the theosophical societies, have made the Government policy much harder to carry out.[43]

The uprisings

The PKI revolt broke out in Java on Friday, 12 November 1926. Three days later, on Monday, 15 November 1926, news regarding the insurrection appeared in the mainstream Singapore press. Using multiple sources, including a special report from *Aneta,* ST revealed many details about the uprising. It reported that hundreds of communists entered the native district headman's house and murdered the chief and two other natives in Menes, Bantam. Shortly after, a European railway surveyor named Benjamin was found murdered. The authorities responded promptly by killing and arresting a large number of rebels.[44]

SFP*,* in contrast, dispassionately reported that the uprising was not at all unexpected for people who had been following the news for the past few weeks. Its correspondent believed that the disturbance was just a small test for the new governor-general and that the situation would not be out of the government's control.[45] Based on news reports from *Reuters*, MT mentioned the insurrections in West Java only very briefly and surprisingly, linked it to the recent seizure of two proletarian Chinese schools in Surabaya, which had been found to have maintained close communication with Chinese communists in Guangdong, China.[46]

In the days that followed, the Singapore press covered the NEI communist uprisings in great detail. While all the mainstream newspapers enjoyed good access to information from multiple sources, the actual reports came across as very confusing. On 16 November, SFP and MT both published an identical piece (based on *Reuters'* telegram from Amsterdam) that reported that the NEI authorities had easily dispersed the mobs and attributed the unrest to the maladministration of

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[42] Java notes: The Acheen affair. (1926, March 17). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[43] Dutch colonial policy. (1926, September 24). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[44] Java disorders. (1926, November 15). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[45] Singapore Free Press: Weekend comment. (1926, November 15). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[46] Javanese riots. (1926, November 15). *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

former Governor-General Dirk Fock.[47] SFP elaborated that the PKI uprisings were poorly organised and disconnected from each other. The movement lacked careful planning and had no clear purpose. The mobs accomplished very little except cutting off telephone communications and attacking isolated police officers at small stations.[48] A day later, the same *Reuters* story reappeared, which was followed by a contradictory report directly from Batavia.

According to this very brief report, about 500 hundred rebels had attacked a garrison in Laboean. The authorities knew little about the details because communication had been cut off. Military reinforcement had difficulties reaching the destination in time due to broken bridges and blocked roads.[49] However, based on the *Aneta* report, ST reported on the same day that the government had already put down the insurgency in Laboean with 25 rebels killed and 29 arrested. Meanwhile, *The Straits Times* ran a very worrisome piece from *Reuters* that the uprisings had spread to Central and East Java. The government arrested 30 communist agitators in Surabaya.[50] On 18 November, *Aneta* confirmed that the situation was still out of control. Entitled "Serious Position in Mid-Java Areas", MT reported that"numbers of communists swarmed out of the sugar estate areas in order to incite disturbances."[51] A *Reuters'* telegram from Amsterdam, in comparison, delivered a positive message stating that "…there is no cause for anxiety. 49 rebels have surrendered to the local police, and the whole executive of the communist party at Bandung has been arrested."[52]

The Dutch authorities suppressed the PKI revolt within a week. Based on *Reuters'* telegram from Batavia, ST reported on 20 November that the major insurgency in West Java had been put down except for minor skirmishes in Bantam. In the absence of official dispatches, the Dutch Colonial Minister Koningsberger assured the media that the insurrection was only a question of sporadic happenings.[53] Meanwhile, SFP published its NEI correspondent's article, which reviewed the uprising in far greater detail than the previously telegram-based news reports and praised the government for taking prompt measures:

> Luckily the authorities were aware that trouble was brewing several days beforehand; they had taken what measures they could. It is therefore worthy of mention that whilst fighting was going on in the old town, the reception at the Palace continued as if nothing was happening and only a few of the guests were aware that the expected trouble had broken out. With the exception of the police, military and a few journalists, nobody in the town knew anything about the matter until the following morning! Police and military had done good work whilst Batavia slept.[54]

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[47] The Javanese riots. (1926, November 16). *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[48] Communist riots in Batavia. (1926, November 16). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942),* p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[49] The Java communist outbreak. (1926, November 17). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942),* p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[50] Java disorders. (1926, November 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[51] Java disorders: Disturbances incited on sugar estates. (1926, November 18). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[52] The Javanese rising. (1926, November 18. *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[53] Java disorders. (1926, November 20). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[54] The communist outbreak in Java. (1926, November 20). *The Singapore Free Press and*

Singapore newspapers published many such updates in the following weeks, which provided readers with exhaustive firsthand coverage of the insurrection and the counter-insurgency operations that followed.[55] More often than not, the content of these articles was repetitive, but their writers tried to supplement the facts with (sometimes contradictory) personal opinions. For instance, only three days after praising the authorities in the article mentioned earlier, SFP printed another piece where its correspondent sharply criticised the Dutch administration for lacking "continuity of determination":

> The government handling of the affair was in many ways as erratic as the organisation and carrying out of the attack. It seemed to have waited for the revolt, although it knew it was impending and, having dealt with it, to have become quiescent again until there were fresh outbursts.[56]

Despite what had happened, the correspondent regarded the revolt as a series of "attacks of loafers and bad characters led by a few communists." He suggested that it "[was] more than probable that the actual number of offenders, who were really 'dyed in the wool' communists, was comparatively small." The public, however, could have had a very unbalanced view on such issues, as the articles included widespread rumours and exaggerated details.[57]

Surprisingly, the Singapore press did not pay much attention to the uprisings in West Sumatra that occurred a month later.[58] It was not until mid-January 1927 that the newspapers started to report that the West Sumatra insurgencies were much more severe than Java's.[59] As the colonial authorities continued to take tough measures against the rebels, the subsequent news reports were full of similar stories concerning massive arrests, internment and banishment of the alleged communist agitators.

Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942), p. 16. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[55] *See* Singapore Free Press: The Java revolt. (1926, November 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942),* p. 8; The riots in Java. (1926, November 29). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942),* p. 11; Java notes. (1926, November 30). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942),* p. 16; Java disorders. (1926, November 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 13. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[56] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 23 Nov 1926, p. 8.

[57] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 23 Nov 1926, p. 8.

[58] The insurgencies were briefly mentioned as "minor irregularities" in Singapore newspapers in December. *See* Java notes: The communist action. (1926, December 15). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 3; Java notes. (1926, December 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 16; Moscow and Java. (1926, December 21). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[59] Java notes. (1927, January 13). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 14; Java notes. (1927, January 19). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

5. Discussing our neighbour's troubles

The Singapore media did not report on the revolt only as a special NEI issue. Newspaper articles regarding the NEI communist uprisings often appeared in conjunction with lengthy discussions of relevant issues in British Malaya. On 16 November 1926, just one day after the Java insurrection was first reported in the Singapore press, a long article in ST expressed sympathy towards the Dutch:

> Our Dutch neighbours have been troubled with these sporadic outbreaks for a considerable time, and we in Malaya sympathise with the difficult task which has been theirs. What has occurred serves to emphasise the amazing freedom from agitation and disaffection which, in the midst of considerable turmoil throughout the East, [Malaya] has had the good fortune to enjoy. For this we have to thank not only the sturdy sense of a people who all derive benefit from a prosperous country but a comparative absence of the menace of the agitator.[60]

The author continued by calling for solidarity of the Malayan people in support of the government's effort to crackdown similar movements:

> What has happened in Java emphasises the need for constant vigilance, and, as we have said before, there is a duty devolving upon the leaders of all nationalities in Malaya to support the authorities in Malaya to support the authorities in seeing that the would-be sower of sedition has short shrift.[61]

As more details about the PKI revolt surfaced, there were heated discussions about whether the Indonesian communists plotted the uprisings in Java and Sumatra in Singapore.[62] Based on an *Aneta* telegram, ST first reported that the NEI communists might have used Singapore as a hub to transport firearms.[63] About a month later, an ST correspondent cited sources from local NEI newspapers, pointing out that Singapore had been a "rendezvous of communist ringleaders." PKI leaders frequently stayed and passed through Singapore en route to China, Russia and Europe. Therefore, the correspondent suggested that NEI and Straits Settlements (SS) governments should take coordinated action in arresting communist agitators and hand them over when necessary.[64] Dachlan, who was arrested for heading the uprisings in West Java, confessed under interrogation that he had received instructions from two PKI leaders in Singapore.[65] An MT reporter, apparently

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[60] The Straits Times: The work of agitators. (1926, November 16). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[61] *The Straits Times*, 16 Nov 1926, p. 8.

[62] According to Ruth McVey's research, prior to the outbreak of the PKI revolt, at least three centres claimed authority over the party: Tan Malaka and his supporters in Malaya, the revolutionary committee in Batavia and the least important official headquarters in Bandung. It was discovered that the Batavia branch revolted without consent from the real party leadership. *See* McVey, 1965, p. 334.

[63] *The Straits Times*, 17 Nov 1926, p. 9.

[64] *The Straits Times*, 21 Dec 1926, p. 9.

[65] The two PKI leaders in Singapore were probably Sardjono and Kusnogunoko, *see*

confused by the real causes of the NEI uprisings and the ongoing communist movement in China, passionately wrote that the NEI government needed sympathy and practical help from Malaya to curb the revolution:

> The Chinese in Malaya can, and do, exert an influence over the Chinese of the Dutch Indies. If they value the friendship that has existed between the many races in both countries, they will lose no time in making an energetic resistance to the ingress of the subtle Red poison that is upsetting the balance of young Chinese overseas. Singapore enjoys the distinction of being a centre of radiation for many purposes; she can be used as the centre of an anti-Red campaign by the Chinese, which would greatly assist our Dutch friends in their job."[66]

As the NEI government's wholesale crackdown on communism reached an unprecedented scale, rumours emerged that many PKI fugitives managed to escape arrest by hiding in Singapore. On 18 December 1926, the arrests of Alimin and Musso — two well-known PKI leaders suspected of plotting the Java uprisings — in Singapore substantiated the rumours. ST regarded the event as a positive result of the cooperation between the NEI and SS governments in deterring communism. The article also reported that the NEI media expressed their "wholehearted support" for the authorities in Singapore for taking care of the common interests of the two colonies. In doing so, Singapore was no longer a rendezvous for the NEI communists.[67] However, to the Dutch authorities' great disappointment, the SS government quickly released the two PKI leaders despite repeated extradition requests from the Dutch. The decision was made on the grounds that they did not pose direct threats to the public security of British Malaya.[68] Alimin and Musso then proceeded to China and then Russia to study at the Lenin School in the following years.[69]

The case of Alimin and Musso triggered even wider public discussions when Sir Percival Philips, a renowned American journalist, published a series of articles in the British newspaper *Daily Mail* in December 1927. Based on his in-depth investigations in the NEI earlier that year, Philips wrote that the Dutch authorities were entitled to criticise the SS government for its poor handling of the extradition issue of Alimin and Musso.[70] Philips' articles immediately attracted the attention of the

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Communism in Java. (1927, January 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; and Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). (1961). *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia, 1926 [The first nationalist uprising of Indonesia, 1926]*. Djakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan; or see Chinese-language edition: 印度尼西亚共产党历史研究所. [Partai Komunis Indonesia. Lembaga Sedjarah] (1963). 印度尼西亚第一次民族起义(1926年)[The first nationalist uprising of Indonesia, 1926]. 北京：世界知识出版社.

[66] Communism in the Indies. (1927, January 25). *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[67] Java communists. (1927, January 7). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[68] Java communists. (1927, December 15). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[69] McVey, 1965, p. 202.

[70] The Singapore press first briefly reported about Philips' article in Communists in Java. (1927, December 3). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG. The full texts of the two articles were not reprinted until 27 and 31 December respectively.

British parliament. William Ormsby-Gore, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, responded to the queries of the House of Commons that the government was ready to rectify the revised Banishment Ordinance and the phrase "conducive to the public good" would enjoy a much broader interpretation. In other words, by fixing the legislative loopholes, NEI communist agitators would be deemed as dangerous to Malaya as they were to Java and Sumatra.[71] ST finally reprinted Philips' two *Daily Mail* articles in full towards the end of 1927. In his writings, Philips pointed out that the Soviet influence in the NEI was very dangerous and would pose enormous threats to British Malaya:

> While the present state of the communist movement in the Netherlands Indies gives no particular cause for alarm, its future is regarded with undisguised anxiety…An important feature of the anti-communist policy of the (Dutch) government is close cooperation with the authorities of the Straits Settlements… "Our interests are identical with yours," a high official of the government here said to me, "We have the same problems and are confronted with the same danger."[72]

Philips further suggested that the SS government should learn from their Dutch counterparts in terms of suppressing insurgencies, banning subversive literature and deporting dangerous propagandists. According to him, banishment had proved to be the most effective way of dealing with communism.[73]

Deterring the spread of communist agitation was not only a political matter, but also a technical one. On 19 January 1927, an SFP correspondent specifically mentioned the superiority of trucks in transporting troops. The Dutch authorities achieved great success in using this method to stamp out insurgencies rapidly in both Java and Sumatra. As railway transportation could be easily disrupted and was not widely accessible, the use of trucks was critical to curbing the insurgencies promptly. [74] It was frequently reported that the PKI rebels managed to paralyse official communication by occupying telephone exchange offices and cutting wires during the revolt. To prevent such scenarios from happening in Malaya, a member of the SS Legislative Council suggested that the government build a wireless telegraphic or telephonic system for policing and military purposes.

> It was easy to imagine the possibilities of interruption during an internal disturbance. There had been a recent illustration of this in the communistic disturbances in Java. One heard that communists took possession of the telephone exchange in Batavia and that several of the employees were either forced to join, or willingly joined them. It was easy to understand that owing to the exposed wire system employed that during any sudden unexpected rising it would be possible to throw out of gear, or even temporarily destroy, telephonic and telegraphic communication in Singapore and generally throughout the colony, or, for that

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[71] *See* Singapore Free Press: Communists and the Straits. (1927, December 7). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; *The Straits Times*, 15 Dec 1927, p. 9.

[72] Playthings of the reds. (1927, December 31). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[73] "TO BOLSHEVISE ASIA". (1927, December 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[74] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 19 Jan 1927, p. 7.

matter, anywhere in Malaya."[75]

Technology is often a double-edged sword. Public anxiety was especially palpable when technology was used for communist propaganda. In August 1927, SFP was shocked to report that Batavia radio amateurs had picked up a radio signal from Moscow, Russia through which both music and speeches had been broadcasted.[76] A month later, a Chinese listener claimed to have picked up transmissions from Vladivostok, Russia. Spoken in very clear Malay, the broadcast urged people in the NEI to rise against the Dutch. SFP expressed its grave concern over the issue:

> If this be true, and there is no reason to discredit it since we know with what thoroughness and care the Soviet school of propagandists have been conducted, it is clear that Soviet agitation may become a matter of serious concern…It would therefore seem that the Soviet organisation has discovered another and very effective method of spreading its doctrines abroad, a method much more difficult to deal with than the method of books and pamphlets, which can be seized and confiscated.[77]

Similarly, in an October 1927 article, SFP reported another similar case, where the NEI authorities discovered that the communists had been using gramophone records as a new means of propaganda.[78]

Extensive discussions about the PKI uprisings also extended to the cultural sphere in British Malaya. Hubert Banner, a British writer who lived in the NEI during the time of the PKI revolt, released his fictional novel *The Mountain of Terror* in 1928. Although Banner's work was first and foremost a romance about a Eurasian girl's love for an English planter in Java, book reviews in the Singapore press repeatedly highlighted the "up-to-date communist intrigue" in the novel and praised Banner for having "real knowledge" about the colony that enabled him to "paint a convincing and authentic picture."[79] Towards the end of 1929, Banner published another novel called *Red Cobra*, which covered the communist influence in Java in greater detail.[80] In response to accusations that *Red Cobra* exaggerated the impact of communist influence in Java, Banner asserted that his writing was based on historical facts and that the real situation was far worse than what the outside world realised: "A massacre of Chinese in Kudus was traceable to the visit of a white communist agitator. Hadji Hassan and his followers did plot to murder Europeans. Rebels seized the Batavia Telegraph Office and the troops had been out for weeks!"[81]

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[75] Legislative Council. (1926, December 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[76] Java notes: Communism by wireless. (1927, August 4). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[77] Singapore Free Press: Wireless propaganda. (1927, September 6). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[78] Java notes: Matters communist. (1927, October 26). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[79] New Books. (1928, November 10). *The Straits Times*, p.15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[80] A literary page – new books reviewed: A Java novel. (1929, November 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

[81] Notes of the Day: The "Reds" in Java. (1930, February 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

In March 1928, the Singapore press voiced their disappointment at the SS authorities for banning the high-quality movie *The Only Way*, as its theme of the French Revolution was deemed seditious, and thus inappropriate for the Malayan audience:

> *The Only Way*, which was banned here, has successfully passed a full board of nine censors without dissent for exhibition in Java, a rider being added that 'the production is an excellent one.' Having regard to the recent communist disturbances in the Dutch Indies, the above decision is at least notable.[82]

6. Conclusion

Given the relative lack of primary materials, digital newspaper archives such as NewspaperSG provide researchers with a number of alternatives to approach understudied subjects. In addition to serving as valuable sources of information, digital newspaper archives offer additional possibilities to exploit data, including quantitative textual analysis, tracing the development of historical events and making sense of the broader contexts.

The preliminary result of NewspaperSG's keyword search shows that public discussions on communism in British Malaya predated the formal establishment of the MCP in 1930. The Singapore press showed particular interest in the communist movement in the NEI from 1925 to 1927. The 1926 PKI revolt generated a far greater influence on British Malaya than the MCP predecessors in the late 1920s.

Content-wise, Singapore's press coverage on the NEI communist revolt was detailed, comprehensive, up-to-date and multi-faceted. With frequent updates on various forms of communist disturbances since 1925, the outbreak of the 1926 PKI revolt was unsurprising to the Dutch authorities and political observers in Malaya. Although the NEI government quickly suppressed the uprisings in Java and Sumatra, the wholesale crackdown on communism and its relevance to the other side of the Malacca Straits kept public discussions going in Malaya. In this regard, the impact of the poorly organised PKI uprisings was far reaching, as anxiety about communism persisted and became contagious in the years that followed. As a result, communism as "our neighbours' trouble" was gradually internalised as "our trouble," which compelled British authorities to adopt harsh anti-communist measures long before the MCP took shape.

Digitised newspapers are useful sources, but to rely solely on such sources is highly problematic due to some of their inherent shortcomings such as the unbalanced coverage of different languages, variable quality of OCR outcomes, inevitable noise in the original data, as well as inappropriate text encoding and extraction. While it is hoped that the further development of technology will unleash greater potential of digital archives, further discovery of traditional materials will also be conducive to enriching this research in many significant ways. Ultimately, different sources should complement each other.

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[82] Untitled. (1927, March 11). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

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Appendix II:

Various Forms of Chineseness in the Origins of Southeast Asian Communism

Abstract
People often make convenient connections between Southeast Asian communism and the influence of the Communist Party of China (CPC), but the impression that these countries import communism from China is severely problematic. The issue of ethnicity, most acutely illustrated by the paradoxical role of the overseas Chinese community, was especially controversial in the rise of communism in the region. This research tries to explore the multi-facet nature of "Chineseness" in the sense of both China as the source of communist revolutionary inspiration and Chinese as the agency for the spread of Marxist ideology. By using the origin of Chinese communism as the basic frame of reference, this paper compares the early communist movements in three colonial states, namely the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and British Malaya. As well as Thailand, which has never fallen under formal European colonial domination. Instead of following events within fixed geographical boundaries or in a strict chronological order, the analysis is structured thematically by focusing on three different yet interrelated angles: (1) anti-imperialism as a common course pursued by the colonial and semi-colonial East; (2) embracing revolution from China; and (3) resisting Chineseness in various forms of nationalist movements.

1. Introduction

People often see the origins of communist movements in Southeast Asia and the region's overseas Chinese community as closely intertwined. This perception is evident in the cases of densely Chinese-populated areas such as Malaya and Siam (Thailand), as well as places like Vietnam and Cambodia, where China's influence has been historically strong in both political and cultural domains. Admittedly, it is very convenient to connect many Chinese-involved communist activities in Southeast Asia to the emergence of the communist party in China, but the simplistic argument – that Southeast Asia imports communism from China – is severely problematic. While overseas Chinese did play critical roles in many radical movements in Southeast Asia, the diffusion of left-wing ideology and the emergence of the twentieth century communist movements in the region could also be traced to many other sources: the influence of the European colonial powers, the shifting world order shaped by the First World War and the Great Depression, the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution and perhaps most importantly, the rise of national awareness across the colonized world.

Against this backdrop, the Comintern was established in 1919 in hopes of promoting communist revolutions worldwide. Communism during the interwar period, therefore, tended to distinguish itself from other political movements for its internationalist outlook and organizational

framework. In practice, however, the Comintern was often accused of failing to provide useful guidance due to its lack of proper understanding of local situations. Owing to the similar socio-political circumstances of the colonial and semi-colonial societies, early communist movements in Asia shared many common features. Yet then adaptation to particular circumstances of Marxist ideology and tactics varied drastically from place to place. Both ideology and strategies were always subject to conflicting interpretations and local conditions. Heated discussions focused on the role of the nationalist bourgeoisie in proletariat-led struggles against European imperialism, the position of the supposedly atheist communists in societies where religion functioned as the only force that could unite the masses, the leadership of the minority proletariat vis-à-vis the mass support of the majority yet mostly uneducated peasantry and so on. Among these contradictions, the issue of ethnicity, most acutely illustrated by the paradoxical role of the overseas Chinese community, was especially controversial. On the one hand, a large number of politically aware Chinese immigrants were active in introducing China's radical revolutionary experience to people in Southeast Asia so they could fight for their rights equal to the Europeans. On the other hand, as Harry Benda suggests, the notion of a "middle class" is mostly absent among the native populations in the colonial societies of Southeast Asia.[1] Alien elements such as ethnic Chinese shopkeepers and moneylenders have been historically identified as exploiters. Therefore, it was the Chinese, rather than "distant European wholesalers or administrators," who were commonly regarded by indigenous radicals and became the targets for discontent and rebellion.

This research explores the multi-faceted nature of "Chineseness." It could mean China as the source of communist revolutionary inspiration and the Chinese as agents for the spread of Marxist ideology. By using the rise of Chinese communism as the basic template for comparison, this chapter also scrutinizes early communist movements in the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and British Malaya. I also compare the three colonial states with Siam, which has never fallen under formal European colonial domination. Instead of following a strict chronological order or investigating events on a country-by-country basis, the analysis is structured thematically by focusing on three different yet interrelated angles: (1) anti-imperialism as a common course pursued by the colonial and semi-colonial East; (2) the embrace of revolution from China; and (3) resistance to Chineseness in various forms of nationalist movements.

2. Unpacking "Chineseness"

While the very idea of "China" seems to exist as an unambiguous or unquestionable entity, multiple expressions denote different aspects of China and Chineseness.[2] What makes the study of Chineseness particularly difficult, as Ien Ang observes, is the emergence of a so-called diasporic paradigm. China is no longer an ontologically stable object of study, but something transcends boundaries in both geographical and cultural senses, as many scholars studying the Chinese diaspora have pointed out. Nor is the content of Chineseness by any means fixed.

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[1] Harry Benda, "Communism in Southeast Asia," in *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1972), 51-2.

[2] Allen Chun, "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity," *Boundary 2* 23 no. 2 (1996): 111.

Instead, it functions as an "open and indeterminate signifier," whose meanings are subject to constant interrogation and renegotiation in different parts of this diaspora.[3] Despite the similarities in their experiences with receiving immigrants from China in different phases of history, the four Southeast Asian states varied considerably with respect to the forms of Chinese political participation in the interwar period. While certain sections of the Chinese diaspora (e.g., some of the local-born "Peranakan", or Straits-born Chinese, in Malay Archipelago communities) were more assimilated into their host societies, hence more invested in local politics than the sojourners, many more remained primarily concerned with politics back in China. Admittedly, there was never a clear boundary between these two groups. Immensely complex nuances under and across different categories in the rapidly changing political landscape in late-colonial Southeast Asia were characteristic of this period. As Allen Chun notes:

> The transformation of Chinese overseas into "overseas Chinese" (hua-ch'iao) was, then, an expansion of Chinese nationalism abroad that attempted to galvanize Chinese identity from what was once kin-centered, dialect groups into a radically new "imagined community" reeducated in standard Mandarin and the orthodox teachings of Chinese civilization. For Chinese who had not severed ties with their homeland, this new sense of identity could be seen as an extension of a primordial Chineseness. For those whose cultural lifestyles had become largely assimilated or syncretic in nature, this new kind of identity was, instead, a source of alienation.[4]

As far as politics is concerned, the diasporic paradigm has its limitation. The key question, as Philip Kuhn puts it, is to study "the 'others' whom the Chinese find themselves among."[5] The geographical proximity and the frequent exchange of information between China and Southeast Asia – as well as various networks inside Southeast Asia itself – further complicates the issue. Admittedly, China's geopolitical influence was important to the diasporic communities, but such an influence also went far beyond them. It was not uncommon for native intellectuals to refer to the "Chinese experience" when contemplating issues specific to their own. Likewise, the Chinese intelligentsia was also constantly exposed to ideas from non-Western sources. While China often occupies the center stage of scholarly discussions on Asian politics, it is severely problematic to adopt a simplistic "center-periphery" framework in which neighbouring countries are seen as passive receivers of Chinese influence, either directly from China or indirectly through the introduction of the Chinese overseas. After all, Southeast Asia is by no means China's periphery. The almost simultaneous rise of communism in China and Southeast Asia during the interwar period is a good example that challenges the very fundamentals of such a paradigm.

In *Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center*, Tu Wei-ming challenges the essentialist view that always puts China at the core of its sphere of influence.[6] As more overseas Chinese get permanently settled in their host countries while more Chinese professionals migrate to the West, Tu argues that the diaspora comes to constitute new cultural centers for a renewed sense of Chineseness in the contemporary era. In his concept of "Cultural China", there are three

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[3] Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm," *Boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 225.

[4] Chun, "Fuck Chineseness," 124.

[5] Philip Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 4.

[6] Tu Wei-ming,"Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991): 1-32.

universes: (1) societies in which the ethnic Chinese account for the overwhelming majority such as mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong; (2) the overseas Chinese communities; and (3) intellectuals who share general interests in the broadly defined Chinese world, that transcends national boundaries and discourses. Although Tu's theory primarily relates to the contemporary era, such a framework is useful in analyzing the multilayered and contested roles of Chineseness in the political turmoil of Southeast during the interwar period. To understand early Asian communist movements, it is essential to grasp at least three interrelated themes, namely (1) the mutual geopolitical influence of China and Southeast Asia; (2) the contradictory roles of the Chinese diasporic communities; and (3) the native intellectuals' attempts to combine communism with nationalist/patriotic/religious traditions, which sometimes entailed an anti-Chinese outlook.

3. Contesting Imperialism: China as a Frame of Reference

According to orthodox Marxist theories, socialism could be realized only in fully developed capitalist societies in which the working class is politically aware and organizationally strong. For a long time, people believed that the socialist revolution would first take place in highly industrialized West Europe where capitalism was most developed. Nevertheless, despite Marx's prediction that capitalism would soon collapse because of its intrinsic shortcomings, the imperial powers of the West seemed to have become even more prosperous in the turn of the twentieth century. With the firm establishment of the capitalist world economic system, the possession of colonies contributed to the improvement of the welfare of the European working class, which significantly eased the tension between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Instead of fighting against colonialism through socialist revolution, many social democrats in the West switched their focus to the active participation in existing democratic political institutions. The purpose was to serve the "interests and desires" of the European working class. This sometimes meant justifying the possession of colonies and championing the supposedly positive civilizing effect of colonialism.[7] Hence, there was a tendency at the beginning of the twentieth century for the West European socialist parties' to prioritize the European working class over the exploited colonies, despite the fact that capitalism had expanded into less developed parts of the world through imperialism.[8] The colonial problem remained a somewhat peripheral concern until the communists' victory in the October Revolution in Russia, after which Leninist Marxism came to function as a workable theoretical foundation for socialist revolutions in the less developed colonial and semi-colonial East. It was against this backdrop that the Comintern was founded in 1919 to coordinate world communist revolutions against Western imperialism.

With almost no exceptions, scholarly works on the rise of Asian communism usually cover two major interrelated aspects, namely the emergence of communist movements across Asia as an integral part of the Comintern-facilitated worldwide revolution against Western imperialism and the ways in which an adopted Marxist ideology came to be locally intertwined with indigenous radicalism. In China, the spread of the Marxist ideology in the immediate aftermath of the

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[7] For a more detailed discussion regarding such kind of view held by social democrats, see McVey's analysis of H. van Kol, the leader of the Dutch Social Democratic Labor's Party (SDAP). Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), 4.

[8] Ibid., 1-4

October Revolution coincided with the various socialist currents that emerged China's New Culture Movement.[9] With an emphasis on democracy and science, the movement aimed to rescue China from a cultural decay allocated to obsolete Confucius traditions. A resolution of the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War further catalyzed the cultural movement. It stipulated that Germany would transfer its rights over Shandong to Japan. The protest then turned into the highly politicized anti-imperialist May Fourth Movement of 1919. The Chinese intelligentsia was greatly frustrated by the contradiction between the appeals of Western modernity on the one hand and the fact that the Western imperialism had become increasingly aggressive towards the East on the other. As a result, the movement paved the road for the dissemination of the Marxist-Leninist ideology under the profound influence of the Russian October Revolution.

As Dirlik suggests, the relationship between the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the establishment of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1921 was dialectical rather than evolutionary.[10] "The [Communist Party] was founded by radicals who only imperfectly appreciated Marxism as a revolutionary and social theory, and were only tenuously committed to it as a political ideology."[11] Chinese intellectuals' understanding of Marxist theories was relatively shallow at the time. Varieties of socialist expressions prevailed. The foundation of the CPC – and which largely transplanted their organizational principles from their Russian Bolshevik counterpart – marked the formal assertion of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist identity in Chinese radicalism from 1921 onward. This assertion, as Dirlik pointed out, required the suppression of other forms of socialism: Chinese communists showed almost no interest in European Marxist literature and "the works on Marxism that found their way in China between 1921 and 1927 were almost exclusively of Bolshevik origin." In other words, "Chinese Marxists discovered in Bolshevism an ideology of action that quickly moved them into revolutionary practice."[12]

Unsurprisingly, ideological lines were vaguely drawn in the emerging period of the Chinese communist movement. There was already a well-developed radical alliance, based largely on pre-existing intellectual and personal networks, connecting activists from the Nationalist Party of China or Guomindang (GMD) and beyond even before there was the communist party. The existing network also laid a solid foundation for the formal alliance of the CPC and the GMD, a form which the Comintern ardently promoted as a workable model for Asian communist revolutions elsewhere. As H.J. Benda remarked in 1966, the dividing line between nationalism and communism was thin in much of Asia.[13] Furthermore, it was the rapid growth of the proletariat in the big cities that enabled the left-leaning intellectuals to push their revolutionary agenda forward. Distinct from the traditional pattern in which intellectuals could only participate in politics by joining in the bureaucracy, the Chinese intelligentsia was now in a position to influence politics from outside. Through their partnership with the working class, the radical intellectuals saw the prospect of approaching China's problems via socialist solutions.

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[9] Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10-11.
[10] Ibid., 11.
[11] Ibid., 255.
[12] Ibid., 269-70.
[13] Harry Benda, "Reflection on Asian Communism," in *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia*. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1972), 261.

Despite the growing influence of the national capitalists and the working class, the Chinese society, like other Asian colonies under the domination of the Europeans, remained overwhelmingly agrarian. In such societies, the emerging nationalist bourgeoisie was either non-existent or too weak to mobilize the mostly peasantry-constituted masses to challenge the colonial regimes effectively.[14] The communist movement, chiefly led by left-wing intellectuals with the participation of the urban proletariat, had no better options but to figure out viable ways to work closely with the peasantry. Unlike the semi-colonial society of China, where the confrontation with imperialism was neither direct nor acute, the colonies in Southeast Asia were under the complete control of the European powers. Consequently, the communists' best opportunity, as Khánh demonstrates in his work on Vietnam, could be found at the nexus of the existing anti-colonial or proto-nationalist patriotic movements and the anti-feudal peasant movement.[15] Although communism was ideally supposed to be more "international" rather than "national," in vernacular practice it was wedded with indigenous practices. It often became a form of "folk communism."[16] On the one hand, native revolutionaries adopted communism as a sort of "modernized anarchism." Such an ideology, at once utopian and millenarian, was able to attract the masses by playing a role akin to religion.[17] On the other hand, as Khánh suggests, internationally oriented communism had provided two useful tools to the local anti-imperialist movements. One was intellectual, i.e., interpreting local anti-colonial struggles as part of a worldwide revolutionary network; the other was psychological, i.e., cultivating the belief among the natives that they were equal to the Europeans.[18]

Like much of China, Vietnam is virtually a mono-ethnic society with a dominant ethnic group that accounts for the overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of the population. With a strong sense of ethnic self-awareness, Vietnam's national unity was predicated on an established precolonial condition.[19] Khánh identifies Vietnam's anti-colonial struggles as primarily based on its patriotic traditions rather than a rising national awareness. Such patriotic traditions emphasize traditional Vietnamese social orders such as ancestor worship and communal cult. According to Khánh, patriotism is more inward-looking, kinship-oriented and entails a sentimental connotation. The constructed (official) nationalism, by comparison, concentrates on the nation's perceived legitimate rights, and usually only exists in the political expressions of the elites. So ingrained were such traditions within the Vietnamese society that anti-colonial struggles could thus be easily translated into patriotic acts or vice versa. In Vietnam's confrontation with French colonialism, indigenous elites with various political orientations could often utilize patriotic traditions to mobilize the masses to achieve their respective nationalist goals.[20] Radical movements, in this case, the revolution led by the communists, tended to solidify such

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[14] The nationalist movement led by the urban bourgeoisie did gain considerable strength over the following years, especially during the period of Japanese occupation. But since this chapter mainly concerns with the origin of the pre-war period, the analysis here does not include a detailed discussion of such movements.

[15] Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23.

[16] Benda, "Reflection on Asian Communism," 260.

[17] Ibid., 259.

[18] Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism,* 55.

[19] Ibid., 32.

[20] Ibid., 27.

patriotism.[21]

By contrast, in plural societies such as Indonesia, where a sense of national unity was non-existent in pre-colonial history, the radical communist movement was based on a different socio-political foundation. Without an overarching ideology that could effectively unite the masses, revolutionary forces in Indonesia fighting Dutch imperialism usually followed three paths. These forces included the Pan-Islamic movement led by Muslim scholars with close connections to the Middle East, the proto-nationalist movement led by the intelligentsia who demanded a higher degree of autonomy and even independence for the colony, and the revolutionary movement brought over by the Chinese population.[22] Quite distinct from China and Vietnam where revolutionary movements were initiated primarily with relatively straightforward political purposes, the early Indonesian organizations were founded not as political parties but as organizations to promote various social and cultural interests.[23] The oldest communist organization in Asia, the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDA), the predecessor of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), was first founded by European socialists.[24] From the outset, the internationalist outlook of the ISDA distinguished itself from the proto-nationalist organizations of the time. As McVey observes, nationalism in its infancy was attractive only to a small number of people, who were only interested in pursuing an uncommitted national movement.[25] Pan-Islamism, by comparison, enjoyed the most substantial mass support within the indigenous population. Such a factor contributed to the formation of the Indonesian communists' alliance with the Sarekat Islam (SI) – Indonesia's bellwether of modernist Islamic organizations with the most extensive contemporaneous network among the masses – long before the Comintern became an active proponent of the bloc-within strategy in China.

In some communist parties, certain ethnic groups were disproportionably numerous. This was especially the case of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant groups in Malaya, Siam, and Cambodia.[26] The emergence of this pattern had to do with two factors: firstly, the relatively early and successful communist movements in the immigrants' ethnic homelands; secondly, the demographic of these groups, which were often more politically mobilized than the resident population. The movements' anti-imperialist slogans were quite attractive to the proletarians among the immigrants not only because they echoed egalitarian ideals in the colonies, but also with the rise of nationalist/patriotic movements at home.[27] To the non-diaspora population,

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[21] Ibid., 34.

[22] First published in 1913, "The Awakening in Asia" by Lenin reference to a "Chinese revolutionary movement" was most likely the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, which overthrew China's last imperial dynasty Qing. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 7.

[23] Ibid., 22.

[24] The ISDA was founded by Dutch socialist Henk Sneevliet in 1914.

[25] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 64.

[26] See Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese revolution, 1885-1954* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 64-96; Anna Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities: the Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 447.

[27] Although technically Thailand was never a formal colony, it had many similar experiences in its confrontation with European colonialism. See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam mapped: a history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2009); Tamara Loos,

however, such movements were usually far less appealing, due to its membership composition and ideological persuasion. Later sections will show that while benefiting from its internationalist approach to colonial problems, communism was, because of its alien quality, vulnerable to the attacks of competing forces.

4. Embracing revolution from China

Formally founded in 1919, the Comintern played a significant role in coordinating the dissemination of communist ideology and providing strategic guidance to communist organizations worldwide. The Comintern gained considerable prestige, at least temporarily, through the implementation of the "looking to the East" strategy in the CPC's formative years in the early 1920s. Although the organization's actual contribution to the rise of Chinese communism is subject to constant debates, the Comintern actively promoted the so-called "Chinese model" as a viable road for communist movements throughout the colonized world. Due to the obvious geographical proximity and other forms of close connections between China and Southeast Asia, the impact of the early Chinese revolution (not limited to the communist movement) on Southeast Asia was profound. This section explores this influence from three major angles, namely (1) revolution as a transplantable model; (2) China as a center for strategizing Southeast Asian communist movements; and (3) the GMD and CPC as active organizers of revolution in Southeast Asia.

(1) Revolution as a transplantable model

It was probably not so difficult for Southeast Asian intellectuals to find the relevance of the Chinese revolution to their own circumstances. After all, China was a non-European society with a mostly agrarian outlook. Before the emergence of world communist movements in the aftermath of the Russian October Revolution, it was Sun Yat-sen's Xinhai Revolution of 1911, overthrowing China's last imperial dynasty that most inspired the people of the East. As a result, Sun's socialist "Three Principles of the People"—commonly summarized as nationalism, democracy, and livelihood—gained popularity among the intellectuals seeking for "teachers and techniques"[28]

However, the acceptance of Sun's Three Principles in Southeast Asia by no means indicated that the flow of ideas was unidirectional, from China to Southeast Asia only. In fact, the establishment of the ISDA predated both its Chinese counterpart and the Comintern itself. With limited exposure to international elements, the Indies communists were quite successful in adapting Marxist ideology to colonial practicalities, especially with regard to attracting a broad membership regardless racial background. After the deportation of the key Dutch founding members, the organization went through a relatively smooth transition under its native leadership from a Marxist interest group into a full-fledged and legally recognized political party.[29] To

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Subject Siam: family, law, and colonial modernity in Thailand (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[28] Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism,* 36, 53.

[29] The Dutch colonial authority's attitude towards the Indies communist party was quite ambivalent while recognizing the party's legality, the colonial government also kept a tight surveillance over the communist activities. The leaders of the communist organization were

survive the colonial regime's tight control, the PKI members joined the SI but still retained their communist membership. This approach coincided with Lenin's call for communist parties worldwide to build partnerships with bourgeois nationalists in their struggles against Western imperialism. Henk Sneevliet, the Dutch founder of the ISDA who later became one of the earliest Comintern representatives to China, introduced the "bloc within" strategy to the newly founded CPC, which ultimately led to the formation of the first GMD-CPC alliance between 1923 and 1927. Ironically, when the "bloc within" strategy was temporarily proved successful in China, the Comintern insisted that the PKI should do the same by staying inside the SI. While such an attitude had a lot to do with the heated debate between Stalin and Trotsky over the Chinese Revolution, the Comintern was apparently very unfamiliar with the changing situation in Indonesia. Unlike its Chinese counterpart, the PKI gradually gained the upper hand in the united front while the SI declined. The communists now had an opportunity to lead the Indonesian Revolution instead of just participating in it.[30] From the Comintern perspective, however, the influence of the GMD-CPC alliance in Southeast Asia was essential. Voitinsky, the head of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau, wrote in 1924:

> There can be no doubt that even the partial victory of Sun Yat-sen over the attempted counterrevolutions in Canton and over their instigators—the Anglo-American-French imperialists—will raise the authority of this party (GMD) in the eyes of the colonial peoples of the Pacific Ocean to a new height and will serve as a stimulant to the liberation movement of these people.[31]

The enthusiasm for the Chinese revolutionary model reached a climax during 1925-1926 when the GMD National Army launched a successful military campaign against the Western-supported Chinese warlords with the help of the Soviet Union.[32] The Southeast Asian communist leaders increasingly regarded the Chinese revolution as the "center of attraction for the awakening masses of the Colonial East."[33] As McVey observed, the PKI used the events in China to demonstrate that revolution was no longer a distant European affair. "If the anti-imperialist effort could succeed in China, where the interests of so many capitalist nations were involved, then surely it could triumph in the Indies, where only the relatively weak Dutch needed to be faced."[34] Likewise, the Comintern also used the Indonesian movement to justify its China policy when the GMD-CPC united front came under question towards the end of 1926. When a poorly organized revolt broke out in Java in November 1926, the Comintern conveniently associated the largely homegrown event to the Chinese revolution:

> That the [Indonesian] revolt should occur just at this time, is doubtless to be attributed in no mean degree to the powerful effect produced by the recent events in China. It is the

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constantly subject to arrest, investigation, and banishment, for more detailed analysis, see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, xii.

[30] Ibid., 83.

[31] Ibid., 224.

[32] The Northern Expedition officially started July 1926. Although Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the GMD after Sun Yat-sen's death, already begun to double his party alliance with the communists, the First United Front did not break up until 1927. By defeating the Northern warlords, the Expedition ultimately reunified China in 1928.

[33] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 350.

[34] Ibid., 229.

> victories of the Canton army, which have strengthened the confidence of the Indonesian people in their power…The Indonesian revolution will be victorious, just as the Chinese revolution will be victorious![35]

(2) China as a center for strategizing Southeast Asian communist movements
With the success of the GMD-CPC First United Front between 1923 and 1927, China soon became a main focus of the Comintern's efforts to initiate anti-imperialist revolutions in the Far East. As a result, the Comintern deployed a large number of agents to China and established ground offices in cities such as Guangzhou (Canton) and Shanghai. Not only did such posts become major hubs for the communication between Chinese communists and the Comintern representatives, but they also served as liaison centers for the revolutions beyond China's national border. Many leaders of the early Southeast Asian communist organizations either worked at or frequently visited the Comintern organs in China. The linkages between Chinese and Southeast Asian revolutions were by no means trivial. In fact, the Comintern's China offices played a pivotal role in strategizing communist movements, which was most vividly illustrated in the cases of Indonesia and Vietnam.

The first person to develop this connection was Henk Sneevliet. As the founder of ISDA, he was forced to leave the Indies by the authorities in 1918 for agitating Indonesian workers against the Dutch colonial regime. After attending the Comintern's Second World Congress in 1920, Sneevliet was sent to China to coordinate the establishment of the CPC and later, the formation of the first United Front between the GMD and the CPC. During his stay in China from 1921 to 1923, Sneevliet apparently maintained close contact with the Indies communist leaders. While copies of communist newspapers were continuously sent to Sneevliet, articles of the deported ISDA veterans also occasionally appeared in the major communist publications such as *Het Vrije Woord* or *Soeara Ra'jat*. Many of the Indonesian communist leaders reportedly visited Sneevliet in Shanghai en route to Moscow. As McVey observes, the contact between Shanghai and Indonesia peaked during Sneevliet's tenure. The PKI was no longer loosely connected with the rest of the communist world.[36]

Tan Malaka was another prominent figure of the PKI who spent an extended period in China. After the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) appointed him as the supervisor to oversee the communist movements throughout Southeast Asia, Tan Malaka arrived in Guangzhou in December 1923, where he chaired the labour office of the Comintern for over a year. Like Sneevliet in Shanghai, Tan Malaka was able to send his directives to the PKI from

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[35] Semaun, "The Rebellion in the Dutch East Indies," *International Press Correspondence,* 2 December 1926, 1438. Also see McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 350. Interestingly, the PKI's official history of the 1960s talked about the influence of the Chinese revolution in a very different fashion. Instead of giving credit to the Comintern policy, the author emphasizes the Indies Chinese, who actually did not play a big role in the Indonesian revolution until much later: "The surging revolution in China, namely the Northern Expedition of the Revolutionary Army from Canton with the aim of defeating the warlords, exerted impact on the movement in Indonesia through the democratic-minded Chinese people there. The Indies Chinese thereby participated in the revolution and the struggles for independence in Indonesia." See Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), *Pemberontakan nasional pertama di Indonesia, 1926 (The First Nationalist Uprising of Indonesia, 1926)* (Djakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1961), 47.
[36] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 203.

abroad thanks to the ease of communications among Asia's port cities.[37] In June 1924, the Pacific Transport Workers Conference convened in Guangzhou in the hope of "catalyzing the development of the movement among a group of workers most susceptible to radical organizations and also improving international connections in the area."[38] Alimin and Budisutjitro joined Tan Malaka to represent the PKI at the conference. Although the Guangzhou Bureau was ultimately abandoned in 1925, Tan Malaka played a critical role in connecting the labour movements in the Far East during his stay in China.

Interestingly, there was a period in 1924-1925 when the PKI had two overseas bases led by its two prominent leaders: the European PKI office led by Semaun and the Guangzhou office headed by Tan Malaka. The two offices "had virtually no direct contact" with each other besides the Comintern channel in Moscow."[39] However, when the Dutch communists proposed to shut down the base in Guangzhou, Semaun insisted that both the Dutch and Guangzhou connections were crucial. Guangzhou was important because there were a large number of ethnic Chinese proletarians in Indonesia and the PKI should bring them under its influence.[40] As the colonial government carried out more stringent measures against communism, Darsono, a PKI representative in Moscow in early 1926, proposed to organize the Indonesian movement in China:

> We would like to have a party conference called somewhere abroad, preferably in China…By organizing some sort of a center in China which will strengthen the Party Central Committee inside the country [*sic*], because when the comrades feel that they have a party leadership outside they will be more enthusiastic and the situation will be improved.[41]

A similar pattern was also evident in the more successful case of Vietnam. Disillusioned with reformism and Wilsonian idealism in the early 20th century, Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh), the most prominent figure in the Vietnamese communist movement, was exposed to Marxist theories during his stay in Paris in the early 1920s.[42] In 1924, Nguyen Ai Quoc came to China from Moscow with a vision of launching two revolutions in Vietnam: a political one that aimed to fight for national independence and a social one targeted at returning the land to the tiller.[43] Primarily based on the organizational structure of Tam Tam Xa, a group of Vietnamese quasi-intellectuals living in southern China, Nguyen Ai Quoc established the Communist Youth Corps (CYC) and its mass organization the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association (*Thanh Nien*, or Youth) in Guangzhou. The *Thanh Nien* headquarters in Guangzhou served as the single most important center for Vietnamese revolutionary activities from 1925 to 1927. The offices had a

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[37] Ibid., 210.

[38] Ibid., 216.

[39] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 214.

[40] "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926, in Partai Komunis Indonesia, and Komintern (PKI), Archief Komintern - Partai Komunis Indonesia (AKPKI), Folder 2, ARCH01744, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[41] "Questions and answers to Comrade Darsana's Report," 6 May 1926, in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCH01744, IISH.

[42] Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: the missing years: 1919-1941* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 42.

[43] Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism,* 64.

wide variety of functions, which included hosting revolutionaries, organizing theoretical and practical training, publishing propaganda and educational materials, and planning clandestine activities.[44] *Thanh Nien* soon developed into a full-fledged communist organization within two years. Although the GMD-CPC split in 1927 led to the inevitable destruction of the Vietnamese communist headquarters in Guangzhou, there was little doubt that *Thanh Nien* laid a solid foundation for the development of the Vietnamese communist revolution. As Khánh noted:

> In 1925 Marxism-Leninism was only one of many political theories, including those of Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen, Piłsudski, introduced to Vietnam; by the end of 1927, it had become a leading ideology with an organizational home. From that time on, communism remained an integral part of Vietnamese nationalism.[45]

(3) The GMD and CPC activities in Southeast Asia

The Chinese revolution of the early 1920s appeared "communist" in the international arena despite the more dominant role of the nationalists. The Comintern's deep involvement in the Chinese revolution, exemplified by the bloc-within strategy that encouraged the CPC to work within the GMD's organizational framework, was among the many factors contributing to such an impression. With Moscow's support, the GMD-led Chinese National Army made successful military advances against the northern warlords, which generated a robust revolutionary momentum from 1923-1927. As soon as the GMD-CPC alliance collapsed in 1927, however, the GMD purged CPC members relentlessly in the following years. The CPC's very survival was placed in jeopardy. Given the chaotic political situation in China and the relatively limited strength of the CPC in the before the Second World War, the degree to which the CPC penetrated into Southeast Asia as an independent organization – rather than as a faction within the GMD-CPC alliance – was questionable. By contrast, with its extensive overseas network inherited from its predecessor *Tongmenghui*, the GMD spearheaded the dissemination of China's revolutionary ideologies all across Southeast Asia. As Grigory Voitinsky, the head of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau wrote in 1924:

> The news of the reorganization of the GMD has penetrated into the French colony of Indochina, the American colony of the Philippines, the Dutch colony of the Malay Archipelago, reached Singapore, Malaya, and India. At the Pacific Transport Workers' Conference in Guangzhou in June of this year delegations from almost all these areas saluted the GMD, although to some extent they tended to idealize its program and activities.[46]

With rare exceptions, such penetrations were often carried out through the channels of overseas Chinese in areas where they were numerous. Such efforts were consistent with the GMD's nationalist approach to winning over hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese. The practice was made possible by China's nationality law, which followed the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). According to this principle, "every legal or extra-legal child of a Chinese father or mother, regardless of birthplace" would be automatically regarded as a Chinese citizen.[47]

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[44] Ibid., 66-68.

[45] Ibid., 88.

[46] Voitinsky, "The Kuomintang and the Communist Party in the Struggle with Imperialism," *Novyi Vostok,* no. 6, 1924, xxvi. See McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 224.

[47] The Qing Dynasty enacted China's first nationality law in 1909 but was overthrown in 1911,

Consequently, while new immigrants to Southeast Asia remained Chinese citizens, those locally born (possessed a citizenship other than Chinese) also had the right to reclaim their Chinese nationality. As McVey notes, "the presence of a large and rapidly expanding Chinese minority in Indonesia naturally had considerable bearing on the usefulness of the Chinese example to the PKI." The Chinese community in the Indies "had supported the GMD from its beginnings and followed the revolution with great interest."[48]

The CPC, unable to export a "revolutionary model" of its own, was more active in establishing communist organizations appealing to the overseas Chinese community, especially in places where substantial native-led communist movements were non-existent. Malaya and Siam are two typical cases that reflect such a pattern. Local communist branches such as the Siamese Overseas Chinese Communist Party and the South Seas Communist Party were founded in Siam and Malaya respectively, both in 1927, under the auspices of the CPC.[49] In Cambodia, the participants in the country's early communist movements were also predominantly Chinese and Vietnamese.[50] Although these communist organizations often hoped to attract supporters regardless of ethnic background, they soon developed their strongest mass support in the immigrant communities. In their attempts to reach out to non-Chinese communities, the "Chinese" outlook would almost always supersede the organizations' class-based "communist" inclination. While working at the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau, Nguyen Ai Quoc criticized the CPC cadres in Malaya for being "out of touch with the real mass elements," as the latter "failed to recruit other races besides Chinese."[51] The CPC cadres' faced many difficulties, such as language barriers, in attracting non-Chinese followers.[52] Beyond such practical problems, the problem was also closely intertwined with many socio-economic issues caused by the colony's ingrained racial segregation. According to Tan Malaka, Chinese people in Malaya were politically more aware and had a better understanding of the economic situation because of their

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but the new nationalist government adopted its 1909 nationality law and retained the principle of *jus sanguinis*. In 1929, the GMD regime passed a new law on citizenship, which reaffirmed the principle of *jus sanguinis*. The Chinese nationality law conflicted with the laws of many colonial states, which followed the principle of *jus soli* (right of soil). In the case of the Dutch East Indies, although the two sides signed the Consular Convention of 1911 which limited the jurisdiction of Chinese consuls, the ambiguities over the national status of the local-born Chinese remained till the early independent period. See Donald Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900-1958* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1961), 30-3.

[48] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 224.

[49] For the origin of Siamese communism, see Kasīan Tēchaphīra, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001), 22; For the establishment of the South Seas Communist Party, see Cheah Boon Kheng, *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924-1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party: Selected Documents and Discussion* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1992), 14.

[50] See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8; Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese revolution*, 83-8.

[51] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 15.

[52] Belogurova, "The Chinese International of Nationalities," 46.

greater exposure to commercial activities in the urban environment.[53] Additionally, "being Chinese" and "being proletarian" often seemed incompatible to locally-born populations, which made the overwhelmingly "Chinese" communist party unappealing.

Due to the GMD's nationwide purge of CPC members, many Chinese communists fled to Southeast Asia after 1927. The 1930s saw a rapid growth of clandestine communist activities in spite of the tight surveillance of the colonial regimes. As a result of the Japanese aggression in China, the rise of Chinese nationalism provided a favourable condition for the China-oriented communist movements overseas. In Malaya, for instance, the communists gained substantial support by actively participating in the National Salvation Movement. The party established numerous open and underground organizations that aimed not only to recruit new members but also to exert broader influence to the diaspora community under the banner of fighting against the Japanese.[54] As Cheah put it, "the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had become a paradox—an Overseas Chinese party oriented toward China and the CPC but trying to lead a Communist revolution in the multiracial society of Malaya."[55]

5. Resisting Chineseness in various forms of nationalism

In spite of its internationalist character, communist revolution in Southeast Asia often took a nationalist route.[56] While nationalist discourse commonly associates struggles for independence with fighting against foreign domination, communists often take more radical approaches against foreign capitalists' exploitation of the indigenous population. "Foreignness" is a highly slippery concept. Its interpretation, therefore, is constantly subject to political manipulation. The controversies over the presence of the Chinese are no doubt integral to the identity politics of Southeast Asia. At the risk of oversimplifying, the Chinese are simultaneously victims (along with the homegrown population) of Western domination and beneficiaries of processes of colonization, through which the Chinese gained a relatively superior economic position.

There were two principal reasons for the rise of resistance to Chineseness. Firstly, in plural societies such as Indonesia and Malaya, the Chinese account for a (sizable) minority of the total people. Chinese are commonly stereotyped as exploiters of the locally-raised population. As a result, rejecting Chineseness in nationalist movements was an indispensable part of the agenda of anti-colonialism itself. Secondly, the Chinese presence has also been quite strong in largely mono-ethnic societies such as Vietnam and Siam due to the geographical proximity. The resistance against the Chinese offers a useful way of stimulating anti-imperialist patriotism and is essential to the processes of identity making towards the formation of nation-states. It is also worth noting that there are no clear dividing lines between the two patterns. Various forms of resistance against the Chinese and "Chineseness" are often closely intertwined. While

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[53] "Tan Malaka on Communism in Malaya, 1925," in *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, October 1926, CO 273/535, The National Archives (TNA), London. Also see Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 50-1.

[54] Akashi Yōji, *The Nanyang Chinese national salvation movement, 1937-1941* (Lawrence: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970), 20-1.

[55] Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 40.

[56] Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, xx.

communism was adapted to suit political needs in distinct local contexts, the intricate inter- and intra-racial networks further complicated its dissemination, which added irresolvable contradictions to the anti-imperialist struggles across Southeast Asia.

(1) The dilemma of overseas Chinese

While the Chinese Revolution appealed to Southeast Asian communists, they were not thereby committed to embracing the Chinese model wholeheartedly. Admittedly, the Chinese revolution was particularly inspiring to the Southeast Asian communists as it served as a manifestation that Marxism-Leninism could work in non-European contexts and largely agrarian societies. In the meantime, however, the fact that the success of the revolution belonged to "the Chinese" made communism less attractive to some of the indigenous population. After all, "the communist paradise so close at hand is a *Chinese* paradise."[57]

In the Dutch East Indies, the PKI leadership was reluctant to develop a working relationship with the Indies Chinese community, which was considered economically well-off and ideologically attracted to communism because of the ongoing revolution in China. Understandably, the PKI would enjoy enormous benefits if they could bring the Indies Chinese under their influence. However, the PKI also feared that its close association with the Chinese would jeopardize the party's mass support, especially in rural areas where the Chinese were often stereotypically seen as ruthless moneylenders or exploitive businesspeople.[58] Although the PKI eventually pursued an implicit policy of working with the Chinese, their connections remained weak throughout the first phase of the party's existence before the colonial government crushed it in 1927.[59] Admittedly, excluding the Indies Chinese from the PKI activities would go against the party's non-ethnicity-based Marxist ideology. Beyond the pure ideological consideration, however, it was the prospect of drawing material support from the Chinese business community that propelled the PKI to make such a move. Furthermore, the PKI leadership believed that the Indies Chinese press, with its sympathetic view of the local revolution, would be of good use for propaganda purposes.[60] The PKI appointed Chinese executive members to represent some of the party divisions and recruited Chinese workers to its affiliated unions. They also launched campaigns to show its moral support for the Chinese revolution and to provide symbolic financial aid to China's disaster relief efforts.[61] The party leadership hoped, sought, vainly it turned out, to receive mutual support from the Indies Chinese community.[62] So China-oriented were most of the Indies Chinese that the level of enthusiasm for participating in a radical Indonesian revolution within the Chinese community was low. Only a handful joined the party,

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[57] Benda, "Communism in Southeast Asia," 61.

[58] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 225.

[59] The PKI leaders in Moscow addressed the importance of working with the Indies Chinese several times in early 1926, but such policy had never been sufficiently implemented as the party was already in deep crisis due to the authorities' crackdown. The failed revolt in the turn of 1926 and 1927 further exacerbated the situation, which led to the party's final collapse. For the Comintern discussions on working with the Indies Chinese, see Alimin, "Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat," 29 July 1926 in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCH01744, IISH.

[60] Alimin, "Discussion at the meeting of the Indonesian Sub-Secretariat."

[61] "Report of Comrade Darsono to India Sub-Secretariat," 6 May 1926 in PKI, AKPKI, Folder 2, ARCH01744, IISH.

[62] McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 226-7.

while the majority opted to stay out of the movement. Many of the Chinese saw any involvement in the domestic politics of the Indies as unnecessary or even negative. It might endanger their business and livelihood under the strict Dutch surveillance.[63]

Akin to the DEI case in which the communist party was mainly comprised of the locally born, parties with predominantly Chinese membership faced similar difficulties in building a mass base that could stretch beyond ethnic boundaries. As mentioned earlier, the CPC facilitated the establishment of some Southeast Asian communist parties under the tutelage of the Comintern. With their Chinese outlook, such organizations were usually efficient in obtaining mass support within the overseas Chinese community but were not successful in influencing the non-Chinese population. A striking example of this pattern is the communist movement in British Malaya. The CPC cadres penetrated into the colony – with vast community and close ties to the Chinese mainland – with relative ease and quickly established an organizational framework. After the completion of this groundwork, however, the Malayan communists found themselves struggling with an unresolvable dilemma, namely the incompatibility of various streams of nationalism. The MCP's membership primarily consisted of the overseas Chinese, more preoccupied with the liberation of China than with the independence of Malaya. Catalyzed by the Japanese aggression in China, the nationalist movement of the diaspora community reached its peak in the 1930s. Meanwhile, the Malay and Indian communities had their own definitions of national liberation. Besides the vaguely articulated anti-British imperialism, there was an absence in Malaya of a necessary ideological common ground upon which a national unity could be achieved.

Communism, now appeared to be overwhelmingly Chinese due to its membership, was not attractive enough in the ethnically segregated plural society of Malaya. Although the MCP soon noticed the situation and did make attempts to overstep this ethnic division in its recruiting, its inability to distinguish loyalty to China from loyalty to Malaya hampered its efforts to make meaningful changes.[64] It was not until the eve of the Japanese invasion in 1940 that the "All-Races Democratic United Front" was finally established. Unsurprisingly, however, such an organization failed to make any visible change to Malaya's intrinsically ethnicity-based political environment.

(2) Resistance against the Chinese and the identity-making in nationalist movements
Anti-colonialism, or the resistance against foreign domination in general, often traces its origin to a specific place's precolonial past. With the rise of nationalist sentiment in the colonies, the discourse of the precolonial past became relevant again to people's imagination about national liberation. Such imagination, as Benedict Anderson famously noted in *Imagined Communities*, is essential to the identity-making process towards the formation of nation-states.[65] Anti-imperialist struggles against the Europeans thus curiously paralleled with various other forms of anti-foreign resistance that existed in the discourse of the pre-colonial period. Historically, Chinese presence in Southeast Asia has been robust and lasting, which inevitably lead to the existence of a sort of patriotism based on anti-Chinese traditions. While Southeast Asian nationalists obtained inspirations from the Chinese revolution, non-communist forces were wary of the danger of a radicalism they associated with "Chineseness." Within communist groups, too, besides

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63 Ibid., 229.

64 Cheah, *From PKI to the Comintern,* 31.

65 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 9-36.

embracing the Chinese revolutionary models, there was also a tendency to reject the Chinese influence through the articulation of more radical approaches. Such paradoxes were most evident in Siam and Vietnam, where the dominant top-down "official nationalism" played a critical role in resisting "Chineseness."[66]

As in Malaya, the followers of early Thai communist movement were also predominantly overseas Chinese. Due to the general lack of interest in Marxist ideology among the Western-educated elites, it was primarily the immigrant groups, rather than the Western-educated intellectuals, that introduced communism into the country.[67] Moreover, as conservative royalist elites monopolized the cultural and political life of the country, they were able to "put up a double-layered cultural resistance to foreign radical ideas through the conservative ethno-ideology of Thainess and the anti-socialist hegemony of the ancient Thai utopias."[68] Consequently, the emergence of anti-communism ironically predated the spread of communism.[69] The royalists occupied a privileged vantage point in defining pure "Thainess," an essentialist nationalist stance designed not to fight against colonialists or neighbours, but to resist the growing Chinese influence in the first half of the 20th century. Kasian argues that the Thai version of official nationalism was not racism per se but an ethnicizing discourse.[70] As a result, communism, imbued with a strong sense of "Chineseness," became increasingly regarded as being "non-Thai." However, a group of Lookjin (Thai-born Chinese) communists gradually bridged the gap between the foreign Marxist-communist ideology and the Thai people. This was made possible not only by their successful effort in translating Chinese communist publications into the Thai language but also involved their thorough conversion – linguistically, occupationally, socially – into "Thainess."[71] The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) at its inception also encountered difficulties in attracting non-Chinese followers, which was similar to the problem facing their Malayan counterparts. However, they managed to overcome this problem by integrating themselves into the orbit of the indigenous Thai cultural system – in other words, by eliminating "Chineseness" from communism, at some cost of theoretical integrity, in the course of vernacularization. The new version of communism was able to survive the government's strict surveillance and harsh repression over time under the guise of Thai culture.[72]

The elimination of "Chineseness," albeit following a different pattern, also took place in the Vietnamese communist. According to Khánh, an important feature that distinguished Vietnamese revolution from other parts of Southeast Asia was the notion of patriotism. Patriotism is distinct from the typical form of nationalism mainly because of its strong sense of ethnic self-awareness, which already existed in the pre-colonial era. Such patriotism tended to emphasize the traditional Vietnamese social order, which included both a form of ancestor worship reminiscent of that of

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66 Contrary to the top-down "official nationalism" which is usually defined by the ruling elites, there is also what Benedict Anderson called vernacular nationalism, which is constructed bottom-up through means such as modern education system or print media, etc. Also see Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, xiv.

67 Kasīan, *Commodifying Marxism*, 6.

68 Ibid., 3.

69 Ibid., 13.

70 Ibid., 16, 189.

71 Ibid., 24-5.

72 Ibid., 199.

the Chinese and a native form of communalism.[73] Although the term "patriotism" did not appear in the Vietnamese language until the turn of the twentieth century, ethnic self-awareness was well grounded in the Vietnamese pride in "pursuing a political destiny separate from that of China, " and anti-Chinese figures in historical discourse were highly regarded.[74] Therefore, "defeating the superior Chinese" constituted an integral part of the Vietnamese patriotic tradition. The elimination of "Chineseness," or more precisely, demarcations from Chinese models, was important in Vietnamese anti-colonial struggles. Such demarcations included the French-educated intelligentsia from the Chinese-educated Confucian gentry; the reformers from the French collaborators; the radicals in southern China from the gradualists, and so on. While the revolution had become increasingly radical, the new generations always managed to find new paths compatible with corresponding circumstances. This pattern is best illustrated in the party re-organization in the aftermath of the *Thanh Nien* disintegration, which could be partially attributed to the GMD repression of the Chinese communists after the breakup of the GMD-CPC Alliance. A schism emerged within the Vietnamese communist movement, as the young communists criticized the older generation for not being revolutionary enough. With the decline of the China-based leadership, the younger generation in Vietnam started to divert the party's political priority from national independence to European-style class struggles.[75] To a large extent, this shift of focus showed that the Vietnamese communist movement had transformed itself from a derivative of the Chinese revolution into an entirely self-run project. As Benda remarks, the "homegrown" Vietnamese revolution is among the most impressive communist movements, as evident in its growing independence from "communist monolithism." As he remarks, "the 'best' communists are obviously nobody's puppet."[76]

6. Conclusion

In his 1956 essay on Southeast Asian communism, Benda points out that postwar scholarly writings tended to overemphasize Chinese leadership and the Chinese communist model in Southeast Asia, partially because of the CPC victory over GMD in 1949, which "heightened its prestige."[77] Although it is debatable whether Benda's claim is still valid today given the sea changes over the past six decades, the themes of "Chinese leadership" and the "Chinese communist model" remain relevant to the discussions of Southeast Asian communist movements.

By comparing Siam, British Malaya, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies, this paper shows that the representations of China, Chinese, and Chineseness in the origins of Southeast Asian communist movements vary drastically from one another (figure 1):

[73] Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism,* 27.
[74] Ibid., 28.
[75] Ibid., 114-15.
[76] Benda, "Reflection on Asian Communism," 255.
[77] Benda, "Communism in Southeast Asia," 59.

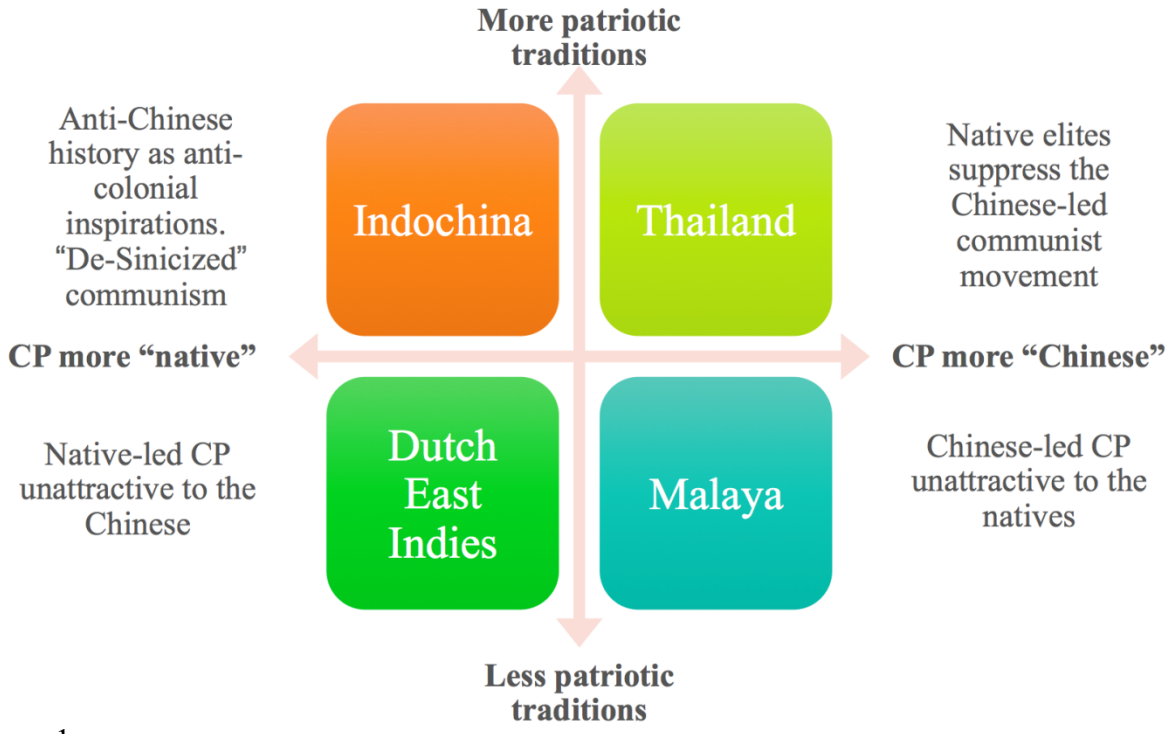

Figure 1

First, the Chinese revolution is a natural frame of reference for anti-imperialist struggles in Southeast Asia. The new generation of Asian radicals considered communist theories to their resistance against foreign domination. Thanks to their greater access to Western education, many intellectuals approached national liberation through socialist struggles. With the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Marxism-Leninism started to exert profound influence all over the world, which inevitably ignited anti-imperialist enthusiasm in the East. China was among the first countries in Asia to receive this impact and subsequently, to graft it on to the country's nationalist movement. Revolutionary Leninism was gradually accepted as the standard form of communism in Asia, as it effectively provided both theoretical guidance and organizational strategies for fledgling communist movements in societies in which capitalism had not yet fully developed.

Secondly, China was a major source of revolution that the Southeast Asian communists could embrace. As a non-European and largely agrarian society, China shared many similarities with Southeast Asia in terms of politics, social structure and cultural values. The achievements of the Chinese revolution, especially those characterizing the years of the First GMD-CPC United Front under Comintern tutelage, were both inspirational and instructional to Southeast Asian radicals desperately in search of viable paths for their own movements. The Chinese revolution served as a potentially transplantable model in the eyes of Southeast Asian communists; it strengthened their belief that communism could work. As the Comintern paid close attention to the Chinese revolution, China also functioned as a hub of communication and a center for strategizing Southeast Asian revolutions. Many Southeast Asian communist leaders either worked at or frequently visited the Comintern offices in China, which provided vital connections to the rise of communist movements in their home countries. To win over the hearts and minds of the vast overseas Chinese population, many GMD and CPC organizations managed to expand in Southeast Asia. However, their inability to work beyond ethnic boundaries constrained the level

of influence that such branches could exert.

Finally, the notion of Chineseness was extremely ambiguous in the Southeast Asian context. The rise of communism further complicated this situation. Communists necessarily worked with various contradictions inherent to the unique economic and socio-political positions of the overseas Chinese. On the one hand, the native-led communist movements were reluctant to absorb Chinese followers, as the latter's bourgeois image could endanger the former's mass base in the proletariat and the peasantry. On the other hand, the Chinese-led communist movements also had enormous difficulties in attracting participants beyond the Chinese community, since such movements were usually imbued with a strong sense of nationalism oriented towards China. Moreover, the resistance against the Chinese influence has been an integral part of the Southeast Asian discourse of patriotism and official nationalism. Due to the "Chinese" outlook of the communist movement, anti-communism is essential to the royalty-monopolized identity-making process of Thainess in Siam. In Vietnam, by comparison, the young communists' departure from the "Chinese revolutionary model" was not only critical to the party's sustainable development but also consistent with the Vietnamese patriotic traditions, in which anti-Chinese struggles were central to the formation of the Vietnamese national awareness.

Primarily written on the basis of nation-states, the Cold War scholarship on Southeast Asian communism often pays little attention to movements across geographical and political boundaries. Among a handful of books that engage in comparative studies, historical depth has sometimes been compromised.[78] Is it possible to study the rise of Southeast Asian communism comparatively under an overarching theme? Christopher Goscha's work on the Southeast Asian networks of the Vietnamese Revolution presents a possible new direction. In the same vein, issues surrounding "Chineseness," rather than just the Chinese networks, are worthy of more careful investigations. While scholars have laid solid foundations in the fields of communism, nationalism, and Chinese diaspora studies in Southeast Asia, many important questions remain unanswered. For instance, why was communism, class-based in theory, so often formed by race, religion and cultural resentment in practice? Why did the native-led communist movements fail to converge with the ones led by the Chinese? Generally speaking, Southeast Asia has been receptive to foreign influences throughout history. While many world religions have found ample spaces to thrive, why has communism been so thoroughly eradicated with only a few exceptions (and what about the exceptions)? Further studies are much needed to answer these questions.

[78] Examples include: Justus Maria van der Kroef, *Communism in South-east Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Colin Mackerras and Nick Knight, *Marxism in Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Jack Henry Brimmell, *Communism in South East Asia: a Political Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Frank N. Trager, *Marxism in Southeast Asia: A Study of Four Countries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

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