

**Transnationalism, Nationalism, and A History in Oblivion**

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At the start of the documentary *South of the Ocean*, a voiceover says that: “For millennia, many hundreds of thousands of Chinese wanderers have come to the South Ocean, as explorers, travelers, conquerors, traders, and refugees. They call this part of the world, the Nanyang.” This is a highly generalized description of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, a long-lasting process spanning two thousand years from the 1st century A.D. to present days. However, the picture depicted by the two sentences is not completed because there were not only “explorers, travelers, conquerors, traders, and refugees” who came into Nanyang before the interruption caused by the Pacific War, but also a group of people with more complex political visions. During the first half of the 20th century, especially after 1927, thousands of Chinese nationalists and communists fled their homeland and stepped on the soil of Southeast Asia to organize local revolutionary forces, echoing the flaring national liberation movement back in China and the Comintern’s promotion of world revolution. Many of them chose Thailand as the destination since there was a large and still growing population of Chinese immigrants distributing throughout this country. They introduced Marxist-communist ideologies into Thailand and set up the Communist Party of Siam (CPS) and the Siamese branch of the Chinese Communist Party. This small group of people, like a single spark, ignited the paddy field of the Thai revolution in the next few decades. However, for a long time, their life stories remained little-known to the public, and even to some of the most informed reporters and historians. Fortunately, with the recent

publication of a series of memoirs by those witnesses and their descendants, this clandestine history now finally sees the light of day.

My research focuses on the transnational movement of the Chinese revolutionaries and communists between mainland China and Thailand during the first half of the 20th century and analyzes how their activities contributed to the spread of Marxism/communism and the birth of an unprecedented revolutionary attempt in the modern history of Thailand. Thanks to the Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award provided by the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS), I managed to conduct my final pre-dissertation survey in Bangkok, Thailand from June to July 2019. During this period, I spent most of the time staying in the National Archives of Thailand, browsing the Thai government's textual records on overseas Chinese affairs, Sino-Thai relations, and anti-communist movements. Discovering and collecting new archival documents was the main task throughout my stay in Thailand. To be honest, burying yourself in hundreds of old yellow newspapers, letters, and official correspondences is not something fun. Sometimes, you feel bored, frustrated, or even exhausted, both physically and mentally, especially when you find out that the archives you thought are of "ground-breaking" academic significance have already been cited and deeply analyzed in an article twenty years ago! However, this is not my first time conducting research in an archive. After overcoming the first few days of unfamiliarity, adjustment, and boredom, I found myself increasingly immersed in the historical contexts created by my archival documents. From the headlines of the daily newspapers, I got to read the same contents as people from almost a century ago. From the confiscated pamphlets

and brochures, I perceived the Chinese immigrants' rising nationalist and resistant sentiments. From the governmental notices and legislations, I caught a glimpse of the overall political and economic landscapes of Thailand back then. This experience gives me a general sense of the time that I study and more importantly, it imparts flesh and blood of details to my theoretical skeleton.

In addition to the times in archives and libraries, I also conducted several interviews with full consent from my informants. The interviewees are mainly ethnic Chinese who work for local Chinese organizations including the Kwong Siew Association of Thailand, Thian Fah Foundation Hospital, and the Chinese Association in Thailand. Most of these Chinese organizations are located along the Yaowarat road, which is widely known as the China Town of Bangkok. This is also the main settlement of the Chinese traders and sailors who arrived in Bangkok during the 18th century and thereafter. Some of my informants came to Thailand quite recently, mainly for the purpose of establishing new businesses or reunifying with family members. The majority of them, nevertheless, are Thai-born-Chinese with Thai citizenship and (at least partially) Chinese ethnic background. They shared their family's or their own immigration stories with me. From those stories, I got to realize that immigration or any form of transnational population movement is not only the cold numbers from yearbooks and customs reports but a matter of spatially extended relationships that many people's life, hope, imagination, and representation are embedded in. These informants and their lived experiences are a good start for my research. Currently, I am planning to go back to Thailand in September 2020 to conduct the dissertation

fieldwork and there's no doubt that this summer lays a solid foundation for any further investigation and analysis.

Overall, my 2019 summer fieldwork was productive, inspiring, and unforgettable. Sometimes I still recall the humid tropical breeze across the surface of Chao Phraya River and the strong smell of lemongrass from a street food stall. However, this trip would not be possible without the financial support from the IRIS. Additionally, parts of my summer research have been presented at the 2019 annual meeting of Council on Thailand Studies (COTS). Therefore, I am incredibly grateful for IRIS and this valuable fieldwork funding opportunity.