The First Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party (1935) and its Aftermath: A Turning Point in the Comintern—ICP Relations

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The First Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party has long been an unattractive theme in Vietnamese studies because of its theoretical vacancy and the absence of the ICP’s main leaders like Nguyen Ai Quoc or Le Hong Phong, in so far as we make use of the documents published on the Vietnamese Communist Party’s history. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, newly released documents held in the Comintern Archives in Moscow reveal that such apparent insignificance of the First Congress derives from the intentional deletion by the VCP of some important documents from their published collected material.

According to these newly released documents, the First Congress of the ICP not only revealed the limits of the Comintern way of carrying out the world revolution through the Moscow-trained communist cadres dispatched to their homelands, but also demonstrated the Indochinese communists’ independence from Moscow, which was proved by their proposal that obviously went far beyond the Comintern’s absolute framework of a “revolution in one country.”

Analyzing the newly released documents in Moscow, this paper aims to review the historical significance of the First Congress in the history of Vietnamese communism and to describe some features of the Comintern-ICP relations in the period 1934–1938, which was filled with the various contradictions generated mainly from the Comintern’s strategy for world revolution. The main emphasis of the paper will be placed on: 1) the ambiguous position of the Overseas Leadership Committee in the organizational reconstruction of the ICP; 2) the rivalry between the two Moscow-trained cadres of the ICP: Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong; 3) Indochinese communists’ efforts to identify themselves and the Comintern’s core principles for a “revolution in one country”; 4) the power struggle within the ICP’s leadership after the First Congress and the rise of the indigenous communists’ role in the ICP, and 5) the unique position of Nguyen Ai Quoc in the history of the ICP-VWP.

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**Keywords:** Indochina, communism, network, revolution, Comintern
1. Introduction

The First National Party Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party (Macao, 27th—31st March, 1935) has been termed the “completion of organizational reconstruction” of the ICP [Huynh Kim Khanh 1982:186] and its return to the political arena in Indochina under the leadership of the newly elected Central Committee. However, judging from the documents on the First Congress published by the Vietnamese Communist Party including “Political Resolutions of the Congress” and resolutions on practical movements, it is impossible to find any new political point of view or policy change in the party line because all the documents still reflect the ultra-leftist line of the Comintern adopted at its Sixth World Congress (1928). In other words their contents are only repetition of the policy offered in “the Political Thesis” of the ICP (1930) drafted by Tran Phu, the First General Secretary of the ICP [See Dang Cong san Viet-nam 1977: 461–663].

It is quite natural, therefore, that the late Huynh Kim Khanh depicted the First Congress of the ICP as “of little significance” in his monumental work Vietnamese Communism (1982): neither the line adopted at the Congress nor the list of participants to it was worth mentioning [Huynh Kim Khanh 1982: 186–187]. According to the materials available at the time he completed his work, it is fair to say that such a point of view was reasonable and persuasive.

It is high time now, however, to totally revise this old point of view toward the First Congress. Documents from the Comintern Archives in Moscow (the former Central Party Archives) released after the collapse of the USSR show clearly that some paragraphs in individual documents or whole documents in whole have been omitted from the collected documents published by the VCP. Of these documents, two in particular deserve mentioning here: “The Resolution of the First Congress of the ICP on the organizational system, authority and tasks of the Overseas Leadership Committee of the ICP” (28th March, 1935) and “The Proposals of the First Congress of the ICP on the Establishment of a Branch of the Comintern Eastern Secretariat in the South Pacific Region” (addressed to the ECCI, 30th March, 1935). [RC f.495 op.154 d.688: 1.41] The main points of these documents lie in (1) power distribution between the reconstructed Central Committee and the Overseas Leadership Committee, and (2) the proposal that a South Pacific branch of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern be established to directly lead the three communist parties of the “South Pacific countries” —the ICP, the Siamese Communist Party and the Communist Party of Malaya.

These documents not only prove that discord existed between the ICP and the Comintern on the command line at that time, but also reflect the strong will of the ICP’s leader —Ha Huy Tap— to change the Moscow-centered leadership of the Comintern to the indigenous communists’ advantage. Clearly, at the First Congress the Indochinese communists saw an opportunity to assert themselves under the lead-
ership of Ha Huy Tap.

In spite of his ranking and talent as a communist leader, the role of Ha Huy Tap has long been neglected in the official history of the VCP owing to his critical attitude toward Nguyen Ai Quoc (alias Ho Chi Minh). Although only the VCP has recently begun to offer moderate recognition that Ha Huy Tap was elected General Secretary of the ICP at the First Congress [Ho Chi Minh Toan tap, tap 6. 1995:657], he has still never been ranked among the communist heroes of the ICP, nor has his biography ever been published in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam [See Nhung nguoicong san 1977]. Conversely, Le Hong Phong, who continued to rival Ha Huy Tap throughout the 1930s, has always been ranked at the top of the communist heroes of the ICP and many kinds of memorial books on him have been published despite his lesser contribution to the development of revolutionary theory of the ICP [See Nguyen Thanh Tam 1989; also see Vien nghiencuu Ho Chi Minh va cac lanhtucua Dang 1997a].

Therefore it is also high time to examine the historical role of Ha Huy Tap through analysis based on the newly released documents and to rectify the superficial image of him created mainly by the political needs of the post-war leadership of the ICP—VWP—VCP.

Through intensive analysis of the released documents on the ICP held in the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary Historical Documents (Moscow), this paper aims to clear up some factors that caused discord between the ICP and the Comintern on the command system of local revolutions, and finally to reexamine the historical significance of the First Congress in the ICP’s history. In the process of analysis, special attention will be paid to the organizational structure and principles of the Comintern, and the relationship between the rival communist leaders at that time—Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong.

2. Difficulties emerging during Preparations for the First Congress

After the oppression of the French colonial government severely damaged the ICP in the period 1930–1931, reconstruction of the Party began to be carried out under the active leadership of the Comintern, especially of the Eastern Secretariat from the year 1932 onwards. It was in 1934 that the Comintern set up the Overseas Leadership Committee (Ban chi huy o ngoai) headed by Le Hong Phong in Macao to accelerate the organizational reconstruction of the ICP. The OLC was composed of three Moscow-trained communists: Le Hong Phong (chairman), Ha Huy Tap (in charge of propaganda) and Nguyen Van Dut (in charge of inspection),¹ but in fact was managed by Ha Huy Tap because of the other members’ frequent assignment

¹) After the departure of Nguyen Van Dut to Cochin China in 1935, Nguyen Ngoc Vy (Phung Chi Kien) also joined the OLC.
elsewhere.

According to the Comintern definition, the OLC is “a provisional organ existing in parallel to the Central Committee, but with its own tasks”: while the latter is to deal with all the domestic matters, the former is requested to act as a conduct between the domestic party organizations and the Comintern, and replace the former in case of emergency [RC f.495 op.154 d.579].

It was very difficult, however, to judge which organ of the two would take priority over the other in the overall command system of the Comintern. First of all, such an ambiguous position of the OLC was to present a serious problem in its relations to the domestic party organizations in Cochin China, where Tran Van Giau had carried out organizational restructuring of the party without any directives from the Comintern or the OLC since his return to Saigon from Moscow in 1932. Finally he also went so far as to set up a “provisional Central Committee” in 1934 which put party cells in Cochin China, Southern Annam and Cambodia under its leadership [RC f.495 op.154 d.686: ll.24–27]. The OLC then dispatched Nguyen Van Dut to Cochin China to set up the Inter-regional Committee of South Indochina against the “provisional central committee” of Tran Van Giau to crush his independent action (November 1934) [RC f.495 op.154 d.676: ll.29–31, 37–38]. Tran Van Giau reluctantly obeyed the OLC’s decision, although he insisted that if the OLC was not an organ designated by the Comintern he would not be able to persuade his comrades to accept its leadership. It might fairly be said, therefore, that the affair in Cochin China made the OLC’s leaders recognize the necessity of taking steps to dissolve dual leadership and to establish a unitary command system within the party.

Secondly, the ambiguity of the OLC’s priority in the Comintern also caused anxiety amongst its own leaders, all of whom were trained at the Communist University for the Workers of the East (KUTV) and expected to become cadres of the ICP after their departure from Moscow. Le Hong Phong, chairman of the OLC, regarded its role as somewhat different from the Comintern’s definition, insisting that the OLC should act as the “leadership and organizer” for the reconstruction of the party central organ” until the opening of the First Congress [RC f.495 op.154 d.686: l.10]. At the same time, an inclination to endow the OLC with much more power than with the Central Committee seems to have increased within the OLC as the formation of the Central Committee emerged as an urgent task of the OLC. The Political Resolution adopted at the Conference of the OLC and the representatives from within the country (July 1934) explains the OLC’s structure and role as follows:

(1) The OLC consists of five members: three will be designated by the Comintern and two will be designated by the Central Committee of the ICP.
(2) The OLC represents the Party to the Comintern and the fraternal parties.
(3) The OLC guides the general political line of the CC. The OLC has the right to dispatch representatives to participate in all tasks of the domestic party
committees and to control them.

(4) The most important decisions of the Central Committee should be approved by the OLC. In the event that the both committees differ in opinion, the OLC has the right to appeal to the Comintern. The Central Committee must fulfill the directives of the OLC until the Comintern resolves such disputes.

(5) In case of the collapse of the CC, the OLC shall direct domestic organizations on behalf of the former.\(^2\) [RC f.495 op.154 d.675: ll.32–33]

When the preparatory work for the First Congress carried out under the leadership of the OLC nearly came to an end in December 1934, all the important documents and proposals that were to be discussed at the Congress were sent to the Eastern Secretariat for consultation in advance. At this point, the OLC’s attitude basically remained unchanged but some leaders of the OLC dared to make a proposal to liquidate the OLC, while asking what the relationship between the OLC and the CC would be in case the former continued to exist\(^3\) [RC f.495 op.154 d.676: l.25]. In the reply to the OLC written in the middle of March 1935, however, the Eastern Secretariat repeated its previous point of view toward the OLC’s role with detailed supplements, of which the following four points in particular differed from the OLC’s supposed role according to its Political Resolution: 1) The OLC and the CC are two organs existing in parallel, which have their respective tasks. Neither organ has priority over the other; 2) The main role of the OLC is not to represent the Party, but to ensure the communication and delivery of documents mainly between the CC and the Comintern; 3) The OLC cannot afford to interfere with the domestic affairs because “the CC of the party located in the country carries out all the political works in the country. It is responsible for the correctness of the party line and directs work of all the party committees within the country.”; and 4) In case of the collapse of the CC, the OLC has no right to replace the former, but “must have enough party reserves to maintain the inheritance of the party leadership in the country.” [RC f.495 op.154 d.585: ll.2–3]

There was no room, however, for the OLC or the Congress to take the opinion of the Eastern Secretariat into account because it is presumed that the reply from Moscow was delivered to the OLC only after the Congress was over. After all, the First Congress of the ICP held in Macao (27\(^{th}\)–31\(^{st}\) March, 1935) was to take two steps to liquidate the OLC “legally.” In the first place, adopting “The Resolution of the ICP First Congress on the Organizational Structure, Power and Tasks of the OLC” (28\(^{th}\) March, 1935), the main points of which consisted of the higher ranking of the OLC over the CC, and the former’s obedience to the leadership of the Party Congress and

\(^2\) Numbered by the author.

\(^3\) Presumably this was a personal opinion of Ha Huy Tap, who managed the OLC after the departure of Le Hong Phong for Moscow in September 1934.
the Comintern [RC f.495 op.154 d.683: 1.41], the Congress could obtain strong enough power to decide the fate of the OLC. Then, the Congress adopted a proposal addressed to the Comintern, insisting that a branch of the Eastern Secretariat should be set up in the South Pacific region to direct the three communist parties of Indochina, Malaya and Siam, and the OLC be liquidated in order to strengthen indigenous communists (30th March, 1935) [Ibid.].

At the end of the Congress, the liquidation of the OLC, coupled with the expulsion of Tran Van Giau from the leading posts of the Party, seemed to have ensured a unitary command system throughout the party organizations for the reconstructed ICP with the newly formed CC as its core. In consequence, except for the treatment of Tran Van Giau, that proposal was never realized because of the negative response from the Eastern Secretariat, but it might surely be said that it is still important today to examine the historical relevance of the failed proposal in the context of the Comintern—ICP relationship.

3. The Turnover at the Congress: Ha Huy Tap as the General Secretary of the ICP

The most unexpected result of the First Congress was that Ha Huy Tap was elected as the General Secretary of the newly formed CC although there was no mention of anyone corresponding to him in the list of CC members. According to the reports of the OLC, the CC was composed of 13 members: 9 regular members and 4 candidates. Except the four known members, Litvinov [Le Hong Phong], Dinh-Thanh, Svan [Nguyen Van Dut] and Nguyen Ai Quoc, all the rest were unknown leaders from indigenous party organizations: a “member of the Inter-regional Committee of Cochin China,” a “member of the Cochin Chinese Regional Committee,” a “secretary of the Tonkin Regional Committee (candidate),” a “member of the Tonkin Regional Committee,” a “secretary of the Laos Regional Committee,” a “member of the Laos Regional Committee (candidate),” “secretary of the Nghe An Provincial Committee,” a “leader of the party organization in Northern Annam (candidate),” and “another member of the Annam Regional Committee.” [RC f.495 op.154 d.688: ll.9–10]

Clearly there was no room for Ha Huy Tap, who had no activity base in the country at that time, to enter into the collectivity of indigenous communist leaders. Some participants to the Congress, however, confirmed that Ha Huy Tap was elected as the General Secretary of the ICP at the Congress [Duc Vuong 1992: 30], and a document of the Comintern also refers to the fact that Ha Huy Tap continued to be the General Secretary of the ICP until his dismissal in 1938 [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: 1.3]. Therefore it might more accurately be said that a CC composed of 14 members headed by Ha Huy Tap, the second General Secretary of the ICP, was formed at the First Congress.

However, such a decision on the post of the General Secretary had not been expected even in the basic plan of the OLC for the First Congress, as a letter from
the OLC to the Eastern Secretariat (20th December, 1934), supposedly written by Ha Huy Tap himself, shows: 4)

We propose to dispatch Litvinov [Le Hong Phong] to the country as General Secretary in order that the political line of the Comintern be ensured well. If you make Litvinov stay abroad, Cinitchkin [Ha Huy Tap] will be dispatched to the Central Committee within the country. [RC f.495 op.154 d.676: 1.29]

The reply of the Eastern Secretariat to that proposal, which was drafted in the middle of March 1935, was:

We support Litvinov as a candidate for the General Secretary of the CC. Sinichkin [Ha Huy Tap] should remain as leader of the OLC. Litvinov will leave soon after the Congress. [RC f.495 op.154 d.585: 1.3]

Even if the reply was assumed to have been delivered to Ha Huy Tap only after the Congress, as we have already seen, clearly he continued to occupy the post of General Secretary until 1938 against the Comintern’s will. It might easily be assumed that Ha Huy Tap, as the virtual commander in chief present at the Congress, would take any steps to avoid a power vacuum arising in the leadership in case Le Hong Phong was to be elected as the absentee General Secretary. But Ha Huy Tap’s behavior after the Congress, as will be discussed below, shows that his inauguration as General Secretary was far from being a provisional measure effective only until the return of Le Hong Phong to Indochina, the Comintern-sponsored candidate for supreme leader. At least, the following two factors must be taken into account to explain Ha Huy Tap’s behavior in a reasonable way.

3.1 The Rivalry between Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong

Ha Huy Tap (ca.1902–1940) and Le Hong Phong (ca.1902–1942) were the two Indochinese communists who could succeed in ascending to higher points in the Comintern’s echelon than their colleagues from Indochina. Escaping from Annam to China because of his active participation in the labour movement, Le Hong Phong studied at the Political Training School founded by Nguyen Ai Quoc and the Huangpu Military Academy in Guangzhou in 1924–1926. In 1926 Le Hong Phong was sent to the Soviet Union for further training as a military pilot. As a member of the CCP, he studied at the Military Aviation Schools in Leningrad and Borisoglebsk together

4) Although the author’s name is not written at the end of the letter, it is written in French the same as other letters signed by Ha Huy Tap. At that time Nguyen Ngoc Vy (Phung Chi Kien) might have joined the OLC, replacing Nguyen Van Dut, who departed for Cochinchina to deal with the affairs of Tran Van Giau in 1934. But his talent in French is unknown, and presumably it was difficult for him to report on the OLC’s activities from its foundation.
with his Chinese classmates in Huangpu, Xu Jie Fan and Li Qian Yuan. But in Borisoglebsk they were not permitted to continue studying because of their slow progress [RC f.514 op.1 d.375: 1.46]. After that Le Hong Phong left Borisoglebsk and moved to the Indochinese course of KUTV in 1928, where he became a member of the ICP.

On the other hand, Ha Huy Tap, who worked as an elementary school teacher in Annam and Coch in China, involved himself in the labour movement while recruiting party members and sending them to Guangzhou. He arrived in Moscow in 1929 for training at KUTV [RC f.495 op.201 d.45]. Ha Huy Tap never experienced Nguyen Ai Quoc’s Political Training School because it had been already closed in 1927, which marks the striking difference between Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong in their political careers.

It was during their stay in Moscow that their political careers overlapped: Both of them were “national organizers” of Indochinese students in KUTV, responsible for their own ethnic sections and, in effect, their head; both of them were candidates for membership of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), a status few elite communists from outside the Soviet Union could enjoy [RC f.532 op.1 d.384:1.15, RC f.495 op.201 d.46]; and both of them were assigned to work in the OLC. In the case of Le Hong Phong, he was elected to be a member of the ECCI at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern (August 1935).

In spite of their similar careers in the Comintern, however, their talents and patterns of behavior as communist leaders contrasted strikingly with each other. While Ha Huy Tap was an outstanding theoretician, who had his own political point of view and enough assertiveness to preside over the First Congress, Le Hong Phong left no theoretical works for the Comintern or ICP. As for his character, remarks depirating his suitability for his status in the Comintern can be found in a document: “He is weak-willed and easily affected by others.” [RC f.514 op.1 d.1064: 1.21]

Thus, the only possible reason for his ascent within the Comintern was his exceptional mobility and active contact with indigenous party members while collecting information and issuing directives to them. During the period 1931–1934, Le Hong Phong carried out underground activities in the southernmost part of China to reconstruct party organizations in Indochina, moving frequently around Guangzhou, Nanning, Longzhou and Macao, making contact with various party members from Tonkin and Siam [RC f.495 op.154 d.686: ll.1–10].

In consequence, such behavior caused Ha Huy Tap to distrust Le Hong Phong especially after the establishment of the OLC. As we have seen, it was Ha Huy Tap who managed the everyday work of the OLC in Macao on behalf of Le Hong Phong, who was unable to fulfill his duty as the head of the OLC owing to his long absence. Ha Huy Tap complains plainly on that matter in his letter to Nguyen Ai Quoc

\[5\] This is the so-called Russian Communist Party or Bolshevik Party.
June, 1936): 6

For these last two years we have been working in much more difficult situations than the period you and Litvinov did. Litvinov was in China for three years (1932–34), but in fact he only worked in Longzhou for six months and in the OLC for four months. That was “the peaceful period,” so Litvinov can never understand the difficulties we have been faced with. For that reason he does not know how to explain our difficulties and demands to the Comintern, and to demand that the Comintern solve our proposals which we have sent you over these last two years. [RC f.495 op.10a d.139]

It might rationally be supposed that such distrust coupled with the conscious sense that Ha Huy Tap himself was the actual supreme leader of the ICP, caused the turnover at the Congress. This maneuver by Ha Huy Tap, however, not only failed to gain the approval of the Comintern but also deteriorated the relationship between the two rival communist leaders. While Le Hong Phong clearly indicated in his curriculum vitae for the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern that he had been elected the General Secretary of the ICP at the First Congress in Macao [RC f.495 op.201 d.46], Ha Huy Tap, after his return to Saigon in 1936, overtly signed off as “Secrétaire” in one of his letters to the French Communist Party [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: 1.163]. After the Congress, the two leaders were to oppose each other again on the issue of introducing the new strategy adopted at the 7th World Congress of the Comintern to the ICP. Therefore the Congress also marks the beginning of the great “schism” within the ICP’s leadership, which was to last until 1938.

Considering the Comintern—ICP relations as a whole, in the period 1935–1938 the ICP had two rival Moscow-trained leaders both of whom identified themselves as the General Secretary of the Party: one of them was strongly sponsored by the Comintern; and the other was recognized as the General Secretary by the Party Congress. Such a result was also unavoidable since the Congress was built up as the supreme decision-making organ of the Party in parallel with the Comintern. It is in this point related to the command system of the Comintern that another factor on the turnover at the Congress lies, as we shall see below.

3.2 Attempts to reform the Command System of the Comintern

The Comintern’s basic strategy to carry out the world revolution consisted of the Moscow-centered remote control of the communist cadres dispatched to their homelands after the training in educational institutions for the communists from outside

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6) At the end of this letter the writer’s name is not mentioned but judging from the content of the letter, it is easy to confirm that the writer is Ha Huy Tap because he was the only member of the OLC that could talk about the situation of the OLC in 1934–1936.
the Soviet Union in Moscow such as KUTV, MLSH (the International Lenin School) and KUNMZ (the Communist University of the National Minorities in the West). It might be considered that at least the following three conditions were necessary to realize that strategy: 1) Moscow-trained cadres should always be loyal to the directives from the Comintern, 2) The communication line between Moscow and the dispatched cadres, including the correspondence with each other, delivery of money and the travel of inspectors from the Comintern, should be maintained without interruption, and 3) In the homelands of the Moscow-trained cadres such party institutions as ensure their leadership should be established following their honorable reentry into the indigenous party organizations.

The unfeasibility of all of these conditions, however, prevented the command system of the Comintern from operating effectively, which lead to the emergence of dual leadership, or the coexistence of indigenous communist leaderships and the Comintern’s command. Contradictions and disputes between these two pervaded many communist parties outside the Soviet Union, including the ICP.

After his arrival in Macao in 1934 for the new tasks, Ha Huy Tap was far from being welcomed as an elite leader by the indigenous communists but found himself to be helplessly caught between the Comintern and the domestic organizations of the ICP, especially faced with many kinds of demands from the latter. In the above-mentioned letter to Nguyen Ai Quoc, Ha Huy Tap depicted the circumstances for his works as follows while complaining about the small sum of money and directive documents sent from the Comintern, which could not meet the demand of the lower stratum of the party at all:

We are responsible leaders, so we can endure life however hard it may be and we are pleased to do so. But it is impossible for our assistants to endure it. After working with us for some time, they request to leave the committee. The lower stratum always writes to us, complaining, “Why can we get only a small sum of money?” They regard me as a “bank”. We are working in a difficult situation but the Comintern has not solved the proposals of the party yet. The lower stratum, on the other hand, may complain today, “Why don’t you give us money?” and tomorrow they may complain again, “Comrades, why don’t you let inspectors come here?” After that they will also complain, “Why don’t you send anybody to Russia?” “How cold you are not to let anybody go to China for the training!” [RC f.495 op.10a d.139]

The Comintern’s financial aid to the ICP at that time was two thousand US dollars a year, which was only enough for travel fees and additional payments for the sympathizers but too little to ensure the OLC’s activities, according to Ha Huy Tap [Ibid.].

Considering Ha Huy Tap’s concern over the reality of the relations between the OLC and the indigenous communists, it is understandable that he was urged to take
some steps to overcome the difficulties generated from the interrupted communication line between the Comintern and the ICP. As the proposal of the Congress (30th March, 1935) shows clearly, the replacement of the powerless OLC by a powerful central organ and the establishment of strong ties with the Comintern came to occupy main positions of his policy to reform the existing relationship with it. Since the prototype of such policy had been outlined earlier in his letter to the Eastern Secretariat (20th December, 1934) [RC f.495 op.154 d.676: II.25–26], it might surely be said that Ha Huy Tap took the initiative in preparing the proposal for the Congress in spite of its appearance as a collective product. According to the proposal of the Congress:

…but our party wants to be under the leadership of an organ which is located near Indochina and has wider powers than the OLC on the one hand, and it wants to bring many OLC comrades back to the homeland to work on the other hand. Therefore our Congress proposes: 1) to establish a branch of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern in the South Pacific region to put three communist parties of Indochina, Siam and Malaya under the direct leadership of the Comintern (Moscow), and 2) to abolish the OLC of the ICP, thus we will be able to increase the number of leading cadres for work at home. [RC f.495 op.154 d.683: 1.41]

The emphasis upon “the direct leadership of the Comintern” shows that Ha Huy Tap had no intention of building his own command system separate from the Comintern’s to dissolve the dual leadership but in reality his main interest lay in strengthening the indigenous leadership of the ICP, including himself within it. Even in the structure of the branch expected as the incarnation of “the direct leadership of the Comintern” it is possible to find some devices to ensure the influence of the domestic party leadership upon decision-making. Although the concrete location of the branch is unknown in the proposal, it might be possible that Singapore was one of the suitable sites for the branch, where the sole branch of the Department of International Communication (OMS) of the Comintern was located in the South Pacific region. Such a location would have made communication between the ICP and the branch much tighter than that between Indochina and Moscow. The commitment of the three communist parties to the leadership of the branch which was explained in detail in the letter of the Siamese Communist Party to the ECCI (1st

7) These points of the letter are not found in the resolution of the OLC’s conference presided over by Le Hong Phong (July 1934), which concentrated on strengthening the structure and role of the OLC. This fact also helps to prove that the proposal of the Congress was based on the private opinion of Ha Huy Tap.

8) The Vietnamese words for South Pacific Ocean in the original text are “Nam Thai Binh Duong”, which is obviously distinguished from “Nam Duong” meaning Indonesia.
April, 1935) also confirms that it was expected to be a kind of joint management between the Comintern and the three parties:

The Leadership Branch for the South Pacific Countries consists of two parts: one shall be designated by the Comintern and the other shall be elected by the ICP, the SCP and CPM. The secretary of the Branch shall be designated by the Comintern or elected by the former with the approval of the latter. [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: 1.112]

Simultaneously with these devices, it was also necessary for Ha Huy Tap to take some steps to ensure his own return to his homeland. Prior to the Congress, Ha Huy Tap had already expressed his intention of commitment to the Central Committee in his letter to the Eastern Secretariat (20th December, 1934) as mentioned earlier in this chapter. In that case, clearly the abolishment of the OLC was the best way for him to strengthen the leadership of the ICP and, at the same time, to remove the possibility of his remaining in the OLC. Some efforts to realize his intention as if it were the collective one of the ICP also can be traced in the documents adopted at the Congress. The last part of the resolution (28th March, 1935) could have been the first step for the abolition of the OLC and his return home if the Comintern had approved of it:

...11) Only the Comintern or the Party Congress (with the Comintern’s approval) has the right to abolish and dissolve the OLC or to establish another committee, or to change the role of the OLC. 12) a)… b) When members of the OLC return home for work under the directions of the Comintern or of the OLC, a permanent member of the OLC will be a member of the standing committee of the Central Committee and an ordinary member of the OLC will be an ordinary member of the CC. [RC f.495 op.154 d.683: 1.41]

His efforts at the Congress, however, were in vain owing to the negative response of the Eastern Secretariat to the proposal (28th March, 1935) based on the resolution adopted just two days before: “It is still too early to set up a united leadership center for the three communist parties and it is necessary that the OLC should continue to exist for the ICP.” [RC f.495 op.154 d.585: 1.2] In the end, there was no room for the Eastern Secretariat to consider any part of the proposal in a positive way. Although Ha Huy Tap was not so passive as to follow the opinion of the Eastern Secretariat unconditionally, paradoxically enough, it was the survival of the OLC that brought about favorable condition for his activities. Soon after the Congress, the OLC came to play the role of supreme leadership organ of the ICP on behalf of the CC because of its virtual collapse; most of the members of the CC, with the exception of Ha Huy Tap, had been arrested after returning to their homeland by September
1935 [RC f.495 op.10a d.139]. Therefore it might be very natural that he continued to act as the supreme leader of the ICP in that situation while remaining in the OLC. Finally in 1936, contrary to the Comintern’s intention to keep him in the OLC, he returned to Saigon after eight years’ absence, leaving Le Hong Phong in China.9)

Such discord between the Comintern’s Moscow command and its “sections,” or respective communist parties outside the USSR, was never a phenomenon specific to the ICP, but was pervasive throughout “sections” of the Comintern. One of the main factors that generated various kinds of discord within the Comintern’s whole system was the uncompromising attitude of its Moscow command toward its own “sections,” which was inclined to reject any attempt by the latter to reform the existing system or to express opinions contrary to Moscow’s policy [Rees and Thorpe 1998].

While Ha Huy Tap was in conflict with the Eastern Secretariat because of his active attempts to reform the existing command system, Le Hong Phong acted totally differently from his rival. As we have seen, at one time Le Hong Phong intended to strengthen the OLC’s power but clearly he was not courageous enough to persuade the Comintern to recognize the OLC’s plan for its role and structure after his arrival in Moscow, which a series of the Comintern’s response to the ICP shows. The following answer of Le Hong Phong to a Siamese communist whom he met in Nanning in 1933 also indicates that he was too cautious to act beyond the Comintern’s authority:

I told him that I had no tasks in Siam, so I could only convey the situation to the Comintern. In my private opinion, “If the communist comrades in Siam wish to be true communists and to be in the Comintern’s section, they must try to carry out work among the working people, especially among the Thai people. The urgent task is the involvement of indigenous people in the leadership organ for the enlargement of work among them.” [RC f.495 op.154 d.686: 1.7]

Such behavior of Le Hong Phong, coupled with his commonplace revolutionary “theory,” was far short of breaking the deadlock for the development of the Comintern-led communist movement. But his pattern of behavior seems to have been advantageous to the Comintern because there was little possibility of his raising troublesome problems to the Comintern. Presumably his loyalty to the Comintern was the reason why he made an exceptional ascent as an Indochinese communist within the Comintern despite his lack of theoretical ability.

The difference in behavior between Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong, thus, was not so much a result of their personal characters as a product of the Comintern’s

9) It is unknown when the OLC was dissolved, but presumably after the departure of Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong for Saigon in 1936–1937 the OLC had already lost its function.
own command system for "world revolution," including the Comintern's Moscow command and all the communist parties attached to it. Ha Huy Tap tried to overcome the limits of the existing communication line between the Comintern and the ICP that could not meet the various demands of the indigenous communists, seeking to be a point of articulation between them. At the same time there was the inevitable problem that a Moscow-trained cadre like him had to solve to merge into the indigenous communists' ranks while maintaining his status as supreme leader. Le Hong Phong, on the contrary, chose to live a life within the Comintern in accordance with its orders, refraining from acting independently of the Comintern's opinions. In any case the Comintern lost a chance to construct a tight communication line between the Comintern and the ICP because of its rejection of the reform proposed by the latter. Thus in the Comintern-ICP relations, two lines of command existed separately with little articulation: the Moscow command of the Comintern on the one hand and the domestic leadership of the ICP on the other.

4. Indochina as One of the "South Pacific" Countries

4.1 "World Revolution" and Revolution in One Country

The proposal of the First Congress, especially on the establishment of a South Pacific branch of the Eastern Secretariat, was also unique in its concept of the framework of local communist movements connected with the "world revolution" strategy of the Comintern. By the middle of the 1930s, Indochinese communists had come to play a leading role in the communist movements in the neighboring area, especially in Siam. The OLC had had close relations with the SCP, the evidence of which was that the two communist parties shared the proposal of the ICP First Congress, in which the SCP's delegate—composed of three members—participated. As we have seen, in the above-mentioned letter to the ECCI (1st April, 1935), the Executive Committee of the SCP repeated the same proposal as the ICP's [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.112–113], explaining more clearly the reason why a united leadership center for the three parties should be founded than the ICP as follows:

... Until now among these parties [the ICP, the SCP and the CPM], some parties are acting independently, some parties have close relations with one another and some parties have direct relations with the Comintern. Therefore, revolutionary movement in the East has been developing unevenly. In one country revolutionary movement is developing, but in another it does not. And in other countries it is regressing as fast as it progresses. For these reasons, the revolutionary front in the East has not enough strength yet, and revolutionary sentiment has not reached a high level yet. [Ibid.]

This was a big challenge to the core principles of the Comintern's revolutionary
strategy. Every communist party attached to the Comintern was requested to submit to the absolute regional framework for “revolution in one country” designed by the Comintern itself. In spite of its adhesion to the world revolution, though fainter after Lenin’s death, the Comintern’s revolutionary strategy consisted in only a conglomerate of each “revolution in one country” carried out by every communist party. In the Comintern’s whole apparatus the eight regional secretariats (Lenderssekretariat) directly took charge of respective communist parties and respective revolutions carried out by them. Those were the Central European Secretariat, Balkan Secretariat, Anglo-American Secretariat, Scandinavian Secretariat, Polish-Baltic Secretariat, Roman Secretariat, Latin-American Secretariat, and Eastern Secretariat. In the Euro-centric arrangement of the regional secretariats, the Eastern Secretariat was the sole organ in charge of the communist parties in the vast area stretching from the Far East to the African colonies, including Indochina. Although every secretariat had its own region of supervision like that, it never meant a unit in which a single communist revolution should be carried out.

In the case of the Eastern Secretariat, the “East” was far from a geographical unit for a regional revolution. As the inner structure of the Eastern Secretariat shows, the “East” means only a geographical division in which, after all, each communist party should carry out its own “revolution in one country” without transnational cooperation with other communist parties (see Figure 1). For example, the Far Eastern Section, one of the sub-regional sections in the Eastern Secretariat, was never regarded as an organ coordinating the activities of the six parties or seeking a kind of “Far Eastern” revolution, but was only in charge of the geographically neighbouring parties through its separate communication lines. In that case “China,” “Japan,” “Korea,” “Mongol,” “the Philippines” and “Indochina” composed the six separate frameworks for regional revolutions carried out by the six communist parties respectively at the same time. Thus, as a whole, the communist parties in the East were lined up in the strict vertical command system of the Eastern Secretariat.

Considering that principle, the SCP in its letter to the ECCI obviously intended to alter the inviolable regional framework of the Comintern into a new one favorable for united action by the three communist parties, introducing a geographical framework unprecedented in the Comintern’s worldview: the South Pacific countries. Therefore, it was very natural that the Eastern Secretariat had refused the proposal of the Congress, adding the following directive to the OLC:

...Siam must make connections with us directly. To prevent creating conditions conducive for collapse, don’t establish connections with the Siamese party. We consider it absolutely inappropriate to establish contact with the CCP from your side. [RC f.495 op.154 d.585: 1.9]

The directive also indicates another aspect of the Comintern’s core principles of
ECCI

Regional Secretariats

- Central European Secretariat
- Balkan Secretariat
- Anglo-American Secretariat
- Scandinavian Secretariat
- Polish-Baltic Secretariat
- Roman Secretariat
- Latin-American Secretariat
- Eastern Secretariat

Far Eastern Section: China, Japan, Korea, Mongol, the Philippines, Indochina
Middle Eastern Section: India, Indonesia
Near Eastern Section: Palestine, Syria, Persia, Turkey and the French Colonies in Africa

Standing Commissions

- Chinese Commission
- Japanese Commission
- Korean Commission
- Near Eastern Commission

Negro Commission
Negro Bureau

Figure 1. The Inner Structure of the Eastern Secretariat (1929)
revolutionary strategy: Every communist party should be expected to establish direct communication with the Comintern and should not be allowed to make contact with other parties on its own initiative. Only with the Comintern’s approval or directives from above it was possible for one party to take action on behalf of another. Within the unilateral command system of the Comintern, any reform or proposal from below was fated to be denied, as the ICP’s case shows. While refusing the proposal of the ICP, the Eastern Secretariat tried to make best use of its influence upon other parties and its network with the neighboring areas. The Secretariat planned to dispatch “two comrades: a Chinese and an Indochinese” for assignment in the SCP, recognizing that the OLC was to nominate the latter, and to send an open letter on the basic tasks of the SCP to the Siamese communists under the name of the CCP and the ICP [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: 1.157].

Such an ambivalent attitude of the Comintern toward its sections was also the case with the CCP, the largest and the most influential party in the East, a concrete example of which was the CCP’s relations with the CPM. It is well known that the CPM had close relations with the CCP and was under its strong influence regarding the revolutionary strategy. In Malaya the Chinese immigrants there initiated the first communist organization in 1925, which was later known as the Nanyang Communist Party 10) [RC f.495 op.62 d.30: 1.39]. The party was so eager to implant the CCP’s revolutionary line to Malay that the CC of the CCP had to send a letter to the former to point out their mistake and give some advice on its rectification [RC f.514 op.1 d.532: II.8–12]. Faced with such a situation, the Comintern’s approach to the Nanyang Communist Party was as follows (1931):

...Until that moment [the recognition of the Nanyang Communist Party as a section of the Comintern] the leadership of the organization must make contact with the CC of the CCP. But at the same time, it has been decided that the Far Eastern Bureau must make directly contact with the communist organization of Malay States [the Nanyang Communist Party]. [RC f.495 op.62 d.10: 1.1]

Thus, while making temporary use of the ties between the CCP and the Nanyang Communist Party, the Comintern ordered the FEB, which had the special function of checking the CCP’s action in the East, to take charge of Malaya directly. The FEB had originally been a “consultative organ on China, Japan and Korea” since its foundation in Shanghai in 1926 [VKP(b)–2,1996: 257], in which the CCP’s position was defined as follows:

10) The Central Committee of the CPM was formed at the Second Congress of the Nanyang Communist Party in 1930 [RC f.495 op.62 d.30: 1.39].
The Bureau should operate as an organ, actually directing works on all the countries (China, Japan, Korea), and take all means to prevent itself from altering into a parallel organ to the CC of the CCP that is to deal especially or preferentially with Chinese affairs while avoiding trivial interference with the inner affairs of the CC of the CCP. [Ibid.]

By the beginning of the 1930s the FEB had grown to take charge of vaster areas, including Formosa, Indochina, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaya and the Philippines [RC f.495 op.62 d.30: II.39–40, VKP(b)–3: 822–823, 884–886]. Parallel to this, the Eastern Secretariat had also made a plan to revive and organize the communist movement in the “South Sea” countries with the CPM as its core, which are explained distinctly in the draft letter of the Secretariat on the situation in Malaya and the tasks of the CPM (1931):

The Communist Party of Malaya [...] by virtue of its strategic position and the development of the Communist [sic] movement in Malaya [...] is called upon to actively support the organization of a Communist [sic] movement in Siam and Burma as well as to assist in the re-establishment of a Communist Party in Indonesia. [RC f.495 op.62 d.16: 1.24]

On the part of the CPM, however, its failure to build a direct communication line with the Comintern via the FEB was the reason why the Comintern refrained from recognizing the CPM as a formal section of the Comintern [RC f.495 op.14 d.385]. Therefore, neither the presence of Malay communists training in KUTV nor the CPM’s activity under the strong influence of the CCP were sufficient for the Comintern to allow the CPM to enjoy membership of the Comintern.

In view of this communication line presupposed by the Comintern (Moscow—Shanghai—Malaya—“South Sea” countries), the ICP’s proposal for the South Pacific branch was obviously also a challenge to it because the ICP intended to remove the command point from China (Shanghai or Macao) to the South Pacific region. The background to the proposal there seems to have been Ha Huy Tap’s intention to tighten relations among the communist parties in the South Pacific region, or in present-day Southeast Asia, under the leadership of the ICP and to create the ICP’s own sphere of influence separate from that of the CCP, because of Ha Huy Tap’s negative view of China and the CCP, which is easily traced in his own letters to the Comintern. In his letter to the Eastern Secretariat after the Congress (29th April, 1935) Ha Huy Tap pointed out the inconvenient communication between the OLC (Macao) and the FEB—the CCP (Shanghai) again and again, complaining about his uncomfortable life in China in which he was badly short of money to carry out his tasks and impeded by the language difficulties [RC f.495 op.154 d.688]. In another letter he went so far as to say that the CCP had never allowed Indochinese commu-
nists who were trained in China to return to their homeland, detaining them in China [RC f.495 op.10a d.139].

As we have seen, the ICP had come to exercise great influence upon the Siamese CP by 1935, which was a result of the historical relations between the Indochinese communists and the communist movement in Siam. The SCP was founded in September 1930 with the unification of two communist factions—the Chinese and the Indochinese—without any Siamese members. The Chinese faction had started activities as the Siamese Special Committee of the Nanyang Communist Party since 1927, with which the former had had close relations. After its split into two special committees, one under the leadership of the Nanyang Communist Party and the other under the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the CCP, they were reunited again as the Siamese Committee of the CPM in 1930 [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.89–91].

On the other hand, the Indochinese faction, which originated from the Udon Provincial Committee of the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth founded in 1928, was composed of Annamese immigrants in Northeast Siam who had strong ties with the communist movement in Northern Annam and Laos [Furuta 1991: 181–188]. According to the directive of a representative of the Comintern, the two factions agreed to unite into one organization—the SCP—in 1930. Soon after unification, however, the newly formed SCP was split into two factions again in 1931 [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.89–91]. After that the two factions, mainly the Central Committee in Bangkok and the Regional Committee in Northeast Siam (Udon Thani), presumably acted separately within their own sphere of influence, while keeping unsteady ties between that were sometimes confrontational [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.115–116, Murashima 1993: 319–325]. The SCP’s relations with other communist parties also reflected its inner situation.

Because of the inner situation specific to the SCP, it had had close relations with the CPM until 1932, when the central organ of the SCP sustained substantial damage from repression and lost contact with the CPM. After that the ICP, especially the OLC, came to replace the position of the CPM by 1934 [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: 1.6, ll.94–95]. However, the SCP’s position between the two sponsors of the above-mentioned factions—the ICP and the CCP—was not stable. On the one hand, the SCP supported the ICP’s proposal to the Comintern and criticized the idea that the revolution in Siam should be tightly connected with the Chinese revolution, without which the former would be impossible [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: l.101]. But on the other hand, the SCP insisted in the above-mentioned letter to the ECCI that the South Pacific branch should be under the direct leadership of the Eastern Secretariat and at the same time have relations with the CCP in Shanghai [RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.112–113]. This point constitutes the main difference between the ICP and the SCP because the ICP’s proposal does not refer to its relations with the CCP at all.

As for the CPM, neither its relations with the ICP at the time of the First Congress nor its response to the ICP’s proposal was known. If we take the loss of the impor-
tant "intermediary point" [RC f.514 op.1 d.624: l.14] between the two parties in 1932 and the SCP’s failure in attempts to recover its contact with the CPM in 1934 into account [RC f.514 op.1 d.624: l.14, RC f.495 op.16 d.51: ll.34–35], relations between the ICP and the CPM are assumed to have been interrupted at the time that the ICP’s proposal was prepared prior to the First Congress. 11) During the same period, however, the FEB paid special attention to the CPM’s own network with Siam, Burma and the Dutch East Indies mainly through its Chinese immigrants’ ties [RC f.495 op.66 d.35: l.37], which had the same stance as the above-mentioned plan of the Eastern Secretariat toward the CPM in 1931.

Considering the Comintern’s remarks on the interruption of communication with the CPM in the period 1934–1935 [RC f.495 op.14 d.385], it might be assumed that in the middle of the 1930s the CPM continued activities within its own sphere of influence separate from that of the ICP. For example, the CPM tried to establish ties with the PKI organization in about 1934 [RC f.495 op.62 d.22: l.6]. The strong influence of the CCP on the revolutionary strategy of the CPM remained unchanged after that [RC f.495 op.62 d.30: ll.49–51].

Therefore, the feasibility of the ICP’s proposal was doubtful because it was not drawn from the practical activities of the three parties that had respective revolutionary networks with other communist parties but initiated by only one of them presumably without consultation among them. On the other hand, the fact that three parties had their own regional networks for revolution indicates that the frameworks for a revolution in one country designed by the Comintern had come to lose its effectiveness by the mid 1930s.

4.2 Indochinese Communists’ Historical Approaches toward their Homeland

From a historical point of view, the proposal for a South Pacific branch can be regarded as one of the Indochinese communists’ attempts to establish their own identity [cf. Furuta 1991, Furuta 1995]. It was obviously an attempt to identify themselves with present-day Southeast Asia, including Siam and Malaya within it. Although the proposal had never come into being, the fact that the CC of the ICP was located in Saigon shows that the ICP’s leadership still pointed toward that region. Therefore, Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong were unanimous in choosing to return to Saigon for their participation in indigenous activities in spite of their acute antagonism on political issues.

One of the reasons for the problem that the communists faced lay in the artificiality of their “country” created by the French colonialists, where the unified kingdom of Annam (Vietnam) had been split into three: Tonkin, Annam and Cochin

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11) Judging from the OLC’s letter to the Comintern on its activities during May 1935-June 1936, contact between the ICP and the CPM was recovered through the SCP during that period [RC f.495 op.10a d.139: l.76].
China. The peculiarity of Annam whose lands stretched from the North to the South also seems to have complicated the matter because every region has its own neighborhood: Tonkin—China, Annam—Laos and Siam, Cochin China—“South Sea” countries.

The early history of the communist movement in Indochina was outstanding for the communists’ attempts to overcome that historical destiny and at the same time the confusion it also caused. First of all, that was the case with the early communist organizations that emerged in the period 1925–1930 crowned with various geographical names: the Vietnamese Youth League (Hoi Viet Nam Thanh nien cach mang), the Revolutionary Party of Tan Viet (Tan Viet cach mang dang), the Annam Communist Party (Annam cong san dang), the Indochinese Communist League (Dong Duong Cong san lien doan), the Vietnamese Communist Party (Dang cong san Viet Nam) and the two ICPs (Dang cong san Dong Duong).\footnote{In the period 1929–1930 two parties existed calling themselves the “Indochinese Communist Party.” The earlier one was formed in 1929 mainly by the radical communists of Tonkin, who withdrew from the Youth League. This ICP merged into the VCP together with the Annam Communist Party on the initiative of Nguyen Ai Quoc in 1930. The later one was the Comintern-led ICP, which was founded in October 1930, based upon the organization of the VCP.}

It is hard to assume that every party recognized the difference between “Vietnam,” “Annam” and “Indochina” definitely, or that every party had its own geographical space for revolutionary activities distinguished from others. For example, in spite of its name “Vietnam,” the Youth League had formed an organizational network covering three regions of Annam and part of Siam with its headquarters (Tong bo) in Guangzhou or Hongkong [Việt Nam Thanh niên Cách mạng Đông chí hối. 1985: 133–155, RC f.495 op.154 d.686: l.1–10]. Furthermore, the fact that the Annam Communist Party had a branch in Hongkong also indicates that it had an expanded organizational network exceeding the territory of Annam although it criticized the name “Indochina” for its vastness [Dang cong san Viet Nam 1977: 257].

As for the Indochinese Communist League, the following explanation given to its members on its foundation (November 1929) shows that the base of its practical activities had no link to the name of the party:

Because the various groups of the Central region, the South, the North [of Annam] could establish connections (liên lạc) among themselves, we named the party the Communist League (Cong san liên doan) (emphasis by the author). [RC f.495 op.154 d.668: l.73]

As we have seen already, however, the Comintern had no framework for a revolution in a country such as “Annam” or “Vietnam.” The only permitted framework for the region was “Indochina,” or more accurately French Indochina composed of
the five regions: Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China, Cambodia and Laos. Therefore the diversity in the party names had come to a halt when the Comintern-admitted communist party—the ICP—was established in October 1930 in accordance with the absolute framework “Indochina” designed by the Comintern.

Along with the confusion on the geographical names, the Indochinese communists were faced with another difficult problem: where to locate the party’s core and in which direction to enlarge their movement. In relation to their ties with the Comintern, this also meant what kind of communication line should be constructed between Indochina and Moscow, and via which intermediate stations. On that matter the ICP’s leadership at the time of the First Congress was inclined to attach importance to Cochin China, the core for the ICP’s organizational reconstruction, presupposing the communication line Moscow—the South Pacific region—Indochina. Therefore, interestingly enough, the ICP’s leadership was dissatisfied with the line Moscow—China (Shanghai, Macao)—Indochina, emphasizing the necessity for “an organ located near Indochina.” [RC f.495 op.154 d.683: 1.41] It was true that both Shanghai and Macao might be far from Indochina for those who tried to locate the party’s core in Cochin China, but neither of those cities would be too far from Indochina for those who preferred to give weight to Tonkin.

Despite the political confrontation between the leadership headed by Ha Huy Tap and Tran Van Giau, they agreed with each other on prioritizing Cochin China over the other regions. As mentioned earlier, after his return to Saigon as a Moscow-trained cadre, Tran Van Giau actively carried out organizational reconstruction in Saigon, starting from the reconstruction of the Cochin China Regional Committee (Xu uy Nam ky), and expanded his work into the area including Cochin China, South Annam and Cambodia. Although he was dismissed as leader of the ICP, its leadership succeeded his scope of activities, which were to be supervised by the newly founded Inter-regional committee of South Indochina [RC f.495 op.154 d.676: 1.38].

In contrast to those Cochin-China-oriented leaders, Nguyen Ai Quoc was of the opinion that the core of the party should be located in Tonkin. According to his own explanation for the reason in the famous paragraph in his report to the Comintern (18th February, 1930):

...The Singapore Section has written to us that, the Annam C.P. will [sic] be under the direction of Singapore.13) But, considering [sic] geographical situation (Russia - China - Annam) as well as political situation (Party more strong [sic], industries more developed [sic] in Tonkin than in Cochin China).
— I propose that, the An [nam], C.P. shall [sic] be directed from Shanghai via Hongkong. [RC f.495 op.154 d.615: 1.8]

13) The “Singapore Section” cannot be confirmed in the Comintern’s documents. Possibly it was a section of the FEB in charge of Singapore, or the Nanyang Communist Party itself.
As some scholars have pointed out, this was an attempt trial to attach Annam to “East Asia” [Furuta 1991: 126, Goscha 1999: 78]. In this respect Nguyen Ai Quoc’s standpoint was distinct from that of the ICP’s proposal in 1935, but it shared the Comintern’s communication: Moscow—Shanghai—Indochina. In comparison with the Comintern’s policy toward the East, his originality lay in the way of developing communist networks among the following regions, based on cooperation between the Annamese and the Chinese communists: Singapore, Siam, Saigon, Tonkin, Yunnan, Guangxi, Hongkong and Shanghai [RC f.495 op.154 d.615: II.8–9]. Thus Nguyen Ai Quoc put the Annam between China and Singapore whereas the FEB tried to approach to the “South Sea” countries via Malaya.

The Tonkin-oriented and pro-Chinese standpoint of Nguyen Ai Quoc had emerged earlier during his stay in Guangzhou (1924–1927). While serving on the Comintern’s Borodin mission to the Sun Wen Government and training Annamese nationalist émigrés there, he planned in 1925 to set up some “communication bases” in Guangxi, the southernmost part of Guangdong and Siam for the Annamese nationalists recruited for his training school, all of which are located on the way to Tonkin and Northern Annam (Nghe An and Ha Tinh) [RC f.495 op.154 d.594: 1.30].

After the establishment of the ICP, however, Nguyen Ai Quoc’s standing could never become predominant within the leadership as his position in the party weakened during his stay in Moscow (1934–1938) because of his nationalist-patriotic ideas totally incompatible with the ultra-left line of the Comintern at that time. As for Nguyen Ai Quoc himself, the fact that he left Moscow for China in 1938 shows that he had never abandoned his own view on the location of Annam even during the difficulties in Moscow. After that, he spent several years carrying out political activities in the southernmost border area in China, trying to make contact with indigenous party organizations and constructing networks among the Annamese immigrants there until his return to the homeland in 1941.

Besides the two above-mentioned views toward Indochina or Annam, a third way of approaching Indochina was outstanding among communists who had fled Nghe An and Ha Tinh to Siam via Laos and had set up the Indochinese Assistance Section (1932–1935) attached to the SCP there to support the ICP’s reconstruction work. Their main effort was directed toward the organizational reconstruction in Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Laos [Furuta 1991: 188–192]. It seems that at the beginning of 1932 some members of the Section wrote a letter to the French Communist Party under the name of the “Provisional Committee” of the ICP, which was never approved by the Comintern. Such an act, needless to say, caused criticism from the Comintern. However, interestingly this incident shows that some members of the ICP preferred to give priority to the main area of their own activities along the route Northern Annam—Laos—Siam as the ICP’s core.

Thus, at the time of the First Congress of the ICP among the Indochinese communists there were three different ways of approaching their homeland but it was
still uncertain which one would be best to carry out the Indochinese revolution successfully. In retrospect it was Nguyen Ai Quoc’s viewpoint, especially on the lifeline “Russia—China—Annam” and the importance of Tonkin that brought about political and military victory to post-war ICP—VWP, because it was inseparably related to the existence of the Sino-Vietnamese border area and the aid from the PRC and the USSR. Southern provinces of China, Guangxi and Guangdong, were also important for his own life as it is well known that in his last years (1964–1968) he spent a few months every year in receiving medical treatment there [Guang Xi She hui ke xue yuan 1995: 148–151]. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that Nguyen Ai Quoc continued to point toward Tonkin or North Annam, the present-day northern part of Vietnam via China until his death despite his politically created image as the symbol of unified Vietnam.

5. Power Struggle after the First Congress and its Aftermath

5.1 Power Struggle after the First Congress and the End of the ICP Leadership Reigned of the Moscow-trained Cadres

After the First Congress, the dispute within the party leadership concentrated upon the introduction of the Comintern’s new policy adopted at its Seventh World Congress in summer 1935, the main aim of which was to build up a popular antifascist front everywhere in the world. The starting point of the dispute was the “Plenum of the CC” held in Shanghai in July 1936, which was in fact a meeting of the OLC because of the virtual collapse of the CC by that time. It was Le Hong Phong who presided over the “Plenum” for the first time after his return to China in order to supplement the shortcomings of the resolutions of the First Congress, which had been convened prior to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. This “Plenum” marked the opening of the “Democratic Front period” (1936–1939) in the ICP’s history, which was characterized by the establishment of a popular front to unite various political factions and the broad masses on the basis of the temporary abandonment of the ultra-leftist line.

The policy change of the ICP, however, raised a serious problem to the indigenous communists who had continued secret party activities for a long time because a document of the “Plenum” (26th July, 1936) pointed out the necessity of “abandoning the forms of narrow and secret organization and making use of all the legal and semi-legal possibilities” for the absorption of the broader masses. Concretely, it offered to rename the existing secret mass organizations of the party in accordance with the purpose of the new policy [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: 1.106, ll.111–112].

Although he participated in the “Plenum” in Shanghai, Ha Huy Tap began to oppose the OLC’s guidelines on the mass organization after his return to Saigon, denouncing the other members of the OLC, Le Hong Phong and Nguyen Ngoc Vy, as “right-wing opportunists” and “liquidators,” who were alleged to have recommended
the “complete dissolution of the Young Communist League, the trade unions, International Red Aid, the peasant unions and other mass organizations” for their replacement by legal and semi-legal organizations for friendship, mutual aid, sport and culture [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: ll.162–163]. He insisted on the maintenance of the mass organizations and their illegal sectors, explaining the reason:

The two right-wing opportunists oppose the existence of the illegal organizations. It is a simple utopia and ridiculous theory because in Indochina there is no freedom of organizations at all. [Ibid.]

Therefore it was very natural that the CC headed by Ha Huy Tap made a series of decisions contrary to OLC policy in its directive to the party organizations (20th March, 1937), including the abolishment of the OLC’s document (26th July, 1936), the maintenance of the secret sector in mass organizations and the existing mass organizations with slight changes to their names [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: ll.111–112].

Faced with strong opposition from Ha Huy Tap, the OLC sent a document to the CC to explain the abolished document (26th July, 1936) and to criticize his sectionalism. But Ha Huy Tap’s refusal to circulate the OLC’s document prevented the OLC from counterattacking Ha Huy Tap’s maneuver. As a result, the OLC had to dispatch Nguyen Ngoc Vy to Saigon to persuade the CC to follow the OLC’s policy. It was not until after the enlarged Plenum of the CC held in Gia Dinh in August 1937 that the CC finally admitted the OLC’s principles on mass organizations and abandoned their way of organizing the masses in secret forms, which were explained to be too short for “directing and persuading the broader masses.” [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: ll.122–123]

Although the CC admitted the OLC’s principles in general, it was divided into two groups with respect to the treatment of the Anti-imperialist Youth League. Ha Huy Tap’s advocates insisted that the party should maintain the League as a secret training organ while developing a general organization for youth. The others insisted upon the abolishment of the name of the League and its shift to a general organization, the enlargement of the organization for youth and the abolishment of the illegal sector, following the policy of the Comintern and the OLC. Finally Ha Huy Tap’s opinion won a majority at the enlarged Plenum, where eight of the thirteen participants supported his opinion. However, the CC refrained from making a clear-cut decision on that problem, only mentioning the necessity for “organizing and developing the young masses in legal or semi-legal forms”. The final decision on the problem of the League was left to the Comintern [Ibid.].

The fact that it took more than one year for the Comintern and the OLC to

14) For example, the Young Communist League was renamed the “Indochinese Anti-imperialist Youth League.”
make the CC adopt the new principles on the mass organizations indicates the decline of the Comintern’s influence upon the ICP as well as the contradictions involved in its strategy for world revolution which depended on Moscow-trained cadres for the pervasion of the Comintern’s policy throughout the world. Ha Huy Tap’s opposition to the OLC’s new policy derived from his merging with the indigenous communists in part, which was not the case with Le Hong Phong at that time. Ha Huy Tap’s case shows that it was difficult for a Moscow-trained cadre to succeed in building dialogue with the indigenous communists and at the same time remain obedient to the Comintern.

Following the enlarged Plenum in August 1937, the Plenum of the CC held in Gia Dinh in March 1938 marks a major turning point in ICP—Comintern relations. At the Plenum, Ha Huy Tap was dismissed as General Secretary because of his “political faults,” mainly his “sectarian tendency” on the policy toward mass organizations [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: 1.3], and replaced by a 26-year-old indigenous communist Nguyen Van Cu. This is the first time an indigenous communist occupied the supreme position within the party, following the two Moscow-trained General Secretaries Tran Phu and Ha Huy Tap. The details of the Plenum, especially the reason for Nguyen Van Cu’s election as general secretary, are still unknown. Only recently some sources pointed out that Nguyen Van Cu’s efforts to resolve the confrontation between Le Hong Phong and Ha Huy Tap and his initiative in the formation of a “Democratic United Front” to unite the fragmented political groups were highly appreciated at the Plenum [Vien nghie cuu Ho Chi Minh va cac lanh tu cua Dang 1997b: 13]. Le Duan, who took part in the Plenum, later referred to Nguyen Van Cu’s personality as follows:

He was younger than us, Le Hong Phong and Ha Huy Tap by five to ten years but he had a unique brain amongst the party, with political sensitivity and ability. Moreover he had a talent for uniting and persuading his colleagues. He was a communist with high morality and respected by everyone. [Ibid.]

That is almost all that we know about Nguyen Van Cu’s role at the Plenum today. But if we take the ICP’s relations with the Comintern into account, some outstanding features of the Plenum can be pointed out. In the first place, it is very difficult to judge who was the real winner at the Plenum. Although dismissed from the supreme position, Ha Huy Tap still remained in the CC as a member of the Political Bureau and the Secretariat, which is sufficient to assume that he maintained his influence upon the party after the Plenum [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: 1.3]. As for the indigenous communists, most of them, including Nguyen Van Cu, could carry out their activities for less than two years until their arrests in 1939–1940.

Secondly, the fact that Le Hong Phong, the Comintern-sponsored candidate for the General Secretary, failed to occupy the supreme position of the party shows the
dramatic decline of the Comintern’s control upon the ICP. In striking contrast to the case of the First Congress, some important information on the March Plenum was delivered from the ICP to the Comintern only after its closing, in which even the new General Secretary was only referred to as an “amnestied political offender” and his name was not mentioned at all [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: 1.3]. Thus, obviously there was no room for the Comintern to make any commitment to the important decisions of the Plenum, which were carried out entirely on the ICP’s own initiative without any consultation with the Comintern. However, such action by the ICP does not mean it neglects the Comintern; on the contrary it wished to “establish close relations between the Comintern and the ICP” and demanded that the Comintern should send directive documents, money and courier to the ICP regularly [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: ll.4–5]. At the same time, the ICP also requested the French Communist Party to send its members to Indochina to set up a section or an information bureau of the party for the formation of a democratic front, and to “organize regular relations between the two parties” [Ibid.]. The ICP’s demands to both the Comintern and the FCP indicates that the ICP had no choice but to make important decisions on the replacement of the leadership at its own initiative in an isolated situation.

On the other hand, the ties between the Comintern and the ICP were weakened by the Comintern’s reorganization in the autumn 1935, the main aim of which lay in the abolition of the regional secretariats and the foundation of the ten secretariats headed by Stalin’s loyal followers, G. Dimitrov (General Secretary), P. Togliatti, D.S. Manuilsky, A. Marty, O. Kuusinen, W. Florin, Wang Ming, D. Ibarruri, M.A. Trilisser and K. Gottwald [Rees and Thorpe 1998: 50–51, Adibekov 1997:188–191]. This was another kind of Euro-centric reorganization of the Comintern. For example, Manuilsky’s secretariat took charge of the communist parties of France, Italy, Spain,15 Belgium, Portugal, Luxembourg and the colonies of France, Italy and Belgium, including the ICP. In other words, these were the communist parties of some European metropolises and their colonies. As a result of the reorganization, the Comintern was inclined to transfer its own responsibility for supervising the communist parties in the colonies to their counterparts in European metropolises.

As for the ICP, the Secretariat of the ECCI had the following plan to strengthen the FCP’s ties with the ICP in 1938,16 which was approved by Manuilsky later: A member of the CC of the ICP should join the CC of the FCP, and “one of the leading comrades” of the FCP should be dispatched to Indochina to communicate with the ICP and provide permanent aid for it [RC f.495 op.20 d.247: 1.237]. While the

15) After 1939 the newly founded Ibarruri’s secretariat took charge of the communist parties of Spain and the Latin American countries.
16) For example, the Secretariat of the ECCI had the same approach to the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands in 1939, recommending the latter to sustain permanent ties with the Communist Party of the USA [RC f.495 op.20 d.560: 1.1].
Comintern was eager to induce the ICP to point to the FCP, it mentioned no plan for strengthening direct communication lines between itself and the ICP. It might be no exaggeration to say that under such policy of the Comintern at that time there was little possibility of strengthening its influence and control upon the ICP.

5.2 The Unique Position of Nguyen Ai Quoc among the Indochinese Communists trained in KUTV

While Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong were struggling with each other for the party leadership, Nguyen Ai Quoc, who was about ten years older than them and had a longer career of communist activities than them, remained in Moscow, separated from the other communists from Indochina. His nationalist-patriot ideas and the formation of the VCP on his own initiative had already deepened his isolation among his colleagues prior to his arrival in Moscow. The main tasks of the ICP’s first leadership headed by Tran Phu (1930–1931) consisted of establishing the party’s legitimacy while criticizing Nguyen Ai Quoc for his arbitrary action and removing his influence on the domestic communists, together with all the documents drafted by him [RC f.495 op.154 d.616: ll.112–113, f.495 op.154 d.632: l.49]. At the same time, in KUTV the Indochinese students headed by Ha Huy Tap also criticized the political documents of the communist groups in Indochina prior to the Comintern-led ICP, including the brief program of the VCP drafted by Nguyen Ai Quoc, from the ultra-leftist point of view of the Comintern at that time [RC f.532 op.1 d.384: ll.24–29].

After the collapse of the ICP’s first leadership, Nguyen Ai Quoc’s position never improved. At the First Congress, Nguyen Ai Quoc’s main work, “The Revolutionary Path” (Duong Kach Menh), was criticized for its “idealist reformism and nationalist theory” [RC f.495 op.154 d.683: l.5] and the OLC also demanded that Nguyen Ai Quoc should write a brochure criticizing his own false past [RC f.495 op.154 d.688: l.13]. Finally, the roles assigned to the oldest communist from Indochina at the Congress were as a candidate for CC membership and the party’s representative to the Comintern, whose main task was to translate the documents of the Congress by himself or to revise documents translated by Indochinese students in KUTV [RC f.495 op.154 d.688: l.9]. In addition to that, the OLC gave him a harsh warning: “The party will attribute to comrade Line [Nguyen Ai Quoc] all responsibility for political mishaps caused by poor translation of the Congress materials.” [Ibid.] Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that Nguyen Ai Quoc was forced to serve as Ha Huy Tap’s translator and messenger under the name of “representative.”

Paradoxically though, it was not his communist colleagues from Indochina but Vasilieva, the actual commander in chief of the ICP in Moscow, who protected Nguyen Ai Quoc from attack by Ha Huy Tap during his stay in Moscow.17) She refused

17) Vasilieva V.Y.(1900–1959) worked as a specialist in Indochina at the ECCI and KUTV in the period 1931–1938. After that, she moved to the Institute of World Economy and World Politics
Congress’ request concerning Nguyen Ai Quoc, stating the following reason:

With respect to Ai Quoc, we think that he must study seriously and hard for a further two years and he cannot indulge in any thing else. After his study, we have a special plan to make use of him. Therefore your requests on Ai Quoc cannot be approved. We ask you to recommend another candidate as representative. [RC f.495 op.154 d.585: I.12]

Thanks to her protection, Nguyen Ai Quoc could continue to study in the International Lenin School as the sole Indochinese student (1934–1936) and at the graduate school of the Research Institute for National and Colonial Problems (NIINKP) (1936–1938) without being involved in the inner power struggle for the party leadership. Vasilieva’s positive attitude to Nguyen Ai Quoc was basically generated from her respect for Nguyen Ai Quoc’s distinct talent for organization and prestige among the indigenous communists. From 1934 on she often expressed her own private opinion on Nguyen Ai Quoc’s role on the formation of the VCP, which was in marked contrast to that of Tran Phu or Ha Huy Tap. Clearly she aimed to affirm Nguyen Ai Quoc’s action in 1930, fabricating a story as follows: “Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc, who has a special task of unification [of the party] from the Comintern, is the founder of the ICP,” or attributing responsibility for the faults of the unification conference not to Nguyen Ai Quoc but to its failure in recruiting “excellent communists”18) [RC f.495 op.154 d.577: I.36, f.495 op.154 d.531: I.42]. Following her continued efforts, finally the historical role of Nguyen Ai Quoc was rehabilitated in the inner documents of the Comintern on the ICP’s history on its seventh anniversary in 1936: “It [the unification of the party] was a creative action almost in accordance with Comintern’s intentions. Thereafter, in Indochina a unified communist party has been established.” [RC f.495 op.10a d.139a: I.10]

Along with her trials to rehabilitate Nguyen Ai Quoc in the ICP, Vasilieva had made a “special plan” to dispatch him to China to manage a planned training school for communist cadres that was the same as his Political Training School in Guangzhou [RC f.495 op.30 d.1175: II.95–96], which, coupled with his approach to Indochina, was to decide his destiny thereafter. By the time of his departure for China in 1938 her confidence in Nguyen Ai Quoc had grown to the point that she expected him to cope with the split in the party leadership [RC f.495 op.74 d.261: I.1].

Although Nguyen Ai Quoc himself was never satisfied with his “idleness” in

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18) It is impossible to suppose that Nguyen Ai Quoc had such “special tasks”, considering the party’s name “Vietnamese CP” and the political contents of its program. Cf. Kurihara 1994.
Moscow alienated from the practical revolutionary movement [Sokolov 1998: 88], it is undeniable that his stay in Moscow (1934–1938) and Vasilev’s support for him gave him an advantage in his political activities thereafter. Soon after his arrival in Yan’an (China) via Xinjiang in 1938, the political situation in Indochina changed dramatically. Following the collapse of the Popular Front government in Paris, the French colonial government resumed oppression of communists in Indochina. In the period 1939–1940 the ICP’s main leaders, including Le Hong Phong, Nguyen Van Cu, Ha Huy Tap and Nguyen Thi Minh Khai had been arrested and jailed with the lone exception of Phan Dang Luu. Faced with the virtual collapse of the Central Committee in Saigon, the initiative to reconstruct the party’s core was to begin in Tonkin under the initiative of Dang Xuan Khu (alias Truong-Chinh), a member of the Tonkin Regional Committee (Xu uy Bac Ky) in cooperation with Hoang Van Thu, Hoang Quoc Viet, Tran Dang Ninh, etc. [Hoang Tung 1990: 27] At the Plenum of the CC held in November 1940 at Dinh Bang village (Bac Ninh Province), a Provisional CC was formed and Dang Xuan Khu was elected as acting general secretary of the ICP.

It can surely be said that the two fault lines which tear off the ICP’s history were formed successively during the short period 1938–1940. The first fault line consisted of the personnel change in the composition of the ICP’s leadership. In particular Ha Huy Tap’s execution and Le Hong Phong’s death in jail marked the end of the reign by Moscow-trained cadres. It was true that at the end of the 1930s at least four Moscow-trained cadres—Nguyen Ai Quoc, Nguyen Ngoc Vy (alias Phung Chi Kien), Nguyen Van Dut and Tran Van Giau—still had survived the repression but with the exception of Nguyen Ai Quoc they were far from promising cadres for the Comintern, unlike Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong. Therefore, as we have seen, at that time Nguyen Ai Quoc was the sole Moscow-trained cadre to be expected by the Comintern to play an important role.

The second fault line consisted in the shift of the party’s core from Cochin China to Tonkin, which was accompanied with a shift in the core of the mass movement led by the party after the collapse of the party organizations in Cochin China generated by the failed uprising in Cochin China (Nam Ky Khoi Nghia) in 1940.

The incident symbolizing the continuation of the results brought about by these fault lines was the Eighth Plenum of the CC held in May 1941 at Pac Bo (Cao Bang Province), which is famous for Nguyen Ai Quoc’s presence at the ICP’s core for the first time after his return to Tonkin. Prior to the Eighth Plenum, he successfully found in Kunming a series of communists and non-communist nationalists who sympathized with his political ideas, including Nguyen Ngoc Vy, Vu Anh, Hoang Van Hoan, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap. With the exception of Nguyen Ngoc Vy, all of

19) Nguyen Ngoc Vy, Vu Anh and Hoang Van Hoan were the members of the ICP’s Overseas Committee (Ban hai ngoai) founded in Kunming in 1939 [Huang Zheng 1987]. Relations between the OLC and the Overseas Committee were unknown. Although Nguyen Ngoc Vy was an OLC
them were indigenous revolutionaries with no experience of training in KUTV. After that, at the beginning of 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc finally succeeded in making contact with the Provisional CC headed by Dang Xuan Khu, which also dispatched Hoang Van Thu to Jingxi (Guangxi) to find him. Therefore it was this dialogue of the oldest Moscow-trained cadre with the indigenous communists that constituted the special feature for the core of the post-war leadership of the ICP—VWP—VCP.

The newly-elected formal CC at the Plenum was occupied by the eight indigenous communists from Tonkin and Annam and two members of the Overseas Committee (Nguyen Ngoc Vy and Vu Anh) [Hoang Tung 1990: 78]. It was an indigenous communist from Tonkin—Dang Xuan Khu—who was elected as General Secretary at the Plenum. According to Dang Xuan Khu, Nguyen Ai Quoc was request ed to undertake the duties of the General Secretary directly at the Plenum, but he declined the offer, saying, “I am fulfilling the tasks assigned by the Comintern. The Comintern may dispatch me to somewhere else, so I cannot fulfill the tasks of the General Secretary of the party.” In his place, he recommended Dang Xuan Khu as general secretary [Hoang Tung 1990: 78].

In consequence Nguyen Ai Quoc offered the supreme position in the party to the younger indigenous communist. Thus, his manner of association with the indigenous communists is in striking contrast to that of Ha Huy Tap and Le Hong Phong, both of whom struggled with each other for the party leadership and failed in building stable dialogue with them. Thereafter, Nguyen Ai Quoc was to devote himself to uniting a broad stratum of the Vietnamese (Annamese) people into a national front for the independence of Vietnam, later known as Viet Minh. His nationalist-patriotic ideas, which had been oppressed under the ultra-leftist line of the Comintern, had a chance to bloom again for that purpose.

In the end, it was his success in merging into the indigenous communists, coupled with his manner of approach to Indochina, that enabled him to pass through these fault lines that none of the other Moscow-trained cadres could hurdle. In other words, that is the reason that Nguyen Ai Quoc occupies a unique position in the history of the ICP. To be exact, it is true that there were some Moscow-trained cadres who survived the above-mentioned period like Tran Van Giau, Nguyen Ngoc Vy, Nguyen Van Dut, Nguyen Khanh Toan and Bui Cong Trung, along with Nguyen Ai Quoc, but none of them could play important roles in the political life of post-war Vietnam except Nguyen Ai Quoc, who won the supreme positions of party and state—Chairman of the CC of the VWP and the President of the DRV. Although Nguyen Khanh Toan and Bui Cong Trung were promoted to the rank of candidates for CC membership of the VWP before their exclusion from the CC, they were mainly

member, the other two were indigenous communists who had not trained in Moscow. Taking this composition into account, the Overseas Committee seems to have had little relation to the Comintern.
assigned to carry out academic research under the communist regime of the DRV-SRV, the same as was Tran Van Giau. Such was the position that the VWP’s leadership—dominated by indigenous communists—afforded to the ex-KUTV students who had been trained to be leading communist cadres after their return to their homeland.

6. Conclusion

The First Congress of the ICP brought to light the various problems generated by the Comintern’s command system. In the first place, as the proposal on a South Pacific branch of the Eastern Secretariat shows, the Indochinese communists regarded the Comintern’s core principles for world revolution—the solid and absolute framework of “revolution in one country” and the separate existence of every communist party within it—as unfit for their revolutionary movement in practice. The ICP’s leadership, headed by Ha Huy Tap, tried to replace the Comintern-fixed framework for “Indochina” with a new one, the “South Pacific” countries, where the united action of the three communist parties was supposed to be indispensable. This was also an attempt to alter the existing communication line between Moscow and Indochina via China into a new one: Moscow—“South Pacific” region—Indochina.

The bold challenge of the ICP to the Comintern’s core principles raised the latter’s negative response to Congress’ proposal. In consequence, the Comintern’s persistence in its core principles and virtual denial of any proposal from below prevented the ICP’s self-assertion from coming into being. Thus a serious defect inherent in the Comintern’s command system became permanent: constant communication between Moscow and remote areas like Indochina, including documents and money supply, was not ensured at all. Therefore it was only natural that after the First Congress, Ha Huy Tap came to increase the range of his own discretion within the framework of the Comintern’s policy.

Secondly, as for Ha Huy Tap, the First Congress of the ICP could have been an important opportunity for his obtaining a steadfast footing among the indigenous communists. However, after that he spent three years in a power struggle with Le Hong Phong for the party leadership. Because of the prolonged power struggle, neither Ha Huy Tap nor Le Hong Phong succeeded in building the firm dialogue with the indigenous communists. Therefore the election of the indigenous communist Nguyen Van Cu as the General Secretary marks the overthrow of the reign of the Moscow-trained cadres from the part of the indigenous communists as well as the end of the Comintern-led revolutionary strategy of the ICP.

Needless to say, the birth of an indigenous General Secretary alone is not sufficient to ensure the victory for the ICP, as Nguyen Van Cu’s tragic end in Saigon demonstrates. If we take the history of Vietnamese communism into account, another factor for its victory should be pointed out: the location of the party’s core. From
a historical point of view, Nguyen Ai Quoc was the only Moscow-trained cadre that could overcome those difficult factors for a communist victory, while Ha Huy Tap, Le Hong Phong and Nguyen Van Cu could not overcome all of them. It was in this respect that Nguyen Ai Quoc should be distinguished from the other leaders of the ICP in the 1930s.

The First Congress of the ICP and its aftermath have called the official party history of the VCP into question, in which the harmonious relations between the Comintern and the indigenous communists of the ICP have been emphasized, while indicating that the history of the ICP—VWP—VCP involved several severe fault lines on the composition of the leadership and the location of the party's core, not to mention its policy change. This paper will only be a step towards the next study of an alternative history of the ICP.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a revised and supplemented version of my paper “The First Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party (1935): Some Reflections on Comintern—ICP Relations” presented at the International Conference for Vietnamese Studies held at Ba Dinh Conference Hall in Hanoi in July 1998. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Ishii Akira (University of Tokyo), Prof. Furuta Motoo (University of Tokyo), Dr. G.M. Maslov (the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), Dr. A.A. Sokolov (the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) for their helpful comments and information for the draft of this paper.

List of Abbreviations

CC: Central Committee
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
CPM: Communist Party of Malaya
d.: delo (file)
ECCE: Executive Committee of the Communist International
f.: fond (collection)
FEB: Far Eastern Bureau
ICP: Indochinese Communist Party
KUTV: Communist University of the Workers of the East
l.: list (folio)
OLC: Overseas Leadership Committee of the ICP
op.: opis’ (inventory)
PKI: Communist Party of Indonesia
RC: Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary Historical Documents, Moscow.
SCP: Siamese Communist Party
VCP: Vietnamese Communist Party
VWP: Vietnamese Workers Party
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