

## Reinvented Revolutionaries: Indonesian and Filipino Communist Exiles in China\*

There is an abruptness to exile. Exile is defined far less by our distance from any particular place or people and far more by the consciousness that they are irrevocably unreachable. In counterpoint, our sense of cosmopolitanism rests not in the act of travel but in its possibility. It is for this reason, the curtailment not simply of travel but also the imagined possibility of travel, that the Covid-19 pandemic has bred a sense of exile around the globe. Even if we are now trapped in what we would regard as home, many of us nonetheless have a jarring sense of fixity, a feeling that we are exiled global citizens. We necessarily and often unconsciously adapt our routines and habits—and imperceptibly but ineluctably our goals and beliefs will change as well—in keeping with the much altered world and our much altered place within it.

Marx and Engels famously described the impact on social relations and human consciousness of capitalism's constant revolutionizing of production and the movement of commodities throughout its global circuits, "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned."<sup>1</sup> Inertia is such that the rapid cessation of motion produces a similar sublimation. There are moments when the abrupt onset of exile, the sudden stillness, breeds an almost apocalyptic sensibility.

The significance of the changes that beset our lives are seldom immediately apparent. This is less a matter of denial, and more an expression of the fact that the ten thousand logical consequences of the altered world in which we live only gradually manifest themselves. As the authors of this paper grappled with the pandemic, its impact on our families, on our spouses' careers or our ability to visit our children residing beyond the rigid national barriers of quarantine, we were instinctively drawn to a set of parallel projects that had long lingered at the edges of our research: the remarkable stories of certain Indonesian and Filipino sojourners in China who were abruptly exiled by political catastrophe.

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1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, 2002), 223.

What became clear to us was that the exiles were compelled to reinvent themselves, in alternate and conflicting ways. The strain of exile accentuated nuances of personal character and political perspective that might otherwise have lain dormant. Our exiles pursued starkly divergent paths. We found that by examining the historical onset and outcome of this exile, we gained a heightened awareness of the social and personal alterations in the world today, not so much their direction as their ubiquity. Like earlier exiles we are in the process of reinventing ourselves.

In 1971, Utuy Tatang Sontani travelled from Beijing to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway. An accomplished playwright widely recognized as a representative figure of post-independence Indonesian literature, Sontani had arrived in Beijing in September 1965 to attend the sixteenth national day celebration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and to undergo medical treatment afterwards.<sup>2</sup> Yet his plans were derailed when merely three days after he had watched the parades on Tian'anmen Square, Jakarta woke up to the shocking news that a group of Indonesian military officers, calling themselves the September Thirtieth Movement, had kidnapped and murdered six senior anti-Communist generals in the Indonesian army. In the following months, the archipelago became enveloped in one of the bloodiest episodes of mass political violence in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Sontani was confronted with the hard truth that returning home meant a death sentence to him—a left-wing intellectual associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Under the protection of the Chinese government, Sontani and his fellow Indonesian exiles lived a materially privileged life and were exempt from the economic hardship faced by ordinary Chinese citizens. Yet they were segregated from the general Chinese population and constantly surveilled by their minders. The nonstop political campaigns during the tempestuous Cultural Revolution caused internal fissures among the exiles and challenged their previously utopian views of China.<sup>4</sup> To escape from the suffocating environment, Sontani endured an excruciatingly long journey, adapted to a new environment at the age of fifty-one, and suffered the loss of the friendships of his comrades who stayed in China and felt betrayed by his decision to leave.

In the same year of Sontani's departure, a youth delegation representing the Movement for a Democratic Philippines, an umbrella organization of various

2. Utuy Tatang Sontani, *Di Bawah Langit Tak Terbintang* (Jakarta, 2001), 78.

3. On the September Thirtieth Movement and ensuing mass killings in Indonesia, there are a number of recent works including John Roosa, *Buried Histories: The Anticommunist Massacres of 1965–1966 in Indonesia* (Seattle, WA, 2020); Vanessa Hearman, *Unmarked Graves: Death and Survival in the Anti-Communist Violence in East Java, Indonesia* (Singapore, 2018); Jess Melvin, *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder* (Abingdon, 2018); and Geoffrey B. Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–1966* (Princeton, NJ, 2018).

4. David T. Hill, "Cold War Polarization, Delegated Party Authority, and Diminishing Exilic Options: The Dilemma of Indonesian Exilic Options," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 176 (2020): 359–360.

protest groups, landed in China for an all-expenses-paid, three-week study tour. Three days after their arrival, when visiting the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary base in Yan'an, twenty-three-year-old Chito Sta. Romana was asked by his Chinese interpreter what the Latin phrase "habeas corpus" meant.<sup>5</sup> In August 1971, a Liberal Party election rally in Plaza Miranda, long regarded as the center of public political life, was bombed. Three grenades thrown on stage killed nine people and wounded over 100 others. No one was ever sentenced for the crime. Leading the list of those suspected of plotting the bombing are President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos as well as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Among those who would later accuse the CPP of responsibility for the bombing was Mario Miclat, one of the party's China exiles. Within hours of the bombing, Marcos suspended the writ of habeas corpus and in September 1972, he declared martial law.<sup>6</sup> Sta. Romana and many left-wing students who were blacklisted by the government would almost certainly face arrest upon their return. The interpreter's enquiry became the question that redefined the life trajectory of Sta. Romana and four of his fellow delegates in the next decade and beyond. As the five of them decided to stay in China to avoid political persecution at home, they faced another unforeseen change: The People's Republic, the revolutionary model which inspired left-wing student movements in the Philippines, would soon reconcile with the United States while befriending anti-communist, authoritarian Southeast Asian governments including that of Ferdinand Marcos. Due to this redirection of Chinese foreign policy, the Filipino and Indonesian visitors would no longer be honorable guests but an embarrassment to their host.

When travel becomes exile much of the colorful pageantry of the foreign takes on muted tones and, in its place, we find a cold, alien landscape. Although Sontani and the young Filipinos probably never met in China, the dilemmas they faced were strikingly similar both to each other, and to those many of us face today during the pandemic. Abrupt political upheavals in their home countries stranded these temporary travelers indefinitely in a foreign land. The exiles' experiences have been buried in history due to both the secrecy surrounding China's aid to Southeast Asian communist movements and the marginality of these individuals in macro-level studies of diplomacy. By unearthing these little-known individual stories and connecting them to our current circumstances, we gain a sharper awareness of how exile alters us and how we respond by reinventing ourselves.

If "cabin fever" in quarantine is hard to bear, imagine living inside compounds behind high walls and guarded by People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers during China's Cultural Revolution. Barred from casual interaction with

5. Clarissa V. Militante, "The Exiles in China," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* 8, nos. 1–2 (1999): 197.

6. Joseph Scalice, "Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines, 1957–1974," (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2017): 659–72.

ordinary Chinese and direct participation in the volatile political campaigns that swept across China, the exiles nevertheless reproduced a similar, if not more intense, series of personal attacks among themselves, which sometimes escalated to physical fights (a sword duel in the Filipino case) and led to depression. “In the hearts of the Chinese people, there won’t be any name other than Mao Zedong; in the sky of China, the stars are overshadowed by a middle noon sun that never sets,” Sontani thus explained why he entitled his fictionalized memoir about his life in China as “Under a Starless Sky.”<sup>7</sup> This ambiguous genre helped Sontani avoid liability when discussing the sensitive politics within the polarized exile community while giving him the freedom to unleash his cold-eyed critique.

Between 1967 and 1975, Francisca Fanggidaej, a Dutch-educated, left-wing Indonesian women’s rights activist, stayed eight long years in the VIP wing of a hospital in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, a microcosm of several other Indonesian exile patients and their Chinese medical staff. To fight off “anxiety, boredom, restlessness and despair,” Fanggidaej turned to Mao’s teachings to energize the monotonous day-to-day life, to alleviate the stress caused by the dense human relationships under confinement, and to suppress her worries and longings for the husband and seven children she left behind in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> In 1967, Christmas greetings from a Dutch radio broadcast brought back memories of her family and Fanggidaej could not hold back her tears. In her diary, she soon criticized herself for being carried away by “petty bourgeois feelings” and tried to normalize her personal sufferings as part of the national tragedy in Indonesia in 1965–1966, which prepared the nation for a Mao-style proletarian revolution. The Indonesian Communists, learning from their past mistake of following the revisionist, peaceful, parliamentary road, would “bury the corpses of their fallen comrades, clean the blood from their bodies, and lift the weapons they left behind.” “Rebel is justified!” Writing from her hospital bed in Guangzhou, Francisca imagined in her diaries the surviving PKI members lighting “sparks of revolution” in the forests and valleys of Indonesia and starting “a prairie fire” for the entire world.<sup>9</sup> On each of her seven children’s birthdays, she wrote them stories about Maoist revolutionary youths—a girl guerilla fighter in South Vietnam, a brave Soviet student who challenged his teacher about “bourgeois humanist” Russian literature, and Hong Kong teenagers who rioted against the British in 1966—as birthday gifts. Her children would never receive these gifts due to the complete severing of communications between China and Indonesia following the freezing of bilateral diplomatic ties.

7. Sontani, *Di Bawah Langit Tak Terbintang*, 102–103.

8. Francisca Fanggidaej diary entry April 18, 1974, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers, (1962–2003), Institute of International Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (hereafter Francisca Fanggidaej Papers).

9. Francisca Fanggidaej diary entry December 22, 1967, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers.



**Figure 1:** Francisca Fanggidaej in 1966. Collection of the Institute of International Social History, Amsterdam. Courtesy of Reza Rahadian.

The international mobility of Fanggidaej and Sontani was propelled by a vision of unity among the newly independent countries, which culminated in the Bandung Conference of 1955. Sukarno, the charismatic host, took on a major diplomatic role in the affairs of the Third World while directing Indonesia towards a balanced position in relation to both superpowers. Sukarno's neutrality in the 1950s facilitated a rich transnational intellectual, social, and cultural exchange across the world, allowing Indonesian students, artists, writers, and journalists to study, tour, and participate in professional events in China and the Eastern bloc.<sup>10</sup> Bandung also marked the high point of China's Third World

10. Anna Dragojlovic, "Materiality, Loss and Redemptive Hope in the Indonesian Leftist Diaspora" *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2010): 161–162. See also Katherine McGregor and Vanessa Hearman, "Challenging the Lifeline of Imperialism: Reassessing Afro-Asian Solidarity and Related Activism in the Decade 1955–1965," in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures*, eds. Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah (Cambridge 2017), 161–176; and Liu Hong, "The transnational construction of 'national allegory': China and the cultural politics of postcolonial Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2006): 179–210.

diplomacy. The charming Premier Zhou Enlai successfully presented a non-threatening image of the PRC to the decolonizing world, promising non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. In 1949, Mao had envisioned the victory of the Chinese Communist Revolution as a milestone in the human story and harbored the ambition to create the headquarters for Asian revolutions in China. Yet after the Geneva Conference of 1954, Beijing had temporarily ceased its support to foreign communist insurgencies in pursuit of an easing of international tensions.<sup>11</sup> At Bandung, although still a member of the Communist bloc and an ally of the Soviet Union, China expressed interest in joining hands with countries such as Indonesia and India to construct an alternative world order, a framework which would prevent the formerly colonized nations from being dragged into an all-consuming superpower competition.<sup>12</sup> China's relations with Indonesia were a major building block of its peace offensive among the newly emerging Third World countries. Although its ties with the PKI, the world's largest non-ruling communist party, became increasingly cordial into the early 1960s, Beijing still sought solidarity with the "bourgeois nationalist" leader Sukarno and valued state-to-state collaboration with his government.<sup>13</sup>

By 1965, the optimistic non-aligned cosmopolitanism of Bandung was but a fond memory; war and dictatorship gripped Southeast Asia. Washington's mass deployment of forces to Vietnam beginning in March 1965 and the brutal rise to power of the Suharto regime presaged a far darker future. These geopolitical tensions sharpened the split in the uneasy comradeship of the Soviet Union and the PRC, leading to open hostilities and then armed conflict between Moscow and Beijing. Moscow, from a position of comparative geopolitical security and industrial stability, could offer trade deals and loans to secure relations with ruling elites around the globe, including with the new Suharto government. Beijing could not match these economic blandishments, but sought to defuse the growing threat posed by the presence of hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops near its border by promoting the line of Defense Minister Lin Biao which called for Protracted People's War—armed guerrilla movements surrounding the cities of the world from the countryside, with the backing of China, which, in a reference to the armed struggles of the 1930s and 40s was seen as the "Yan'an of world revolution." In 1966, under the banner of cultural revolution, Mao unleashed the vast force of the very young, the Red Guards,

11. Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, "Leadership Transfer in the Asian Revolution: Mao Zedong and the Asian Cominform," *Cold War History* 14, no. 2 (2014): 195–213.

12. Chen Jian, "Bridging Revolution and Decolonization: The 'Bandung Discourse' in China's Early Cold War Experience," *The Chinese Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (2008): 207–241; John W. Graver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Oxford, 2016), 92–112.

13. Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2019).

against his domestic political rivals and against “Soviet Revisionism.” Thus opened the brief period of militant global Maoism.<sup>14</sup>

Among the parties most influenced by this political line was the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which was founded at the beginning of 1969, on what was termed “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought,” in opposition to the pro-Moscow line of the rival Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). The CPP looked to China as the global redoubt of armed guerrilla movements and sought arms and aid from Beijing. Delegations of CPP representatives traveled to China at the opening of the new decade to arrange their delivery. Layers of Filipino youth radicalized by growing social unrest and opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam, saw in the Cultural Revolution the embodiment of their radical ideals. Separate from the CPP delegations, groups of students likewise began to arrange to travel to China. Unbeknownst to them, however, Mao was putting an end to the export of the brief-lived militant Maoism. The Soviet crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine asserting the right of Moscow to intervene militarily in the affairs of socialist countries should they jeopardize the national interests of the USSR, posed a direct threat to Beijing should the instability of the Cultural Revolution persist. Mao turned the PLA on the protesting youth to regain control of the Cultural Revolution. Looking to forge ties with Washington in opposition to their common enemy, Moscow, Mao ostracized Lin Biao, whose political alienation led him to attempt to flee to the Soviet Union a year later. Mao established relations with Kissinger and Nixon. The political line of Protracted People’s War was abandoned, and in its stead, Beijing promoted the “Three Worlds theory,” setting itself in the tier of a “third world” along with other developing countries. On this basis, Beijing opened friendly relations with ruling elites and autocrats, among them Marcos and Chilean President Augusto Pinochet. By doing so, the Chairman ironically erected the diplomatic framework for the “restoration of capitalism” under Deng Xiaoping.<sup>15</sup>

The students and CPP delegates now stranded in China by the imposition of dictatorship by Marcos, found themselves doubly isolated, as the political line which they identified with China and with Mao was being rapidly and publicly repudiated. Among them was Mario I. Miclat, a member of the CPP underground delegation who stayed in China from 1971 to 1986. He and his wife, together with six other delegates and the three young children of the CPP leader

14. On the Sino-Soviet split and its implications for parties around the world, see Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton NJ, 2008); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015); Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York, 2011); Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963* (Stanford, CA, 2007); and Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959–1973: A New History* (Lanham, MA, 2018).

15. Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York, 2012), 547–8; Matthew Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: the Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (London, 2013), 25.

Jose Maria Sison, arrived in China shortly before the Plaza Miranda Bombing. The Filipino communist leader hoped that this group would “form the core of the future embassy of the People’s Democratic Republic of the Philippines” under Beijing’s protective wings.<sup>16</sup> For the first nine years of their life in China, the Miclats worked for Radio Peking’s Filipino service and stayed in the Eighteen Mansions (*shibasuo*), an exclusive compound managed by the International Liaison Department (ILD) of the Chinese Communist Party for exiles from Southeast Asian communist parties, including Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaya.<sup>17</sup> The Miclats lived “beneath the earth” largely because of the incongruities in Chinese foreign policy during the transitional phase of the early 1970s. On the one hand, Mao was reluctant to give up China’s revolutionary identity. The ever-increasing threats from the Soviet Union as perceived by the Chinese leadership made it reasonable for Beijing to make two abortive attempts in 1972 and 1974 to ship firearms to the CPP. On the other hand, soon after Nixon’s icebreaking visit, Mao kissed the hand of Imelda Marcos, the First Lady of the Philippines, in Beijing, which heralded the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1975. The Miclats found themselves becoming redundant; their duty, as explained to them by their Chinese interpreter while listening to bird songs by a lake during a tour to the Summer Palace, was to wipe out the exquisite food their Chinese host prepared instead of wiping out the enemy at the frontline.<sup>18</sup>

The strain of isolation combined with these rapid and seemingly inexplicable political alterations was unbearable. One feels a contemporary sympathy for this feeling of powerless exile in a context of mounting global political upheaval. The exiles turned in upon themselves in bitter acrimony. Between August 1976 and January 1977, Mario Miclat spent six nightmarish months on the isolated and remote Xiangjiang Farm in Hunan, Mao’s home province, together with the “Dirty Dozen”—twelve young CPP members who gave themselves a Hollywood style name upon being granted asylum by Beijing following their failed mission to transfer China-made weapons via one of the Paratas Islands in 1974. In Miclat’s record, resembling a season of the “Big Brother” reality TV show, the ideological differences and interpersonal disputes among the exiles, as some lost faith in the party leadership and their political conceptions, unfolded in dramatic forms and climaxed in a fight involving an antique sword and a handmade gun on Mao’s birthday.<sup>19</sup> This episode of “collective hallucination” would have driven Miclat to suicide without the intervention from their Chinese caretakers from the ILD. The psychological damage of the frenzied internal campaigns, compounded by his detest for Sison’s use of violence at Plaza

16. Mario I. Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions: A Novel* (Pasig, 2010, Kindle Edition), locations 816–828.

17. Alma Cruz Miclat, “A Peek from behind the Bamboo Curtain,” in *Dark Days of Authoritarianism: To Be in History*, ed. Melba Maggay (Pasig, 2019), 74.

18. Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions*, locations 2067–2071.

19. Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions*, locations 5110–5115.



Miranda, which he regarded as “the bloodiest act of terror that happened in the Philippines during peace time,” resulted in Miclat’s decision to leave China in 1986 after the downfall of Marcos.<sup>20</sup> He became a university professor back in his home country and a born-again Christian.

Following a different path than Miclat, many of the Filipino and Indonesian communist exiles left China for Western Europe during the transformative late 1970s and 1980s. Deng Xiaoping was consolidating his leadership and starting to detach China from foreign communist insurgencies while embracing economic integration with the world. For those who again embarked on a journey of overseas relocation, everything was different from the previous time: rather than ideological identification, they forged legal belongings as new citizens of their countries of destination; instead of the fluctuating dynamics of the world communist movement, their mobility was regulated by the international migration regime. In 1985, drawn by the prospects of reuniting with her son who was studying in the Netherlands, Fanggidaj arrived in the small Dutch town of Zeist, where she settled in an apartment complex for asylum seekers from the Third World.<sup>21</sup>

For those who remained in China, their relationship to their host government also underwent fundamental changes. In 1967 Suar Suroso and his family also took the Trans-Siberian Railway, albeit in an opposite direction to Sontani. In the 1950s, Suar served as the representative of the youth wing of the PKI, *Pemuda Rakyat*, at the international organization World Democratic Youth. The job took him to a variety of countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America before his matriculation to the Lomonosov Moscow State University in 1960. Due to his protest against the Russians turning a blind eye to the brutality of the Suharto regime, however, Suroso was declared *persona non grata* by his Soviet host. He and his family subsequently left Moscow for Beijing. In the late 1980s, so as to clear the way for the recovery of normal diplomatic relations with Jakarta, the Chinese government issued Suroso and his family PRC passports while assigning them jobs in the civil sector. They were no longer technically termed “foreign guests of the Party” but were rather PRC “residents of foreign origins.”<sup>22</sup> Suroso and his wife moved from Beijing to a clandestine compound for retiring Southeast Asian communists in the suburb of Nanchang, the capital of the landlocked province of Jiangxi. Their children integrated into Chinese society and flourished in business. With lukewarm support from the Chinese government, Suar published numerous books on Sinicized Marxist theories in the 2000s. He believed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a much more advanced system than Western liberal democracy. He was

20. Miclat, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions*, locations 1087–1088.

21. Ita Fatia Nadia, “Kata Pengantar,” in *Memoar Perempuan Revolutioner*, eds. Hersi Setiawan and Francisca Fanggidaj (Yogyakarta, 2006), 8.

22. Suar Suroso, interview by Taomo Zhou, Nanchang, China, October 10 and 12, 2013.



**Figure 2:** Francisca Fanggidaj in 1980. Collection of the Institute of International Social History, Amsterdam. Courtesy of Reza Rahadian.

convinced that socialism would be reanimated by a new generation of youth in Indonesia.

Visiting Filipino students Sta. Romana, Jaime FlorCruz, and Ericson Baculinao led an exile life in China similar to that of the CPP delegation and the Indonesians. But in a historical twist, their years of living as left-wing exiles proved to be not time wasted but a valuable experience that enabled them to join U.S. media companies including ABC, *Time* Magazine, CNN, and NBC as leading journalists and became well-known for their reporting on the 1989 student movements in Tian'anmen Square. In August 1971, FlorCruz arrived in China as a "hippie," attracted by a romanticized image of the country with "people who looked contented and happy even if life was hard."<sup>23</sup> The Plaza

23. Militante, "The Exiles in China," 203.

Miranda bombing turned FlorCruz and four other student delegates from enchanted tourists to accidental exiles. In the early stage of their stay in China, following Mao's instruction to look up to the peasants as role models, they tended fields in a remote village in Hunan, learned engineering and navigation at the seaport in Shandong, and organized group political study sessions in their spare time. As their passports expired in 1973 and they became "stateless," their efforts were redirected towards acquiring employable skills in the gradually opening labor market in China. FlorCruz enrolled in the history department of Peking University in 1977 together with the first batch of college students to be admitted based on their academic merits rather than political background after the Cultural Revolution. The university years deepened his understanding of the country, as he acquired hands-on knowledge from his Chinese classmates, who later formed the backbone of China's Reform and Opening. Among them were the current Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and the now disgraced Bo Xilai, one of the most powerful politicians in China before his life sentence on corruption charges. At the time of FlorCruz's graduation from Peking in 1982, his educational background and fluency in Mandarin Chinese opened the door of *Time* Magazine, which, like many other Western news agencies at the time, had recently entered China and was eagerly in search of multilingual talents.<sup>24</sup> In a similar pattern with FlorCruz, Sta. Romana and Baculinao were recruited by ABC and NBC, and all three of them decided to continue working in China even after the end of Marcos' rule in the Philippines made it safe for them to repatriate. Most recently in 2017, after a long journalism career in China and a professorship in diplomacy and geopolitics at the University of the Philippines, Sta. Romana returned to Beijing as the Filipino ambassador to the PRC.<sup>25</sup>

"Exile is life led outside habitual order," Edward Said reflects.<sup>26</sup> The sense of exile, so marked in the world today, involves the irrevocable loss of the familiar and the compulsion to adapt ourselves to a new and alien set of circumstances. When you emerge on the other side of exile you do not recover what once was. It is not simply that the world is fundamentally altered, but that we are as well. The fragments of life before and after exile, whether in climax or declension, are necessarily incongruous. The diversity of paths which our political exiles ultimately pursued highlights this fact. While the playwright Sontani was repelled by and ultimately rejected China's ideological absolutism in the 1960s, women's rights activist Fanggaldaej used quotations from Mao's little red book as a self-help mantra in a claustrophobic environment. While former Filipino Communist Miclat converted to fundamentalist evangelicalism, Indonesian revolutionary Suroso transformed into a devoted advocate for "socialism with

24. Jaime FlorCruz, interview by Taomo Zhou and Joseph Scalice, via WhatsApp, July 13, 2020.

25. Chito Sta. Romana, interview by Taomo Zhou, via wechat, April 18, 2020.

26. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 149.



**Figure 3:** Chito Sta. Romana speaking in Pangasinan, July 3, 1971. *Asia Philippines Leader*, July 23, 1971.



**Figure 4:** CCP Delegation in Shaoshan, the birthplace of Mao Zedong, September, 1971. FlorCruz and Sta. Romana are the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> from the left in the front row. Courtesy of Jaime FlorCruz.

Chinese characteristics,” as epitomized in Deng Xiaoping’s developmentalism. Filipino student activists Sta. Romana, FlorCruz, and Baculinao deftly seized on the education and employment opportunities during the early days of Reform



**Figure 5:** CPP Delegation in 1978 in Hunan. From left to right, Janos Sison, Rolando Peña, and Dick Malay. Courtesy of Dick Malay.

and Opening and built careers as media professionals who presented the metamorphosis of China to a global audience. Sta. Romana and FlorCruz generously shared their experiences with us over WeChat and Whatsapp, a digital bridge between the locked-down cities of Beijing and Manila and our circuit-breaker-regulated Singapore. As we ended our phone call interviews, we recognized that for them and for us, personal transformation during exile is only ever a partially conscious process.

While it is impossible to yet predict what divergent paths our current exile will engender, we are nonetheless reinventing ourselves. The study of history, and the history of exiles in particular, does not inform us of the outcome, but it does give us the ability to approach this process with a clear-eyed awareness of what is at stake.