

***Voice of the Malayan Revolution: The CPM Radio War against Singapore and Malaysia, 1969–1981.* Edited by Wang Gungwu and Ong Weichong. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2009. Hardcover (with accompanying CD-ROM): 350pp.**

The book under review comprises transcript summaries of Chinese (usually Mandarin, but occasionally Teochew, Hakka and Hainanese) and English language radio broadcasts to Malaysia and Singapore from the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) radio station which operated in Hunan, China from 1969 until 1981. The selections from the transcripts are aimed at bringing to light “some examples of CPM thinking, at least those emanating from leaders like Chin Peng” (p. 4). The book is a very useful research tool, beautifully produced and accompanied (with the researcher’s edition) by a CD-ROM including all of the available summaries of the English and Mandarin broadcasts. These broadcast transcripts will be invaluable research materials for decades to come for scholars of the CPM, and for those who study the histories of modern Malaysia and Singapore, Sino-Southeast Asian relations, and broadcasting and intelligence activities in Asia. It is a pity, however, that there was not a more insightful Introduction or a more balanced and critical presentation of the materials.

The Voice of the Malayan Revolution (VMR) began transmissions in 1969 during the heyday of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and six years after the Left in Singapore and Malaya had been decimated by Operation Coldstore. The station was closed down in 1981 in a period when Deng Xiaoping was making efforts to normalize relations with the states of Southeast Asia. This work states that it was the then Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who convinced Deng Xiaoping to shut down the radio station (p. 9), an extended claim deriving from Lee Kuan Yew’s account of his meeting with Deng Xiaoping in 1978 (*From Third World to First*, pp. 665–66).

In this work, following a general Introduction (on which more below) a selection of the transcript summaries are presented under five sections: (1) Milestones and Key Documents of the CPM; (2) The People’s Revolutionary Armed Struggle; (3) The Proletarian Internationalist Spirit; (4) The Splintering of the CPM’s United Front; and (5) Clash of Wills: the CPM’s Interpretation of State Policy in Singapore and Malaysia. Each of these sections also has a few paragraphs of introduction, but essentially no analysis of the

broadcasts. The CD-ROM which is provided with the researcher's edition contains the full transcript summaries available within the archives of the Internal Security Department (ISD) in Singapore.

This brings us to the question of how the book came to be. The materials contained within were provided to the Rajaratnam School of International Studies by the ISD, the successor to the Special Branch of the Malayan Police. An earlier related volume *Freedom News: the Untold Story of the Communist Underground Publication* (RSIS 2008) was also based on materials provided by ISD. In neither volume is information provided as to from where the initial impetus for publication came. However, we do have a context from the subtitle, "The CPM Radio War against Singapore and Malaysia 1969–1981". This work and its presentation are reflections of the spectre of the past that, to some extent, still haunts Singapore and the volume under review falls neatly within the state-endorsed (and in this case state-sponsored) representation of the past.

While the radio broadcasts as transcribed were indeed CPM policy broadcasts and propaganda, the Introduction to this work suggests how these need to be viewed and the context within which the CPM propaganda must be understood. The Introduction contains a plethora of terms describing the aims and activities of the CPM — to "foment unrest", to "gain political influence through control of labour", to "use violence to terrorize its enemies", to "employ any means to win victory", and to engage in "unrestricted terrorism" and "indiscriminate terror". Such rhetoric echoes that used by the British colonial polity in its own earlier counter-insurgency activities, and resembles (although from the opposite corner) the propaganda of the VMR transcripts themselves.

This also forms part of the rhetoric of the modern Singapore story where the state, incarnate in the PAP, has always been engaged in inimical enmity with the CPM, which was intent on the destruction of the Singapore and Malaysian states, and in response to which the only possible response was to destroy it. This story requires the beatification of those who fought against the CPM and the demonization and exorcism of those who pursued and promoted these alternative avenues. A historian might observe that, while these two sides indeed had opposite political agendas, they both used propaganda, both claimed to be fighting for the people, both demonized the other and both used hardline measures in pursuing their political goals.

The Introduction provides no information on the people involved in the radio station, except for Chin Peng, despite many still being

alive and having publicly discussed their roles. There is no mention even of Chan Sun Wing, Lee Kuan Yew's former parliamentary secretary, who left Singapore to join the radio station. Description of the context of the production of the original broadcasts would have greatly improved readers' understanding of the radio station and the significance of the broadcasts.

Some copy-editing would not have gone astray. Even the first three sentences of the Introduction contain several basic grammatical errors. Other expressions such as "broke the airways" and "partake in the revolution" could have been corrected by a rapid edit. There is reference to the "the first two phases of the history of the MCP" with no further indications as to what these were (p. 4). The claim that, in Malaysia, Malay special rights were asserted through Rukunegara (p. 272) is certainly not in accord with accepted perceptions of Malaysian history.

NOTE

A 2002 *Yazhou Zhoukan* article by Xu Zerong detailing some background to the radio station is available in English translation together with some photographs of the site and its buildings at: <<http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/SEA-China-interactions-Cluster/TheColdWarInAsia/2000%20An%20Exposé%20of%20the%20Communist%20Party%20of%20Malaya's%20Secret%20Radio%20Transmission%20Station%20in%20Hunan%20Province%20China.pdf>>.

GEOFF WADE is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore.