

Foreword

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The euphoria of that cold, dry November day in 1989 when a cheering crowd brought down the Berlin Wall has inevitably melted away. But for historians and students of Cold War history, the day marked the beginning of a new era that has only improved with passing years. Not only have the long-hidden secrets of the Cold War years held in Soviet bloc archives slowly surfaced to be examined by eager historians, but a similar opening has also marked the Chinese, Vietnamese, and other archives. The results have been a spectacular blossoming of Cold War histories or, more accurately, “new Cold War history.” Documents holding secrets of the past half-century have allowed historians to peek into the inner workings and thought processes of the Soviet bloc Communist parties and their Western opponents. The plethora of new information has inevitably resulted in a significant revision of the known history, casting a very different light on the roles played by such various actors as Josef Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sutan Sjahrir. This volume is an exciting addition to the growing crop of New Cold War history.

This volume stands out for its original and fresh approach, which the editors have called “geohistorical.” Taking advantage of the archival materials on three continents, the contributors to this volume have been able to cast their accounts in a multidimensional perspective, combining the insights and information found in the communist archives with other national archives. They show how ideological and national struggles overlapped and intersected at dif-

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ferent points in time and weave a fascinating tapestry unavailable until now. What emerges in these rich chapters confirms some suspicions, lays to rest many myths, and exposes the reality of narrow nationalistic considerations behind international revolutionary rhetoric. Surprisingly, the authors also find contrarian evidence of how some communist leaders, long believed to be pragmatic nationalists, were actually zealous revolutionaries.

The volume also confirms what has been known from nonarchival sources: that despite public rhetoric, Stalin had little confidence in the prospects of communist revolution in Southeast Asia. Even though he entrusted the Chinese Communist Party with leading the internationalist revolution in Asia, promotion of world revolution was far from their main concern. Vietnamese communists have been widely portrayed as nationalist first, but Tuong Vu shows that senior leaders of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) not only cheered but signed up to serve on the internationalist communist front in Southeast Asia. Ho Chi Minh privately admitted that dissolution of the ICP was a sham designed to calm non-communist worries about the communist core of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The essays in this volume also throw new light on the agonizing dilemma faced by Asia's nationalist movements when confronted with the choice between imperialist and colonial powers and the newly rising non-democratic communist movement. As Christopher Goscha demonstrates in his fascinating essay, while Ho-led Vietnam and Phibun Songkhram's Thailand threw in their lots with opposite camps, non-communist Asian leaders—from Burma, Indonesia, and India—were thrown into a quandary. Not only did they view with dismay the choice between colonial oppression and communist authoritarianism, but they were also deeply fearful of a new conflict between the two camps. Out of this concern arose the search for a third way. Chen Jian shows how agile Chinese communist dialecticians successfully turned decolonization their way by adopting a policy of “coexistence” with the emerging “third-way” practitioners of the decolonizing world by stressing a shared history of Western colonial exploitation.

Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann richly deserve our congratulations and deepest gratitude for producing the remarkable *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945–1962*, which mines the treasures from the newly opened communist archives and national records, offering a unique, multidimensional account of a key turning point in modern Asia.

Connecting Histories

