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COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER #67

Ambivalent Alliance

Chinese Policy towards Indonesia, 1960-1965

By Taomo Zhou, August 2013



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Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor

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Ambivalent Alliance: Chinese Policy towards Indonesia, 1960-1965

Taomo Zhou

Introduction

From 1960 until 1965, the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia shared an aspiration to replace the bipolar world structure dominated by Moscow and Washington with a more equitable international order. This convergence of interests enabled the two countries to enjoy a remarkably cordial quasi alliance with one another. To alleviate the isolation it suffered after the Sino-Soviet split, and the fragmentation of the International Communist Movement, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) offered an enthusiastic endorsement of the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, or the PKI).¹ High-level visits and cultural, educational, and economic exchanges between the nations reached a climax in 1964-1965.

At the same time, the years 1960 and 1965 also marked two large waves of anti-Chinese movements in Indonesia. In 1959-1960, a large-scale anti-Chinese crisis broke out due to Indonesian governmental decrees banning retail trade by "aliens," which included people of Chinese descent. In the face of this challenging situation, Beijing chose to send out a fleet to bring ethnic Chinese back to China. Then, in 1965, the overseas Chinese suffered from brutal attacks in the aftermath of the abortive coup that took place on 30 September 1965 (hereafter "the Movement"). The generally agreed-upon facts about this highly controversial coup go as follows: Indonesian Army units from the presidential palace guard abducted and later killed six senior anti-Communist generals. Due to the longstanding animosity between the Indonesian Army and the PKI, the coup was widely perceived in Indonesia as the PKI's attempt to seize power. On 2 October, Major General Suharto launched an effective counterattack and later initiated a nation-wide anti-Communist campaign.² Due to public suspicion about the close

¹ The PKI was the third largest communist party in the world after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the CCP.

² For an overview of the coup and the massacres that followed, see Robert Cribb, "The Indonesian Massacres," in Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons and Israel W. Charny, eds., *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 233-262. For different interpretations on the coup in English language literature, see Arnold Brackman, *Communist Collapse in Indonesia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969); Benedict Anderson and Ruth T. McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1971); Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Victor M Fic, *Anatomy of the Jakarta Coup, October 1, 1965* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2004); and John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: the September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup D'etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

connections between the Chinese and Indonesian communist parties, Chinese Indonesians became victims of harassment, robbery, and even murder.³ In total, an estimated 500,000 Chinese responded to the above-mentioned campaigns by leaving Indonesia and returning to China. In 1967, Beijing suspended diplomatic relations with Jakarta.

Although more than half a century has passed since these events, our understanding of these five years full of complexity and contrast in Sino-Indonesian relations remains incomplete. From the late 1960s to the late 1990s, the lack of sources on foreign policy decision-making on both sides limited the study of the bilateral relationship during this period to analyses of news releases.⁴ In the past decade, although the opening of Chinese archives has made it possible for historians to obtain an insider's view on the formation of Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War, Indonesia and Sino-Indonesian relations have fallen by the wayside.⁵ Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of Chinese language skills among Indonesianists, and a lack of scholarly interest in Indonesia among China historians. Hong Liu's recently published *China and the Shaping of Indonesia*, for example, is the only piece of scholarship that has made use of newly available Chinese sources. The book is an inspiring account of Indonesian intellectual history as well as a detailed examination of cultural diplomacy between China and Indonesia during the years of 1949-1965. However, because Liu relies heavily on sources from the early to mid-1950s, his text largely ignores bilateral political interactions between China and Indonesia in the eventful and important years of 1960-1965.⁶

³ Against the perception that the Chinese Indonesian were particularly targeted for violence, Robert Cribb and Charles A. Coppel argue that the Chinese were not killed on the same scale as the indigenous during 1965-1966. See Robert Cribb and Charles A. Coppel, "A Genocide That Never Was: Explaining the Myth of Anti-Chinese Massacres in Indonesia, 1965-66," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 4 (December 2009): 447-465.

⁴ See Lea E. Williams, "Sino-Indonesian Diplomacy: A Study of Revolutionary International Politics," *The China Quarterly* 11 (Jul.-Sep., 1962): 184-199; Robert P. L. Howie, "Sino-Indonesian Relation, October 1965-April 1967" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 1968); Sheldon W. Simon, *The Broken Triangle: Peking, Djakarta, and the PKI* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969); Antonie C. A. Dake, *In the Spirit of the Red Banteng: Indonesian Communists between Moscow and Peking, 1959-1965* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1973); David Mozingo, *Chinese Policy Toward Indonesia, 1949-1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Sukma Rizal, *Indonesia and China: The Politics of a Troubled Relationship* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁵ China's experience during the Cold War has become a burgeoning academic field in the past decade. For representative works, see Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History* 1, Iss. 1 (2000): 21-52; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Niu Jun, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* No.48 (2005); Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1966: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, *After Learning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁶ Hong Liu, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949-1965* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011).

This paper aims to fill in this gap in the existing scholarship through a critical reading of documents recently declassified by the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives in Beijing. In November 2008, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives declassified for the first time Chinese diplomatic documents produced during the years of 1961-1965.⁷ The collection comprises documents generated from different levels of government, ranging from minutes of meetings between top-level Chinese leaders and foreign visitors to lower-level communications between Chinese embassies and consulates abroad and in Beijing. This immense body of fresh historical material is complemented by other types of Chinese language documents available on the topic, including memoirs, newspapers, and periodicals. In addition to these textual sources, I have also conducted interviews with retired Chinese diplomats who were eyewitnesses to these turbulent five years in Sino-Indonesian relations. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of materials in Bahasa Indonesia, in this paper I am limited to materials in Chinese language.⁸

Beyond new sources, this article explores China's Cold War experience from a transnational perspective. As Michael Szonyi and Hong Liu have written in a critical review of the state of the field, although China's complex role in the Cold War has received increasing attention in recent years, much of the new scholarship tends to read the archival materials from the PRC through the "old" lenses centered on nation-states and high politics.⁹ This article, however, argues that the interactions between China and Indonesia were shaped by three interacting, and sometimes competing, transnational forces: the waves of decolonization in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the overseas Chinese communities, and the international communist movement. By contextualizing Chinese policy towards Indonesia within this global dynamic, this article challenges the assumptions adopted by a majority of PRC diplomatic histories, which regard Mao Zedong and the Chinese central leadership as the only crafters of China's international strategy. It examines how the Chinese living in Indonesia reacted to state-to-state

⁷ This is the second batch of materials declassified at the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives. The first batch of declassified materials includes documents produced during the years of 1956-1960, which were made available to the general public in June 2006.

⁸ Up until now, the Indonesian foreign ministry archives remains largely closed to general public. There are only occasionally publications of first person accounts on the subject, see, for example, Ganis Harsono, *Recollections of an Indonesian Diplomat in the Sukarno Era* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977).

⁹ Michael Szonyi and Hong Liu, "New Approaches to the Study of the Cold War in Asia," in Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 1-11. Szonyi's own work, Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), is an admirable endeavor to break away from the nation-state centered approach to China's experience in the Cold War. *Cold War Island* focuses on the everyday Cold War in people's lived experiences on the island of Jinmen.

policies, and became involved in bilateral relations as targets and as active participants in anti-Chinese political movements in Indonesia. From this perspective, this paper also calls into question the widely accepted characterizations of Mao's China as isolationist and challenges the notion that Mao's China was an exception to the trend of worldwide Chinese migration, which started at the end of the Qing era and has soared since China's adoption of its "open door" policy in 1979.

Through these transnational factors, this article focuses on how the grand strategic design of the Chinese central leadership clashed with the reality of the Indonesian archipelago, resulting in China's persistently ambivalent policy towards Indonesia. This paper will first look at how the central leadership in Beijing used its pre-existing ideological framework to make sense of Sukarno's Indonesia. It highlights Third World solidarity—an ideology shared by the Chinese, Indonesians, and many other Third World leaders, to represent the underrepresented and underdeveloped actors in Cold War international politics. This article also sheds light on Beijing's strategic need to recruit newly independent Afro-Asian countries to join it in its confrontation with both the United States and the Soviet Union.

By shifting the focus to communication between Beijing and the Chinese diplomatic mission in Indonesia, this article will then examine how the complicated situation in Indonesia eluded the Chinese central leadership's framework of analysis and political vocabulary. It argues that despite the Chinese central leadership's efforts to form an alliance with Sukarno, China maintained its ties with the Chinese community in Indonesia, which had long been the subject of economic envy and ethnic violence. Meanwhile, China was actively engaged with the Indonesian communists, whose political status was on the rise before its fatal crash in the 30 September Movement. Thus, in the Indonesian context, China became an outsider as a foreign nation-state. Yet at the same time, China was also an insider as the native land of the predominantly business-minded ethnic Chinese, and as a "comrade" of the PKI. This blurring of insider and outsider statuses, and the subsequent paradoxical representation of China as the sponsor of both Chinese capitalists and Indonesian communists, put considerable weight on the ambivalent alliance between Beijing and Jakarta, and led to its final collapse in 1967.

Chinese Central Leadership's Perception of Indonesia under Sukarno

Ideological Aspects

At the first large-scale Asian-African conference held in Bandung, West Java, in April 1955, Indonesian leader Sukarno announced to the participating nations that: “We Asians and Africans must be united.”¹⁰ Sukarno’s proposal of an alliance among Afro-Asian nations strongly resonated with the thinking of Chinese leaders, who used the Bandung Conference as a platform for strengthening Beijing’s relations with Asian countries.¹¹ In the years following the Bandung Conference, Beijing forged a vision of an “imagined community” of post-colonial developing countries that were against the domination of world politics by the two superpowers. Beijing’s perception of Indonesia was heavily influenced by its aspiration to represent the underrepresented, non-white, non-Western, and newly independent actors in Cold War international affairs. Although the “Third World” did not formally enter the PRC’s political discourse until the 1970s, it can be argued that Beijing viewed Indonesia first and foremost as a “Third World” country from 1960 to 1965.¹² In other words, the Chinese leadership assigned Indonesia an important role in China’s desired alliance among all the “wretch of the earth”—the former colonies or semi-colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In the 1960s, China’s association with the Soviet-led socialist camp weakened as the rift between Beijing and Moscow became more apparent. Beijing came to more closely identify with formerly colonized countries, since the latter shared its grievances and anxieties in the struggle for political independence and economic development during the Cold War. Though more resource-rich and populous than the other members in the Afro-Asian community, the PRC still saw itself as the victim of encroachment and exploitation by the colonial powers in the past, and

¹⁰ George McTurnan Kahin, ed., *The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 43-44.

¹¹ Chen Jian, “Revolution and Decolonization: The ‘Bandung Discourse’ in China’s Early Cold War Experience,” in Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories. Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp.137-171.

¹² The term “Third World” was first coined by the French scholar Alfred Sauvy in the early 1950s. Sauvy used it to draw a parallel between the French “Third Estate” (commoners who were opposed to the First and Second Estates of the priests and aristocracy respectively) and people in the former colonial world who did not belong in either the US or Soviet camp. In the Chinese context, Mao was the one who introduced the very term of the “Third World” into public discourse. In February 1974 during a talk with the President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, Mao categorized the U.S. and the Soviet Union as the First World, the “middle elements”—such as Japan, Europe, Australia and Canada—as the Second World, and China and the former colonial countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as the Third World. See Mao Zedong, 1974. Two months later, Mao’s “Theory of Three Worlds” was publicly put forward for the first time by Deng Xiaoping in a speech to the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly. See “Deng Xiaoping, the head of Chinese delegation spoke at the United Nations,” *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], April 11, 1974. There are some nuanced differences between Sauvy’s and Mao’s definitions, although both include former colonial countries that were unaligned with either the Communist Soviet bloc or the Capitalist NATO bloc during the Cold War. In this article the “Third World” is used according to Sauvy’s definition, which is more widely accepted.

of humiliation at the hands of the two superpowers in the Cold War. For instance, in a conversation with Sukarno concerning Soviet aid to China, Chen Yi, the Vice Premier and Foreign Minister of the PRC, accused the Soviet Union of “not wholeheartedly helping to promote the development of the Afro-Asian countries,” and “adopting a chauvinist attitude in international affairs and within the international Communist movement” (*shixing daguo zhuyi he dadang zhuyi*).¹³ On another occasion, Chen Yi expressed to his Indonesian guest, Foreign Minister and First Deputy Prime Minister Subandrio, that the Soviet aid was not to be depended upon since “Khrushchev wants China to be a second-rate country forever.”¹⁴

Strategic Aspects

China’s proclaimed solidarity with the Third World also served as a propaganda tool for winning the hearts and minds of the developing world, where the competition for influence among the Western powers and the Soviet Union intensified in the 1960s. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the accelerating process of decolonization and large waves of national liberation movements. Beijing, with its relationships with both the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorating, saw unprecedented opportunities to end its diplomatic isolation in the former colonies and semi-colonies. Its proclaimed solidarity with the newly independent nations allowed the PRC to position itself as part of a marginalized community united against the two superpowers.

China’s perception of former colonial countries, such as Sukarno’s Indonesia, had its origins in Mao’s conceptualization of the “intermediate zone” (*zhongjian didai*), a perceived buffer between the two super powers which included “many capitalist, colonial, and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa.”¹⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of the “intermediate zone” gradually evolved into a line of strategic thinking that aimed to break the Cold War bipolar international structure and reorganize the existing pattern of alignments. In the 1960s, Mao put forward his “two intermediate zones” (*liangge zhongjian didai*) thesis, in which he observed that “there exist two intermediate zones” between the US and the Soviet Union. The

¹³ “Minute of the First Meeting between Chen Yi and Sukarno,” November 28, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 203-00592-02.

¹⁴ “Minute of the Second Meeting between Chen Yi and Subandrio,” December 1, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 203-00592-05.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1933), p. 388.

first was composed of “the vast economically backward countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America,” and the second included the “imperialist and advanced capitalist countries in Europe.”¹⁶ By 1964, even as Mao began to believe that a global war was imminent, he cherished the Third World front against both Washington and Moscow. Mao told a group of Indonesian visitors that “the Soviet Union emerged from the First World War; China and many other socialist countries came out of the Second World War; and imperialism will perish in a Third World War.”¹⁷

In the case of Indonesia, Sukarno’s conceptualization of “new emerging forces” of the formerly colonized world echoed Beijing’s strategic thinking. One example is that, in late 1962, Sukarno set up the Games of New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) as a counter to the Olympic Games for newly independent states, which Beijing enthusiastically endorsed.¹⁸ By this time, whether a regime was prepared to vigorously challenge the existing international order became the most important criteria for China to judge if a state was “socialist” or not. This underlying logic was reflected in Chen Yi’s talk to Subandrio:

Ask the Soviets: What is socialism? Should it be the British Labour Party’s socialism? Or the Vatican’s socialism? Or Khrushchev’s socialism? Or Lenin and Stalin’s socialism? Or Mao Zedong’s socialism? Which is it? President Sukarno firmly opposes imperialism and colonialism. Anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism will become socialism in the future! If one wants to build socialism, learn from Sukarno’s socialism.¹⁹

Chinese Diplomacy at Work in Indonesia

Uncertain Partnership: The PRC and Sukarno

Ideationally, the Chinese leadership in Beijing viewed Indonesia under Sukarno as a key member in the brotherly alliance among Afro-Asian nations, and strategically as a critical country in the intermediate zone. Beijing was thus greatly invested in cultivating its relationship with Sukarno, most prominently exemplified by, as shown in the paragraphs below, its support

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, “Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong,” In *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967), pp. 283-284.

¹⁷ “Conversation between Chairman Mao and Head of Indonesian Congress,” June 9, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01336-02.

¹⁸ “Prime Minister Zhou Enli, Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi and Vice Prime Minister He Long met with the head of the Ministry of Sports from Indonesia,” April 27, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01240-08.

¹⁹ “Conversation between Vice Premier Chen Yi and Subandrio,” January 24, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01910-05.

for Sukarno's West Irian campaign and Indonesia's confrontation with Malaysia (known as the *Konfrontasi*).²⁰ However, the Chinese diplomatic mission in Indonesia observed a different side of Sukarno, who had been savvy, or even manipulative, in his dealings with the Americans, the Soviets, and the Chinese. According to the Chinese diplomatic mission's depiction, Sukarno was an uncertain partner in the Afro-Asian alliance who raised feelings of distrust, suspicion, disappointment, and even sometimes anger, on the part of the Chinese.

In the summer of 1960, Sukarno's campaign to reclaim West Irian as Indonesian territory reached a climax, and received unfailing moral endorsement from Beijing. As Sukarno repeatedly swore to thoroughly oppose the remnants of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, China reassured him that Indonesia's friendship "was more important than [China's] relationship with the Americans and the Dutch" and that "China would never betray the Indonesian brothers by ingratiating the Western imperialists."²¹ Additionally, in its domestic and international propaganda, Beijing also endeavored to promote Sukarno's image as a nationalist leader who stood staunchly opposed to imperialist forces, and his vehement verbal denunciations of the imperialists were published in the CCP organ *People's Daily*.²² During a meeting in June 1961, Mao insinuated to Sukarno that the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, wanted to snatch the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement from him.²³ In January 1963, Liu Shaoqi proclaimed that because India had become a "chauvinist country," Nehru could no longer represent Afro-Asian countries. Therefore, China encouraged Sukarno to assume the leading role in Afro-Asian unity, because he was the vanguard of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism.²⁴

While Beijing officially granted recognition to Sukarno as the pioneer of the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle, the Chinese diplomatic mission's evaluations of Sukarno were more

²⁰ West Irian is the western half of the island of New Guinea, which used to be under the colonial control of the Netherlands. Dutch and Indonesian leaders failed to reach an agreement about the sovereignty of West Irian at the Roundtable Conference in 1949. During the 1950s, the Dutch government began to prepare West Irian for full independence as the Dutch persisted in emphasizing that the local Papuans had developed cultures and languages totally different from those of the Indonesians. This was deemed as a blatant assault on their sovereignty by Indonesian leaders, who regarded West Irian as an integral part of their country.

²¹ "Conversations between Vice Premier Chen Yi and the Indonesian Ambassador to China on the issue of Chinese minority joining the Indonesian citizenship", January 26, 1961, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 203-00561-05.

²² See for example, "Sujianuo qiangdiao buneng tingren diguozhuyi baibu mingyun" [Sukarno emphasized Indonesia could not put its destiny into the hands of the imperialists], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], January 28, 1960.

²³ "Conversation between Chairman Mao and Indonesian President Sukarno," June 13, 1961, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 204-01469-02. It is noteworthy that China's relations with India had been deteriorating and an outbreak of border conflict was looming large at the time when this conversation took place.

²⁴ "Briefings on Subandrio's visit to China," January 13, 1963, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 204-01504-01.

ambivalent. From reports sent from Jakarta to Beijing emerged an image of a shrewd politician pitting the great powers against each other. The Chinese diplomatic mission's first major disappointment with Sukarno occurred when Moscow began to bid for influence in Indonesia. In February 1960, the Soviet Union strengthened its ties with Indonesia through Khrushchev's visit to the country and the offer of a 250 million USD concessionary loan. Against the background of a widening rift between Beijing and Moscow, the Chinese embassy in Jakarta wishfully downplayed the actual impact of Khrushchev's visit when it reported to Beijing that "the flamboyant welcoming ceremonies were superficial," and "Sukarno accompanied Khrushchev only to raise his own political status in international affairs."²⁵ Another analytical report concluded that Jakarta did not sincerely aspire for a genuine friendship with Moscow because "the ruling class in Indonesia wanted Khrushchev's money but not his influence."²⁶

Eventually, Sukarno won the West Irian campaign as the United States exerted diplomatic pressure on the Netherlands to transfer the sovereignty of the region to Indonesia. Yet Sukarno soon redirected the nation's political passions to another crisis—the confrontation with Malaysia. Indonesia's confrontational campaign aimed to block British plans to integrate the remains of its former Southeast Asian colonies into the Federation of Malaysia. During the years of 1963-1964, Jakarta was on the brink of war with Malaysia, and its relations with Britain and the United States rapidly deteriorated.

Beijing strongly endorsed Indonesia's confrontation with Malaysia by condemning Malaysia as a "neocolonialist scheme...produced by Britain, and masterminded by the US."²⁷ Yet the Chinese diplomatic mission in Indonesia also observed how Sukarno vacillated between escalation and de-escalation in his confrontation with Malaysia and how he based his policy choices upon opportunistic calculations. For example, in early 1964, Sukarno declared a ceasefire and resumed the tripartite talks between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In an intelligence briefing sent back to Beijing, the Chinese embassy in Indonesia suggested that Sukarno would "seek for common interests with the reactionaries in Malaysia and the

²⁵ "Briefings on Khrushchev's visit to Indonesia," February 29, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00713-01.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ "Discussions with Singaporean Premier Lee Kuan Yew on the issues of the 'Malaysia Plan', the merger of Singapore and Malaysia and the Singaporean delegation's visit to China," May 23, 1962, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01795-01; "Conversations among Premier Zhou Enlai, Vice Premier Chen Yi and the Indonesian ambassador to China," March 19, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01869-06.

Philippines.”²⁸ Analysts at the Chinese Foreign Ministry were ready to conclude that the “dark side and the double-dealings of the bourgeois nationalists” had been fully exposed.²⁹

What further reinforced the Chinese embassy’s ambivalence towards Sukarno was the convoluted negotiation process between China and Indonesia over the Second Afro-Asian Conference (or the Second Bandung Conference). The Second Bandung Conference was part of Beijing’s effort to compete with the imperialists and revisionists for influence in non-committed, formal colonial countries.³⁰ However, regardless of persistent urging from Beijing, Sukarno seemed less enthusiastic about the Second Bandung Conference than about the conference of non-aligned countries, which Beijing regarded as its major rival. Sukarno co-founded the conference of non-aligned countries with the PRC’s three major nemeses of that period—Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. Until 1964, Sukarno preferred joining India and Egypt in maneuvering between the two camps than to joining China in confronting both superpowers. To China’s relief, Sukarno was rejected at the conference of non-aligned countries in October 1964 due to his policy of confrontation with Malaysia. This diplomatic setback and the ensuing international isolation compelled Sukarno to take another step closer to the PRC. In 1965, at his last Independence Day ceremony before the 30 September Movement, Sukarno stated: “We are now fostering an anti-imperialist axis—the Jakarta-Phnom Penh-Hanoi-Peking-Pyongyang axis.”³¹

The Chinese evaluation of Sukarno’s position in Indonesian domestic politics was ambivalent as well. Sukarno established a “Guided Democracy” to replace liberal democracy in Indonesia in 1958.³² Under the Guided Democracy system, Sukarno exercised political power by balancing between the two largest domestic political forces at the time—the Indonesian Army and the PKI. Yet from the early to mid-1960s, the balance gradually tilted towards the Indonesian communists, and thus aroused much antipathy on the part of the army. The rising tension between the PKI and the Indonesian Army, alongside with the rapidly deteriorating

²⁸ “On the issue of Malaysia,” February 2, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 110-01696-03.

²⁹ “British relations with India and Malaysia,” January 31, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 110-01696-03.

³⁰ “On the Second Afro-Asian Conference,” September 18 1962, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01789-08.

³¹ Marshal Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation, 1965-1968* (Washington D.C.: The Compass Press, 1990), p. 36.

³² A classic work on this process would be Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962). The very idea of Guided Democracy was probably inspired by Sukarno’s visit to China in 1956, during which he was greatly impressed by the progress in China and the effectiveness of the highly centralized political system there. On this see Hong Liu, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia*, pp. 205-230.

economic situation, raised the Chinese diplomatic mission's concern about the possibility of internal unrest in Indonesia. In August 1964, the embassy reported to Beijing that "the right-wing elements and the imperialists were infuriated by Sukarno's turn to the left. They will attempt to topple Sukarno. The conflict between subversion and counter-subversion will become more acute."³³ An analytical report produced by the Chinese Foreign Ministry at the end of 1964 suggested that "Indonesia's national economy has been deteriorating dramatically...Sukarno is distracting people from the grim economic conditions by the policy of confrontation [with Malaysia]."³⁴ From late October to December 1964, Chinese intelligence agencies in Hong Kong followed rumors surrounding plots and coups against the government in Indonesia. One intelligence report sent back to Beijing in December 1964 noted that according to information from the US Consulate in Hong Kong, Sukarno's health was in critical condition and the anti-communist army generals might make a move to seize power.³⁵

Unwanted Embroilment: The PRC and the Overseas Chinese in Indonesia

Sukarno announced at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955 that: "we are united by a common detestation of racialism."³⁶ However, besides the conflict of strategic interests in the Cold War context, what further weakened the Afro-Asian solidarity envisioned by both Sukarno and the Chinese leadership was the issue of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, who numbered 2,500,000 by the 1950s and 1960s. Through the conceptual lens of Afro-Asian solidarity, both China and Indonesia saw themselves as victims of oppression, first by colonial powers and then by the Cold War superpowers. But within Indonesian society, the ethnic Chinese—an ethnic minority which had accumulated a disproportionately large share of wealth—were oftentimes regarded by other ethnic groups as a source of economic oppression. Despite the trans-racial claims made by both China and Indonesia in order to appeal to each other and other Third World nations, the ethnic Chinese remained the targets of violence and victims

³³ "Embassy in Jakarta on Sukarno's Independence Day speech," August 24, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01233-02.

³⁴ "Reports on Vice Premier Chen Yi's visit to Indonesia and Burma," December 17, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 203-00592-04.

³⁵ "On a possible coup in Indonesia," October 30-December 20, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01233-06.

³⁶ Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, p. 43.

of racism in Indonesian society. The episodic ethnic violence against the Chinese minority in Indonesia was an added complication for Chinese diplomacy.

The PRC's position toward the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia was two-fold. On the one hand, Beijing was strategic in promoting its interests through the ethnic Chinese community. The overseas Chinese community provided the channel through which Chinese diplomats carried out Beijing's policy doctrine in Indonesia. For example, several Chinese intellectuals surrounded Sukarno, including his personal assistant and interpreter, Situ Meisheng. Situ possessed connections to high-level politicians in both countries. He was born into a second generation Chinese migrant family in Indonesia. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Situ became Sukarno's intimate advisor, and he met the president in his pajamas every morning in the Presidential Palace. Situ was also the only voice through which Sukarno was heard in Mandarin—without his presence, Sukarno refused to give a speech during his visits to China. Until the outbreak of the abortive coup on 30 September 1965, with no official government title, Situ had been living a life that was in a large part defined by his close ties with Sukarno. As state power incrementally transferred from the hands of Sukarno to Suharto after the coup, Situ's position in Indonesia was unsettled and vulnerable, and it was Beijing that offered to protect him. After the 30 September Movement, Zhou Enlai personally made all the necessary arrangements for Situ and his family to take refuge in China and to finally settle in Macau.³⁷

Besides the ethnic Chinese who were close to the power center, the PRC also mobilized leftwing students in the Chinese language schools, many of whom later found a way to serve the People's Republic with their local knowledge and language skills. Chen Lishui, Wen Liu, and Huang Shuhai were all Indonesian-born ethnic Chinese who later became the first generation of Indonesian interpreters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC.³⁸ It was strategically convenient for the PRC diplomats to approach the Chinese sojourners, who had few emotional

³⁷ Yuan Houchun, *Yige "canyu chuangzao lishi de huaren": Situ Meisheng chuanqi* [An ethnic Chinese who participated in the making of history in Indonesia: a biography of Situ Meisheng] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue Publishing House, 2006). This biography is the only thorough study on Situ Meisheng. It is not a rigid work of historical study, but composed in a literate prose by a journalist who conducted substantial research on Situ's life.

³⁸ Huang Shuhai, ed., *Pictures from Siantar* (Beijing: Published with aids from Hongwen Foundation, 2008). The book was not an official publication. It was presented to me by Mr. Huang Shuhai, the editor of this collection and a former diplomat who served as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Chen Yi's Indonesian interpreter in the early and mid-1960s. Huang used to be a progressive student in the Chinese language school in Siantar and was later recruited to serve at the Chinese Embassy in Jakarta in 1955. Interview with former PRC diplomat Huang Shuhai, Beijing, July 2009 and December 2010.

ties to Indonesia and who expected to return to China, for information, intelligence, and access to local social networks.

On the other hand, Beijing consciously tried to lower potential risks associated with the negative image of ethnic Chinese. The success in business achieved by some of the Chinese had long been a source of envy for the indigenous people (or “*pribumi*” in Indonesian). During the colonial era, the Chinese were positioned between the European colonial government and the indigenous population. After Indonesia declared its independence, the Chinese in general were still economically better off than the indigenous population, and continued to form a significant portion of the middle class. During this period, Chinese Indonesians did not automatically become citizens of the Republic of Indonesia in the way that indigenous Indonesians did, and many found this distinction to be discriminatory and disrespectful.³⁹

Additionally, as the young PRC struggled to end its isolation and gain international support, it was eager to prove to Indonesia as well as to other Southeast Asian countries that Beijing was not masterminding communist movements through the ethnic Chinese abroad. Immediately after the Bandung conference in 1955, China and Indonesia signed the Sino-Indonesian Dual Nationality Treaty, requiring both countries to cease recognition of dual nationality. Of an estimated 2.5 million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, about one-third possessed dual nationality. Under the terms of the Dual Nationality Treaty, any Chinese Indonesian 18 years and older was obligated to take either Chinese or Indonesian citizenship. Beijing’s main motivation was to prove its disinterest in organizing a communist “Fifth Column,” and to win the trust of Indonesia.⁴⁰ Yet the implementation of the Dual Nationality Treaty was later disrupted by the anti-Chinese campaigns that broke out in Indonesia in 1959-1960 and in 1963. As shown below, China’s handling of the 1959-1960 anti-Chinese riots suggested that although the Chinese diplomatic mission relied upon the Chinese community in Indonesia for support, the central leadership in Beijing was not willing to sacrifice a stable relationship with Sukarno in order to protect ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

³⁹ For more on the status of Chinese in Indonesia in this era, see Charles A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Leo Suryadinata, *Understanding the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007).

⁴⁰ Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu waijiaoshi yanjiushi, ed., *Zhou enlai waijiao huodong dashiji* [The chronology of Zhou Enlai’s activities in foreign affairs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1989), p. 109.

In May 1959, two Indonesian government decrees precipitated a crisis in Sino-Indonesian relations. The first was a Ministry of Trade regulation revoking the trading licenses of aliens in rural areas by December 1959, and the second, a decree empowering regional military commanders to remove aliens from their places of residence for “security reasons.”⁴¹ Six months later, Sukarno promulgated Presidential Decree No. 10, which demanded the suspension of Chinese retailers’ business activities in rural areas by January 1, 1960, and legitimized the takeover of foreign enterprises by indigenous merchants.⁴²

At the outbreak of these massive anti-Chinese actions, Beijing adopted a constrained and cautious attitude. During his meeting with the Indonesian Ambassador in December 1959, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi asked the latter to pass on the following words to the Indonesian President: “Vigilance against the imperialists’ conspiracy to impair Afro-Asian unity is very important.”⁴³ Chen Yi claimed that the soaring antipathy against the PRC in Indonesia was a “guise” (*huangzi*) of the American plot to overthrow the communist regime in China, which was an eye sore to the imperialists.⁴⁴ According to the analysis of Chinese policy makers, the most powerful weapon for crushing the virulent scheme of the American imperialists was the further strengthening of Third World unity.

However, when trying to implement this policy, the Chinese diplomatic mission in Indonesia seemed to be trapped between the instructions from Beijing and the PRC’s ties and connections with the local ethnic Chinese communities. During the 1959-1960 anti-Chinese campaign, the Indonesian army and police used force against ethnic Chinese civilians who refused to be relocated from the countryside as required by Presidential Decree No. 10, causing a considerable number of casualties among the ethnic Chinese. In July 1960, a clash broke out between the police and local Chinese at a condolence ceremony in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province, for those who were killed by the Indonesian Army. The incident resulted in

⁴¹ Central War Administrator’s Announcement, No. 039, May 12, 1959 (Jakarta, 1959), quoted in Mazingo, *Chinese Policy*, p. 159.

⁴² Zhou Nanjing, “Sujianuo zhongguo yindunixiya huaren” [Sukarno, China and the Chinese minority in Indonesia], in Zhou Nanjing and Kong Zhiyuan, eds., *Sujianuo zhongguo yindunixiya huaren* [Sukarno, China and the Chinese minority in Indonesia] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Social Science Press, 2003), p. 58.

⁴³ “Conversations between Vice Premier Chen Yi and the Indonesian Ambassador to China,” December 9, 1959, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00389-03.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the detention of the leaders of the Medan Chinese society and a ban on Chinese newspapers.⁴⁵ In the aftermath of the event, the Chinese Foreign Ministry dispatched a strongly worded telegram criticizing the embassy in Indonesia for its inability to stop the escalation of tension between the army and the local Chinese community, and demanding a “summary of lessons learned.” This admonitory message stated: “To our great disadvantage, ethnic Chinese in Medan ignored the regulations promulgated by the local military authorities and arbitrarily organized memorial activities.”⁴⁶ The embassy in Jakarta conducted “self-criticism” in response, admitting its failure to “thoroughly understand the major principles and guidelines.” The self-reflection went further to conclude that:

According to our policy towards nationalist governments, we should adopt a constrained manner in our struggle with the anti-Chinese elements in Indonesia...since Sukarno still tenaciously holds the banner of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and peaceful neutralism, we should avoid denouncing him in person and try to overcome nationalistic emotions for our long term interests in Indonesia.⁴⁷

Chinese diplomats also faced a huge dilemma when Beijing decided to suspend its repatriation program. Beijing, out of frustration over its inability to resolve the anti-Chinese movements in Indonesia through diplomatic means, began to call back overseas Chinese in December 1959. By the summer of 1960, some 60,000 Chinese had left the country and Beijing had spent 40,000,000 USD on bringing the Chinese home.⁴⁸ The repatriation program involved prohibitively high economic costs for China. Around August 1960, the PRC stopped calling back ethnic Chinese from Indonesia and urged potential repatriates to stay in the archipelago. In order to avoid an outburst of animosity against the PRC caused by the sense of betrayal, Beijing instructed its diplomats in Indonesia to carefully “direct the contradictions towards the Indonesian government” through “persuasion by cadres.”⁴⁹ From July to October, the Chinese

⁴⁵ “Briefings on the arrest of local Chinese leaders and the closure of Chinese news agencies by the Medan military command,” July 23, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00695-02.

⁴⁶ “Please summarize the lessons learned from the incident in Medan,” August 7, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00695-02.

⁴⁷ “The embassy’s discussion of the instructions from the Foreign Ministry,” August 12, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00695-02.

⁴⁸ “Conversations between Deputy Foreign Minister Geng Biao and Indonesian Chargé d'affaires ad interim,” November 29, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00703-01.

⁴⁹ “Confidential attachment: briefings on the enforcement of the ‘more to stay, less to withdraw’ policy,” August 18, 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00708-02.

embassy cancelled eleven merchant fleets booked by the local Chinese societies for repatriation. The embassy reported that, after repeated instances of “moral education,” the vast majority of Chinese gathered in Indonesian ports waiting for passage to China had arranged for resettlement in Indonesia. However, by the end of September 1960, over 100,000 Chinese had insisted on returning to the PRC, although they were no longer welcomed. The Chinese diplomats encountered emotional protests when the Chinese government renounced its previous stance on the repatriation campaign. There were cases of mass gatherings in protest against the PRC, and some ethnic Chinese even intimidated the Chinese diplomats through the use of collective suicide threats.⁵⁰

The ethnic Chinese issue also reinforced Beijing’s ambivalent attitude towards Sukarno. The anti-Chinese campaigns in 1959-1960 were initiated by Sukarno so as to win support from certain indigenous groups that suffered from business competition with the Chinese and the Indonesian Army. Yet during his meeting with Mao Zedong in 1961, Sukarno declared that he personally thought “there is no ‘ethnic minority’ per se in Indonesia.” He was opposed to “the view that regards ethnic Chinese as minority, but also to the so-called conceptual distinction between ‘aboriginal’ and ‘alien’.” Sukarno took off his hat and pointed out his black hair to Mao: “It is hard to tell whether I am an ‘aboriginal’ or not, perhaps I have Chinese blood in me. Who can tell?”⁵¹ Despite these friendly gestures, Sukarno continued to use the ethnic Chinese issue as a card to play in Indonesian domestic politics. In May 1963, another wave of anti-Chinese riots broke out in Indonesia. In the same fashion as less than three years before, China took a very cautious position. This soft stance resulted from coolheaded strategic calculations on the side of policy makers in Beijing, and involved painful, sometimes heart wrenching, decisions on the side of Chinese diplomats in Indonesia.

Unfamiliar Comrades: The CCP and the PKI

In December 1965, when Mao learned of the death of D.N. Aidit, the General Secretary of the PKI, who was gunned down in Central Java by Suharto’s troops, he wrote:

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ “Conversation between Chairman Mao and Indonesian President Sukarno,” June 13, 1961, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 204-01469-02.

Sparse branches stood in front of my windows in winter, smiling before hundreds
of flowers/
Regretfully those smiles withered when spring came/
There is no need to grieve over the withered/
To each flower there is a season to wither, as well a season to blossom/
There will be more flowers in the coming year.⁵²

The poem showed Mao's characteristic style, confident and hopeful for a revival of the communist movement in Indonesia. Whether the PKI plotted the Movement, and whether the plan received support from China, remain hotly debated even today. On the basis of newly available Chinese language materials, it is highly likely that the 30 September Movement was plotted by a secret bureau of the PKI, and that the plot was kept obscured from the rest of the party members, excluding a few top leaders. The Chinese central leadership was informed of the plan and acquiesced to it. It is highly unlikely, however, that Beijing knew of the exact timing of the operation or participated in the planning.

Although the intra-party bond between the CCP and PKI appeared to be strong during the years 1963-1965, there had always been ideological differences between the two parties. The PKI had long rejected the Maoist practice of seizing power by force, and until the Movement, had achieved success through a peaceful, parliamentary road to power, of which Beijing disapproved. The two parties' relations were mostly based on mutual resentment towards Soviet domination of the international communist movement. The Chinese influence on the PKI should not be overestimated.

From its founding until the early 1960s, the PKI remained a relatively independent party whose connections to the CCP were loosely defined. Beijing's evaluation of its Indonesian comrades in 1959 was mixed: "On the one hand, the PKI emphasized independence, autonomy, and equality among communist parties; on the other hand, it confirmed that the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] was the vanguard of the International Communist movement."⁵³

However, the 22nd Congress of the CPSU held in October 1961 marked the point at which the PKI began to side with Beijing. At the Congress, Khrushchev's keynote speech, which

⁵² Mao, 1965.

⁵³ "Recent activities of foreign communist parties," May 11, 1959, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00980-02.

emphasized de-Stalinization and criticized Albania, was taken by Beijing as an oblique indictment of China.⁵⁴ In Moscow, Aidit refrained from joining Khrushchev in the attack against the Albanian Communists, with whom the PKI had close contact.⁵⁵ Later, Aidit and other members of the Indonesian delegation travelled to Beijing, where they held discussions with Mao and other CCP leaders. Mao told Aidit during their meeting: “Khrushchev is so reckless that he can do anything. His tricks change from year to year. There were so many tricks at the CPSU Twenty-second Congress. I think Khrushchev teaches by negative example (*fanmian jiaoyuan*).”⁵⁶ Upon his return home, Aidit made a statement in defense of Albania: “As long as a country genuinely conducts a socialist political, economic, and social system, the country remains a part of the socialist camp...Albania is a country which is building a socialist society. Comrade Khrushchev himself does not deny this.”⁵⁷ At the same time, the PKI asserted that it had the right to evaluate Stalin’s contributions according to its own judgment.⁵⁸

As the PKI distanced itself from the Soviets, Beijing took further steps to forge an alliance with its Indonesian comrades. In September 1963, Aidit was invited to visit China and was hailed as “a brilliant Marxist-Leninist theoretician” and a “close friend and comrade-in-arm of the Chinese people.”⁵⁹ Aidit also became the first non-Chinese honorary member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and was invited to give a lecture to the CCP Central Party School. In December 1963, in his political report to the second plenum of the seventh Central Committee of the PKI, Aidit proposed a theory that the world’s countryside would encircle the world’s cities. This was incorporated into Lin Biao’s widely-circulated speech, “Long Live the Victory of the People’s War,” two years later.⁶⁰ All these feathers in Aidit’s cap reflect both Beijing’s recognition of Aidit, and the radicalization of China’s foreign policy line.

⁵⁴ Yang Kuisong, *Mao Zedong yu mosike de enenyuanyuan* [Amity and enmity between Mao Zedong and Moscow] (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 536-539.

⁵⁵ “Recent activities of the PKI (Issue 2),” March 1960, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-00980-02.

⁵⁶ “Conversations between comrade Mao Zedong and General Secretary of the PKI Aidit,” November 17, 1961, quoted in Yang, *Mao Zedong yu mosike de enenyuanyuan*, p. 551.

⁵⁷ “Comrade Aidit commented on the Twenty-second CPSU Congress at the welcoming reception for the returning PKI delegation,” *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], December 1, 1961.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Comrade Aidit invited to deliver a political report to CCP Central Party School on the basic issues of Indonesian revolution,” *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], September 3, 1963.

⁶⁰ D. N. Aidit, *Set Afire the Banteng Spirit! Ever Forward, No Retreat!* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964); Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of the People’s War! In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1965).

From 1964 to the early months of 1965, the PKI and the PRC formed close collaborative relations based on a shared interest in pushing Sukarno further to the left in his foreign and domestic policies. For instance, the PKI played an important role in urging Sukarno not to invite the Soviet Union to the Second Bandung Conference.⁶¹ China also actively engaged itself in the Indonesian political scene shortly before the 30 September Movement. Less than one month before the coup took place, at Sukarno's request, China provided small arms to the Fifth Force, a militia comprised of mainly PKI members trained and armed to defend Indonesia against a potential invasion by Malaysia and its British and American allies.⁶² Additionally, Beijing offered equipment and training to the pro-PKI Indonesian Air Force.⁶³ The Air Force Commander-in-Chief, Omar Dani, visited China two weeks before the Movement, in which he played an active role.⁶⁴

Moreover, during a meeting with Chen Yi in Jakarta on August 21, Subandrio expressed Indonesia's wish to "make its own nuclear weapon," and requested China's help.⁶⁵ One month later, an Indonesian atomic energy delegation flew to China and visited research institutes, laboratories, as well as the nuclear reactor.⁶⁶ On the day of September 30, Mao asked the Indonesian delegation that came to Beijing to attend the PRC National Day celebration: "Now the world is not peaceful, so we need military forces and moreover, the atomic bomb. Do you want to build an atomic bomb?" After hearing an affirmative answer from the head of the delegation, Mao said: "Two big countries in the world want to monopolize nuclear power, but we won't listen to them. We still create our own."⁶⁷ Despite Beijing's wish not to disrupt Sino-Indonesian alignment by rejecting Indonesia's eager request for help, even Mao himself emphasized to the Indonesian guests that China had just started its own nuclear industry, and

⁶¹ "PKI Chairman Aidit on Mikoyan's visit to Indonesia," July 18, 1964, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01231-02.

⁶² "Conversation between Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing and the Indonesian military delegation," January 24, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01910-07; and "Ambassador Yao Zhongming meets with Subandrio," February 11, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01319-05.

⁶³ "On our friendly relations with the Indonesian military and military aids," April 1, 1963, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01560-02.

⁶⁴ "Request for instructions on Indonesian air force commander-in-chief's visit," September 15, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 204-01174-01.

⁶⁵ Taomo Zhou, "Sino-Indonesian Interactions on the Nuclear Issue: New Evidence from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," *CWIHP Bulletin* 19, forthcoming.

⁶⁶ "Briefings on the visit of Indonesian atomic energy group of the Indonesian economic delegation," September 18-29, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01323-02.

⁶⁷ "Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong, Chairman Liu Shaoqi and the Indonesian delegation," September 30, 1965, *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, 105-01917-02.

Indonesia should, first and foremost, develop its agriculture and industries.⁶⁸ It seems reasonable that Mao's remark reflected his conviction that a war was forthcoming, and was not a commitment of nuclear transfer to Indonesia.

China's involvement in Indonesian domestic politics made its role in the abortive coup highly suspicious. The new evidence from the Chinese side suggests that the top Chinese leadership in Beijing was probably aware of the PKI's plan to thwart the anti-communist army generals from making the move to seize power. Yet the PKI most probably made its plan independently of foreign influence. By early August 1965, Sukarno's health had been consistently deteriorating. Since the PKI relied heavily upon Sukarno's political support, the party was haunted by the scenario in which its longtime nemesis, the Indonesian Army, would take the chance to seize power from Sukarno's hands. On August 5, 1965, Aidit had his last meeting with Mao in Beijing before he was summoned back to Indonesia by Sukarno due to the latter's critical health conditions. During the meeting, Mao asked what the PKI would do in the case of Sukarno's death, and if the army would attempt to seize power. Aidit laid out a plan for a preemptive strike:

[W]e plan to establish a military committee. The majority of that committee would be left wing but it should also include some middle elements. In this way, we could confuse our enemies. Our enemies would be uncertain about the nature of this committee, and therefore the military commanders who are sympathetic to the right wing will not oppose us immediately. If we show our red flag right away, they will oppose us right away. The head of this military committee would be an underground member of our party, but he would identify himself as a neutral. This military committee should not last for too long. Otherwise, good people will turn to bad people. After it has been established, we need to arm the workers and peasants in a timely fashion.⁶⁹

Aidit's plan described above was a fairly accurate prediction of what actually happened less than two months later. Furthermore, the hypothesis that a clandestine bureau of the PKI was responsible for the Movement is supported by arguments presented in John Roosa's recent research, which is built upon close readings of Indonesian and American materials.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Chairman Mao meets the delegation of the PKI," *Chinese Communist Party Central Archives*, August 5, 1965.

⁷⁰ Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder*.

Conclusion

This article has examined Chinese diplomacy in both theory and practice, at the center and in the periphery, through Chinese policy towards Indonesia from 1960 to 1965. It has also explored the co-existing, and sometimes conflicting, ways in which the PRC identified itself along the lines of anti-colonialism during the Cold War, vis-à-vis the territorially dispersed Chinese communities, and through communist ideology. As argued in the first part of the article, the Chinese “self-other” dichotomy was not simply based upon a set of clear-cut criteria of whether a certain regime was ruled by a communist party or not. As an unsatisfied member of the socialist camp and a developing country with the potential to become a world power, Mao’s China stood at the crossroads of the East-West confrontation and the North-South division. Although post-colonial Indonesia under Sukarno’s rule was labeled as a “bourgeois nationalist” country, the “bourgeois” nature of the government in Jakarta did not prevent communist China from pursuing friendly relations with Indonesia.


According to Beijing’s macro-level international outlook, Indonesia was the epitome of a non-Western country that shared China’s memory of struggling against colonial and imperial powers, and the aspiration to break away from the Cold War power structure dominated by the two superpowers. However, as the second part of this article has demonstrated, the complex and sometimes confusing situation on the ground in Indonesia persistently contradicted the pre-designated “bourgeois nationalist regime” label. The ambivalence in Chinese policy in Indonesia from 1960 to 1965 was very much a reflection of the clash between the “Indonesia” imagined and preconceived by the central leadership, and the “Indonesia” encountered by the Chinese diplomats.

While following a “China-centered” narrative, the paper has nevertheless endeavored to avoid reconstructing a “China-centric” story. As the paper is based on Chinese language archival materials, Indonesian perspectives are marginalized, yet not completely ignored. By delineating the processes by which the Chinese diplomatic mission dealt with Sukarno, the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, and the PKI, this paper has shown that agency also rested on the Indonesian side, as the Indonesian actors powerfully shaped the making of Chinese policy. Additionally, while this paper focused on the Chinese perception of Indonesia, it has also depicted Indonesia’s inverse perception of China. Despite Beijing’s efforts to cultivate a sense of Afro-Asian solidarity with

Sukarno's regime, its connections with the overseas Chinese community and the PKI prevented it from legitimately pursuing its cause among the Indonesian audience. Beijing ended up simultaneously symbolizing both the capitalist exploiter in the Indonesian economy and the communist interventionist in Indonesian politics.

Last but not the least, this article is a preliminary attempt to combine top-down geopolitical analysis with the bottom-up social history of migration. It has aimed to construct the intellectual connections between high-level decision-making in the Cold War context and the everyday lived experiences of PRC diplomats, the elites in ethnic Chinese communities in Indonesia, and the faceless and almost entirely nameless migrants. On a broader level, this paper has probed the question of how much weight should be given to transnational social forces in China's relations with the outside world, and to what extent personal voices can be captured during a period in which individual lives seemed to be overshadowed by great power politics.

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