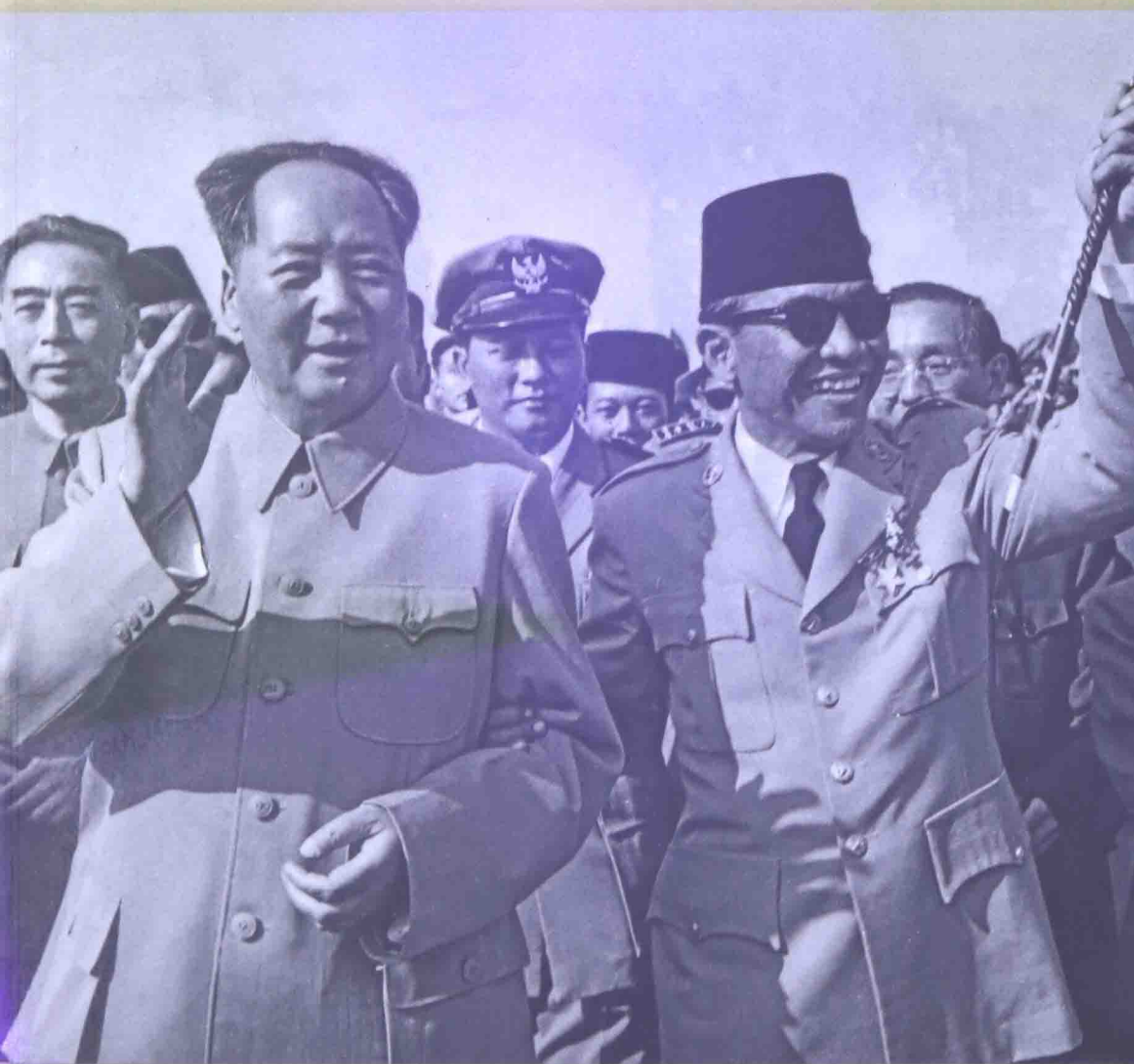


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Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949–1965



Hong Liu

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**CHINA AND THE SHAPING
OF INDONESIA,
1949–1965**



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*In dedication to my mother, Lian Qingbo,
and to the memory of my late father, Liu Angbin*

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CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>List of Figures</i>	xiii
Introduction: China in Indonesia: What's in a Name?	1
<i>Déjà Vu All Over Again? "The China Fever" and Its Significant Precedent</i>	2
<i>Approaches to China in Indonesia</i>	6
<i>Nature and Characteristics of China Observers in Indonesia</i>	17
<i>Structure of the Book</i>	22
Part I: (Re)presenting China	
Chapter 1: Changing Images of China in Pre-1949 Indonesia	33
<i>Historical Interactions and Perceptions of China in Pre-20th-century Indonesia</i>	34
<i>Indonesian Nationalists and China, 1900–49</i>	41
<i>Perceived Parallelisms</i>	52
<i>Conclusion</i>	57
Chapter 2: Discourses on Chinese Politics	59
<i>"New Democracy": Chinese Practices and Indonesian Perceptions</i>	60
<i>China in the International Arena: "An Awakening Lion" or "A Threatening Red Dragon"?</i>	70
<i>"Brother Mao": Images of Mao Zedong in Indonesia</i>	73
<i>Conclusion</i>	76
Chapter 3: Social Dynamism and Economic Progress	79
<i>The Purposefulness and Orderliness of an Egalitarian Society</i>	80
<i>New China's "Amazing" Economic Growth</i>	89
<i>The People's Commune as an Epitome of Social and Economic Progress</i>	93

	<i>Making Sense of China's Socio-economic Progress: Politics or Chineseness?</i>	96
	<i>Conclusion</i>	104
Chapter 4:	Of Culture, Religion and Intellectuals	106
	<i>"New Culture" and Nation-building</i>	107
	<i>Intellectuals in the PRC: "Engineers of Human Souls" or "Tools of Propaganda"?</i>	112
	<i>A Question of Religious Freedom</i>	119
	<i>Conclusion</i>	124
 Part II: Constructing the China Metaphor		
Chapter 5:	Indonesian Dreams and the "Chinese Realities": The Sociopolitical and Intellectual Dimensions	127
	<i>Political Instability and Cultural Antagonisms at Home</i>	129
	<i>Disillusionment and Alienation of Intellectuals</i>	136
	<i>Preconceptions about Indonesia and the Construction of China-images</i>	144
	<i>Conclusion</i>	153
Chapter 6:	An "Inner China" and External PRC: The Ethnic and Diplomatic Dimensions	154
	<i>Indonesian Chinese Society and the Construction of Images of the Ancestral Homeland</i>	156
	<i>Brothers of Different Kinds: Indonesians' Paradoxical Views of the Chinese</i>	168
	<i>Sino-Indonesian Diplomatic Relations and the Making of the China Metaphor</i>	175
	<i>China Creates Its Own Images</i>	185
	<i>Conclusion</i>	200
 Part III: Shaping a New Trajectory		
Chapter 7:	Sukarno, the China Metaphor and Political Populism	205
	<i>Sukarno and China before 1956</i>	207
	<i>Mr Sukarno Goes to Beijing</i>	213
	<i>Sukarno's Perception of China and Vision for Indonesia</i>	223
	<i>Conclusion</i>	230

Chapter 8:	Pramoedya, the China Metaphor and Cultural Radicalism	234
	<i>Pramoedya before 1956: The Evolution of a Cultural Intellectual</i>	236
	<i>Pramoedya in China: The Politics of a Transnational Romance</i>	242
	<i>The Transformation of Pramoedya: The Critical Years, 1956–59</i>	253
	<i>Conclusion</i>	259
Conclusion:	China as an Alternative Modernity	267
Appendix:	Biographical Notes on Major China Observers in Indonesia, 1949–65	275
	<i>Bibliography</i>	292
	<i>Index</i>	316

LIST OF FIGURES

1.	Hatta Visiting the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Nanjing, 1957	49
2.	Cover of Armijn Pane, <i>Tiongkok Zaman Baru. Sedjarahnja: Abad ke-19 — Sekarang</i>	51
3.	Cover of Arifin Bey, <i>Dari Sun Yat Sen ke Mao Tze Tung</i>	66
4.	Insertion of Sugardo's <i>Tiongkok Sekarang</i>	67
5.	Ali Sastroamidjojo having dinner with Mao and Zhou Enlai, Beijing, 1955	75
6.	Poem of Situmorang and photo of him with Guo Monuo, Beijing, 1961	83
7.	An Indonesian woman's writing about China: "We Come, We See, We Learn..."	88
8.	Cover of Sakirman's <i>Pembangunan Ekonomi Raksasa Tiongkok Rakjat</i>	98
9.	Cover of the <i>Kompas untuk Generasi Baru</i> magazine (1954), on Indonesian college students visiting China	102
10.	Barioen, Pane and Tabrani in Hangzhou, 1951	110
11.	Indonesian visitors in Tiananmen Square, July 1965	112
12.	Hatta in Xinjiang, 1957	121
13.	Sudiro with students at Tsinghua University, Beijing, 1956	144
14.	"Our Dilemma" — cover of <i>Ta Hsueh Tsa Chih</i> [College Student Magazine], 1951	159

15. Over 20,000 Chinese in Jakarta celebrating the establishment of Sino-Indonesian diplomatic relationship, May 1950 163
16. Zhou Enlai in Bandung, 1955 178
17. Sukarno dancing with Marshal Chen Yi, Jakarta, 1961 181
18. Sima Wensen in Surabaya, 1956 190
19. Calendar poster attached to and distributed with *Tionggok Rakjat*, 1965: "A General sends his daughters to the countryside" 193
20. Calendar poster attached to and distributed with *Tionggok Rakjat*, 1965: "Preparing for the tilling of the land in winter" 193
21. Sukarno was welcomed by Mao and the Chinese in Beijing, 1956 217
22. Sukarno and Mao Zedong, Beijing, 1956 222
23. Pramoedya speaking at the conference commemorating the 20th anniversary of Lu Xun's death, Beijing, 1956 246
24. Cover of Agam Wispi *et al.*, *Dinasti 650 Djuta* 261
25. Cover of Chinese translation of Situmorang's *Collection of Poems*, translated by Chen Xiaru *et al.* 262
26. Cover of the *Sastra* magazine (1964) which was closely associated with the "Manifesto" members 265

INTRODUCTION

China in Indonesia: What's in a Name?

What we have seen in the past ten days is very amazing and exciting. Amazing, because everywhere we saw people were energetically working for development. New factories, which had not existed before and had not even been thought about by the old regime, have emerged all over the place.

Mohammad Hatta (1957)¹

In Indonesia, people only think of themselves; over there, everyone thinks of others. Here, people have to be greedy in order to survive; over there, the greedy instinct has been totally eradicated.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1957)²

While the outcomes in the field of economic construction are generally inspiring, the results are tragic in the fields of developing morality and protecting the basic rights of man.

Arifin Bey (1953)³

I went to the country where my ancestors were born, hoping to find a communist nirvana; what I encountered was more like a hell.

Cheng Lim Fei (1959)⁴

¹ Mohammad Hatta, "Selamat Tinggal (Pidato pada Jamuan Makan yang Diadakan Duta Besar Indonesia di Peking, pada Tanggal 2 Oktober 1957)", in Hatta, *Kumpulan Pidato*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Inti Idayu Press, 1983), p. 99.

² Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Djiwa Revolusioner di Tiongkok Tetap Bergolak", *Sin Po*, 5 January 1957.

³ Arifin Bey, *Dari Sun Yat Sen ke Mao Tze Tung* (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1953), p. 166.

⁴ Cheng Lim Fei, "Saja Pernah Sekolah di Tiongkok", *Gadjah Mada* 9 (May 1959): 92.

This introduction chapter addresses three central issues intriguingly and intimately related to the studies of postcolonial evolution in Indonesia during the Sukarno era (1949–65): the significance of narratives and discourses about China, whose multifaceted presence and conflicting reception in Indonesia are vividly exemplified by the above quotations; major themes in the existing studies on China in Indonesia; and the nature and characteristics of China-image-makers. I argue that a transnational inquiry into the presentations, constructions, and domestic ramifications of perceptions of China can shed new insights into Indonesia's complex transformations and multidimensional Sino-Indonesian interactions. Furthermore, by focusing on the discursive formation of and interplay between knowledge and power and the unfolding of China as an alternative form of modernity in a non-Western society, this study intends to contribute to a comparative understanding of the changing image of China in the outside world, which has been almost exclusively built upon experiences in the West and Japan.

***DÉJÀ VU* ALL OVER AGAIN? “THE CHINA FEVER” AND ITS SIGNIFICANT PRECEDENT**

In November 2001, the Chinese prime minister, Zhu Rongji, paid an official visit to Indonesia — the trip caused quite a stir. All major newspapers in the nation published editorials and commentaries about his trip, the first visit by a PRC premier in more than a decade — after Zhu's predecessor Li Peng's trip to Jakarta in 1990, which resumed a diplomatic relationship that was frozen after the 30 September Movement in 1965. In an editorial entitled “We Can Directly Listen to the Successful Stories of China's Development”,⁵ *Kompas* stated that China's progress had been “spectacular and fascinating”. With Zhu's visit, “we can now listen to the successful stories concerning China's development over the last 20 years”. Hailing Zhu's visit as “very special”, the editorial of *The Jakarta Post* pointed out that “Indonesia would do well to take advantage of and explore the opportunities presented by this occasion.” It reminded readers of the fact that “this is a completely new, modern and very confident China that the rest of the world has to deal with”. The editorial went on to say that Zhu had been “chiefly responsible for transforming China over the last 10 years

⁵ “Kita Bisa Mendengar Langsung Kisah Sukses Pembangunan Cina”, *Kompas*, 7 November 2001. On related and similar suggestions, see Charles Himawan, “Can China Help RI Eradicate Corruption?” *Jakarta Post*, 9 November 2001.

into its present state, and in doing so, he is also the man responsible for changing the global power equation".⁶

In the meantime, the past two decades have witnessed the rapid growth of economic relations between the two nations. By 2005, the year when the Sino-Indonesian strategic partnership was established, China became Indonesia's fourth-largest export market; bilateral trade jumped from \$1.18 billion in 1990 to \$43 billion in 2010.⁷ Sudrajat, Indonesian ambassador to Beijing, stated in 2008 that "China and Indonesia are almost in a 'honeymoon' state", while some commentators called it "a golden era of bilateral relations".⁸

This recent wave of China fever, however, is by no means unique in modern Indonesia. As this study seeks to demonstrate, during the Sukarno era, many prominent intellectual and political figures of various ideological persuasions, from the anti-Communist politician Mohammad Hatta to Pramodya Ananta Toer, "one of the few Indonesians with a coherent and developed vision of the nation's history",⁹ regarded China as an inspiring model of social engineering and cultural regeneration in the nation-building process. Nevertheless, unlike the present time when the PRC is seen in a more detached and neutral manner,¹⁰ images of China during the Sukarno era were much more diverse and convoluted; they were widely represented through a variety of public and intellectual media. These representations, furthermore, were brought into policy domains and subsequently constituted a politically loaded site of contestation. For some, China was a

⁶ "Welcome Premier Zhu", *Jakarta Post*, 7 November 2001.

⁷ See the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/4360.html>>; "China and Indonesia seal strategic pact", *International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 2005; "China Seeks to Boost Trade with ASEAN", *Business Times*, 27 April 2005; *Jakarta Post*, 31 March 2010; Wen Jiabao, "Strengthen Relations and Deepen Cooperation", *China Daily*, 3 May 2011.

⁸ "Indonesia, China Relations almost in Honeymoon State: Sudrajat", *Jakarta Post*, 14 April 2008; Zaki Amrullah, "From Pogroms to Partners – Indonesians' Views of China" (May 2010), <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5563991,00.html>> [accessed 12 May 2010].

⁹ Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁰ For instance, Jusuf Wanandi, a member of Board of Trustees of the influential Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, suggested that "Southeast Asia should study the Chinese economy and its future development", but he also regarded China as "a market, an investor, and a development partner for East Asian economies". See his "China-RI Ties: Challenges and Opportunities", *Jakarta Post*, 7 November 2001.

totalitarian regime that their nation should not emulate, while for others it only served as a reminder of the existence of the local Chinese community — an “economically exploitative and socially separated ethnic minority”. Indeed, even for the same individuals, China evoked changing images over different periods of time, ranging from Indonesia’s foe to its friend.

China, in short, was anything but the mere name of a nation-state located to the north of the Indonesia archipelago. Rather, it represented an ambiguous and complex state (of mind) and a loaded site of contestation. The discovery of China became a pretext for and contextualization of the rediscovery of Indonesia itself, which in turn helped shape the country’s trajectory. The affirmation of a revolutionary, efficient and seemingly prosperous China appeared to have highlighted to many Indonesians their nation’s disappointing postcolonial transformation. The appeal of an imagined China, furthermore, revealed a deep sense of alienation in Indonesia. Through a process of discursive practice and intense debates, the conflicting China images were gradually transformed into what I call “the China metaphor”, which mirrored the complex characteristics and ambivalent nature of Indonesian intellectuals and politicians. By way of its domestication and integration into their thought and policies, the narratives about China subsequently constituted a significant factor in Indonesia’s postcolonial transformation. As such, the China metaphor acquired far-reaching significance beyond the original connotations of perceptions of the PRC.

China’s physical and normative presence and its conflicting receptions, therefore, were important, because they touched upon one of the central issues embedded in the postcolonial transformation, namely, the intertwining of knowledge and power through a thick web of discursive and appropriation practices.¹¹ As will be established in the rest of this

¹¹ While my discussion of the conceptions of power and knowledge is influenced by Michel Foucault, who views power as constituted by certain structures or “discourses”, this study considers the crucial contextualization of the power/knowledge equation and the specificities of the Indonesian notions of power. For some discussions of the Foucauldian conceptions of power and knowledge, see Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980); and Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner, “Introduction”, in, *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Dirks, Eley, and Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3–45. For a penetrating analysis of Javanese ideas of power, see Benedict Anderson, “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture”, in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1–70, esp. pp. 43–7, “Power and Knowledge”.

introductory chapter, those responsible for articulating the China-images and moulding them onto the “China metaphor” were also the same people shaping the nation’s political and cultural trajectories. The debates about China, as a consequence, became an integral part of the country’s quest for a political format and cultural identity in a broadly conceived “Asian framework”. Within this context, China served as a point of reference and an important yardstick against which differing political statements were formulated, expounded and heatedly debated. For instance, as will be detailed in Chapters 7 and 8, the political populism and cultural radicalism of the Guided Democracy period (1959–65) drew conceptual and practical inspirations from the China example, which in turn intensified the on-going political polarization and ultimately contributed to the final show-down of events surrounding the 30 September Movement. The interplay between the search for new modes of sociopolitical engineering and the incorporation of China into these alternative modes, therefore, became a major dynamic in the tumultuous history of the Sukarno era.

This book explores the presentations, constructions and implications of the discourses about China within the context of a changing social and political milieu between 1949 and 1965. This period was a time of critical transition, in both Indonesia and China as well as in their relationships. The year 1949 witnessed the founding of both the People’s Republic of China and the formal transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch to the Republic of Indonesia. The two nations established diplomatic relations in the following year, thus opening a variety of channels of interaction in the political, social and cultural arenas and facilitating the travel of ideas and practices across national boundaries. The 30 September Movement in 1965 ended the Sukarno era and propelled a rapid deterioration of diplomatic ties with the PRC. The year 1965 in China was a time when the final stage was set for a devastating decade-long period of internal turmoil, the so-called “Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution”.

This study examines the following central questions: What were the substance and variations of Indonesians’ perceptions of China? Who presented these perceptions and what were their sociopolitical characteristics? What were key explanatory factors (sociopolitical, intellectual, ethnic and diplomatic) that shaped the specific images of the PRC? How were conflicting perceptions of and narratives about China formulated and transformed into the China metaphor? How did the China metaphor reveal society’s general mood and impinge upon the political and cultural thinking of the time? Was China constructed as an alternative form of modernity to the prevailing conceptions and practices originating from the West? And