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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'état 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 diguo zhuyi 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.