

**BEYOND IDEOLOGY:**  
*China-Indonesia Engagement and the Making of  
the Guided Democracy, 1955-1959*

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**Abstract**

China's engagement with Indonesia from 1955 to 1959 was neither ideologically oriented nor realpolitik, but somewhere in between. It happened not only because of the changing domestic political situations or completely subject to the shifting international environment, but was also closely associated with intrinsic social and historical issues that transcended geographical, ideological and ethnic boundaries within and across the two nation-states. To some extent, this effective engagement was not a result of Indonesia's leaning towards the left, but a reason for it—not in the sense of direct political intervention, but through the pursuit of common identity and interest, which significantly shaped the making of Indonesia's Guided Democracy.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, China, overseas Chinese, Guided Democracy, Cold War

**Abstrak**

*Hubungan antara China dengan Indonesia pada tahun 1955-1959 tidak selalu berorientasi ideologis atau politik semata, tetapi berada di antara keduanya. Hal ini bukan hanya dipengaruhi oleh perubahan situasi politik dalam negeri atau lingkungan internasional, tetapi juga terkait erat dengan permasalahan sosial dan sejarah yang melampaui batas-batas geografis, ideologis dan etnis antara dua negara. Pada titik tertentu, eratnya hubungan saat itu bukan disebabkan oleh kecenderungan Indonesia yang semakin ke kiri ataupun intervensi politik secara langsung, tetapi dikarenakan adanya kesamaan kepentingan dan identitas kedua negara yang secara signifikan mendorong terbentuknya Demokrasi Terpimpin di Indonesia.*

**Kata kunci:** Indonesia, Cina, Cina perantauan, Demokrasi Terpimpin, Perang Dingin

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite various hardships, the bilateral relationship between China (PRC) and Indonesia gradually entered a phase of substantial development after the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference. The friendly ties between the two countries became further strengthened after Sukarno officially implemented the Guided Democracy (*Demokrasi Terpimpin*) in 1959. From a pure diplomatic perspective alone, 1955-1959 was a critical period for the two countries' close engagement.

This timeline curiously paralleled with the rapid power growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) since the 1955 General Election. Given the close ties between the PKI and their ruling communist counterparts in China, many scholars—especially those who wrote with anti-communist overtones (Dijk, 1972; Zheng, 1960)—often make convenient yet politically biased conclusions that (1) the PKI served as an important proxy for the Communist Party of China (CPC) to intervene within Indonesia; (2) Indonesian domestic politics became increasingly radicalized under Sukarno's left-leaning leadership; and (3) the radicalization of Indonesian politics could be largely attributed to the unprecedented popularity of the PKI.

Similarly, the post-1965 mainstream discourse in Indonesia tends to interpret the close engagement of Indonesia and China during this specific period from two major angles: (a) seeing Indonesia's leaning towards China as an inevitable consequence of the changing atmosphere of the country's domestic politics; and (b) seeing the Chinese intervention in Indonesian domestic affairs as a result of China exporting its revolution and communist ideology (see Mazingo, 1965). These two angles might be useful lenses to examine the two sides' initial incentives to cooperate with each other. But both angles are far from sufficient to explain the complex and unstable mechanism of the two countries' relationship at that moment. In fact, any account on the Sino-Indonesia bilateral relationship would be incomplete without paying close attention to the changing international political environment and the

interplay among the key players in the scene, namely the communist government of China, President Sukarno, the PKI, the army, the different factions of the overseas Chinese community, and a wide variety of other political forces.

In the dominant Cold War discourse of the 1950s, the state-to-state relationship was usually seen as ideologically defined or socio-politically determined. The China-Indonesia interaction during this period, however, was intertwined with many other issues such as ethnicity, the seeking of (inter)national identity and the rearrangement of domestic political structure, etc. The China-Indonesia relationship was so complex that the nation-state-based analytical framework of the Cold War diplomacy has its intrinsic limitations to be transplanted to scrutinize the nuances of the two sides' engagement. Ruth McVey (1968, pp. 357-94), leading scholar of Indonesian communism, has rightly pointed out that "China has been not one thing to the Indonesians but three: a state, a revolution and an ethnic minority".

More specifically, the interactions between China and Indonesia in the late 1950s could be categorized as simultaneously following three major intertwined strands: (1) between two newly established regimes of independent nation-states with similar self-positioning in international political arena but quite different ways of articulation in ideology; (2) between a ruling communist party and a whole spectrum of political forces in which the communists played a somewhat important yet hardly dominant role, and (3) between two "imagined communities" where "Chinese" and "Chineseness" had very distinct implications (See Anderson 1991).

Relevant research on this topic has been done by only a handful of Cold War historians (Simon 1969; Mazingo 1976; Dijk 1972; Zheng 1960; Sukma 1999) from outside of Indonesia and China, largely due to the fact that the issue remains sensitive in both countries, and it would be extremely difficult to conduct a comprehensive study on this topic without using credible sources from official archives. While most of the scholars noticed the three aforementioned strands, their assessments on

this issue are usually based on limited primary sources and biased second-hand literatures. With the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC opening to the public, a large number of classified documents concerning the China-Indonesia engagement in the 1950s have become available, scholars are thus able to conduct more intensive research by using these materials. In 2011, Liu Hong published a book on China-Indonesia interactions between 1949 and 1965, which was the first monograph on this topic that had effectively used sources in English, Chinese and Indonesian. However, due to the complex nature of this particular theme, a lot of nuanced issues remain undiscovered.

By utilizing primary sources such as pamphlets, meeting minutes, public speeches and newspapers in both Indonesian and Chinese as well as secondary sources in English, I have tried to make sense of context by closely reading of a wide variety of texts. For propaganda purposes on both sides, some speeches were originally given in Chinese and then translated into Indonesian or vice versa. The politics of translation (see Ricci 2011; Flood 2009) thus becomes a very interesting angle to investigate the two country's engagement.

This paper demonstrates that China's engagement with Indonesia from 1955 to 1959 was neither ideologically oriented nor *realpolitik*, but somewhere in between.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the improvement of the Sino-Indonesia bilateral relationship during this period is not only because of the changing domestic political situation or completely subject to the shifting international environment, but more importantly, it is closely associated with intrinsic social and historical issues that transcend geographical, ideological and ethnic boundaries within and across the two nation-

<sup>1</sup> *Realpolitik* refers to diplomacy that is practical rather than ethical or ideological. Common examples for China's *realpolitik* diplomacy is China's alignment with the United States instead of the Soviet Union in the 1970s, which is based on Mao Zedong's Three World Theory: the two superpowers as the first world, the allies of the superpowers (e.g. Europe and Japan) as the second world, and the rest (including China and other nations of the Non-Aligned Movement) as the third world. It is commonly believed that the origin of the Three World Theory could be traced back to China's participation in the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference.

states. It was not simply through Sukarno, the PKI, or the Indonesian Chinese community that the CPC-led Chinese government intervened in Indonesian domestic politics. Rather, as I will show in this paper, Beijing's engagement with Indonesia went far beyond sheer ethnic and ideological domains and reached an enormously wide variety of interest groups in Indonesia, including groups that had conflicting interests and those anti-communist and anti-Chinese in essence. To a great extent, this effective engagement is not a result of Indonesia's leaning towards the left, but a reason for it—not in the sense of direct political intervention, but through the pursuit of common identity and interest, which significantly shaped the making of Indonesia's Guided Democracy.

## ARTICULATING REVOLUTION IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

Before Indonesia's first parliamentary election was held in 1955, the cabinet was led alternately by the nationalistic PNI (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Party) and the largest Islamic party Masjumi (*Partai Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia*, Council of Indonesian Muslim Associations)(see Ricklefs 1982; Feith 1962).<sup>2</sup> The major debate between these two parties had been constantly focused on the role of Islam in the state. As the vanguard of Indonesian secularism, the PNI always advocated the use of the state's founding philosophical principle *Pancasila* (the Five Principles) in dealing with conflicting issues among Muslims, nationalists, Christians and other groups (see Department of Information, RI 1999).<sup>3</sup> Although the PNI

<sup>2</sup> The PNI was initially established by Sukarno in late 1920s and was dissolved in 1931 after Sukarno was arrested for organizing anti-Dutch movement. Although the PNI was commonly regarded as "Sukarno's party", he was not the leader of the PNI when it was revived in 1946, since he had already become the president of Indonesia, and was thus deemed as "above politics".

<sup>3</sup> Indonesia's official philosophical principle *Pancasila* was first promulgated by Sukarno in 1945, which derived from Javanese words "panca" and "sila", literally means "the five principles". The original version of Sukarno's *Pancasila* included contents emphasizing nationalism, internationalism, representative democracy, socialism and religiosity. The five principles were then modified by the Investigating Committee for the Preparation of Independence (Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia, BPUPKI) into: 1. Belief in the one and only God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*); 2. Just

claimed that *Pancasila* was not anti-Islam, Masjumi still gained strong support for its Islam-centered policies from almost all other major Islamic parties such as the NU (*Nahdatul Ulama*, Ulema Awakening) and the PSII (*Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia*, Indonesian Islamic Union Party) in this debate. Standing side-by-side with the competing nationalists and the Islamists was the well-liked PKI, which had been campaigning quite effectively in attracting people from lower classes.

The result of the 1955 General Election turned out to be very disappointing to Sukarno, as it failed to achieve political stability through the election of a powerful working government (the majority in the parliament) as he had wished. Although the PNI still got the highest number of votes (22%) in the election, it could hold only 57 seats in the legislature, which was tied with Masjumi (see Feith 1962). Following Masjumi was the NU, whose number of seats surprisingly increased from the previous 8 to 45 (18.4% of the votes) (*ibid*). The PKI also had very good performance and it successfully won 16.4% of the votes (39 seats) in this election, which was just slightly lower than the NU. The top four parties obtained nearly 80% of the total votes, whereas the rest of the parties only shared a very limited proportion of the seats. The PNI remained nominally the biggest party in the parliament. After combining the seats of the two Islamic parties, however, the Islamic faction would far outnumber the nationalists. To counter-balance the Islamic forces, the PNI had no better options but to work closely with the third faction, namely the communists.

It was after 1956 that Sukarno started to openly criticize the parliamentary democracy, indicating that the system ran against Indonesian social harmony and was ineffective in resolving conflicts (Sukma. p.27). Meanwhile, Sukarno began to seek for political alternatives by reiterating the concept of *Nasakom*, which emphasized the unity and the co-existence of na-

and civilized humanity (*Kemanusiaan Yang Adil dan Beradab*); 3. The unity of Indonesia (*Persatuan Indonesia*); 4. Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives (*Kerakyatan Yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan, Dalam Permusyawaratan dan Perwakilan*); and 5. Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia (*Keadilan Sosial bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia*).

tionism, religion and communism.<sup>4</sup> Sukarno's criticism towards the parliamentary democracy was at this point strongly supported by the armed forces that were also discontented with the system, as the army felt that its role in domestic politics had been increasingly jeopardized by the PKI's growing influence (Lev 1969, pp 287-302).

Mohammad Hatta, a firm believer of parliamentary democracy, resigned from his vice presidency in December 1956, which made it possible for Sukarno to push his more autocratic political agenda forward. Three months later, supported by both the army and the PKI, Sukarno officially renounced the parliamentary system and further strengthened his power as the president. On 5 July 1959, Sukarno made the official declaration that Indonesia would revoke the 1950 Provisional Constitution and reinstate the 1945 Constitution. This event also marked the beginning of the Guided Democracy.

One of the direct consequences of the Guided Democracy was the radicalization of Indonesian domestic politics. Since Sukarno assumed dominant power, he had been enthusiastically advocating continuous struggles against imperialism, as Sukarno believed that in order to achieve genuine independence, his country must return to *Jalan Revolusi* (the road of revolution) (see Lane 2008). Sukarno also took advantage of the PKI-army rivalry by positioning himself as a mediator. By balancing the power of the competing forces while simultaneously using them, Sukarno was able to enjoy the preeminent authority in his country and dominate domestic politics very effectively, despite the fact that the foundation of this power structure was very fragile.

Some scholars suggest that Sukarno was actually more pro-PKI beneath the guise of balancing the power of the army and the communists, as he himself was afraid of "being engulfed by the army's power" (Sukma 1999, p.28; Crouch 1975). This argument looks plausible but is not necessarily true. In fact, the

<sup>4</sup> Nasakom is an Indonesian acronym referring to the combination of "NASionalisme (nationalism), Agama (religion) and KOMunisme (communism), which was first articulated in 1926.

army was only one of many anti-communist forces, and Sukarno had to act as the balancer among a wide range of groups: the Muslims, the merchants, and people from different ethnic groups, etc., all have their own reasons to oppose communism. Admittedly, it was very difficult to make radical changes to the existing power structure (in this case, to carry on revolution) without touching upon the vested interest groups. The PKI, by contrast, was one of a few radical pro-revolution forces. Sukarno's call for continuous revolution resonated with the radical political ideals that the PKI had been advocating for. Therefore, the radicalization of Indonesian domestic politics was not a result of the PKI's growing power, rather, it was under the backdrop of domestic political radicalization that the PKI gained considerable influence through Sukarno's articulation of revolution. Communism flourished as revolution proceeded.

Under Sukarno's balancing of power, the influence of the anti-communist forces did not decline significantly, which was manifested by the growing power of the army through the implementation of the 1957 martial law. The army gained tremendous prestige in cracking down a number of regional rebellions, including defeating the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) in Sumatra and the Darul Islam rebels in West Java. The PKI also encountered various obstacles in implementing its radical policies. The party's *aksi sepihak* (unilateral action) in implementing the 1959 land reform laws was violently resisted by the NU supporters (See Kasdi 2001).

### WHEN *DULIZIZHURESONATES* WITH *BEBAS-AKTIF*

Due to the fragility of Sukarno's balancing of power and the ingrained status quo of the domestic power distribution, the articulation of continuous revolution had gone through a wide array of hardships in Indonesian domestic politics. On the contrary, Sukarno's increasingly radical political stance and the country's shift to more revolutionary diplomacy were so much more glaring in the arena of international politics. As Michael Leifer pointed

out in his *Indonesia's foreign policy* piece, "given the fragile balance of internal forces which made for immobilism in domestic politics, the most fruit field for pursuing 'the romanticism of revolution' was in foreign policy (Leifer 1983, p. 68)." In this regard, there was probably no other country in the world that was as romantic and revolutionary as China in the late 1950s. It was precisely during this period that the China-Indonesia relationship became increasingly close.

In the early stage when Indonesia achieved its independence, the country's foreign policy principle was "*bebas-aktif*", which could be literally translated as "independent and active". After years of bloody struggles against the Dutch colonialism, Indonesia was not only politically in need of international recognition, but was also economically deprived and thus became very active in seeking foreign aid. Given the increasing tension between the two ideological blocs, the Indonesian government had to deal with foreign policy issues very cautiously in order to take care of the interests of various domestic constituencies. With no diplomatic relations with any communist states in the world, Indonesia's attempt (very controversial domestically) to approach communist China in the early 1950s was its first actual practice of "*bebas-aktif*" principle.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was first proposed by the Hatta administration on 11 January 1950 in the hope of winning as much international recognition for Indonesia as possible (Sukma 1999, p. 20; Also see Anderson 1972). On March 29, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier and the Foreign Minister at that time, responded positively that China would like to establish formal diplomatic relations with Indonesia based on the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The first Chinese ambassador Wang Renshu presented his credentials to Sukarno in August 1950, but the Hatta administration decided not to send an ambassador to Beijing in return as many people in the government were still suspicious of developing a close relationship with a communist country. Instead, Indonesia

appointed Isak Mahdi as the charge d'affaires to Beijing.

Within the first few years after the formation of diplomatic relations, Jakarta was very suspicious of Beijing's political intention towards Indonesia, as they believed that Wang Renshu's major task in Indonesia was merely supporting the growth of the PKI and to work on the overseas Chinese community so that they would support the communist-ruled People's Republic of China over the Kuomintang-dominated (KMT) Republic of China (Zheng 1960, p. 13). Led by Mohammad Natsir and SukimanWurhisandjojo respectively, the first two cabinets of Indonesia were both formed by the anti-communist Masjumi Party. The former refused to hand over the old embassy building of the Republic of China to Wang Renshu and only allowed him to set up the new embassy in a hotel; the latter arrested a large number of members of the PKI and the CPC in August 1951 and denied the entry of 50 Chinese embassy staff members to Indonesia (*ibid*). In November 1951, Wang Renshu was recalled to Beijing due to dereliction of duty triggered by an allegedly "notorious photograph scandal", in which he was caught drinking soda half naked by a pro-KMT photographer (see Xu 2011, pp. 34-37). According to ZhengXuejia, a Taipei-based scholar, the Indonesian Government had declared Wang Renshu persona non grata even before he was recalled (Zheng 1960, p. 16).

Despite the difficulties in the early 1950s, the Sino-Indonesia relationship experienced a significant improvement afterwards. Other than the aforementioned changes in Indonesian domestic politics, the Sino-Indonesia engagement was also closely associated with the changes of international political landscape and Beijing's shift in terms of foreign policy from the purely ideology-oriented "*Yibiandao* (lean to one side)" to the more pragmatic "*Duli Zizhu* (independence and self-determination)".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Yibiandao* (lean to one side) was one of communist China's three key foreign policies, the core of this policy was to "lean to socialism", which included two folds of meanings: (1) to develop socialism based on a united front that includes workers, peasants, urban small capitalists and national capitalists; (2) To fight against imperialism by forming a united front of people from socialist countries and proletariats from other countries.

The 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung is regarded as an extremely important historic milestone in Chinese official diplomatic history. Instead of defining itself as a pure communist state, China reiterated its political stance as anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist. It was at this conference that China for the first time formally introduced its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to the broader audience of the international community, which well echoed with the conference's 10-point "declaration on promotion of world peace and cooperation".<sup>6</sup> It was also at this conference that Premier Zhou Enlaiput forward China's policy of "*Qitong Cunyi*" (seeking common ground while reserving differences) in dealing with issues of conflicting interests among the Third World countries. Apparently, this was a very obvious departure from the "*Yibiandao*" policy that Beijing implemented when the CPC just rose to power.

But this shift by no means indicated that communist China had become less radical. Another factor that significantly shaped China's foreign policy towards Third World countries was the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship as the result of Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and the Soviet policy of peaceful co-existence with the capitalist bloc. Mao Zedong was deeply disappointed, not only due to the fact that the de-Stalinization would ultimately undermine his own authority in China, but also because he believed that the co-existence policy would sell out the socialist bloc. Since 1957, China and the Soviet Union had been engaged in an intense theoretical debate, in which the Soviet Union held that the communist parties' mission of revolution was over,

The other two policies were "*Dasao Ganjing Wuzi Zai Qingke*" and "*Lingqiluzao*", which meant that the communist government did not recognize the old treaties that previous governments signed with foreign countries and insisted on establishing new relationships with all countries.

<sup>6</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was initially created for the China-India peaceful agreement in 1954, which aimed to resolve the two countries territorial dispute. The five principles include: (1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) Mutual non-aggression, (3) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) Equality and mutual benefit, and (5) Peaceful co-existence.

since the landscape of international politics had been fundamentally changed; whereas China insisted that revolution against any form of imperialism must be carried on. This theoretical debate was turned into a competition between the two countries contesting for the leadership within the socialist bloc, which led to the eventual split of the world's two largest socialist countries after 1959 (Lenman 2000, p. 769).

Accordingly, as China re-defined imperialism, the Soviet Union became a target that the revolutionary forces of the Third World countries should fight against. In this context, China's foreign policy of "*Duli Zizhu*" was embodied through the articulation of its anti-America and anti-Soviet stance, which exactly paralleled with Indonesia's "*Bebas-aktif*" policy and Sukarno's political concept that divided the world into two categories, namely the NEFOS (New Emerging Forces) and the OLDEFOS (Old Established Forces). As the two countries' self-positioning and perceptions of world politics were so similar, China and Indonesia started to engage with each other a lot more closely than before. Although China itself struggled with the catastrophic famine for three years, Beijing generously provided uninterrupted aid to Indonesia. From 1958 to 1965, Chinese aid to Indonesia totaled \$215 million, which ranked number one among all countries in Asia and Africa (Li et al. 2012, pp. 27-36). The two countries also formed an "international united front" to contain the US and the UK from expanding their influence in Southeast Asia—China was Indonesia's strongest supporter for its West Irian campaign against the Dutch and the *Konfrontasi* against Malaysia.

### CHINA AS AN ALTERNATIVE PATH FOR INDONESIA'S POLITICAL REARRANGEMENT

The PKI was commonly described as an indispensable linkage between Indonesia and Communist China in the 1950s (see Simon 1969). Literature concerning this topic often depicts the PKI as China's proxy, through which the communist ideology penetrated into Indonesia and diffused extensively throughout the country (See Dijk 1972; Sukma 1999). Admittedly, the PKI did

serve as an important channel of communication in the two countries' engagement, but this by no means suggests that the PKI was only a tool that Beijing utilized to intervene in Indonesia. In other words, the exertion of power was by no means unidirectional (China → PKI → Indonesia). In fact, the groups involved in the two sides' interactions were not only limited to the communists and those left-leaning individuals.

As Liu Hong noted in his recently published *China and the Shaping of Indonesia*, although a small proportion of Indonesian intellectuals characterized Chinese politics as "an outright communist dictatorship under Soviet Control", the majority of Indonesian observers saw China's New Democracy as "genuine expression of nationalism and cultural tradition" and thus tended to "separate China from communism" (Liu 2011, p. 77). This propensity could largely be attributed to, and was profoundly reinforced by, the observation and experience of a considerable number of Indonesians who visited China and witnessed the country's remarkable achievements in terms of political stability, economic development, and social solidarity in the first ten years after the PRC was established (*ibid.*, pp. 79-105).

China's progress was particularly significant in the economic domain. Thanks to the effective implementation of the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957) and the large amount of Soviet aid, China achieved an unprecedented success in its socialist transformation. Within these five years, China's gross value of industrial products increased 128.6% and the national income grew 8.9% annually on average (GOV. cn, accessed 13 December 2013). By 1957, 92.9% of China's national income was generated by the output of the collective economy (state-run, cooperative and joint state-private ownership), and private enterprises basically disappeared as the result of the socialist transformation (*ibid.*). According to Chen Lishui, the interpreter at the Chinese embassy at that time, Vice-president Mohammad Hatta and Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo often asked Ambassador Huang Zhen (1954-1961) various questions regarding China's macroeconomic policy and how people in China were motivated to work

(Chen, accessed 14 December 2013; also see Liu 2011, p. 91). Invited by his Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai, Ali Sastroamidjojo made an official visit to China right after the successful Bandung Conference in May 1955. Hatta also made his trip to China in the following year. Both had very detail-focused talks on economic development with China's top leaders.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1956, a huge Chinese delegation led by Madame Song Qingling visited Indonesia during the celebration of country's 11<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. Song was the second wife of Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China and she was one of very few political figures that were well respected by both communist and nationalist supporters inside and outside of China. Although Song chose to stay in the Mainland after the fall of the KMT regime in 1949, she was not an official member of the CPC until a few days before her death in 1981. In 1956, Song only held a symbolic leadership position as the Vice Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Her visit to Indonesia, however, had significant meanings in multiple aspects: firstly, to present a friendly image of China other than communism in order to reassure various political forces in Indonesia that China was not a threat (Song 1957, pp. 59-60);<sup>7</sup> secondly, to gain the trust of the vast Indonesian Chinese community, in which many people were still swinging between the communist regime in the Mainland and the nationalist regime that had fled to Taiwan;<sup>8</sup> thirdly, to promote more comprehensive cooperation between China and Indonesia in terms of struggles against imperialism, strengthening economic ties, and cultural exchange, etc. (Song 1957, pp. 55-78); fourthly, to rearticulate the significance of promoting the solidarity of Asia and Africa by upholding the "Bandung Spirit"; and finally, to emphasize

<sup>7</sup> During Song's visit to Indonesia, Sukarno told Song that his thought had been profoundly influenced by Sun Yat-sen's political ideals.

<sup>8</sup> Although the Sino-Indonesian Dual Nationality Treaty was signed 1955 at the Bandung Conference, it was not officially ratified until 1960 due to the opposition of some Indonesian political constituencies. Therefore the citizenship of the Indonesian Chinese was still a pending issue in 1956.

women's important roles in the making of the new societies (Song 1957, pp. 12-19).

Just one month later, Sukarno made his first official visit to China, which intentionally overlapped with the celebration of China's 7<sup>th</sup> National Day. He received a warm welcome by the top communist leaders and the excited masses in Beijing. There were allegedly more than 300,000 people lining the streets from the airport to the city center to show their highest respect to this charismatic leader (Liu, accessed 14 Dec 2013). Sukarno was not only deeply impressed by the enthusiasm of the public, but more so by the ideas that he got from his fruitful meeting with Mao Zedong, the paramount leader of communist China who had just gained unchallenged power through the country's successful Socialist Transformation.<sup>9</sup> Mao pointed out that while it was important to develop democracy in new societies, national unity should always be prioritized in order to keep stability and get rid of chaos. During Sukarno's stay in China, the Vice Premier Chen Yi had many opportunities to explain in details how the Chinese-style *Minzhujizhongzhi* (Democratic Centralism) and *Renmin Minzhu Zhuanzheng* (People's Democratic Dictatorship) could work better than the Western-style democracy in newly independent countries like Indonesia (*ibid*).

After Sukarno's visit to China, Indonesia's foreign minister Roeslan Abdulgani submitted a report to the parliament. In this report he said, "I am glad and privileged to have this tour throughout China, because it never fails to amaze me to have observed the decidedly happy trend of development in the nation of 600 million people toward a better life." (Abdulgani 1956; also see Liu 2011)

Even the intellectuals from the conservative Muslim community, who were traditionally seen as being anti-communist, started to have more substantial contacts with China. Their views on China, as Liu Hong has observed, turn out to be "not only at variance, but also politically charged". On the one hand, there

<sup>9</sup> The Socialist Transformation also refers to the 1<sup>st</sup> Five-Year Plan, in which China basically established socialist public ownership and achieved the economic development goal ahead of schedule.



were people like H.A. Soenarjo, the president of the National Islamic Institute in Yogyakarta (IAIN) and Hadji Zainul Arifin, one of the NU's influential figures in the parliament, openly spoke highly of PRC's progress in improving Muslim's living conditions and the efforts to ensure religious freedom; on the other hand, however, a number of intellectuals firmly held the view that China was lacking of religious freedom and expressed their concerns about the serious situation faced by Muslims in China even after they visited the country (Liu 2011, pp. 119-124).

In order to strengthen the cultural connections between the two countries, China adopted two strategies, namely the "inviting-in" and the "reaching-out". Since 1954, Beijing had invited a large number of Indonesia intellectuals and cultural groups to visit China, especially those who coming from the *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra)*, a literary and cultural organization closely associated with the left-wing groups.<sup>10</sup> During his stay in China in 1956 and 1958, Indonesia's renowned writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer got many opportunities to exchange insights on socialist realism with his famous Chinese counterparts such as Zhou Yang, Mao Dun, Liu Baiyu, and Liu Zhixia (Liu, accessed 12 Dec 2013). Some Indonesian folk songs—such as *Sing Sing So*, *Ayo Mama*, and *Bengawan Solo*—were extremely popular among Chinese youth in the late 1950s.

In the meantime, China also sent a large amount of cultural and athletic delegations to Indonesia, many of them were well liked by the Indonesian public. Led by the celebrated writer Zheng Zhenduo, the PRC sent its first large-scale cultural delegation to Indonesia in 1955.<sup>11</sup> Among a number of famous delegates, Peking opera actor Li Hezeng and ethnic Tatar dancer Zuohala became Indonesian spectators' favorite (see Zhu 1956). In 1956, an acrobatic delegation consisting of 46 people had an extremely successful three-month tour to Indonesia (see Ding 1959). The performances of this delegation were

so popular that some Indonesian media even had the full coverage of the delegation's whole trip across the archipelago. Some acrobats' personal stories were also featured in newspaper reports.<sup>12</sup>

Chinese embassy and consulates became major hubs disseminating Chinese culture and political ideals. Many Chinese literary works were translated into Indonesian languages. According to the statistics of the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing, the number of its Indonesian-language publications was second only to English, some even became Indonesia's best sellers (Liu, accessed 12 Dec 2013).

### THE DOUBLE DILEMMA OF "CHINESENESS" AND "COMMUNISM"

Indonesia had a huge overseas Chinese community.<sup>13</sup> According to the official estimation of the Indonesian authority in 1953, there were approximately three million ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia and only one fifth of them had obtained Indonesian citizenship (Hua Qiao Zhi Bianzhuan Zhuan Weiyuanhui 1961, p. 57). The CPC overthrew the KMT regime in the same year (1949) as Indonesia obtained formal recognition for its independence. At this time, the nationality of the overseas Chinese remained ambiguous, as many of them possessed dual citizenship due to the differing legal systems of China and the Dutch East Indies.<sup>14</sup> This issue became increasingly complex when regime change took place, since the new states did not necessarily inherit the judicial system of the previous state.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See "Akrobatik Peking," *Harian Rakjat*, 24 August 1956 and "Akrobatik Peking--Pemain-2 yang Terkenal," *Harian Rakjat*, 29 August 1956

<sup>13</sup> -----, Kewarganegaraan, Suku Bangsa, Agama dan Bahasa Sehari-hari Penduduk Indonesia Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2010. Badan Pusat Statistik. 2011

<sup>14</sup> The Dutch system followed the principle of *jus soli*, or right of the soil. Citizenship was based on people's places of birth. By contrast the Chinese system followed the principle of *jus sanguinis*, or right of blood. Citizenship was determined through family lineage.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike Indonesia which largely inherited the legal system of the Dutch East Indies, China's principle in dealing with issues left over by history was called "*Dasao Ganjing Wuzi Zai Qingke*" and "*Lingqiluzao*", which meant that the communist state did not recognize the laws of its predecessors.

<sup>10</sup> The literal translation of the *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* is the Institute of People's Culture.

<sup>11</sup> See "Pertunjukan delegasi kebudayaan Republik Rakyat Tiongkok," pamphlet printed for the performance of the PRC Cultural Delegation, 1955

According to the two nationality laws promulgated respectively in 1946 and 1947, those who were born in Indonesia and those who lived in Indonesia for more than five years would be eligible to acquire Indonesian citizenship.<sup>16</sup> Due to the fact that Indonesia had not gained formal recognition from the Dutch authority and KMT was replaced by the communists in the same year, the two nationality laws were not brought into practice. In 1949, the Indonesian government signed an agreement with the Dutch government at the Hague Round-Table Conference, which stated that Indonesia had unilaterally settled the issue of dual citizenship. In light of this agreement, the Chinese nationals residing in Indonesia were only allowed to select one nationality between China and Indonesia (Zheng 1960, p. 26).

On 22 April 1955, however, a new Sino-Indonesian Dual Nationality Treaty was signed by the Indonesian Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet and the Chinese delegation led by Premier Zhou Enlai at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung. This treaty, which was more detailed than the Indonesian nationality laws, stipulated that people should (re)determine their choice of nationality within two years of the coming into effect of the agreement.<sup>17</sup> The Dual Nationality Treaty went through a series of unexpected obstacles in the process of ratification on the Indonesian side. The PNI and the PKI were the only two parties that supported this treaty (Zheng 1960, p. 30). Other parties opposed it as they held that most of the overseas Chinese had already spontaneously renounced the citizenship of China when the Indonesian nationality laws took effect after The Hague Round-Table Conference in 1949, and therefore, these ethnic Chinese should not be required to choose between the two nationalities again under the provisions of the Dual Nationality Treaty (Willmott 1956, p. 76). Among people who expressed their strong oppositions to the treaty were the Peranakan Chinese politicians

such as the Minister of Health Lie KiatTeng and Tjung Tin Yuan from the Catholic Party, as these conservative forces believed that the implementation of this treaty might lead to an undesired Chinese communist intervention in Indonesian domestic politics (*ibid*; also see Zheng 1960).<sup>18</sup>

In fact, such suspicion was not totally groundless. In May 1959, the Ministry of Trade promulgated a new regulation that aimed to ban alien merchants from operating retail businesses in rural areas which was strongly backed by the army, who intended to take this opportunity to undermine the PKI's influence in the countryside. It was the regional military commanders who actually enforced this regulation. In West Java, Colonel Kosasih imposed the retail-ban to the alien traders with a forcible evacuation of these aliens from the areas where they resided. Given the fact that the Dual Nationality Treaty was still hanging in limbo, the Chinese government reacted promptly in order to take care of the interests of the "Chinese nationals". The embassy in Jakarta even sent out staff members to instruct the local Chinese to protest against the army's order of evacuation (Mozingo 1976, p. 168). As the result, this action was regarded as a typical example of China's intervention in Indonesian internal affairs, which eventually brought about diplomatic tension between the two countries. Beijing was particularly discontented with Jakarta's ambivalent attitude towards the army's provocative actions which indulged the army to sabotage the two country's "established friendship". Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister of China, directly urged Sukarno to intervene in this issue, and called for the immediate ratification of the Dual Nationality Treaty and the protection of Chinese nationals' rights and interests (Mozingo 1976, p. 169). Concerned that the dispute might lead to a possible confrontation with the army, Sukarno made the decision that the retail-trade ban should be carried on, as he justified that the ban was pertinent to Indonesia's national interests (Sukma 1999, p. 30). The only concession he made to Beijing was to promulgate a

<sup>16</sup> The two nationality laws are *Undang-Undang Warganegara No. 3, tahun 1946* (Nationality Law, No. 3, 1946) and *Undang-Undang Warganegara No. 6, tahun 1947* (Revised Nationality Law, No. 6, 1947)

<sup>17</sup> Article Two of the Agreement on the Issue of Dual Nationality between the Republic of Indonesia and the People's Republic of China

<sup>18</sup> Some people also attributed the delay of the ratification to the legislative body's inefficiency caused by the frequent changes of the Cabinet.

presidential decree, which exempted sixteen categories of Chinese traders who were affected by the original regulation (*ibid*).

The PKI also found it very difficult to endorse the government's radical policies that would harm the interests of the Indonesian Chinese community. According to the regulations carried out by the Ministry of Trade, the largely Chinese-comprised alien merchants, particularly those in West Java, should either sell their business to local Indonesians and then move to big cities, or simply move to more remote areas where such regulations did not apply (Sukma 1999, p. 29). Being supportive of the Nasakom government sometimes conflicted with the PKI's strategy of maintaining a good working relationship with the CPC, which had been making unremitting efforts to win over the hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese against the KMT regime. Whenever the PKI tried to defend the overseas Chinese community under the China's pressure, the anti-communist forces would accuse it of fawning on Beijing or being opportunistic to benefit from Chinese businessmen (*ibid*; also see Mackie 1976).

As David Mozingo noted, "Beijing was not using the Chinese embassy to obstruct the retail-trade ban, which applied throughout Indonesia, but only to oppose the army's forcible evacuation of Chinese families from West Java" (Mozingo 1976, p. 171). For obvious reasons, Beijing gradually noticed that the enforcement of the retail-trade ban was inevitable and irreversible. Although the ban was troublesome to Beijing, to carry on continuous protests against Indonesia would only bring about a deeper division between the two countries. The removal of Chinese communities from the rural areas, although a regional issue, was undoubtedly dangerous—not only because it was deeply anti-Chinese and anti-communist, but also because it reflected the inability of the government and the PKI to curb the growing influence of the army, as well as highlighting how fragile the power structure was under Sukarno's leadership.

In order to take the initiative to cope with the overseas Chinese issue, Beijing launched a campaign to call overseas Chinese "back to their

motherland", which was interpreted by some scholars as Beijing demonstrating that it could also violate the 1955 Dual Nationality Treaty by using its economic leverage (*ibid*). Beijing successfully recruited more than a hundred thousand overseas Chinese who were willing to opt for the nationality of China, the campaign resulted in severe inflation that deeply struck the Indonesian economy. However, due to the high social and economic costs generated from the campaign, Beijing finally terminated the recruitment by early 1960 (Mozingo 1976, p. 175).

To prevent diplomatic tensions from further jeopardizing the bilateral relationship, Beijing and Jakarta eventually exchanged instruments to ratify the Dual Nationality Treaty on January 20, 1960.<sup>19</sup>The pursuit of common interests ultimately led to the reconciliation of the two countries. Particularly in 1961, in spite of the on-going discontent of Indonesia's right-leaning forces and the exacerbated rivalry between these groups and its pro-China leftists, diplomatic tensions were significantly eased as a result of Beijing and Jakarta exchanging high-level visits (Sukma 1999, p31). Since then, Beijing made a number of silent concessions to Indonesia on the overseas Chinese dispute in exchange of Sukarno's support in international issues. When anti-Chinese activities happened again in 1963, Beijing chose to endorse the Indonesian government, which put the blame on "imperialists" and "counter revolutionary groups" (Sukma 1999, p32). Subsequently, Beijing reiterated its unconditional support for Indonesia's stand on the West Irian issues and country's confrontation with the newly established Federation of Malaysia. Exactly like David Mozingo(1976) has insightfully summed up, at the expense of sacrificing the interests of the overseas Chinese:

The Chinese leaders decided that the principal contradiction determining their policy toward Sukarno was international, that is between imperialism and the Indonesian nation, rather than internal, between the Sukarno-PKI progressive elements and the reactionary anti-communists led by the army and the Muslims.

## CONCLUSION

With shared national interests and similar self-positioning in international political arena, Beijing and Jakarta became increasingly close to each other after the 1955 Bandung Conference. The unsatisfactory outcome of the liberal democracy gave the Indonesian leaders the incentive to seek for breakthroughs in foreign affairs and re-consider the alternatives for the country's political arrangement. Despite distinct ideological persuasion, Indonesia's political rhetoric of continuing revolution and struggling for more comprehensive independence profoundly resonated with China's *Duli Zizhu* principle in its foreign policy that aimed to unite the newly independent nation-states in the Third World. Through the close and extensive engagement in the late 1950s, China gradually became a crucial and successful frame of reference for Indonesia to measure its own political reform. To some extent, Beijing's engagement with Jakarta had deeply influenced the making of Indonesia's Guided Democracy. In the meantime, however, due to the intertwined double dilemma of "Chineseness" and "communism" in Indonesia, the seemingly quite effective engagement between the two countries was actually based on an extremely shaky foundation as radicalization of Indonesian politics went forward, which ultimately led to the eventual destruction at its height within a very short period.

Looking retrospectively, both Sukarno's unstable balancing of domestic forces and the fragile Beijing-Jakarta alliance made the complete elimination of the PKI and the immediate collapse of the Sino-Indonesia relations after the 30 September Movement in 1965 self-explanatory. But it also raises interesting questions: (1) given the growing influence of the army and other conservative forces during the Guided Democracy, was the radicalization of Indonesian domestic politics necessarily a process of moving towards communism? (2) Given the PKI's radical land reform policy and its ambivalent attitude towards the Sino-Soviet dispute, was the party necessarily pro-China? (3) Given the division of opinion on the dual nationality issues, were overseas Chinese

necessarily pro-PRC? (4) Given the fact that Beijing maintained good relationships with Jakarta by sacrificing the interests of overseas Chinese, was foreign policy necessarily serving the need of the politics of domestic affairs, not vice versa? The answers could be immediate "NOs", but to answer each of these questions in detail would require further investigation and careful re-consideration based on the discovery of new sources.

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