

# Cold War, Chinese Overseas and Sino-Indonesian Relations: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

This review situates Taomo Zhou's analysis of Chinese overseas during the Cold War in relation to U.S-Indonesian and China-Indonesian bilateral relations. After introducing Migration in the time of Revolution, the author compares Simpson and Hong Liu's monograph which offers a mirror image about China and American's influence on Indonesia. The last part concludes these works from three aspects, including structure analysis, the Cold War study and transcend the Cold War studies with new trends.

**Keywords:** *Cold War, overseas Chinese, migration.*

## 1. MIGRATION IN THE TIME OF REVOLUTION

Taomo Zhou's Migration in the time of Revolution bridges the literatures on the diplomatic history and migration studies to ask the question, "how did the Chinese diaspora and their connections with homeland affect China's geostrategic position and their internal ethnic relations?" [1](p.12) In this persuasive and eloquently argued book, Zhou takes Indonesian Chinese as specific case and discusses Sino—Indonesian relations chronologically from 1940s to 1960s, with fresh evidence (Mao-Aidit conversation), making the arguments that [1] Beijing's role in 9·30 movement. Nonetheless Mao may know PKI's plan in August 5, Beijing was not the "architect of the coup" and whose influence was marginal. [2] Diplomatic relations and diasporic politics. Despite the convergence of strategic interests between Beijing and Jakarta in the early 1960s, governmental relations inevitably intersected with diasporic politics and ethnic tensions. [3] Diasporic politics and ethnic relations. Overseas Chinese communal conflicts caused by CCP—KMT confrontations, aroused suspicion from Indonesian government and aggravated ethnic tensions in host society. Moreover, diasporic society itself gained unforeseen momentum that neither Taipei nor Beijing could control, which also destabilized bilateral relations.

This book synthesizes top-down and bottom-up perspectives and incorporates both institutional history and human stories, which illustrates diaspora's personal life-stories and changing bilateral relations at the same

time. All these are based on abundant first-hand resources and on-the-pot interviews. Fortunately, Zhou took the opportunity when Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives declassified thousands of documents produced between 1949 and 1965, and China's provincial archives were more open before 2013. All these records were reclassified and no longer available several years ago. Besides, the author also found some special and personal collections (including newspapers, magazines, clippings and internal newsletters) in Xiamen, Hong Kong and Amsterdam universities or institutes. In addition, Zhou took the advantage of personal relations with those returned overseas Chinese who latterly became her professors in Peking university, doing interviews and visiting overseas Chinese farms. Based on multinational and multilingual archives and vivid oral histories, this book contributes a lot to New Cold War history and preserves migrant personal memories during the age of revolution.

We could make assumption that, if there were not 2.5 million Chinese, China would not attach so much importance to this archipelago, incorporating Indonesia into anti-imperialist united front or deeply involving in Jakarta's internal politics. In other word, Beijing would have no foundation or excuse, after all, Indonesia does not border China. This book successfully analyzes five inter-weaved questions in the development of Sino—Indonesian relations: the overseas Chinese problem, pribumi—Chinese tensions, CCP—KMT confrontation, CCP—PKI interparty linkage and state-to-state diplomacy. [1]

Chapters 1 and 2 compare the KMT and CCP's strategies for expanding their influence among Indonesian Chinese during 1940s. While Nationalist Party could rely on formal diplomacy, the Communist Party established informal web of personal connections centered on left-leaning intellectuals and activists. Moving to the 1950s and 1960s, Chapters 3 and 4 depict the full-blown rivalry between Beijing and Taipei in diplomacy and Chinese community respectively. Pro-PRC blocs launched aggressive attacks against their counterparts for control over Chinese-language media, civic associations, and Chinese-medium schools. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the pribumi perception of Red-versus-Blue struggle and the response of Beijing to 1959-1960 anti-Chinese Crisis. When Indonesia authorities and pribumi conflated the opposed identities of "Red" and "Blue" into one category: Chinese, who were therefore suffered from indiscriminate violence, Beijing adopted a moderate attitude to the Crisis and was unwilling to sacrifice stable relations with Sukarno to protect the Chinese in Indonesia. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 examine Beijing's strategic collaborations with Jakarta in the early 1960s, which reached the summit in August 1965 when Sukarno claimed an anti-imperialist axis—the Jakarta—Peking axis had fostered. Zhou clarifies that Beijing did not instruct Aidit to topple Sukarno and analyzes how Mao and Suharto utilized the 9-30 movement (or rhetoric) to mobilize mass population and justify the legitimacy in the domestic politics. Chapter 10 documents the stories of returnees who came to mainland from Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s. It was estimated that at least 60,000 ethnic Chinese students during 1950s, 100,000 economic migrants through the first half of 1960s, and 164,000 ethnic Chinese (mostly refugees) by the late 1960s had returned to homeland. Zhou depicts repatriated overseas Chinese' adaption to socialist China and their protest politics in everyday lives. Besides, these returnees also sustained the overseas channels and promoted China's domestic transformation which transcended the Cold War and proceeded to the localization and globalization era.

This book treats diplomacy as a social process from the ground up. By doing so, it joins recent debates by scholars such as Meredith Oyen and Laura Madokoro in bringing diplomatic history and migration study into a single field of transnational vision. [1] In addition, Zhou also adds an Indonesian case to the research field where Charlotte Brooks, Fredy González and Chien Wen Kung shed light on how this "Red versus Blue" struggle became a prominent feature of Chinese communities in America, Mexico and Philippines in the early Cold War.

Just as the concept "migration diplomacy" (Oyen, 2016)—the process of using migration policy for diplomatic ends—implies, foreign policy affects migration and policy makers also use migration policy to benefit foreign policy. [2] Despite migrants or diaspora have autonomy and initiative, they could hardly ever

transcend beyond the structure of bilateral relations and the Cold War logic. 1965 and 9-30 Movement could be regarded as a watershed in Sino—Indonesian relations. The emerging of Suharto regime turned to the West and transformed Sukarno's policies completely. Consequently, ethnic Chinese were forced to assimilated into local society and were deprived of receiving Chinese education and using Chinese languages or even surnames. The reversal of Chinese diasporic destiny in Indonesia originated from the trilateral interactions between China, America and Indonesia. Simpson's *Economist with Guns* and Liu Hong's *China and the Shaping of Indonesia* offer us a mirror image on how The East Wind prevails over the West Wind and vice versa?

## 2. MIRROR IMAGE: THE EAST WIND AND THE WEST WIND

Simpson argues that existing accounts of U.S.—Indonesian relations ignore the long-range developmental vision inextricably linked to the geopolitical and anti-Communist concerns articulated by U.S. officials, social scientists, and businessmen and many Indonesians throughout the 1960s. [4](p. 5) Besides, historians have failed to recognize the underlying continuity of American policy during the 1960s, instead, they have devoted the bulk of their attention to what in retrospect should be regarded as an interregnum from 1964 to 1965. [4](p. 251) Based on American archives, including governmental records and private foundation paper, Simpson exposes Washington's enduring vision for Indonesia—a military-dominated, development-oriented regime integrated into the regional economy and bound to multilateral institutions—was firmly embedded in a discourse of modernization. More specifically, U.S. officials believed that integrated programs of technical, military, and economic assistance and multilateral efforts to stabilize the Indonesian economy could induce Indonesia to Western-oriented development. These comprehensive programs covered philanthropic foundations training economists and military officers, IMF and World Bank promoting structural adjustment, and social scientists deploying theories to account for and legitimize the role of the military in the modernizing process.

How did this military-led modernization route come into being? Why was the continuous process suspended in the early 1960s and continued after the 9 • 30 Movement? These two questions involved the Cold War backdrop and the emergence of modernization theory which dominated social science thinking about political and economic development in both the academic and policy realms by the early 1960s. This Cold War background, as Simpson referred to, was Soviet bloc's foreign aid expanding dramatically, targeting countries such as Cuba, Indonesia, India, Egypt, and Ghana at this time. Kennedy administration policymakers recognized

that they needed to respond to the “Soviet aid offensive” by declaring a “Decade of Development”, and initiating programs such as the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. In Indonesia, the U.S. administration presented an alternative to the developmental model promoted by Soviet officials. This alternative insisted that “actions to defeat communism in Indonesia must be supplementary to long-range effective programs to improve the living standards of the masses”. [4](p. 251)

However, in the time of revolution, America’s plan had not been promoted smoothly in Indonesia. On the one hand, a complex web of events in 1963, Kennedy’s assassination and Konfrontasi, conspired to lead Washington to interrupt the moderate plan and push for a coup against Sukarno. On the other hand, China’s increasing influence on Sukarno and PKI offered Jakarta another path beyond the two superpowers. Liu’s China and the Shaping of Indonesia complements the other half of this picture, which was missing in Simpson’s work.

It was clear that leaders in the developing world, like Sukarno, were coming to the view that the Western model was beyond the reach of their countries, and the Soviet and increasingly the PRC appeared to provide more relevant routes to development and prosperity. In his 1956 overseas trips, Sukarno observed and compared the two major social systems. On his way back home, he told reporters that, in PRC he witnessed the realization of his ideas and saw the practice of a guided democracy which the only one that can bring people into a new world. [4](p. 222) Liu devoted one chapter each to Sukarno and the Pramoedya Ananta Toer to detailed their visits to China and their transformation or conversion afterwards.

In China and the Shaping of Indonesia, Liu carefully researched the images of China among Indonesian politicians and intellectuals of the period, as example of Sukarno and Pramoedya. He recapitulated that there were three sets of master narratives to represent China—as a purposeful and harmonious society, a participatory and populist polity, a vibrant culture imbued with great intellectuals’ creativities. [4](p. 267-8) However, these images or perceptions of China were definitely not the whole truth of New China, but a type of representation. The author proposes a “China Metaphor” to articulate this point, that is, these Indonesians explained China’s “miracle” in racial terms: oriental characteristics of diligence, subordination and unified spirit. Communism was not the driver, but nationalism and populism. These were characteristics that could be harnessed in the Indonesian republic too. In a word, “The China metaphor reflected not only Indonesians’ disillusionment about what had gone wrong at home but, more importantly, their aspirations for what could have been achieved” [4](p. 270). In so doing, Liu challenged the express or assumption of many scholars that the only model of modernity for Indonesians in this period was the

western modernity project, and argued that China served as an important and viable alternative. [4](p. 271) And this modernity derived from Indonesian’s self-image and its frustration over the political turmoil in the archipelago.

Comparing Economists with Guns and China and the Shaping of Indonesia, we find that when they confronted two models of nation-building and state governance, Indonesian elites were selective and autonomous to some extent. Simpson indicated that, although U.S. officials and scholars shared a broad consensus on the definition of modernization, elites in Indonesia selectively appropriated its ideals to suit their own diverse needs and purposes. [4](p.252). Western-educated technocrats did not take U.S.-style liberal capitalism and encouraged state’s leading role. The Muslim community was divided into “Modernist Muslims” and “Traditional Muslim”, and the latter were deeply wary of a secular path to modernization. Instead of a transitory role, army leaders envisioned themselves as permanent guardians of political and economic order. In short, there was a plurality of Indonesian views on modernization in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and American views on the matter were rarely accepted by Indonesian wholesale but rather adapted to Indonesian circumstances. [4](p. 255) Similarly, in Liu’s work, he clarified that narratives about the PRC not necessarily constitute the China metaphor. Only those which corresponded with politicians or intellectuals’ respective visions for domestic scene could be transformed into “metaphor”. Therefore, as a reflective mirror and a viable model, China’s socioeconomic success was attributed to a “nationalistic” not a “communist” China. This selective adaption, instead of mechanically transplanting, made China metaphor a significant part in shaping Indonesian political and cultural trajectories.

Simpson and Liu focused on different groups in Indonesia domestic politics. Liu analyzed politicians and intellectuals who were mainly leftists or centrists, and the rightists or Indonesian army were almost missing. On the contrary, armed forces played a prominent role in Economist with Guns, and the Muslim parties and figures were reappearing too. Therefore, these two books complement and contrast with each other at the same time. On the one hand, they covered different actors of various political persuasions. On the other hand, a successive analysis of power structure in Jakarta revealed the internal and international backdrop of “Chinese Problems”.

### **3. PARADIGM SHIFT: (NEW) COLD WAR HISTORY**

These three books are all very important. It is a difficult one to summarize without losing their nuanced approaches and the complexity of their arguments. Let us

compare these works from three aspects in the concluding parts, including structure of analysis, the Cold War study and transcend the Cold War with new trends.

(1) The Level-of-Analysis. In the international level, both the Beijing—Jakarta ambivalent alliance and the Washington-supported Suharto's military-led modernization were produced in a bipolar structure. From the early 1960s, "the most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered but connected to political and social development in the Third world". [5] Or in Mao's word "struggle for the intermediate zone". Simpson and Liu researched two models of modernization applied in the archipelago during 1950s and 1960s, which involved the choice of authoritarian or totalitarianism, state or market, freedom or mass mobilization, heavy industry or living standard...

Besides, in Southeast Asia arena, "Chinese problem" and "communism expansion" were intertwined and thus it linked these emerging countries' domestic politics with regional conflicts and international confrontation. Overseas Chinese had been exaggeratedly depicted as the "fifth column" and KMT—CCP competition complicated the migrant problems and ethnic tensions. In *Migration in the time of Revolution*, Zhou indicated the connections between borderland and communism—Jakarta concerned about the possible rise of a Chinese-majority Communist movement in Kalimantan, because West-Kalimantan adjoined Sarawak where there was a Communist movement dominated by ethnic Chinese. [5](pp. 103-106) This also reminded us of the KMT army retreated and resettled in the borderland area between Thailand and Burma.[6]

It was well-known that, "Chinese problem" and anti-Chinese crisis did not happen in Indonesia only. In Malaya, Singapore, Philippines, India and Indochina, many ethnic Chinese were vulnerable to domestic reform or revolution and suffered from border disputes or decolonization war. Taking Indonesian Chinese as research objects, *Migration in the time of Revolution* has offered us a pattern to explore diasporic politics in the Cold War and how superpowers' rivalry affected common people's lives. Chinese diaspora's personal experience could be a proper lens to reconceptualize the Cold War from everyday politics and capture the enthusiasms, emotions, and fears of ordinary people. This also could be recognized as basic level of analysis—the people itself.

In addition, on international relations level, when researched in bilateral relations between Beijing—Jakarta and Washington—Jakarta, three authors all connected domestic politics with diplomacy. Just as Zhou's arguments on 9 • 30 movement as a rhetoric to be

used. When Chairman Mao deployed it as a political discourse for his purge of Liu Shaoqi; Indonesian elites used anti-China propaganda as a temporary strategy to stir up public anger and legitimized the Suharto regime. These two significant and stormy processes — the Cultural Revolution in China and Suharto's dictatorship in Indonesia — in Cold War Asia were mutually reinforcing. Both countries used bilateral friction to develop domestic propaganda and propel mass mobilization.[7] (p.189.)

(2) Cold War study: methods and materials.[8] There is little or no reference to Indonesian documents, newspapers, or interviews, making *Economists with Guns* a book more about US policy towards Indonesia than a study about the dynamic and interaction between the two countries. However, Liu and Zhou's use of sources is exceptionally wide-ranging. They use Chinese and Indonesian sources extensively, including governmental archives, local records, personal collections, newspapers and periodicals published in Indonesia and China, and have interviewed many observers and participants. From these three books, we could compare and discern the paradigm shifts in the Cold War study. Simpson's work represented traditional Cold War study with focus on western power especially the United States, and relied almost entirely on western-language archives and records. They concerned high politics and security crisis, instead of social dynamics, culture and ideology and the transformation of the life of common people. It was difficult for them to break through the America-centered structure of analysis and pay as much attention to other countries as the U.S.

Liu and Zhou's works to some extent symbolize the new trend in the Cold War study originated from the late of 1980s when the Cold War was coming to an end. Apart from trilingual and multinational materials, as Liu suggested that we should treat "China as something more than a communist state and an ethnic Chinese homeland and placing its changing and multifaceted constructions in post-colonial Southeast Asia," and "go beyond the conventional approach framed by the primacy of the nation state, diplomacy, ethnicity and the East-West binary". [7](p.11) They challenged the hegemony of "nation-state" as a self-evident research unit, with an emphasis on the flows of persons, notions, ideas and transborder influences. For example, Liu illustrated many Indonesian official delegations to China and how they were affected by the achievements of China's economic construction, by analyzing these leaders and elites' views and expressions reported in the newspaper after these visits. Zhou explored Ba Ren—Wang Renshu, China's first ambassador to Indonesia—whose earlier anti-Japanese activities in North Sumatra and his poems, plays and *History of (Pre-) Modern Indonesia*. This accurate and interesting text analysis

convinced us that Ba Ren personified the intertwined histories of China and Indonesia and the entanglement of diplomacy and migration.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: TRANSCEND THE COLD WAR NARRATIVE

Liu briefly outlined the historical depth to the process, some of it going back to the precolonial past. There was the growth of peranakan Chinese Malay journalism and literature which was readily understood and read by the wider population, and the high regard of Indonesian nationalists for Sun Yat-sen and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. However, the “China Metaphor” story abruptly ends on the eve of 9 • 30 Movement, and leaves readers with the question of whether the idea of China as a source of Modernity rather than a communist icon was able to survive the anti-communist purge in Indonesia.

Similarly, Zhou retrospected the development of Chinese diaspora communities from the early 20th century, and analyzed how Chinese nationalists and KMT overseas members aroused nationalism and patriotism over the Dutch East Indies. Besides, she extended the discussion toward Suharto and post-Suharto era and examined how ethnic Chinese changed their roles in Sino — Indonesian interactions. Indonesian Chinese returnees’ oral history connects the past and present in a proper and vivid way.

The termination of the Cold War did not represent the end of history. Both U.S-China rivalry in Asia-Pacific and Belt and Road Initiative incorporate Indonesia as a predominant actor. China was not only a powerful metaphor to legitimize military action in the early Suharto period, but also a metaphor and a model for efficient economic development led by the industrial sector. In this way, a continuum can be seen to exist in the idea of the China Metaphor and U.S-modernization from Suharto period up until the present.

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