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Special report: the Bandung Conference sixty years on

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, a seminar was organised on 27 June 2014 at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne by CHAC (*Centre d'Histoire de l'Asie Contemporaine, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne*) and GRIC (*Groupe de Recherches Identités et Cultures, Université du Havre*). It was attended by around 30 participants including 12 presenters. A more complete report in French is available at www.bandungspirit.org. The complete proceedings of the seminar will be published in 2015.

Darwis Khudori

Bandung Conference, Bandung Spirit, Bandung Era

The 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference was a turning point in world history. For the first time representatives of the former colonised nations united forces and proposed alternatives to the world order dominated by the superpowers. It was the birthday of the so-called Third World, a term indicating the willingness to take up position outside the two blocks of superpowers. The conference triggered solidarity movements among the peoples, countries, states and nations of Africa and Asia. It made possible the representation of African and Asian countries in the UN, and the recognition of the voice of colonised peoples in the world order. It accelerated the complete re-conquest of independence of Africa and Asia. It led to the Non-Aligned Movement between the two blocks of superpowers. It allowed the newly independent countries to lead a development based on *their* national, popular and sovereign interests. It contributed enormously to the prevention of a possible third world war and to the evolution of humanity, towards a more just and peaceful world.

The Bandung Conference also gave birth to an idiom: 'Bandung Spirit', which can be summarised as a call 1) for a peaceful coexistence between nations, 2) for the liberation of the world from the hegemony of any superpower, from colonialism, from imperialism, from any kind of domination of one country by another, and 3) for building solidarity towards the poor, the colonised, the exploited, the weak and those being weakened by the world order of the day, and for their emancipation.

However, the period of development generated by the Bandung Conference known as the 'Bandung Era' was ended tragically around 1970 by the overthrow of the leaders inspired by the Bandung Spirit, the abortion of their development projects and the entry of their country into the Western Block circle.

Now, almost 60 years after the Bandung Conference, colonisation has officially disappeared, the Cold War has ended, and the Non-Aligned Movement has almost lost its *raison d'être*. Yet, similar systems of domination by the powerful in the world order persist, wars continue to threaten humanity, mass hunger, diseases and poverty still characterise many parts of the world, and injustice has appeared in more sophisticated forms and larger dimensions. On the other hand, some countries have been considered to be 'emerging', such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (known as BRICS), but also Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey – which have been included in the G20, the 20 largest economies in the world. So, what assessment can be made of the Bandung Conference?

Speakers and topics

After a welcoming word by the host Hugues Tertrais, director of CHAC, and an introduction by the seminar's initiator and coordinator Darwis Khudori, lecturer and researcher at GRIC, the day started with four short documentary films on the Bandung Conference, followed by comments and discussion. This was followed by three successive panel discussions, each consisting of paper presentations by the speakers and a plenary discussion.

The first panel dealt with the Bandung Conference and its impacts. The five speakers were: Darwis Khudori (*Written works related to the Bandung Conference: state of knowledge*), Samir Amin (*Deployment and erosion of the Bandung project*), Boutros Labaki (*Context and impact of Bandung on Arab East*), Amzat Boukari-Yabara (*From Richard Wright to Malcolm X: vision and influence of Bandung on the Afro-American struggle*) and Adams Bodomu (*Africa-Asia relations: How Bandung redefined area and international studies*).

The three speakers of the second panel discussed the follow-up of the Bandung Conference in Africa and Asia: Lazare Ki-Zerbo (*Experience of the International South Group Network under the light of Bandung*), Youcef Benabdallah (*Experience of development in Africa and Asia: the logics of development through the case of Algeria, Korea and China*) and Nadia Chettab (*Africa and the economic locomotives of the South: reality and perspectives*).

The third panel was dedicated to the development in Africa, Asia and Latin America in connection with the Bandung Conference. The three speakers were: Ricardo Parvex (*These last seventy years in Latino-American continent: between the Non-Alignment and the Cold War*), Omar Benderra (*From Bandung to BRICS: a Fanonian outlook on the multipolarity*) and Nguyen Dac Nhu-Mai (*New Bandung Spirit: an opportunity for the renaissance of a multipolar world*), followed by a plenary discussion.

Main issues of the discussions

The discussions following the paper presentations allowed for a deepening and extension of the theme of the day. The most important issues discussed, were:

1. The assessment of Bandung 60 years on

Statements such as 'Bandung has failed' or 'Bandung did not keep its promises' or 'Bandung did not give any alternative to the hegemony of superpowers it denounced', are not relevant. 'Bandung' (in the sense of the Conference itself and the dynamic of development that followed it) has demonstrated immense achievements. The proofs are numerous. However, Bandung has its limits that explain its erosion. It is these limits that should be studied.

2. The essence of the Bandung Spirit

The essence of the Bandung Spirit was and is 'non-alignment'. Non-alignment to the hegemony of the two blocks of superpowers of that day – West and East – who unilaterally and for their own benefits imposed their rules on the whole world. Today, one hegemonic block remains: the economic triad of USA, EU and Japan (and industrialised Southeast Asia), which imposes a 'neo-liberal globalisation' on the whole world. The Bandung Spirit is to be interpreted today as non-alignment to neo-liberal globalisation.

3. France and Bandung

The hostility of the Western Block (USA, UK, France, etc.) towards the Bandung Conference has been revealed in various books. The French diplomatic archives show that France as a colonial power, was very concerned by the Conference (the Vietnam affair was not totally settled; North Africa claimed their independence; Algerian war had just started; Sub-Saharan Africa started to move). The archives show that France closely followed the Conference and its constellation (Bogor, Bandung, Cairo, Conakry, Beograd, Moshi, Algiers...) from its preparation in 1954 to its end in 1965.

4. The world without Bandung

What would be of the world if Bandung had not taken place? The Bandung Era, between 1945 and 1990, was the first wave of the rise of the peoples of the South forcing the North to adjust itself to the requests of the South. Today, while the

North has taken back its control over the world through neo-liberal globalisation, there are signs of affirmation of the rights of the peoples, nations and states of Africa, Asia and Latin America that could be considered as the second wave of the rise of the South. At an academic level, without Bandung, there would have been no area studies linking Africa-Asia, and Africa-Asia-Latin America.

5. The enlargement of Bandung

Latin America has been aligned with the Bandung movement from the 1960s (with the foundation of Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and the Tricontinental Conference in Havana 1966), but the Non-Aligned Movement only really took off after 2000. Now, the time seems to have arrived for a larger alliance of peoples, nations and states of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The position of the peoples of the North is crucial. Do they remain silent by supporting de facto the imperialist politics of their leaders? Or, are they willing to align with the enlarged alliance of Bandung? Bandung was a world political success because it was led by the states. In order to make the second Bandung or the second wave of the rise of the South a success, the alliance of the peoples of the South and the North has to grow into an alliance of the states.

6. The 'emerging' countries

The term BRICS to represent a group of 'emerging' countries does not correspond to reality as it involves two contradictory phenomena: 'lumpen development' and 'emergence'. The first is characterised by economic growth accompanied by pauperisation of the population, while 'emergence' is characterised by a sovereign construction of a coherent, integrated and efficient national productive system capable of competition and exportation, accompanied by a rural development allowing an equal access to land for the rural population and a guarantee of national food sovereignty. According to these criteria, the only country really 'emerging' is China. Some countries only have certain elements of emergence (Brazil, India), while many do not have any elements of emergence at all: they are more accurately 'submerging', and suffering from lumpen development, a development mainly based on the exploitation of natural resources and characterised by a widening gap between the rich and the poor.

7. The China-Africa relationship

In response to the call of the Bandung Final Communiqué, China is the only country that has been developing an economic and cultural cooperation with Africa in a methodical, systematic, consistent and continuous way since the end of the 1950s up to the present. Its approach is completely different from that of G7, which takes a position of 'donor', imposing severe conditions (especially liberalisation and privatisation) that jeopardise the national sovereignty of those African countries wishing to receive their 'aid'. On the other hand, the Chinese 'win-win' approach does not impose any conditions. Meanwhile, Chinese actions in Africa are often critiqued by representatives of the North, especially since China became Africa's primary trading partner in 2008, overtaking USA and EU. This issue should be watched carefully by using rigorous scientific approaches.

8. Other issues

A number of other issues were raised without further discussion that may be addressed in future meetings. These included:

- The African problem (the relationship between Africa and the world reveals the weakness of Africa and there is a risk that the destiny of Africa continues to be decided by others. Why is this?);
- China: sovereign or imperialist? (For example, the sovereignty claimed by China over almost all of the Eastern Sea or the South China Sea);
- The reunification of Korea;
- The women question;
- The question of religious diversity tearing up Africa and Asia;
- The question of arms control;
- The question of Palestine.

Below: The venue photographed in 1955 (left) and again in 2000 (right).

