Revolutionary Allies:

Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian Relations in the Bandung Decade

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Oriental Studies

Kyle Haddad-Fonda
Magdalen College
University of Oxford
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Abstract

In the decade following the Asian-African Conference of 1955, the communist government of the People’s Republic of China took unprecedented interest in its relations with countries in the Middle East. China’s leaders formed particularly strong ties first with Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt, then, beginning in 1958, with the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which at that time was engaged in a bitter struggle for independence from France. The bonds that developed between China and Egypt and between China and Algeria were strengthened by a shared commitment of the governments of these countries to carry out “revolutions” that would challenge Western preeminence in global affairs and establish their own societies as independent voices on the world stage. The common ideological heritage of these three revolutionary countries allowed their leaders to forge connections that went beyond mere expressions of mutual support. Sino-Arab relations in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be explained by a realist narrative of attempts to exert power or influence through high-level diplomacy; rather, the evolving relationships between China and its Arab allies demonstrate how three countries could co-opt one another’s experiences to define and articulate their own nationalist identities on behalf of domestic audiences.

This thesis pays particular attention to two constituencies that played a central role in mediating the development of Sino-Arab relations: Chinese Muslims and Arab leftists. Focusing on publications about Sino-Arab relations written by or intended for members of these two groups makes clear the manners in which domestic ideological concerns shaped the development of international relationships. Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations between 1955 and 1965 were primarily symbolic. The perception of international amity gave journalists, policymakers, intellectuals, and religious figures free rein to expound their own
distorted interpretations of Chinese and Arab society in order to promote their own ideological causes. These causes, which varied over the course of the decade, included the incorporation of Chinese Muslims into Chinese politics, the conferral of revolutionary legitimacy on Nasser’s government, the celebration of China as a champion of global revolution, the legitimization of the FLN, and the presentation of China as a fully anti-imperialist country in contrast to the Soviet Union. Each of these projects had in common the enduring goal of transforming how citizens of China, Egypt, and Algeria perceived their own national identity.
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Kyle Haddad-Fonda
Issaquah, Washington
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Note on Language and Transliteration

This thesis is based on sources in Arabic, Chinese, and French. When citing texts in Arabic, I have followed the standards of The International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). I have used the IJMES transliteration system for all Arabic words and names that do not have common spellings in English or French. Where common English spellings do exist, I have used those spellings (for example, Gamal Abdel Nasser rather than Jamal ʿAbd al-Nasir). I have transliterated the Arabic names of Francophone Algerians in accordance with how those men and women would have rendered their own names in French (for example, Benyoucef Benkhedda rather than Bin Yusuf Bin Khida). When citing sources in Chinese, I have strictly followed the Pinyin system, except when transliterating names that are more commonly known in English by other variants (for example, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek rather than Sun Zhongshan and Jiang Jieshi).

In a few instances, I have referred to Arabic words and phrases (usually Islamic religious terms) that have been translated or transliterated into Chinese. When necessary, I have given both the Chinese and Arabic versions of these terms. I have also referred extensively to the works of Ma Jian, a Chinese Muslim who published several books in Arabic under the transliterated surname and Islamic given name “Muhammad Makin.” To remain faithful to these texts as they were published, I have distinguished between the works of Makin and Ma, even though their authors were in fact the same person.

In general, it should be clear from the context and the citation whether quoted passages were originally written in Arabic, Chinese, or French. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of such passages are my own. Where the sources of these quotations might be ambiguous, I have clarified in a footnote.
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Asie-Océanie, 1956-1967 / Chine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMA</td>
<td>Beijing Municipal Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFMA</td>
<td>Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNRA</td>
<td>Conseil National de la Révolution Algérienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLN</td>
<td>Front de Libération Nationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office (of the United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td><em>Foreign Relations of the United States</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMD</td>
<td>Guomindang (Kuomintang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Gansu Provincial Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPRA</td>
<td>Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IISG</td>
<td>Papers of the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis [International Institute of Social History], Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (of France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNA</td>
<td>Mouvement National Algérien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTLD</td>
<td>Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MXJ</td>
<td><em>Mao Zedong xuanji [Selected writings of Mao Zedong]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>Parti Communiste Algérien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCF</td>
<td>Parti Communiste Français</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Parti du Peuple Algérien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADUM</td>
<td>Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCMP</td>
<td>Survey of China Mainland Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Afrique du Nord / Service de liaison avec l’Algérie, 1957-1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAR</td>
<td>United Arab Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKNA</td>
<td>The National Archives (of the United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFDY</td>
<td>World Federation of Democratic Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNP</td>
<td><em>Zhou Enlai nianpu</em> [A chronological biography of Zhou Enlai]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZWJWX</td>
<td><em>Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan</em> [Selected diplomatic papers of Zhou Enlai]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Among the most intriguing photographs from the protests in Egypt in January and February 2011 that toppled Hosni Mubarak’s government were those of Egyptians waving handwritten posters in Chinese characters. For the most part, these signs were simple, amateur projects – products of Google Translate with poor penmanship and questionable word choice that belied any claim to understand Chinese. Next to similar posters in several other languages, most notably Hebrew, their meaning was clear: the Egyptian people regarded Mubarak as a tool of foreign interests so out of touch with the realities of Egypt that he could not understand the millions of marchers who insisted in Arabic that he resign. Some of the posters written in Chinese, however, were so much more ambitious that they deserve a second look. Commentators on the Internet devoted a surprising amount of attention to one protestor, whose sign proclaimed in remarkably competent handwriting that “the Egyptian people demand that President Mubarak step down” (aiji renmin yaoqiu zongtong mubalake [sic] xiatai).¹ This appeal posed an inescapable question: whom did the maker of this poster intend as its audience? To be sure, few if any of the other protestors in Tahrir Square could have read its text. Did this man or the others who carried Chinese-language signs hope to reach a sympathetic television audience in China? Although only a few marchers among millions made any reference to China, this idea is nonetheless deeply provocative to Western analysts because it plays into a long history of suspicion of China’s involvement in the Middle East.

Since the height of the Cold War in the 1950s, Western observers have been continually alarmed at the notion that China might aspire to a leadership role among the countries of Asia and Africa. Half a century ago, the perceived threat was “communist subversion,” whether overt in terms of direct military intervention or clandestine in the form of foreign aid and insidious ideological propaganda. Today, that fear has evolved into anxiety that Asian and African countries might see China as a superpower that can rival, undermine, or even supplant American interests. Dozens of books have been published in the last few years purporting to reveal the real story of China’s involvement in the non-Western world, particularly in Africa but also in the Middle East. One theme common to each of these studies is the growing understanding that, whatever else happens, Chinese influence in these areas is impossible to ignore. The protests, uprisings, and revolutions that have rocked the Arab world since January 2011 have intensified scrutiny of China’s international aspirations, since veto power in the United Nations Security Council has frequently placed China in a position to thwart American ambitions. In this context, even a passing comment on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s official Twitter feed that “China’s experience [is] worth emulation” is a potentially explosive declaration.

2. For a particularly alarmist example of mainstream Western journalism about China’s threat to the Middle East, see Greg MacGregor, “Red China Warns London and Paris,” New York Times, 4 November 1956, 19.


Visitors to the Chinese embassy in Cairo’s fashionable district of Zamalek will find no overt evidence that the Chinese government aspires to the status of a global superpower as so many analysts fear. The collages of photographs on the embassy walls reveal how China officially presents itself to the Arab world in the twenty-first century. On one display board, dozens of photographs with bilingual captions depict a massive military exercise in which Chinese soldiers, equipped with the most modern weapons, demonstrate their power and precision (and, of course, rescue a helpless elderly Tibetan woman in the process). Near the embassy’s front entrance, a second, newer display board celebrates the orderliness of the Chinese government’s evacuation of its citizens from Cairo during the protests of January 2011. In photograph after photograph, megaphone-wielding embassy officials direct hundreds of Chinese people – many waving Chinese flags – into perfect lines to await the planes and ships that will deliver them home, away from the chaos of Egypt. At first glance, it is an odd choice to celebrate the fact that, as Egypt was undergoing what most Egyptians now enthusiastically describe as a “revolution,” the Chinese government scrambled to remove its citizens from the country. But this message is also characteristic of Chinese diplomacy. China is selling order and stability, buttressed always by a healthy dose of nationalism. Its hands-off attitude toward recent events in the Middle East reflects longstanding continuity in Chinese foreign policy going back long before 1949; mindful of China’s own battles against Western and Japanese imperialism, successive generations of Chinese leaders have always regarded non-intervention in the domestic affairs of foreign countries as an inviolable principle.\footnote{The continuity underlying Chinese foreign policy and the effects of imperialism on it are analyzed in greater detail in Michael H. Hunt, The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).} In fact, China presents itself to the Egyptian public today much the same way it did in the 1950s, emphasizing that it is a pluralistic but united society with a strong and organized government that has brought prosperity to the Chinese
nation. Although China’s growing economic clout has raised the stakes for its investment in the Middle East, the fundamentals of Beijing’s approach to Sino-Arab relations have changed far less than one might expect over the course of the past sixty years.

Despite this continuity, most recent publications about Sino-Arab relations have made only a cursory effort to explore the historical context in which those relations evolved. China’s interactions with the Middle East might be a popular subject for political scientists, economists, and anthropologists, but historians have almost completely overlooked the topic for the past two decades. This inattention is perplexing, particularly in light of the unprecedented availability of archival resources. Simply put, Sino-Arab relations prior to the 1990s are not well understood by historians, whether in China, the Middle East, or the West. This thesis is a first step to fill this gap in the historical literature and to draw attention to the need to understand better the development of Sino-Arab relations. As the first major study of China and the Middle East during the Cold War to be based on extensive research in both Chinese and Arabic sources, it reviews, reinterprets, and refocuses the few existing works about the history of Sino-Arab relations, which are by now far out of date. In so doing, it not only provides background information that supplements and sometimes complicates prevailing interpretations of China’s contemporary involvement in the Middle East, but it also challenges accepted notions about how postcolonial countries interacted in the mid-twentieth century.

6. For the most part, this generalization can be applied equally to histories of China’s relations with Africa. One exception is Deborah Bräutigam’s The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), which thoughtfully outlines the history of China’s involvement in Africa and its relevance for contemporary relations.

7. One exception, Yufeng Mao, has analyzed cultural contact between China and the Middle East during the Republican Era, but she has done so almost entirely from the Chinese vantage point and with no attention to China’s impact on the Middle East. See for example Yufeng Mao, “Sino-Muslims in Chinese Nation-building, 1906-1956” (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 2007) and Yufeng Mao, “A Muslim Vision for the Chinese Nation: Chinese Pilgrimage Missions to Mecca during World War II,” The Journal of Asian Studies 70 (2011).
The main goal of this thesis is to examine the development of relations between China and Egypt and between China and Algeria. It concentrates on the decade between the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 and the breakdown of efforts to organize a second Asian-African Conference in Algiers in 1965. Consequently, it traces what might be considered the “rise and fall” of close associations among the postcolonial countries of the Third World, treating China’s relations with Egypt and Algeria as case studies that can illuminate not only Sino-Arab relations more generally, but also the so-called “Bandung spirit” as a whole. Although Beijing courted other Arab countries during the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt and Algeria became China’s most significant Arab allies. Nasser’s Egypt was both the first Arab country to recognize Communist China and the country that built by far the closest relationship with Mao Zedong’s government. Although Algeria was a relative latecomer in that it did not seek Chinese support until 1958, it is nonetheless particularly relevant because the Chinese enjoyed greater prestige in Algeria than perhaps anywhere else in the Middle East. Most important, Egypt and Algeria were the two Arab countries in the best position to engage with the Chinese on an ideological level. The Chinese and Egyptian governments, as well as the provisional Algerian government in Cairo (the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne, or GPRA), portrayed themselves as revolutionary regimes. The Chinese Communist revolution of 1949, the Egyptian Free Officers’ revolution of 1952, and the Front de Libération Nationale’s (FLN) ongoing struggle for Algerian independence from France were defining experiences at the forefront of political consciousness in each of these three countries. Those revolutions provided a meaningful ideological framework for the development of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations. China’s revolution was a common topic of discussion in both Egyptian and Algerian newspapers. The Chinese state press also presented Egypt and Algeria as inheritors of a common revolutionary tradition. As a result, Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations were
reinforced by an ideological dimension that was not present to the same extent in, for example, China’s interactions with Syria.

In order to understand what Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations meant to the people of those three countries, this thesis looks beyond elite diplomacy to explore the two constituencies most crucial in negotiating and facilitating these relationships: Chinese Muslims and Arab leftists. Beijing employed representatives of China’s large Muslim population for propaganda purposes, ensuring that prominent pro-regime Muslims were present at every meeting with Arab leaders. Muslims throughout China were also an eager audience for news about their co-religionists in the Middle East. By contrast, Egypt rarely included radical leftists – and certainly not self-identified communists – in its delegations to China (although, in the late 1950s, the FLN sometimes did). Even so, many Arab communists and socialists did visit China during the 1950s and 1960s. Back home, Arab leftists analyzed and debated what lessons China’s communist experiment might hold for their own countries. Moreover, although both Chinese Muslims and Arab leftists were marginalized politically, they were constituencies whose acquiescence was crucial at a time when Mao’s and Nasser’s regimes, as well as the FLN, were still consolidating their authority. As a result, it is imperative to appreciate how these two groups could influence foreign policy decision-making. Only by writing Chinese Muslims and Arab leftists into the

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8. This thesis uses the term “Chinese Muslims” to refer generally to all Muslims, regardless of official ethnicity, living in China. Inevitably, the vast majority of the Muslims involved in Chinese diplomacy in the Middle East belonged to the Hui minzu, but some other minzus were represented as well. Jonathan Lipman, Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) has advocated the term “Sino-Muslims” to refer to those Muslims, mostly Hui, who lived within the Chinese cultural milieu, thereby excluding Muslim ethnic groups such as the Uyghur who retained a separate language and distinct cultural identity. This thesis prefers the term “Chinese Muslims” because it is more concerned with official Chinese policy toward all of its Muslim minorities than with the cultural identification of any particular Muslim group. Although the China Islamic Association made certain to recognize official distinctions among Muslim minzus, it also treated all Chinese Muslims as a coherent community joined by their common faith. It is, therefore, appropriate in many circumstances to refer to Chinese Muslims as a whole when discussing official government policy.

9. This thesis uses the term “Arab leftists” to refer to politicians and intellectuals in the Arab world who were inspired by Marxist economic and political ideas, regardless of whether they were members of explicitly communist organizations.
narrative of Sino-Arab relations can one achieve a complete understanding of how foreign policy decisions resonated in particular communities.

This focus on ideology and domestic politics necessitates a radical reinterpretation of Sino-Arab relations that positions nationalism and nation-building at center stage. The overarching argument of this thesis is that Sino-Arab relations were relevant not because of their limited impact on the international arena, but because the governments of China, Egypt, and Algeria manipulated those associations for their own ends. Every diplomatic encounter meant something different in each of those three countries. What these situations had in common, however, was that proponents of Sino-Arab relations, whether Chinese, Egyptian, or Algerian, hoped to use those relationships to confer ideological legitimacy on some particular nationalist vision. For the Chinese government in 1955 and 1956, the pursuit of closer relations with Egypt offered a means to rally Chinese Muslims behind the Communist regime. In Egypt, contact with China presented Nasser’s government with an opportunity to articulate a national commitment to anti-imperialism that outflanked both leftist and Islamist domestic opposition to his rule. Beginning in 1958, overt support for the Algerian independence movement allowed the Chinese government to cultivate an image of itself as a champion of other radical independence movements and to validate its own ideology by claiming that other anti-imperialist countries were adopting the Chinese model of revolution. The Algerians also sought ideological legitimacy from the Chinese, whose recognition of the FLN as a genuine revolutionary organization was much more important than the inconsistent amount of military aid that Beijing supplied to its Algerian allies. Relations between China and Egypt or between China and Algeria remained strong so long as they contributed to each country’s attempts to define a national ideology and construct a national identity. The Bandung spirit that pervaded the late 1950s and early 1960s reflected the importance of international cooperation in consolidating national authority; as China’s relations with Egypt
and Algeria demonstrated, however, this goodwill did not evolve into genuine bilateral engagement that could survive the vagaries of changing national priorities.

Historical Overview of China’s Involvement in the Middle East

Although the Bandung Conference heralded the beginning of the Chinese Communist government’s interest in pursuing diplomatic relations with Arab countries, cultural and political contact between China and the Middle East was by no means a new phenomenon in 1955. Economic and cultural exchange along the Silk Road dates back at least two thousand years. The first Muslim communities in China were established as early as the seventh century, when Arab traders brought Islam to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Popular accounts of Sino-Arab relations tend to highlight the travels of Ibn Battuta and Zheng He, two larger-than-life figures whose journeys took them between China and Africa; together, they represent the centuries of sustained cultural contact across both Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. The most widely accepted historiographical model of Chinese Islam delineates three “waves” of transmission in which new ideas and practices from the Middle East reached China. The first of these waves, which lasted from the seventh century to the fourteenth century, began with the arrival of the first Muslims in China and ended with the rise of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The second, which peaked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, brought Sufism to China from the Middle East and Central Asia. The 1890s witnessed the beginning of the third wave, in which some Chinese Muslims sought to impose an orthodox interpretation of Islam as a way of revitalizing and strengthening China’s Islamic community at a time when China was increasingly subject to European and Japanese

10. For more detail on the early history of Muslims in China, see Donald Daniel Leslie, Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800 (Belconnen, Australia: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986).
hegemony. This impulse was epitomized by the anti-Sufi Yihewa’ni (Ar. ʾikhwān, named after the Wahhabi supporters of the Saud family), founded by Ma Wanfu after his return to China from the Arabian Peninsula in 1893. The immense prestige of the various Sufi orders (Ch. menhuan; Ar. ṭariqa) during the second wave and of the Yihewa’ni during the third demonstrates that many Chinese Muslims regarded the Arab Middle East as the source of “genuine” Islam. This recognition of the Middle East’s central role in Islam eventually formed part of the foundation on which secular relations between China and the Arab world were constructed.

In contrast to the cultural and religious significance with which most Chinese Muslims invested the Middle East, few Arabs would have given China any consideration prior to the 1950s. China was perceived as distant and exotic, as evidenced by the widely accepted (though probably inauthentic) hadith that Muslims should “seek knowledge even unto China.” Some Arab writers in the late-Ottoman era did think to include Chinese Muslims in their expanding conception of the global Islamic community, as when ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi imagined a Chinese delegation attending a worldwide Islamic conference in his *Umm al-qura [The mother of towns]*. For the most part, however, the only Asian country that captured the attention of Arab and Turkish intellectuals prior to World War I was Japan. As a non-Western country that had successfully modernized to the point that it could compete with the imperialist powers of the West, Japan became a model to many Ottoman-era intellectuals who hoped to effect a similar transformation. Japan enjoyed particular

15. Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-
popularity in the Middle East after defeating Russia in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, the first major military victory for a non-Western country over an imperialist power. A leading Egyptian champion of Japan was the proto-nationalist author Mustafa Kamil, whose 1904 tract *Al-Shams al-mushriqa [The rising sun]* asserted that only global cooperation between East Asia and the Muslim world could fight back effectively against the British Empire, which was itself global in scope. Even if China took a backseat to Japan in the Arab or Ottoman imagination in the first half of the twentieth century, the eagerness of so many Muslim intellectuals to exalt a powerful, defiant Asian country as a model to be emulated set the tone for the postcolonial era, when some Arab leftists began to view China as the more suitable partner.

Two of the themes that guided Communist China’s approach to dealing with Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s – recognition of Islam’s role in facilitating contacts and an ironclad commitment to Chinese nationalism – were already key features of Sino-Arab relations during China’s Republican era. The most prominent Chinese Muslims between 1912 and 1949 (nearly all of them of the Hui ethnicity) tended to be nationalist reformers dedicated to modernizing their own community and integrating it into a revitalized China. These men, including the warlord-turned-Guomindang (GMD) official Ma Fuxiang and the Salafi-turned-nationalist imam Hu Songshan, sought influence through large-scale cultural and educational institutions such as the Chengda Normal School (Chengda Shifan Xuexiao)

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16. Ibid., Ch. 4.; Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), Prologue. The Russo-Japanese War continued to inspire nationalists in the Third World even five decades after its conclusion. When the American author Richard Wright traveled to the Bandung Conference in 1955, he met a young Indonesian who insisted that “the biggest event of the twentieth century was the defeat of Russia by Japan in 1905” because “it was the beginning of the liberation of the Asian mind.” See Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995 [1956]), 60.


and the China Islamic Association (Zhongguo Huijiao Gonghui), a Nationalist forerunner of
the similar organization founded by the Communists in 1953. Many of the Chinese
Muslims who studied Arabic and Islam in the Middle East, particularly at al-Azhar
University in Cairo, fully subscribed to this ethic of nationalist integration. A surprising
number of these students later wrote that, when living in the Middle East, they felt shame
because of China’s weakness and thus tried to represent China positively to the foreign
Muslims they met. Several of the Chinese Muslim students who studied in Cairo in the first
half of the twentieth century went on to play important roles in the redevelopment of Sino-
Arab relations after 1955, most notably Ma Jian, who met with many Egyptian delegations in
the 1950s. This tactic of using Chinese Muslims to communicate with Arab Muslims on
behalf of the government was first practiced on a major scale in the desperate 1940s, when
Chiang Kai-shek sent several Islamic delegations to the Middle East to spread anti-Japanese
propaganda and assert that the Chinese people were united behind him in resistance.
Because of this tradition, one might interpret the decision to employ Chinese Muslims to
promote China to Middle Eastern countries after 1955 as a return to the GMD’s policy of the
previous decade.

Yet while it is important to be mindful of this continuity in Sino-Arab relations, it
should not distract from the fact that China’s overtures at the Bandung Conference to Arab
countries of all political proclivities were part of a bold, new policy to win support for the
Chinese government. The Bandung Conference, where representatives of 29 independent

19. Ibid.; Jonathan Lipman, Familiar Strangers, Ch. 5.
20. Muhammad Makin (Ma Jian), Nazra jam‘a ila tarikh al-islam fi al-sin wa-ahwai al-muslimin fiha [General
contemplation of the history of Islam in China and the conditions of its Muslims] (Cairo: Al-Matba‘a al-
appeal to the Egyptian people in book form. See Wafd al-sin li-l-ta‘arif al-islami [The delegation of China for
Islamic understanding], Kam min al-buldan al-siniiyya ihtalatha al-junud al-yabaniyya? [How many of the
Chinese lands have been occupied by the Japanese armies?] (Cairo: Al-Matba‘a al-‘asriyya bi-misr, 1939).
Asian and African countries gathered to pledge solidarity and denounce European imperialism, marked the first time that non-Muslim leaders such as Zhou Enlai dealt directly with their top Arab counterparts. In Bandung, Zhou and other Chinese leaders sought to win over Arab leaders with their responsible and conciliatory attitude toward international politics. Zhou paid particular attention to Nasser, with whom he spent at least some of his leisure time in Bandung. Perhaps surprisingly, he also courted the more conservative Saudi then-Prince Faisal, who agreed to grant visas to Chinese Muslims undertaking the hajj. During the official conference proceedings, Zhou was the first non-Muslim delegate to support the Arab position on the Palestinian refugee crisis, overcoming Indian opposition to ensure that the Conference’s final communiqué supported the rights of displaced Palestinians. Zhou’s performance in Bandung so impressed Nasser that the latter agreed to send his Minister of Pious Endowments (wazīr al-awqāf) Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri on a formal visit to China in May 1955. Al-Baquri’s trip to China, during which he was accompanied by Cairo University law professor Mustafa Kamil, was the first in a series of escalating contacts between China and Egypt over the course of the following year. In the summer of 1955, an Egyptian trade delegation toured China and reached an important agreement, which laid the groundwork for Egyptian diplomatic representation of China by establishing a permanent commercial office in Beijing. The same year, a Chinese acrobatic

22. For example, the pacifist American minister Homer Jack, who attended the Bandung Conference as an observer, reported seeing Zhou, Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Nehru’s daughter Indira Gandhi, and Burmese Prime Minister U Nu eating a casual dinner together after one of the Conference sessions had adjourned. See Diary of Homer Jack, 24 April 1955, in Papers of Homer A. Jack, Series VI, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA.

23. In 1952, the first official Communist Chinese hajj delegation caused national embarrassment when, upon reaching Pakistan, it was not granted visas to continue to Saudi Arabia.

24. For the final communiqué of the Bandung Conference, see China and the Asian-African Conference: Documents (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1955). The minutes of the closed-door sessions of the Bandung Conference are preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (henceforth abbreviated CFMA). See the minutes of the heads of delegations meeting at the Asian-African Conference, 20-24 April 1955, 207-00048-01, CFMA. The various proposals for inclusion in the final communiqué can be found separately. See each country’s proposals and the Conference’s decisions at the Asian-African Conference, 18-23 April 1955, 207-00047-01, CFMA.
troupe performed in Cairo as the first official representatives of the Chinese government to travel to Egypt. Finally, in January 1956, a group of Chinese students arrived in Cairo to study Arabic at Cairo University, reviving – albeit in more secular form – the tradition of Chinese Muslim scholars studying at al-Azhar. These exchanges between China and Egypt led eventually to Egypt’s formal diplomatic recognition of Communist China in May 1956, a mere thirteen months after the Bandung Conference.

Nasser’s decision to recognize China was a great political victory for the Chinese. Not only was Egypt the first Arab country and the first African country to recognize the Beijing government, but it was also only the third Asian or African country (after Nepal and Afghanistan) to do so following the outbreak of the Korean War. The ousted ambassador of the Republic of China, He Fengshan, was infuriated by his expulsion from Egypt, but he was resigned to accept a significant defeat for his country’s foreign policy. What particularly unnerved Western policymakers, including American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was the prospect that Nasser’s decision could re-establish momentum by which a succession of other countries would follow Egypt’s lead. Accordingly, Dulles immediately ordered American ambassadors stationed throughout the Middle East to reiterate the American argument in favor of the Chinese Nationalist regime in Taipei to the governments of the countries in which they were posted. As it turned out, Dulles was right to be concerned: both Syria and Yemen joined Egypt in switching their ambassadors from Taipei to Beijing before the end of 1956, followed by Iraq after ʿAbd al-Karim Qasim’s coup in July 1958.

25. See He Fengshan, Waijiao shengya sishinian [Forty years of my diplomatic life] (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 1990), 349-350. He silently left Cairo to return to Taipei several months before he was officially required to depart.

26. US Department of State, Central Files, 793.02/5-1756, “Circular Telegram from the Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions,” 17 May 1956, reprinted in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957 (henceforth abbreviated FRUS), vol. 3, 362-363. Dulles’ instructions stressed that foreign governments should not recognize the Beijing government because the fact that more countries recognized the Republic of China indicated that People’s Republic of China was not the legitimate government of China – an undeniably circular argument.
Thereafter, when countries across Africa became independent, they had a choice between establishing relations with China’s Communist or Nationalist governments. Many of the more radical new regimes opted for the former. For China, recognition from Egypt thus conferred considerable international legitimacy. By comparison, Nasser’s goal in recognizing Beijing was somewhat more material; after his purchase of Soviet arms via Czechoslovakia the previous year, he hoped to secure a channel to ensure access to more Soviet weapons through a non-member of the United Nations in the event of an arms embargo against the entire Middle East. While this eventuality never transpired, Egypt’s increasingly close relationship with China quickly paid off in other ways, particularly during the Suez Crisis, when Beijing vocally sided with the Egyptian cause and even contributed financially to the Egyptian war effort.

Despite the enthusiasm with which both the Chinese and Egyptian governments had pursued diplomatic relations in 1955 and 1956, the first tensions between the two countries emerged within a few years. 1958 was a turbulent year in both China and the Middle East. The Taiwan Strait crisis, the Great Leap Forward, the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the Iraqi Revolution, and the Western military interventions in Jordan and Lebanon all contributed to the radicalization of politics throughout the Third World. The effects of these successive conflicts and crises resonated far beyond the boundaries of the countries directly involved; for example, in the summer of 1958, the Chinese government linked the deployment of American troops to Lebanon and the Chinese shelling of Nationalist-held islands in the Taiwan Strait. The mobilization campaigns launched as part of the Great

28. Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 181, 202-203; “Mei ying qinluizhe ying liji cong zhongdong, nanchaoxian he taiwan gun chuqu [The American and English invaders should immediately leave the Middle East, South Korea, and Taiwan],” Renmin Ribao, 25 July 1958, 2.
Leap Forward were accompanied by a renewed emphasis on Marxism. In this political climate, Chinese leaders promptly abandoned the tolerant rhetoric that had characterized their interactions with Asian and African countries during the previous three years. Reflecting this ideological reorientation, Chinese publications intended for a Muslim audience abruptly ceased glorifying Egypt and other Arab regimes in February 1958, preferring instead to focus on how Muslims could best advance the aims of the Great Leap Forward.\textsuperscript{29} In the newly formed UAR, Nasser’s need to consolidate power and legitimize Syrian-Egyptian unification necessitated a more conspicuous commitment to Arab nationalism as well as increasingly harsh persecution of Syrian communists. Even with these new priorities, however, the definitive rift between Beijing and Cairo did not occur immediately. Throughout 1958, the Chinese government declared its support for Nasser, the formation of the UAR, and the principles of Arab nationalism and Arab unification.\textsuperscript{30} It was not until March 1959 that Chinese and Egyptian officials openly criticized each other. Later that year, the most contentious arguments between the two sides were triggered by the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) invitation to disaffected Syrian communist Khalid Bakdash to speak in Beijing and by Nasser’s outrage (supporting the position of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) over China’s crackdown in Tibet. Relations between China and Egypt remained strained throughout the Sino-Indian War in 1962. During the years from 1959 to 1963, the initial enthusiasm of the Bandung era appeared to have cooled.

As China’s relations with Egypt were beginning to crumble, Beijing began to seek new, more radical allies among the decolonizing countries of Africa. In addition to such avowedly socialist countries as Mali and Guinea, one of the most important of China’s new African partners was Algeria, where the FLN was desperate for international support in its

\textsuperscript{29} Compare, for example, the first and second issues of 1958 in \textit{Zhongguo Musilin [Chinese Muslims]}, the official magazine of the China Islamic Association.

\textsuperscript{30} Chinese consul general in Damascus to the Foreign Ministry, 15 July 1958, 107-00153-05, CFMA.
of independence against the French. In fall 1958, China became the first non-Arab country to recognize the GPRA and its new president, Ferhat Abbas. Even if, in a sense, Algeria was soon to “replace” Egypt as China’s staunchest revolutionary ally in the Arab world, it is important to note that it was Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fawzi who first asked China to recognize the Algerian nationalists. Since both Mao and Nasser considered themselves patrons of the Algerian revolution, Beijing and Cairo were united in their support for the FLN even in the midst of their disagreements over other issues. From the beginning, the Chinese government approached its relations with Algeria in a different manner from the way it had courted Egypt in 1955 and 1956. China, which had once begged for international acceptance, was now in a position to bestow recognition upon an isolated regime. Accordingly, Chinese officials were brazen and overbearing in their private meetings with members of the FLN, whom they lectured on the Chinese model of carrying out a “people’s revolution.” Whereas the Chinese government had once shied away from discussing communism with Egyptian representatives, top Chinese officials were relatively vocal in support of communism with Algerian visitors to Beijing. The fact that Sino-Algerian relations in the late 1950s were much more overtly ideological than Sino-Egyptian relations had been just a few years prior reflected both the radicalization of the Chinese government and the reality that decolonization in Africa allowed it to be more selective in choosing its allies. By 1959, it appeared that China’s remarkable willingness to cooperate with non-Communist nationalist countries at and after the Bandung Conference was merely a brief aberration.

31. Chen Jiakang, Chinese ambassador in Cairo, to the Foreign Ministry, 29 September 1958, 107-00162-06, CFMA.
32. Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
In 1963, the Chinese government pulled an about-face by resuming its conciliatory foreign policy of the mid-1950s. Zhou and Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi traveled to ten African countries between December 1963 and February 1964, beginning with their first official visits to Cairo and Algiers. In both his public speeches in Cairo and his private meetings with Nasser, Zhou behaved as if the tensions and disagreements of 1959-1962 had never occurred. Zhou’s primary goal for his African “safari” was to win support for a second Asian-African Conference. For the Chinese, such a revival of the Bandung spirit would present the opportunity once again to portray China as the leader of the decolonized countries of Asia and Africa in a forum from which the Soviet Union would be excluded. The specter of the Sino-Soviet split, which had become public in the early 1960s and had turned increasingly hostile thereafter, loomed over Zhou’s entire visit to Africa. Now a pariah within the communist bloc, China had to revert to Asian-African solidarity and anti-imperialist nationalism in order to outmaneuver Moscow and win allies around the world. China, isolated in the international community once again, responded by resuming the strategies it had employed in 1955. Both Nasser and independent Algeria’s first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, were unfailingly friendly toward Zhou in Cairo and Algiers; they publicly welcomed him with effusive praise both for him personally and for Communist China as a whole. Yet despite their positive tone, neither Nasser nor Ben Bella needed to court China’s approval, as they had in the 1950s. By 1963, both Egypt and Algeria had new priorities, particularly economic development, and China simply could not afford to match the arms race in American and Soviet promises of aid and investment. When China finally abandoned plans for the second Asian-African Conference in 1965, a decade of unparalleled intensity in Sino-Arab relations effectively ceased.

33. Technically, this visit was not the first time that Zhou set foot on Egyptian soil, since he had passed through the Suez Canal en route to France in 1920.
To be sure, China continued to have political contact with Arab and African countries throughout the rest of the 1960s. The domestic upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, which ravaged the institutional structure of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, did not preclude Chinese engagement with the rest of the world. The Cultural Revolution did, however, accelerate the process by which China refocused its foreign policy to support only a few extremely radical governments and opposition organizations. In the Arab world, China’s principal allies during these years were the Marxist guerrilla organizations of Yemen and Oman, as well as various constituents of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), particularly George Habash’s Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).34 Gradually, as China’s internal politics and leadership hierarchy stabilized in the 1970s, it re-established contacts with mainstream governments. Beginning in 1979, China began to pursue a much greater economic role in the Middle East, both in terms of industrial investment and of weapons sales to Arab regimes. It is this economic aspect that dominates Sino-Arab relations today. Chinese companies are now directly involved in the economies of every country in the Middle East. Sino-Arab relations in the twenty-first century thus differ markedly from the 1950s and 1960s, when China was poor and isolated. Nevertheless, the history of the early development of Sino-Arab relations remains relevant, not least because all of the governments in question still extol the 1950s and 1960s as a golden age in their mutual relations.35 It is easy, as a result, to impose a narrative arc onto the history of Sino-Arab relations: initial enthusiasm catalyzed the development of meaningful partnerships, which gradually gave way to hostility and then


disengagement, which in turn gave way over time to the current renaissance in which the bonds of the late 1950s are being reconstituted. This narrative is exaggerated and over-generalized, but it is a convenient starting point for this thesis, whose most fundamental question is how the heady optimism of the Bandung Conference and its aftermath dissipated so completely in just a single decade.

Approaches to the Study of Sino-Arab Relations

The basic facts of Sino-Arab relations during the Cold War have been well documented. Western historians and political scientists began examining Communist China’s involvement in the Middle East soon after it established relations with Egypt in 1956. Some of the earliest serious analyses of the topic, published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, reflected the uneasy atmosphere of their era, when the threat of communist “subversion” inspired writing that was often histrionic, if not outright polemical. Because the most frequently cited histories of modern Sino-Arab relations were all written between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, they struck a more even-handed tone by detailing both the early triumphs and the subsequent tensions that emerged between China and its Arab allies. For the most part, these studies are sober and accurate. Their main weakness, however, was that their authors did not have access to the diverse range of sources that have since become available. Not only was the use of government archives completely out of the question.


before the beginning of the twenty-first century, but extensive research about political topics in China was difficult before the 1990s at the earliest. Not surprisingly, all but one of the most widely read studies of Sino-Arab relations cited no Chinese-language sources at all.\textsuperscript{38} Instead, they relied on a few government publications and translations of Chinese national newspapers available through the American government’s Survey of China Mainland Press. These sources, however, reflected only a fraction of the public propaganda of the Beijing government and were not an adequate foundation to support any detailed argument about China’s ambitions in the Middle East. As a result, many English-language histories of Sino-Arab relations were inherently unbalanced, offering deeper insight into the political situation in the Middle East than in China.\textsuperscript{39}

In addition to the difficulties of limited sources, many previous studies of Sino-Arab relations were also marred by conceptual problems, particularly the fact that their authors invariably interpreted the attitudes of the Chinese, Egyptian, and other Arab governments solely within the context of the wider Cold War. It is undeniable that both the United States and the Soviet Union played crucial roles in the regional politics of the Middle East and East Asia during the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, authors of secondary literature about Sino-Arab relations have tended to go too far in attributing each country’s foreign policy decision-making to considerations about their relationships with Washington and Moscow. In so doing, these historians have left little scope to consider Sino-Arab relations in their own right. The two most nuanced books to focus specifically on China’s policy toward the Middle East, Yitzhak Shichor’s \textit{The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy} and Lillian Craig

\textsuperscript{38} The exception to this trend is the work of Yitzhak Shichor, who conducted limited research in Chinese. Among studies of Sino-African relations written during this period, Bruce D. Larkin’s \textit{China and Africa, 1949-1970: The Foreign Policy of the People’s Republic of China} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971) is also notable for its attention to Chinese sources.

\textsuperscript{39} The best example of this tendency was Hashim S.H. Behbehani’s \textit{China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World}, which analyzed several Arab popular movements in great detail but which made no genuine attempt to analyze China’s reasons for supporting them.
Harris’s *China Considers the Middle East*, both exemplified this trend. By identifying “China’s fundamental and consistent interest in the Middle East” as the need “to prevent the domination of the Middle East by a hostile power,” Shichor marginalized Sino-Arab relations as a sideshow of the larger Cold War and overlooked any possibility that the Chinese government might have had more positive goals for its relations with the Arab world.⁴⁰ Although Harris published her study in 1993, just after the end of the Cold War, she nevertheless interpreted China’s attitude toward the Middle East as a consequence of its ever-changing relations with the United States and the Soviet Union.⁴¹ Tellingly, in a different work, she periodized Sino-Arab relations in terms of China’s relations with Washington and Moscow and paid only secondary consideration to what actually occurred between China and its Arab allies.⁴² The most detailed monograph about the first two decades of Communist China’s relations with Egypt, Mon’im Nasser-Eddine’s *Arab-Chinese Relations*, did not discuss the role of the United States and the Soviet Union as much as Shichor’s and Harris’s books, but it also subordinated Sino-Arab relations to the Cold War context. For Nasser-Eddine, Sino-Egyptian relations were inherently about both countries’ struggles for “influence” in the Third World, a competition in which the superpowers were cast as antagonists.⁴³ Nasser-Eddine never attempted to define what this “influence” would have meant to the Chinese or Egyptian governments. Regardless, it is clear that neither country could have possibly succeeded in imposing its will anywhere in the bipolar international arena. Perhaps the most fundamental contradiction in Shichor’s, Harris’s, and Nasser-Eddine’s analyses was that relations between China and its Arab allies never directly affected

⁴¹ Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*.
⁴² Lillian Craig Harris, “Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China’s Policy in the Islamic World,” *The China Quarterly* 133 (1993).
the course of the Cold War, thus calling into question whether their attempts to evaluate Sino-Arab relations from a solely international perspective could ever produce meaningful conclusions.

Indeed, several eminent scholars of the international history of the Middle East have asserted that China had no relevance to the region during the mid-twentieth century and have suggested that the significance of Sino-Arab relations has been overstated. Although he conducted some research into Sino-Arab relations himself,44 Fred Halliday was ultimately skeptical, contending that “China had no significant impact on any regional country or issue” and that, at least up to the 1990s, “the modern history of the Middle East could be written without any reference to it.”45 Peter Sluglett was somewhat more diplomatic in dismissing China’s direct influence on the Middle East, conceding that China was “certainly important” as an “example” for some radical Arab governments, but he still concluded that China was only important to the Arab world inasmuch as the Sino-Soviet conflict influenced Moscow’s Middle East policy.46 To a great degree, Halliday and Sluglett’s skepticism was warranted. It would be wrong to pretend that China ever wielded more than a fraction of the influence possessed by the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet it was precisely this inability to exert real power that made the relations between China and Egypt and between China and Algeria so intriguing. Unconstrained by critical security interests in the Middle East, the Chinese government was free to be particularly outspoken with regard to Arab affairs. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sino-Arab relations were not about power, but about perceptions. Sluglett was correct – China’s example did matter to many left-wing Arab politicians and intellectuals – yet historians have not explored in detail just why China was so attractive.

44. Fred Halliday, “China and the Middle East.”
Moreover, neither Halliday nor Sluglett noted that the Chinese, Egyptian, and Algerian governments all tried to manipulate their relations for domestic audiences. Because of the continuous interplay between foreign affairs and national politics during this period, the study of Sino-Arab relations reveals at least as much about the internal situations of those three countries as it does about their foreign policies.

The most influential historians of Sino-Arab relations – including Nasser-Eddine, Shichor, and Harris – have paid only token attention to domestic issues of ideology, identity, and cultural politics within the countries they have studied. Instead, their traditional, realist perspective has led them to value high-level meetings, political negotiations, and trade agreements over the question of what the development of Sino-Arab relations actually meant for ordinary Chinese or Arabs. None of these authors identified any relevance for domestic politics except as a constraint on the freedom of leaders to pursue closer relationships with one another; in particular, their studies lacked any appreciation for how domestic political considerations could have shaped the manner in which governments approached Sino-Arab relations or how those relations could have resonated among ordinary citizens. The best way to illustrate this oversight is to examine each author’s approach to writing about Chinese Muslims. Not only did the Chinese government use Muslims to promote Communist China in the Middle East, but Chinese Muslims also attentively followed the development of relations with Egypt and other Arab countries. Yet Shichor dismissed their significance entirely, writing incorrectly that Beijing “was slow to perceive the relevance of Chinese Muslims to its foreign policy.”

Nasser-Eddine, who was more concerned with Egyptian politics than Chinese, simply suggested that China was wise to employ Muslims in its dealings with Egypt because the Islamist opposition to Nasser’s government might otherwise

have attempted to block Sino-Egyptian rapprochement. Harris advanced a similar position, arguing that Chinese Muslims were relevant only because Arab Muslims might have objected to how poorly the Beijing regime supposedly treated them. In other words, these authors only paid attention to how Arab Muslims interpreted the plight of their Chinese co-religionists, rather than to how Chinese Muslims themselves reacted to an international phenomenon in which they had both a major role and a vested interest. Because English-language secondary literature about Sino-Arab relations has eschewed all issues of identity and cultural politics, the question of how the Chinese government employed its relations with Arab countries to appeal to its own Muslim population has not received sufficient attention.

Recent work published in mainland China provides the most detailed research into the history of Sino-Arab relations, including some of the cultural ramifications of these contacts. Because of the declassification in the past decade of documents in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, as well as the publication of a spate of memoirs by former officials in the Communist government, the most revealing sources on this subject are in Chinese. No Chinese historian has yet synthesized all these materials into a complete study of the development of Sino-Arab relations, but several scholars have published exhaustive research into certain aspects of that topic. While this new research should not be overlooked, it is ultimately of limited utility, however, because its authors have all adopted a nationalist perspective. The study of China’s interactions with Muslim countries is a sensitive and potentially contentious topic; most Chinese historians to date have not been sufficiently skeptical in interpreting the motives of the Beijing government. The work of a young Chinese scholar named Li Qianyu typifies this unwillingness to question conventional interpretations of Chinese history. Li has conducted more extensive archival research into

48. Mon’im Nasser-Eddine, Arab-Chinese Relations, Ch. 5.
49. Lillian Craig Harris, “Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China’s Policy in the Islamic World”; Lillian Craig Harris, China Considers the Middle East, 79-81.
China’s relations with Non-Aligned countries during the 1960s than any other historian, but his perhaps disappointing conclusion was that Chinese foreign policy could be explained simply by the fact that Mao and other leaders were following their own Marxist ideology by fighting Soviet “revisionism.” 50 In addition, many Chinese authors who write specifically about the Arab world do so in part to champion closer relations between China and Arab countries today; as a result, their research takes on an editorial tone that makes it less useful as historical scholarship. In particular, many such works lose credibility by glossing over the tensions between China and Egypt that developed between 1959 and 1962, instead depicting Sino-Arab relations as a continuous exercise in mutual goodwill. 51 Moreover, Chinese scholars often adopt a tone of triumphalism by portraying Egyptian recognition of Communist China as inevitable without discussing either the nuances of the Egyptian political situation or the extreme efforts that the Chinese government undertook to convince Nasser that China could make a suitable ally. 52

Perhaps the most frustrating type of Chinese nationalist historiography is that which focuses on Chinese Muslims. The status of Islam in Chinese society is – as it was in the


51. Ma Lirong, “Xin zhongguo yu zhongdong de wenhua jiaoliu [Cultural exchange between new China and the Middle East],” Xiya feizhou [West Asia and Africa] 4 (2010); Sun Bigan, “Zhongdong wenti de lishi kunjing yu zhongguo de zhongdong zhengce [The historical dilemma of the Middle East problem and China’s Middle East Policy],” Zhongguo pudong ganba xueyuan xuebao [Journal of China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong] 4 (2010); Yang Fucheng, “Xin zhongguo wajiao liushinian zhong de zhong’a guanxi [Sino-Arab relations in sixty years of new China’s foreign diplomacy],” Alabo shijie yanjiu [Arab world studies] 1 (2010); Zhang Ying, “Zhongguo dai feizhou alabo guojia de ‘huoban wajiao’ [China’s ‘partnership diplomacy’ with African and Arab countries],” Alabo shijie yanjiu 5 (2009). A willingness to overlook unpleasant facts is also characteristic of the much more limited Arabic-language scholarship on the history of Sino-Arab relations. For example, Karam Hilmi Farahat, Al-Sin wa-misr: ‘al-tarikh al-hidari [China and Egypt: Across Modern History] (Cairo: Dar al-ahmadi li-l-nashr, 2008), 196-197 not only omits any reference to the tensions between China and Egypt in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but even credits Nasser with ending the Sino-Indian War and strongly implies that Nasser supported the Chinese position in that conflict, when in fact the opposite was the case.

52. See for example Du Xingzhi, “Zhongguo aiji jianjiao wushinian [Fifty years since the establishment of relations between China and Egypt],” Silu xinyu: Xin zhongguo he alabo guojia wushinian wajiao licheng [New rhyme of the Silk Road: The fifty-year diplomacy between new China and Arab countries] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2006).
1950s and 1960s – a particularly sensitive issue. In order to analyze it cogently, a historian must be willing to question received notions of Chinese minority policy, the relationship between Muslims and the Chinese state, and the meaning of Chinese nationalism. Yet the CCP’s attitude toward minorities, in which the Chinese nation is divided into fifty-six minzus according to rigidly defined ethnic criteria, is so deeply ingrained after six decades that this paradigm has pervaded Chinese scholarship on the Middle East.  

Part of the problem is that much Chinese research about the Middle East, especially that related to Islam, is published by official institutions in Ningxia, the Hui Muslim autonomous region in north-central China. These minority-centered institutions exist both to promote Muslims within Chinese society and to reinforce the notion that Muslims are fully Chinese. As a result, the academic work they produce tends to reflect this mission. The Hui historian Ma Mingliang, a professor at the Northwest Nationalities University (Xibei Minzu Daxue) in Lanzhou who is well positioned to conduct research into Sino-Arab relations because he speaks Arabic and has lived in Kuwait, epitomizes this trend. In his scholarship, Ma has divided the world into coherent and unchanging “civilizations” (essentially in the same manner as Samuel Huntington), including “Islamic” and “Sinic” civilizations. For Ma, Chinese Muslims belong to both worlds and have a responsibility to bring them closer together. Accordingly, he highlighted the contributions of Muslims (especially the Hui) to Sino-Arab relations in the 1950s and 1960s, a significant angle that has been neglected by Western scholars.  

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53. The minzu paradigm, developed in the early 1950s, was based in part on Stalinist notions of minority identity. It continues to emphasize descent rather than religion. According to official Chinese policy, adherence to Islam is a traditional cultural practice of ten minzus, but religion is not to be used as a criterion for determining a person’s minzu. A Hui man who no longer practices Islam remains Hui because his ancestors were Hui, while a Han person who converts to Islam remains Han for the same reason.

54. Not only are many relevant books published by the Ningxia renmin chubanshe, but the *Huizhu yanjiu* [Journal of Hui Muslim minority studies], one of the Chinese academic journals most willing to publish articles about Islamic connections between China and the Middle East, is also based in Ningxia.

55. Ma Mingliang, *Yisilan wenming ya zhonghua wenming de jiaowang licheng he qianjing* [The process and prospects of contact between the Islamic and Chinese civilizations] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006).

56. Ibid., 184-186. In particular, Ma has highlighted the role of Da Pusheng, the Hui vice president of the China
casting Muslims as intermediaries between civilizations, Ma gave his own community a central role in China’s international history. In promoting a reified conception of a national “role” for Muslims, however, he did not permit any room to consider Muslim identity in China – or, indeed, any question of identity, whether Chinese, Arab, or Muslim. By basing his work on the assumption that people’s cultural and national affiliations are fixed by their ethnicity and nationality, Ma, like other Chinese historians, has overlooked many of the salient issues of identity that the study of Sino-Arab relations might help to illuminate.

Consequently, this thesis must seek inspiration further afield than previous scholarship on Sino-Arab relations to find more constructive examples of how to conduct research into transnational topics while maintaining sight of the importance of constantly evolving notions of nationalism and the relevance of identity and ideology. A useful starting point is the work of Cemil Aydin, who has explored how Japanese and Ottoman intellectuals envisioned supranational integration as a tactic for strengthening their own states against imperialist encroachment.  

57. Aydin focused on Japan and the Ottoman Empire before World War I rather than China, Egypt, and Algeria in the mid-twentieth century, but in many ways his study of East Asian-Middle Eastern relations is a model for this thesis. Aydin’s observations about how two seemingly distant countries appropriated and redefined Western rhetoric about “civilization” are directly relevant to the Bandung era, when Asian and African countries co-opted Western notions of sovereignty and human rights to advance their own demands.  

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Islamic Association, who attended the Bandung Conference and led the first Communist Chinese hajj delegation in 1955.


Equally relevant is Aydin’s focus on Japanese-Ottoman relations as an intellectual rather than a political phenomenon. Rather than attempt to make the case that the limited high-level contact between Tokyo and Istanbul was more meaningful than it really was, Aydin explored, for example, what Japan signified to Ottoman subjects who were ultimately far more concerned with their own country’s plight than with what was happening on the other side of Asia. In so doing, he was able to identify a mutually reinforcing relationship between national and transnational ideologies analogous to that propounded in this thesis. Aydin’s work is a reminder not to discount the intricacies of domestic politics and national identities even when analyzing an international topic.

This thesis is also inspired by recent research that has challenged historians’ understanding of Soviet relations with postcolonial Muslim countries of the Third World. The Soviet Union had to contend with its own Muslim population, which was considerably larger than that of China, and policymakers in Moscow likewise attempted to utilize their own Islamic cultural and religious institutions to expand Soviet influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. The best recent scholarship on the role of Soviet Muslims in foreign affairs has demonstrated that much of the target audience for these efforts was Muslims inside the borders of the Soviet Union, whom the Moscow government hoped to inculcate with a sense of belonging to a communist society. Beyond the Middle East, historians have recently paid particular attention to Soviet relations with the government of Indonesia, another predominantly Muslim country that emerged from colonial domination in the wake of World War II. This impressive body of new research demonstrates not only that communist

engagement with the Islamic world was sustained and deliberate, but also that Indonesian President Sukarno had wider leeway than was previously appreciated to construct his relations with Moscow in a manner that benefited Indonesia’s development as a nation-state. Nevertheless, this surge of academic interest in Soviet relations with the Islamic world (as well as with non-Muslim countries in Asia and Africa) has not yet satisfactorily explored the larger implications of this topic. Moreover, despite the attention devoted to Soviet-Muslim relations during the Cold War, no major academic project has attempted to reconsider the relations of Chinese communists with those same countries and to challenge the conclusions of secondary literature about Chinese foreign policy that is woefully out of date. By focusing specifically on one decade of China’s relations with Egypt and Algeria, this thesis serves as an optimistic first step toward a new commitment to understanding Sino-Muslim relations that might eventually redress this imbalance.

This thesis also re-evaluates the meaning of Asian-African solidarity, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the idea of “neutralism.” These topics have not been the subject of extensive scholarly debate in the West since the mid-1960s, when many books and articles adopted a patronizing tone, discussing “new” countries with “inexperienced” leaders who were, consequently, generally depicted as naive. The implied consensus of 1960s historiography about relations among Third World countries was that Asian-African solidarity was little more than a temporary phase that Asian and African leaders would outgrow as they became

61. Ragna Boden, “Cold War Economics.”
62. One advocate of further research on the somewhat more general topic of Soviet relations with the Third World (including the Muslim World) is David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 12 (2011).
63. G.H. Jansen, for example, asserted that “both the Afro-Asian movement and the group of the non-aligned peoples served their turn by gathering the new countries into protective corrals wherein they had time to learn the techniques of foreign policy and diplomacy before exercising the right to independent choice.” See G.H. Jansen, Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 406. Peter Lyon took a similarly critical perspective by calling neutralism “superficial” and “full of pious generalities” in a book that criticized Asian and African leaders for the supposed incoherence of their idealistic foreign policies. See Peter Lyon, Neutralism (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1963), Ch. 3.
more realistic about the nature of power in the international community. Yet despite their uncharitable tone, commentators from the 1960s were at least correct that solidarity within the Third World was not strong enough to endure in any meaningful form beyond that decade. In recent years, with the benefit of newly available archival materials, some scholars have made the first tentative attempts to re-evaluate from a more sophisticated perspective the question of why this ideology “failed.”

The best framework for investigating this topic remains the underappreciated work of Robert Good, who as far back as 1962 insisted that Asian-African solidarity could only make sense within the context of nation-building. According to Good, “foreign policy for a new state is mainly (though not exclusively) a response to domestic conditions, not to external problems. Rather than attempt to manipulate the external environment in ways suitable to the nation’s interests, the foreign policy of a new state seeks to affect its internal environment in ways favorable to the building of the state and to the maintenance of the regime in power.”

Good’s insistence that Asian-African solidarity was intimately related to the demands of nation-building was largely ignored by his peers, as well as by most subsequent analysts, who have focused instead entirely on international issues. This thesis applies Good’s abstract theoretical framework to the specific needs of the Chinese, Egyptian, and Algerian governments. By synthesizing analyses of domestic politics in each of these countries with the development of their mutual relations, it corroborates Good’s ideas about how precarious postcolonial regimes interacted with each other in the face of uncertainty at home as well as abroad.


Sources and Structure of the Argument

In order to understand fully how Sino-Arab relations resonated in the political discourses of China, Egypt, and Algeria, it is critical to ensure that none of these three countries is given short shrift. This balance is nearly impossible to preserve, however, because different types of sources are available from each country. Research in government archives is easiest in China, where the declassified documents of the Foreign Ministry Archives in Beijing have been accessible to Western researchers for nearly a decade.\(^{66}\) China is also replete with smaller archives at the provincial and municipal levels, although the availability of documents varies considerably from archive to archive (and, in many cases, from archivist to archivist). By contrast, the archives of the Egyptian and Algerian governments are much less forthcoming, offering only incomplete and capricious access to relevant materials. On the other hand, both Egypt and Algeria offer a wider range of published sources – periodicals, pamphlets, memoirs, and books – than was produced in China, where dissent was punished and publishers toed the party line. Consequently, this thesis relies on a diverse mix of sources. It is based primarily on the newly available documents of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, but these have been supplemented wherever possible with extensive research in other sources, including other archival documents. The result is a somewhat eclectic collection of sources that do not always offer as much detail as one might like, but which nonetheless present more than enough information to illuminate the key features of China’s relations with Egypt and Algeria.

Working with Chinese archival materials requires both an ability to read between the lines of the official language and an appreciation for the limitations of the available

\(^{66}\) The Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives opened in 2004, initially with a limited selection of available documents. The Foreign Ministry gradually declassified documents from the first fifteen years of Communist China, culminating in November 2008, when materials from the years 1960 through 1965 were released.
documents. The Foreign Ministry Archives in Beijing consist mainly of four types of documents: formal written exchanges with foreign leaders, transcripts of discussions between foreign delegations and elite Chinese policymakers, memoranda sent back and forth between Beijing and various Chinese embassies around the world, and analyses by Foreign Ministry functionaries of the political situations within foreign countries. Unlike American or British diplomatic archives, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives do not contain discussions or debates about what China’s foreign policy should be – nor, for that matter, do the archives even contain precise statements outlining what China’s foreign policy actually was. Since Mao personally took charge of major decisions, such documents – if indeed they ever existed at all – would have been maintained by the central government rather than the Foreign Ministry. Therefore, insight into top-level decision-making must be inferred from what sources are available. The transcripts of discussions with prominent leaders, including Mao as well as Zhou, Liu Shaoqi, Chen Yi, Peng Dehuai, and Lin Biao, offer a glimpse into how these individuals articulated their own interpretations of China’s place in the world. The analyses of international politics present in the Chinese archives also reveal how the Beijing government interpreted world events, even if those documents rarely expressed opinions about how best to respond to those developments. From these sources, one can piece together a relatively precise understanding not only of what Chinese leaders said and did when meeting with their Egyptian and Algerian counterparts, but also how those contacts influenced how these leaders perceived China’s role in world affairs.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives also offer a viable starting point for analyzing the effects of Sino-Arab relations within Chinese, Egyptian, and Algerian domestic politics. Meticulous transcripts of the visits of Arab guests to China – including religious and military figures as well as politicians – provide a glimpse of what aspects of Chinese society interested representatives of influential constituencies in Egyptian and Algerian politics and
of how ordinary Chinese responded to their visitors. For a more thorough picture of how international relations resonated in Chinese society, this thesis supplements research at the national level with information from local archives in Beijing and the historically Muslim city of Lanzhou. Although they are woefully incomplete, these sources can demonstrate how the Chinese government presented certain international events to its citizens. Official government publications such as Renmin Ribao [People’s Daily] and Hongqi [Red Flag], as well as lesser-known state-controlled publications, provide additional insight into how the regime discussed foreign relations. Also crucial to this thesis are the publications of three Chinese men who traveled to Egypt in the mid-1950s: the ethnically Tatar, Uyghur-speaking Bao’erhan (also known as Burhan Shahidi), who served as director of the China Islamic Association; a Hui Muslim student named Li Zhenzhong, who went on to become a prominent professor of Arabic; and a Burmese-born Han propagandist named Ma Hanbing.67 The most complete and most useful memoir of a Chinese official who visited Algeria is that of Zeng Tao, who served as China’s first ambassador in Algiers after Algeria’s independence.68 The most revealing information about Chinese-Muslim life derives from a periodical started in 1957 by the China Islamic Association, Zhongguo Musilin [Chinese Muslims]. Together, these sources offer ample evidence with which to explore the relevance of the Arab Middle East in Chinese society.

To understand better how intellectuals in Nasser’s Egypt viewed China, this thesis relies on a wide variety of published sources in Arabic. Despite Nasser’s authoritarianism, Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s nurtured a robust print culture. Consequently, it is difficult to

67. Bao’erhan, Bao’erhan xuanji [Selected writings of Bao’erhan] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1989); Li Zhenzhong, “Niluo hepan [The Nile River],” Yisilan wenming yanjiu [Islam Culture Study], Henan Province Social Science Academy Center for Islamic Cultural Studies (2006); Ma Hanbing, Ma hanbing wenji [The collected works of Ma Hanbing] (Urumqi, China: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1989).

68. Zeng Tao, “Wo de shouren dashi shengya: zai aerjiliya wu nian [My career as the first ambassador: five years in Algeria],” in Wo de dashi shengya [My career as an ambassador], Liu Xiao and Wu Xiuquan, eds. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993).
generalize about what Egyptians thought of China because every major newspaper presented China, the Chinese, and Mao Zedong’s government in a different manner. Perhaps most valuable are the many articles about the Chinese model of development in the leftist weekly Ruz al-yusuf, which lavished praise on Mao’s government beginning in 1955. That year, Ruz al-yusuf became the first Egyptian newspaper to dispatch a reporter to tour Communist China and pass judgment on the country.⁶⁹ Over the course of the following decade, many more Egyptians – most of them left-leaning journalists – made the same journey. The impressive number of Arabic-language books and articles of travel writing about China from this period reflects the extent to which China captured the interest of an Egyptian public eager to hear more about what life was like in a country widely regarded as distant and exotic.⁷⁰ These publications offer the best evidence from which to analyze the role that China played in Egyptian public discourse. Of the Egyptian travelers to write about China, Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri deserves special mention, since, as an Islamist and a member of Nasser’s inner circle, he presents an interesting contrast with the leftists who made similar visits.⁷¹ In addition to travel writing, this thesis also draws on the writings of Egyptian communists, who were compelled to discuss both China and the Soviet Union as the two examples of the ideology they advanced.⁷² In the context of the global Cold War, any writer who hoped to expound a vision for Egypt’s future in the 1950s or 1960s was forced to confront the issue of how

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69. That judgment was rendered in Muhammad al-Bili’s “A沃尔 tahqiq misri ‘an al-sin al-sha‘biyya! [The first Egyptian investigation of people’s China],” Ruz al-yusuf 1435 (12 December 1955).
70. This thesis will draw on the writing of a large number of Egyptian journalists and social commentators, including al-Bili, Isma’il al-Habrak, ‘Ali Hamdi al-Jamal, Muhammad ‘Awda, Ihsan ‘Abd al-Quddus, Lutfi al-Khuli, Rashid al-Barrawi, and Anouar Abdel-Malek. Also relevant are the works of several Arab journalists who were not Egyptian but whose work was available in Egypt, including the Lebanese journalist ‘Abd al-Salam al-Adhami and the Sudanese communist writer ‘Abdallah ‘Ubayd.
72. The best collection of Egyptian communist documents is available at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. While the notes and pamphlets preserved in this archive do not discuss Communist China as much as one might hope, they are nonetheless an invaluable starting point for this research. Another particularly important leftist study of Chinese communism from the 1950s is Muhammad ‘Awda’s Al-Sin al-sha‘biyya [People’s China] (Cairo: Dar al-nadim, 1955).
China’s communist experiment might be relevant for Egyptian politics and society. As a result, Egypt’s strengthening ties to China engendered a spirited discourse about China that has hitherto been untapped by historians.

The example of China’s communist revolution was even more directly relevant to the Algerians, who between 1954 and 1962 were actively engaged in their own struggle for political independence. Many of the most prominent members of the FLN, including the first two presidents of the GPRA, Ferhat Abbas and Benyoucef Benkhedda, visited China before Algeria finally won independence. In general, the official Algerian delegations to China after 1958 were led by left-leaning members of the provisional regime, including Benkhedda and Omar Oussedik. The most valuable accounts of the impressions of Algerian visitors to Beijing are contained in the memoirs of men who accompanied these delegations. The reports of Saad Dahlab, Redha Malek, Aberrahmane Kiouane, Brahim Ghafa, and Si Azzedine (the nom de guerre of Rabah Zerari) all reveal how the FLN’s leaders interpreted Chinese communism in the midst of the ongoing war. These and other memoirs by prominent FLN members are supplemented wherever possible with archival information from Chinese and French government collections, as well as Algerian documents published by Mohammed Harbi. Unlike in Egypt, it is difficult to find contemporary sources about China that would have been available to ordinary Algerians; instead, this thesis must rely on the plethora of memoirs published after 1962 (including many from the past decade).

Accordingly, it emphasizes the attitudes of the FLN’s leaders toward China rather than how China was portrayed in the political discourse of the time.

By combining research in diplomatic archives with a large amount of published material discussing contemporary cultural issues and by emphasizing simultaneously high-level diplomacy and its ramifications in the popular arena, this thesis presents a more refined interpretation of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations in the decade after the Bandung
Conference than previous historians have proffered. No longer is the history of China’s involvement in the Middle East simply a succession of meetings, visits, agreements, and denunciations. Rather, this thesis delves deeper than this realist focus on international strategy to analyze the intersections between international and national politics. The most significant consequences of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations between 1955 and 1965 were symbolic. The perception of international amity gave journalists, policymakers, intellectuals, and religious figures free rein to expound their own distorted interpretations of Chinese and Arab society in order to promote their own ideological causes. These causes varied over the course of the decade: the incorporation of Chinese Muslims into Chinese politics, the conferral of revolutionary legitimacy on Nasser’s government, the celebration of China as a champion of global revolution, the conferral of legitimacy on the FLN’s revolution, and the presentation of China as a fully anti-imperialist country in contrast to the Soviet Union. Each of these projects had in common, however, the goal of changing how citizens of China, Egypt, and Algeria perceived their own national identity.

This thesis is organized in roughly chronological order, with each chapter addressing a particular period of Sino-Arab relations. The first two chapters analyze the origins of China’s ties to Egypt between the Bandung Conference and the end of 1957. Chapter one details the domestic impact of this relationship within China, where the CCP cultivated an image of Chinese support for Egypt that legitimized Mao’s government and mobilized Chinese citizens, especially Muslims, behind its policies. The second chapter, which focuses on the relevance of China to Egyptian domestic politics during this same period, asserts that China was significant in Egyptian public discourse mainly as a symbol that justified the idea of a national revolution. In both China and Egypt during the mid-1950s, therefore, Sino-Egyptian relations were presented to the public in a manner that promoted nationalist ideologies in support of Mao’s and Nasser’s regimes. The third chapter of this thesis explores the
breakdown in Sino-Egyptian relations after 1958, arguing that China abandoned its conciliatory attitude toward the non-communist countries of the Middle East and reverted to a more militant Marxist stance primarily because of the changing demands of Chinese domestic politics during the Great Leap Forward. China’s improving relations with the Algerian FLN, whose leaders were willing to espouse socialist doctrines and proclaim their interest in learning from the Chinese example, proved more conducive to promoting the CCP at home as the champion of revolution around the globe. Chapter four demonstrates how Algerian nationalists viewed Chinese communism as an ideology that could legitimize both the FLN’s military efforts and its status as the leading representative of the Algerian nation. Finally, the last chapter of this thesis uses Zhou’s visits to Cairo and Algiers between 1963 and 1965 as a lens through which to understand how the tumultuous events of the early 1960s transformed Sino-Arab relations once again. It proposes that China, partly because of the pressures of the Sino-Soviet split, again relied on its relationships with Arab countries to define its political identity, a project complicated by the fact that, by 1963, Egypt and Algeria were no longer in need of China’s friendship.

The ups and downs of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations in the decade after 1955 were the results of diplomatic machinations that were much more about perceptions than about substance. Mao, Nasser, and top Algerian leaders were never as concerned with whether China genuinely supported Egypt or Algeria as they were with the appearance of that support. China made only token financial commitments to Egypt in the years following the Suez Crisis, and Western fears about China’s arms shipments to the FLN grossly distorted China’s actual military interest in North Africa. This confusion was by design. The Chinese government cultivated the idea that it was the patron of both Egypt and Algeria, while the Egyptians and Algerians likewise sought the ideological legitimacy that close relations with Beijing suggested. It may seem strange to propose in a thesis about Sino-Egyptian and Sino-
Algerian relations in the 1950s and 1960s that the material benefits of these diplomatic efforts were all but inconsequential. In actuality, this thesis is not about the foreign policies of these three countries, but about the significance of Sino-Arab relations to the ideological and national development of each country individually. After all, China is hardly relevant to the study of the Suez Crisis, but the Suez Crisis is assuredly relevant to the study of China. One may wonder, therefore, what is to be gained by discussing the domestic politics of China, Egypt, and Algeria in the same study. The answer is that the similarities among the responses of the governments of these countries to their strengthening ties – during a period in which all three were struggling to consolidate power and navigate an often hostile international community – can reveal much about how postcolonial regimes more generally responded to the evolution of an ethic of Asian-African solidarity. In contrast to the recent trend of nostalgic celebration of supposedly selfless fraternity, a somewhat skeptical attitude toward the Bandung Conference and the Bandung spirit is warranted. The evolution of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations in the decade after 1955 makes evident the abiding power of nationalism. Mao, Nasser, and the leaders of the FLN were all concerned not only with strengthening their own authority, but with reinforcing an ideal of national unity. Ideologues in all three countries understood contact between China and the Arab world – and, indeed, Asian-African solidarity more generally – as little more than a means toward this end.

73. Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung,” has been particularly diligent in his attempts to catalogue and criticize examples of this trend in the twenty-first century.
CHAPteR ONE: DeFININg THE CHINESE NATION, 1955-1957

Li Zhenzhong was sitting in a Russian class in Beijing in the autumn of 1955 when a messenger summoned him to report to the Ministry of Education. Li later recalled that day as particularly nerve-wracking, since he had no idea what China’s capricious bureaucracy wanted from him. At the time, he was making his final preparations to study engineering in Moscow. Upon his arrival at the Ministry of Education, he was immediately asked to abandon these plans. Instead, he was told, he would join the first delegation of Chinese students since 1949 to travel to Cairo to study Arabic. Li’s heavy winter coat was exchanged for more suitable attire, and, just a few months later, he embarked on the long journey to Egypt by way of Hong Kong and Karachi. In January 1956, when he arrived in Cairo with a group of six other students, he spoke no Arabic. Despite appearances, the sudden selection of Li to travel to Cairo was part of a careful strategy hatched at the highest level of the Chinese government. Li was chosen because he was a Hui Muslim of suitable class background who was pre-approved to study abroad. Supposedly, it was Zhou Enlai himself who, upon learning that the original group of students chosen to go to Cairo did not include any Muslims, had Li added at the last minute.1 The addition of a handpicked Chinese Muslim to that first delegation of students illustrates just how meticulous the Chinese government was in scripting every aspect of its relationship with Egypt.

The members of the CCP made up for their inexperience at international diplomacy with careful preparation. Whenever an Egyptian delegation visited China in the mid-1950s, Zhou personally micromanaged each encounter between the visitors and their Chinese hosts.

Zhou’s painstaking attention to detail was particularly exemplified by his order not to allow Egyptian Minister of Pious Endowments Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri to view any world maps during his tour of China in May 1955. In the 1950s, official Chinese maps were printed in four colors, identifying whether countries were “imperialist,” “colonized,” “liberated,” or “fighting for liberation.” According to the Chinese interpretation of Marxist doctrine, a nationalist, anticolonial country could not fully achieve “liberation” until it adopted communism. Just a short time before al-Baquri’s visit, a Chinese map had triggered a minor diplomatic incident in Shanghai when an Indonesian official had objected to the portrayal of his sovereign and independent country as “fighting for liberation.” In order to avoid a similarly awkward encounter with al-Baquri, Zhou prescribed a radical solution to his subordinates: inspect every place the Egyptian minister might visit or request to visit and remove every map. This anecdote also reveals Zhou’s characteristic willingness to overlook the finer points of communist ideology whenever it proved too rigid for his diplomatic agenda. The development of congenial relations with the Arab world was simply too important for the Chinese government not to control the image that it presented to its Egyptian guests.

Perhaps the most important task in any analysis of China’s goals for its relations with the Middle East is to understand exactly the elements of the image China wished to portray. Previous studies of Sino-Egyptian relations have paid close attention to what Chinese representatives said and did in dealings with their Egyptian counterparts, but those works have almost entirely ignored the question of how they portrayed China and the Chinese. It is true that the Chinese government was so desperate to court Nasser that it agreed to trade steel

2. Central Foreign Ministry to the Xinjiang Provincial Committee, 20 May 1955, 107-00072-02, CFMA.
3. Even the two books that specifically address China’s foreign policy toward the Middle East overlook this question. See Lillian Craig Harris, China Considers the Middle East and Yitzhak Shichor, The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy.
it did not have for Egyptian cotton it did not need, but this sort of economic gesture of friendship was only part of China’s larger strategy to rebrand itself in the eyes of the world.⁴ Zhou and other top leaders were selling the Egyptians a particular, carefully constructed vision of a new China. This China was progressive, but it was not overtly communist; it was revolutionary, but the primary target of the revolution was imperialism rather than capitalism. Breaking out of international isolation required the refutation of prevailing stereotypes, which cast China as a backwards, repressive, and undependable country. To win over Egypt, the Chinese had to demonstrate that they were trustworthy allies, which meant downplaying the CCP’s doctrinaire commitment to communism even as they emphasized communism’s success in invigorating the economy. Instead of discussing Marxism, the Chinese government focused on proving that, since 1949, China had begun the process of becoming “modern.” Part of this discourse of modernization, naturally, promoted the new Chinese government’s agenda for industrializing its country. Equally important, however, was its celebration of nationalism and pluralism. The Chinese government’s presentation of the Chinese as a people fully unified behind a common mission and a common identity was a deliberate way to make China seem developed, especially compared to earlier times when it had suffered from disunity and decentralization. Simultaneously, Zhou and other Chinese leaders took pains to stress that, contrary to popular belief, China was a pluralistic society with great ethnic and religious diversity. Not only did the Chinese Foreign Ministry insist during the mid-1950s that all Chinese citizens enjoyed complete religious freedom, but it actively celebrated religious and ethnic minorities as crucial components of Chinese society.

When the Chinese Communists trumpeted the unification of many ethnic groups into a single

⁴ Officials in the British Foreign Office were immediately perplexed by the Sino-Egyptian trade agreement of August 1955, since they understood that China neither produced enough steel to send to Egypt nor had any pressing need to import Egyptian cotton. See the handwritten discussion before the text of the Sino-Egyptian trade agreement, 24 August 1955, FO 371/115093, UKNA.
modern nation as one of their main triumphs, it was a vision of a new China calculated to
appeal to the Egyptian government, which was wary of both communism and the treatment of
Muslims in China.

The Egyptians, of course, were not the only audience for which the Chinese
government portrayed China during the mid-1950s as a responsible, anti-imperialist,
industrializing, nationalist, and pluralistic country. Not only was Beijing in the midst of a
more general campaign to charm the postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa during and
after the Bandung Conference, but the Communist government also intended to appeal to a
domestic audience. Although Chinese officials insisted that the Chinese people constituted a
single, united nation, in reality the country was politically fragmented and the government’s
control remained fragile. At the same time the Chinese government was pursuing a
conciliatory foreign policy in order to secure closer relations with Egypt, it was also using
Egypt to legitimize itself in the eyes of its people. The development of relations between
China and Egypt in 1955 and 1956 was closely linked to a campaign by the Communist
government to mobilize the Chinese people in support of the state. In particular, the
government targeted Chinese Muslims, who – despite propaganda to the contrary – were a
marginalized community not yet fully integrated into the Chinese nation-state. There is no
evidence available in diplomatic archives or in the memoirs of relevant policymakers to
support the contention that China’s attitude toward the Middle East was motivated primarily
by domestic considerations. There is, however, abundant evidence that functionaries at all
levels of the government were conscious of the importance of the popular reaction to
international developments and that the central government micromanaged every aspect of
the mass politics engendered by events in the Middle East. The most significant
characteristic of the domestic response to the development of Sino-Egyptian relations was the
prominence that the national government accorded to Chinese Muslims by celebrating their
role in bridging the gap between China and its newest ally. Official publications aimed at Chinese Muslims and documents discussing the popular demonstrations in support of Egypt during the Suez Crisis allow one to analyze how the Chinese government manipulated Sino-Egyptian relations to rally support at home. Aid for Egypt became a tactic to single out Chinese Muslims and call on them not only to sympathize with their fellow Muslims in the Middle East, but also to endorse the Chinese government’s outspoken support for anti-imperialist causes around the world. By providing opportunities for all Chinese people, and especially Muslims, to participate actively in international politics, the domestic response to Sino-Egyptian relations reinforced an inclusive conception of Chinese national identity at a time when the Communist government was still consolidating its position.

The Challenges of Nation-Building in the Early People’s Republic

For at least the first decade after its creation, the People’s Republic of China was a work in progress. Although Mao Zedong established a centralized national political apparatus and proclaimed a unifying national ideology in 1949, China did not become an integrated nation-state immediately upon the end of its civil war. Rather, the Communist government had to make a special effort to consolidate its authority, particularly in outlying provinces that it had not controlled during the Sino-Japanese War. In many cases, CCP cadres were carrying on a long tradition of Chinese nation-building, which employed strategies such as calendar reform, the campaign against foot-binding, the cutting of queues, the printing of new textbooks, and even the development of scouting programs to catalyze the transition from “subject” to “citizen” in modern China. On the margins of the Chinese state,

5. This argument has been advanced most cogently in such works as Prasenjit Duara’s *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) and John Fitzgerald’s “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” *The Journal of Chinese Affairs* 33 (1995).

6. The study of this process of nation-building on a more general scale was made popular by Benedict
especially among ethnic and religious minorities, these campaigns took on special significance.\(^7\) While the CCP continued many of these practices, it also expanded nation-building by tying it to campaigns of wide-scale domestic mobilization and introducing an element of state-sanctioned violence. Whereas early students of modern China tended to interpret the 1950s prior to the Great Leap Forward as a sort of “golden age” in which the Communist regime was competent, benevolent, and universally accepted, more recent scholarship has largely refuted this conventional wisdom.\(^8\) Instead, historians have come to view the 1950s as a period in which the government worked tirelessly to spread its ideology at any cost. For example, the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries (1950-1952), the Anti-Unity Sect Campaign (1951-1953), the Three-Anti Campaign (1951), and the Five-Anti Campaign (1952) were all brutal attempts to use mass politics to advance Mao’s vision of Chinese communism.\(^9\) These mobilization efforts, which laid the groundwork for how the

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state interacted with its citizens throughout the Maoist era, demonstrated the importance that the government placed on instilling its vision of the Chinese nation-state in all Chinese people.

In the past several decades, historians have especially begun to acknowledge the interplay between the foreign policy of China’s Communist government and its attempts to mobilize its citizens at home. Because the newly established regime faced several external threats at the same time it was consolidating power, it was convenient for Mao’s government to link domestic and foreign initiatives. Perhaps the clearest example of these connections has been elucidated by Jeremy Brown’s research on the relationship between the Korean War and the establishment of Communist power in Guizhou.\(^\text{10}\) Guizhou, a province in southwestern China with a sizable population of ethnic minorities, was not fully pacified until 1951. In order to achieve control there, the Communist government, in Brown’s words, “conflated domestic resisters with international threats,” using the patriotic reaction to the foreign war to drum up local support for the government.\(^\text{11}\) On the national level, the official Aid Korea/Resist America Campaign was an explicit attempt to use the war to stimulate other programs for domestic mobilization, especially the Anti-Unity Sect Campaign and the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries.\(^\text{12}\) The ongoing war allowed the government to define its domestic opponents as traitors, but even more important it provided an opportunity for the government to radicalize the urban middle class (many of whom were skeptical of the Communist takeover) behind a patriotic cause.\(^\text{13}\) The practice of linking international events

\begin{itemize}
\item[11.] Ibid., 125.
\item[13.] Julia C. Strauss, “Paternalist Terror,” 84-85.
\end{itemize}
with domestic politics continued well beyond the first several years of Communist rule. Chen Jian even asserted that Mao decided to shell Nationalist-held islands in the Taiwan Strait first in 1954 and then again in 1958 in part because he hoped to “stir up people’s revolutionary enthusiasm” to promote “socialist reconstruction” at the outset of the Great Leap Forward.\textsuperscript{14} In all these instances, it is impossible to argue convincingly that Mao’s government undertook major foreign policy decisions solely because of these national campaigns; what is clear, however, is that no international issue during the first decade after 1949 was ever completely independent from domestic politics.

This new historiography of Chinese foreign relations, which obscures the distinction between domestic and foreign politics, has tended to focus on events directly related to the Cold War while overlooking China’s relations with other countries in Asia and Africa. Because the Korean War and the two Taiwan Straits Crises were the defining events of China’s Cold War experience, as well as the conflicts that most shaped China’s relations with the United States, it is natural that they have received particular attention in Western scholarship. By contrast, China’s conciliatory diplomacy toward non-Western countries from 1955 to 1957 is relatively underappreciated. According to the prevailing historiographical interpretation of this period, China’s sudden interest in mollifying both the West at the 1954 Geneva Conference and the non-communist countries of Asia and Africa at the Bandung Conference reflected a profound shift in strategy on the part of China’s ruling elite.\textsuperscript{15} This new approach followed China’s relatively successful intervention in the Korean War, which demonstrated China’s military might and established its presence in global affairs. Shu

\textsuperscript{14} Chen Jian, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 169-173.

Guang Zhang has offered a constructivist perspective of China’s new diplomacy by asserting that Mao, Zhou, and other leaders hoped to “construct an image of a ‘normal state,’” which would allow China to be accepted by the international community. While Zhang was concerned with how the Chinese government presented itself to other countries, he paid scant attention to its ongoing dialogue with its own citizens. Chen Jian, who criticized Zhang and other authors for ignoring continuities between the CCP’s historical commitment to anti-imperialism and its Bandung-era diplomacy, also charged Zhang with failing to recognize the relationship between domestic mobilization and foreign policy. Despite Chen’s interest in the connection between mass politics and international relations, however, he did not offer any explanation for how domestic politics might have shaped what he calls China’s “Bandung discourse.” Instead, his passing suggestion that China’s international relations in the mid-1950s should be interpreted in the context of how Beijing’s leaders sought “to translate foreign policy challenges into sources of sustained domestic mobilization” hints at a perspective that this chapter explores in greater detail.

For a model of how historians might draw connections between China’s domestic campaigns and its developing relations with non-communist countries of the Third World during the mid-1950s, it is instructive to turn to recent work by historians of Soviet Central Asia. Not only did the Soviet Union include six constituent republics in Central and Southwest Asia with Muslim majorities, but it also shared borders with Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran. Beginning in 1955, when Nikita Khrushchev’s government inaugurated a new policy that emphasized the Soviet Union’s anti-imperialist credentials, Moscow utilized state-controlled Islamic institutions to win support from non-communist countries in the Muslim

18. Ibid., 209.
world. The most important organization in this propaganda campaign was the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia (known by the Russian acronym SADUM), which had been established in Tashkent in 1943 as an organization of ‘ulama’ to control religious life in Central Asia. As Eren Murat Tasar has established, SADUM played a dual role in promoting the Soviet government both at home and abroad. SADUM’s complete institutional control over the practice of Islam in Soviet Central Asia, including over the annual hajj delegations, gave it remarkable prestige at home and abroad. As Tasar has argued, SADUM was able to use its international status to articulate a particular vision of Central Asian Islam that jibed with Soviet conceptions of modernity, thereby using global Islam as a way to educate Soviet Muslims on what it meant to belong to the Communist state. Yet despite this recent interest in the domestic aspects of relations between Soviet communists and the Muslim countries of the Middle East, no comparable research has explored the similar projects of Chinese Muslims. Some historians and political scientists have recognized broad similarities between the Islamic bureaucracies of the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties and the relevance of those institutions in relations with the Middle East, but the ramifications of this connection deserve more detailed examination.

Although China’s Muslim population was far smaller than that of the Soviet Union, it was still an important constituency whose incorporation into the Chinese nation was a priority for the CCP. Not only had Muslims throughout China been responsible for many of the bloodiest and costliest rebellions against the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) during the nineteenth century, but the Nationalist government had been forced to contend with a pair of separatist movements in Xinjiang as well as many powerful local Muslim leaders who proved

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20. Ibid., 342.
unwilling to submit to centralized authority. Chinese Muslims remained restive even after 1949, as demonstrated by the anti-Communist insurgency that Muslims led throughout central China between 1950 and 1958. Some historians have also argued that Muslims were disproportionately affected by many of the CCP’s most controversial policies, especially its land reform campaigns.22 In order to neutralize the threat of Muslim unrest, some Chinese leaders had long advocated a vision of a Chinese national identity that explicitly included Muslims. For example, Sun Yat-sen frequently wrote of the need to imbue Muslims with a sense of belonging to the Chinese nation, and both the GMD and the CCP paid close attention to the Muslims of the Chinese frontier well before the outbreak of war with Japan.23 The most passionate advocates for including Muslims in the Chinese nation, however, were Muslim leaders themselves, who preached integration as the best way of modernizing and strengthening their own community. Recently, Yufeng Mao has chronicled the efforts of Chinese Muslim leaders during the Republican era to preach pride in Chinese culture as a fundamental part of an Islamic religious awakening.24 Even prominent Chinese Muslim leaders who studied in the Middle East, learned Arabic, and immersed themselves in Arab issues identified passionately with their Chinese heritage.25 Additional research is required to

22. Yang I-fan, Islam in China (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1975).
23. Yufeng Mao, “A Muslim Vision for the Chinese Nation,” 378 quotes Sun’s assertion that, “without the participation of the Muslim nationality, the Chinese national movement will not achieve its final success; without the union of all the world’s Muslims, the work of eliminating [global] imperialism cannot be completed.” The attention that the GMD paid to the incorporation of Muslims is also discussed in Jonathan N. Lipman, “How Many Minzu in a Nation? Modern Travellers Meet China’s Frontier Peoples,” Inner Asia 4 (2002) and Hsiao-ting Lin, Modern China’s Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West (New York: Routledge, 2011).
25. Two such nationalist Muslims were Ma Jian and Pang Shiqian. Although Ma was a devout Muslim who translated the Qur’an into Chinese, he also believed it was so important for Egyptians to understand Chinese culture that he translated Confucius’ Analects into Arabic. See Muhammad Makin (Ma Jian), Kitab al-hiwar [Analects of Confucius] (Cairo: Al-Matba’a al-salafiyya, 1935). Although he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, Pang was a committed Chinese nationalist, as is evident from his memoir of studying in Egypt. See Pang Shiqian, Aiji jiuan [Nine years in Egypt] (Beijing: China Islamic Association Publishing Society, 1988 [1951]). Yufeng Mao, “Sino-Muslims in Chinese Nation-building.” Ch. 3 has also collected many anecdotes that demonstrate how thoroughly Chinese Muslims identified as “Chinese.” The most illustrative of these stories concerns a Muslim student in Egypt named Na Zhong, who represented China at the 1938 Congress of Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defense of Palestine because he was embarrassed that China had not been
build on Mao’s work by investigating more completely the projects of Muslim nationalists in the Communist era, but it can be definitively said that a discourse of Muslim integration into Chinese culture was pervasive in many parts of China’s Muslim community in the early years of the People’s Republic. Because of the commitment of many prominent Muslim leaders to Chinese nationalism, the Beijing government found them to be willing partners when it drafted them into service to further its international goals.

Perhaps the reason that, to date, no serious effort has been undertaken to write Chinese Muslims into the history of Chinese foreign relations is that Islam in China tends to be a specialized subject studied only by a small group of scholars. Among the few recognized experts on Chinese Islam, only anthropologist Dru Gladney has devoted any attention to the role of Muslims in China’s diplomacy in the 1950s and beyond. In an article primarily about current issues in Xinjiang, Gladney proposed that the Chinese government possesses an “Islamic card,” which he defined as China’s strategy “of promoting its Muslims, and positive policies toward its Muslim minorities, in order to gain favor with mainly Muslim Middle Eastern countries.” Gladney has been an avid champion of the notion that both Chinese identity and the identities of Chinese minority groups have been carefully constructed and negotiated over a long period, writing that the “recognition and promotion of [China’s] Muslim and other minorities serves a national as well as an international goal, that of constructing a coherent Chinese self.” Yet although Gladney recognized the association between China’s promotion of Islam and the formation of Chinese identity, he did not

represented at previous Muslim conferences.


explore this topic in detail, perhaps because he focused on contemporary China rather than the 1950s. Despite his usual interest in the construction of Chinese national identity, Gladney dismissed the role of Muslims in Chinese diplomacy of the 1950s as a mere propaganda tactic to appeal to foreign Muslims. In so doing, he did not fully appreciate the extent to which the Chinese government relied on the development of friendly relations with the Arab Middle East to promote itself among its own Muslim population.

Selling China to the Egyptians

In the mid-1950s, when the Chinese government adopted its strategy of diplomatic conciliation and ceased emphasizing communism in its encounters with non-communist countries, it did not have to invent a new ideology from scratch. Instead, it courted the postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa by accentuating the CCP’s long history of staunch opposition to imperialism. During and after the Bandung Conference, anti-imperialism offered a shared vocabulary through which newly established, nationalist regimes could communicate; by stressing a shared history of oppression at the hands of Western colonial powers, Asian and African leaders could find mutual understanding upon which to construct their diplomatic relations. As early as 1923, the top leaders of the CCP had envisioned a “national revolution” against foreign imperialism as a goal inseparable from the class revolution they also hoped to advance. In 1946, when he espoused his Intermediate Zone Thesis in an interview with the journalist Anna Louise Strong, Mao publicly recognized a

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29. In making this argument, Gladney followed Yitzhak Shichor’s “The Role of Islam in China’s Middle Eastern Policy,” in Islam in Asia, vol. 2, “Southeast and East Asia,” Raphael Israeli and Anthony H. Jones, eds. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), which identified the importance of Islam in courting Middle Eastern countries and which was even considerably more cynical than Gladney’s article in portraying China’s Islamic diplomacy as a propaganda trick designed to fool foreign Muslims into thinking Chinese Muslims were better off than was actually the case.

connection between China and non-communist countries that were also victims of imperialist penetration. According to Mao, the inevitable conflict between communism and capitalism would be played out not as an overt war, but as a battle for influence in the vast “intermediate zone” of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As the Chinese government set aside the hardline communist intransigence that had characterized its diplomacy during the Korean War, it began to promote this anti-imperialist thread of CCP ideology more adamantly. In order to court Nasser’s Egypt, the Chinese had to formulate a convincing argument that, communist or not, China and Egypt shared a common history, a common predicament, and a common cause.

China’s leaders made a conscious effort to present their homeland at the Bandung Conference as a responsible country that should be welcomed as a legitimate member of the international community. Beijing’s official policy was to celebrate its participation in the Conference as a victory in and of itself (a plausible claim, given how diplomatically isolated China had been since 1949). Consequently, Zhou and his fellow delegates avoided any kind of radical statement that would alienate non-communist countries. In fact, they planned to avoid discussing communism altogether, except to introduce the successes in economic development and social reform that China had achieved since 1949. Zhou even asked Nehru, Nasser, and Burmese Prime Minister U Nu during their pre-Conference summit in Rangoon to avoid bringing up Marxism in order to “avoid unnecessary debate.”


supplementary remarks at the opening of the Conference, Zhou tried to relieve tension by declaring that “the Chinese delegation has come here to seek common ground, not to create division.” This “common ground,” Zhou asserted, could be found in a shared experience of imperialism at the hands of the West.  

One Western reporter in attendance in Bandung noticed Zhou’s “milder and more reasonable tone” at Bandung, manifested especially in his offer to consider mediation over the Taiwan issue, challenging the stereotype that the CCP’s leaders were unwilling to engage in international dialogue. Nonetheless, since Zhou simultaneously condemned Western imperialist countries, especially the United States, China’s strategy in Bandung should not be interpreted as a softening of Beijing’s militant position. Instead, Zhou was using his country’s anti-imperialist credentials to appeal to the other Conference attendees. From 1955 until the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in early 1958, it was China’s policy to downplay its communist ideology by emphasizing its commitment to anti-imperialism.

In order to gain Nasser’s confidence during the Bandung Conference, Zhou needed to demonstrate that the Chinese vociferously opposed the imperialist threats that mattered most to the Egyptian government. The two main issues on which Zhou sided with Nasser in Bandung were opposition to Israel and support for Algerian independence from France. The discussion of the Palestinian refugee crisis by the Conference’s political committee best evinces the timeliness and effectiveness of China’s support for Arab causes. The topic of

34. Zhou distributed printed copies of his main speech and instead delivered a different speech orally in which he downplayed certain issues that most concerned the other delegates, including the relationship between Communist China and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the question of communist subversion abroad. Both Zhou’s main speech and these supplementary remarks can be found in Zhou Enlai, “Zai yafei huiyi quanti huiyi shang de fayan [Speech in front of the general session of the Asian-African Conference],” Zhou enlai waijiao wenxuan [Selected diplomatic papers of Zhou Enlai] (henceforth abbreviated ZWJWX) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1990), 112-125.


36. Chen Jian, who downplayed the extent to which Beijing was abandoning its traditional strategy of carrying out domestic and worldwide revolution, drew attention to the fact that these “conciliatory” gestures were accompanied by saber-rattling in the Taiwan Strait. See Chen Jian, “Bridging Revolution and Decolonization,” 228-229.
Palestinian repatriation was first broached by the Afghan delegation, after which the Syrian representative condemned any negotiation with Israel. In turn, the delegates from Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, and Jordan all spoke out against Israeli aggression. When they had finished, Nehru argued that the Bandung Conference should take no specific stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict and criticized the Syrians for refusing direct negotiations with the Israelis. Rising to speak, Zhou thus found himself with a twofold opportunity: he could win Arab support and emerge from Nehru’s shadow by becoming the first non-Muslim leader in Bandung to support the Arab position. In the end, it was Zhou’s backing that ensured the Conference’s final communiqué did not omit the Palestinians. His unwavering opposition to Israel was a successful diplomatic tactic inasmuch as it indicated to Arab attendees at the Conference that they could count on Chinese support.

Not only did the Chinese present themselves at the Bandung Conference as staunch anti-imperialists who cared deeply about the pressing issues of the Middle East, but they also made a deliberate effort to promote China as a pluralistic society with a cultural and religious connection to the Middle East. Zhou stressed in his speeches and conversations that, although he was an atheist, he had the utmost respect for those who were religious. The Chinese delegation he assembled for the Conference included Da Pusheng, a Hui imam who served as deputy-director of the China Islamic Association. It was Da’s job to establish contacts with Muslim leaders from other countries, including the Egyptian Minister of Pious Endowments, al-Baquiri. Zhou specifically mentioned Da in his supplementary remarks in the opening session of the Conference to justify his claim that adherents of all religions could

38. The final communiqué pledged all Conference attendees to support “the rights of the Arab people of Palestine.”
live together peacefully. Da also participated in the negotiations with Saudi Prince Faisal to permit the first Chinese hajj delegation, which he led, to travel to Mecca. The willingness of the Chinese to use religion to improve political relations was by no means limited to Islam during the mid-1950s; en route to Bandung, Zhou had even proposed to U Nu to send a Chinese Buddhist delegation to Rangoon. This reliance on religious diplomacy explains why al-Baquri was the first Egyptian government official formally invited to tour Communist China. Since Islam was the strongest cultural bond between China and the Middle East, even the top policymakers within the atheist CCP were eager to exploit that connection.

The Chinese government understood well the challenges it faced in its attempts to achieve rapprochement with Egypt and other Arab countries. In a series of reports during and after al-Baquri’s visit, the Foreign Ministry repeatedly summarized the problems Muslims such as al-Baquri might find with China. One internal report discussing Egypt’s opinion of China during al-Baquri’s visit noted that Egypt had yet to “accept China” because its own position in Cold War geopolitics was “difficult” and because powerful Western countries resented its independence. Other reports were much more frank, arguing that China still needed to explain and justify its territorial claims, agricultural cooperatives, and policies toward private ownership, all of which al-Baquri apparently failed to appreciate. In particular, the Foreign Ministry worried that al-Baquri and other foreigners would not understand whether someone would be allowed to live under communism without working or whether the Chinese government practiced forced labor. Another report noted that many Egyptians were concerned that China was merely a puppet of the Soviet Union and lacked

41. Chen Dunde, Zhou enlai feiwang wanlong, 152.
42. Report on Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil’s impressions of China, 27 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA.
43. Report on Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil’s visit to Guangzhou, 24 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA.
true independence. Chinese leaders clearly considered it most crucial, however, that al-Baquri be shown a positive image of religious life in China. He was shepherded continually to mosques, Muslims’ homes, factories that employed Muslims, Christian churches, and Buddhist temples. He was greeted at every stop by effusive and content locals individually chosen to alleviate the foreign visitor’s apprehensions. The meticulous Foreign Ministry documents relating to al-Baquri’s trip exude an idealistic optimism that, with time, patient explanations of China’s people and policies could overcome any cultural, ideological, political, or religious differences and win over even China’s harshest critics in the Muslim world.

The Chinese government deemed al-Baquri’s visit essential to the development of China’s foreign policy because, from the outset, Zhou viewed this opportunity to promote cultural exchange as the first step in a process that would accomplish a political goal: Egyptian recognition for the Beijing government and, ultimately, the end of China’s isolation in global politics. In the central Foreign Ministry’s first memorandum to its provincial committees outlining its official approach to al-Baquri’s visit, it stated that Egypt was friendly toward China despite not having established formal diplomatic relations with it. The primary goals of the visit, according to the memorandum, were to “promote Egyptian understanding of China,” to “continue the trend of peaceful neutrality” celebrated in Bandung, and to establish a “foundation” (jichu) for sending trade delegations between the two countries. In its early dealings with Egypt, the Chinese government was always mindful of the next step and always keen to spur their relationship forward. After al-Baquri’s visit resulted in trade talks in July and August 1955, Zhou managed to secure a promise to grant Chinese trade representatives in Cairo “similar treatment accorded to consular

44. Ibid. and Summary of opinions expressed by Mustafa Kamil, 20 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA.
45. Plan for Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil’s visit to China, 4 May 1955, 107-00007-01, CFMA.
representatives,” which eventually proved to be the first step in advancing formal diplomatic
relations between the two countries. Thus, al-Baquri’s visit marked the beginning of a
process with geopolitical consequences that extended far beyond merely helping one
individual to understand Chinese culture.

Throughout the latter half of the 1950s, as China sought closer relations with countries
in Asia and Africa, the Foreign Ministry continued to emphasize carefully planned protocol
when greeting visiting dignitaries. Accordingly, Zhou, recognizing both the opportunity al-
Baquri’s visit presented for China and the need to convince his visitor that Islam was thriving
in China, was determined to take no chances in demonstrating his government’s respect for
Islam. Because al-Baquri’s visit began before the end of Ramadan, the central Foreign
Ministry instructed its subsidiary committees in all the provinces al-Baquri would visit to
delay his meals until after sunset. In addition, the Foreign Ministry instructed all of its staff
involved in hosting the two Egyptians not to drink alcohol or eat pork in their presence and to
ensure that the two men were lodged only in hotel rooms with bathtubs in which they could
wash their feet before prayer. Most remarkable, the Foreign Ministry explicitly asked its
committees to avoid letting “female comrades” serve the two men – probably an unnecessary
concession to Islamic mores, but one indicative of how scrupulously the Chinese government
planned to impress its visitors. The Foreign Ministry arranged for al-Baquri to converse
with an 88-year-old Hui man surnamed Ma, who parroted the party line when he patriotically
informed al-Baquri that the biggest hope of the Chinese Muslim community was to liberate

46. Telegram from the president of Egyptian trade delegation, Muhammad Abu Nusayr, to Gamal Abdel Nasser
via the Egyptian Embassy in New Delhi, 22 August 1955, 107-00017-02, CFMA.

47. One of Zhou’s primary English-language interpreters described this protocol in his memoir of the Foreign
Ministry. See Ji Chaozhu, The Man on Mao’s Right: From Harvard Yard to Tiananmen Square, My Life inside

48. Ministry of Culture to the Foreign Ministry, 8 May 1955, 107-00072-02, CFMA. Zhou also honored his
visitors by making £1,000 donations in their names to the needy in the Chinese Muslim and non-Muslim
communities, which he announced to his visitors in a letter initially written in largely ungrammatical Arabic,
then later heavily edited. See Letter from Zhou Enlai to Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil, May
1955, 107-00007-03, CFMA.
Taiwan. Ma then explained the situation in such terms that al-Baquri agreed “all the world’s people” should be free from American imperialism. Another Muslim factory worker expressed the same desire, then declared his hope that every country’s citizens could lead lives as peaceful and as prosperous as his people’s. These conversations suggested not only that the government respected Islam and that ordinary Muslims endorsed Communist rule, but also that Mao’s regime could make them prosperous members of a modern society.

In these as in other encounters between Chinese and Egyptian officials in the mid-1950s, the Bandung Conference provided the Chinese with a vocabulary they could employ to communicate with their Egyptian counterparts. Chinese communiqués sent to the Egyptian government during this period were unfailingly predictable. They praised the Egyptians as fellow inheritors of a great civilization, lamented the decline of that civilization under imperialism, celebrated their respective successes in fending off imperialist powers, pledged a commitment to world peace for all, and looked forward to the inevitable prosperous development of their countries. Islam fit nicely into this formula because it represented China’s historical engagement with the rest of Asia and Africa and because the Chinese could claim to champion the cause of Islam by restoring that connection and improving the lives of its Muslim citizens. This assertion reflected China’s dual identity as a modern and anti-imperialist country, since the CCP claimed Western imperialism was to blame for the backwardness of the world’s Muslims prior to the Chinese revolution. By placing Muslims at the heart of their foreign propaganda, China’s leaders demonstrated their commitment to fostering a diverse society. This pluralistic element in the Chinese government’s vision for its own society has been too casually disregarded by historians. The ease with which the Chinese government incorporated Islam into the discourse it presented to foreign countries reflected a vision of Chinese nationalism that was, at least in theory,

49. Transcript of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri’s conversations, 25 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA.
remarkably inclusive of ethnic and religious minorities. Accordingly, one must also consider how the CCP translated this vision for a domestic audience in order to understand the full impact of its developing relations with Nasser’s Egypt.

Selling China to the Chinese

In the highly charged political climate of the 1950s, the Chinese government never missed an opportunity to propagandize to its own citizens. As a result, it was inevitable that the development of relations with Egypt – undeniably a diplomatic triumph for Mao’s regime – would receive great attention in the state-run Chinese press. In general, the Chinese media portrayed Sino-Egyptian relations for its domestic audience in the same manner as the Chinese central government did in its private communications with the Egyptian government. Both the Foreign Ministry and the domestic press emphasized the religious connections between Chinese and Arab Muslims, celebrated the CCP’s supposed commitment to religious freedom, declared that China was a diverse and pluralistic society, and glorified national and international unity behind the anti-imperialist cause. In its propaganda aimed at all Chinese citizens, the Chinese media took special effort to involve prominent pro-regime Muslims, especially those at the helm of the China Islamic Association. Prior to February 1958, when Muslim publications abruptly ceased covering the Middle East, Chinese Muslims were the targets of a sustained, aggressive campaign to legitimize the CCP and its leaders by linking them to Egypt and other Arab countries. This strategy encouraged Chinese Muslims to identify as part of a global Islamic community centered in the Middle East, but it was also overtly nationalist. By unconditionally supporting Egyptian Muslims in their struggle against Western imperialism, Beijing asserted, it served the cause of global Islam and thus deserved the unwavering loyalty of its own Muslim citizens. The Chinese government actively promoted a transnational identity that, at first glance, seems at odds with its vision of Chinese
nationalism. In fact, the government stressed global Islam in order to subvert any notion of pan-Islamic loyalty. Chinese propaganda recognized the unique religious identity of Muslims only in a manner that reinforced the idea that their political identity was that of full membership in the Chinese nation-state.

A convenient starting point from which to consider the presentation of the Middle East in Chinese propaganda is the work of Ma Hanbing, a crass and prolific party cadre whose poems and essays epitomize the use of Middle Eastern politics to galvanize a domestic audience. Ma was born in 1916 in Burma, where he became an ardent opponent of British colonialism. He subsequently rose to high positions in the Xinjiang Propaganda Department and the national Ministry of Culture. Although he made a career out of writing for Muslims in Xinjiang before moving on to work for the national media, he was not himself a Muslim. Accordingly, the poems and essays that he penned for China’s major national newspapers while accompanying the first Chinese cultural delegation to Egypt in 1956 were generally secular in tone and content. Ma’s Egyptian writings were a call to arms intended to rally all Chinese to commit to the fight against imperialism around the world. For Ma, it was indicative of dangerous complacency for the Chinese to remain uninterested in the Middle East simply because China had already won liberation for itself. For example, Ma “helped” an Egyptian soldier write a poem pledging to sacrifice on behalf of his nation, a commitment Ma celebrated because he hoped his Chinese audience would respond the same way:

Who says the world is already tranquil?
The colonists are still rampaging,
The flames of war in Algeria are burning,
And from Cyprus come the sounds of gunshots.

On the territory of our homeland,

50. Ma Hanbing, Ma hanbing wenji, 2-3.
The flickering specter of the devil has already appeared. My brothers, my relatives, Again they cannot sleep without waking. If war cannot be prevented, We will have no use for trembling in fear. We will seize all our weapons And be willing to lay down our lives for the struggle.51

Ma’s goal was to extol Egypt’s anti-imperialist credentials and to portray the Egyptians as allies committed to a global cause. Such propaganda, which was designed to impart revolutionary fervor in its audience, was common in China, where leaders routinely emphasized mobilization campaigns and mass politics in support of foreign policy aims.

The connection between China and Egypt that Ma sought to establish was two-sided, since he also used it to glorify the Chinese government by asserting at every opportunity that Egyptians admired and hoped to study China’s example. Ma’s essay “Niluo hepan [The Nile River],” first published in Jiefangjun Bao [People’s Liberation Army Daily], illustrated this strategy. He quoted the “Qur’anic” injunction (actually derived from a discredited hadith) to “seek knowledge even unto China,” which he cited to demonstrate that the Egyptians he met were eager to “learn from China.”52 Because China’s foreign policy was based partly on the revolutionary ideal of spreading communism abroad, the notion that Egyptians hoped to emulate the Chinese model was a potential source of national pride. Again, Ma depicted the Egyptians as completely enthralled with the Chinese cultural delegation. Tickets to see its acrobatic troupe (according to Ma) sold out less than five minutes after going on sale.53 He

51. Ma Hanbing, “Aiji shibing de shengyin [An Egyptian soldier’s voice],” Ma hanbing wenji, 29; originally published at the height of the Suez Crisis along with several other poems as Ma Hanbing, “Fang ai shi chao [Transcripts of poems written on a visit to Egypt],” Renmin Ribao, 8 November 1956, 8.
53. Ibid.
peppered his writing with the imagery of rebirth and renewal, as when he declared in one poem that “I have seen the springtime of the Egyptian people.” Similarly, he described Nasser as “brimming with youthful passion” and approvingly quoted him as saying that “although [Egypt] is a small country, it has innumerable heroic youth.” For Ma, the fact that Egypt was a newly emerging revolutionary power was important because it underscored a worldview in which China was already established as a progressive regime that could aspire to leadership within Asia and Africa. Whether or not China actually would be recognized as a leader by Asian and African countries was very much beside the point, since Ma’s poems and essays were never intended to be read outside of China. Instead, his goal was to use the idea of legitimacy on the international stage to promote the Communist regime at home.

An examination of the writings of Bao’erhan, the nominal leader of all China’s Muslims, reveals particularly clearly the strategy of using support from Arab countries to glorify and legitimize the CCP. Bao’erhan toured the Middle East twice in 1956, first in the spring with the same artistic troupe as Ma Hanbing, then at the head of the second hajj delegation in the autumn. Bao’erhan also entertained al-Baquri in Urumqi in 1955. Along with Zhou and Chen Jiakang (the first Chinese ambassador in Cairo), he was one of three Chinese diplomats most essential to the establishment of Sino-Arab relations in the 1950s. At the same time, because he was the venerable leader of a religious organization who was also a trusted Communist, Bao’erhan had unsurpassed value as a propagandist for domestic as well as foreign audiences. His report on his travels to the Middle East, which received widespread coverage in the Chinese press in March 1957, is an intriguing document that has been surprisingly neglected in previous studies of Sino-Arab relations. Bao’erhan declared

56. Bao’erhan, “Zhongjindong geguo renmin dui woguo renmin de youyi [The friendship of the people of each country in the Near and Middle East toward our country’s people],” Bao’erhan xuanji, 59-63; originally published as Bao’erhan, “Zhongjindong renmin dui woguo renmin you zhe shenhou de youyi [The people of the
that ordinary Arabs understood how much the Chinese Communist revolution of 1949 had benefited the Chinese people. He wrote that Arabs explicitly supported Mao and the CCP; the Egyptians, he said, even went so far as to chant “Long live People’s China!” and “Long live Mao Zedong!” in the streets, along with patriotic Egyptian slogans in support of Nasser.\textsuperscript{57} By uniting Mao and Nasser in this way, this propaganda both reinforced a nationalist worldview and marshaled Nasser’s prestige in support of Mao. Bao’erhan’s October 1956 assessment of the Middle East for \textit{Renmin Ribao} was particularly blunt in its assertion of foreign support for the Communist government:

> “Friendship with the Chinese people!” has already become a widespread slogan among the peoples of each Asian and African country. The peoples of each Asian and African country value the historic victories achieved by the Chinese people in their own struggle for complete national independence and enthusiastically recognize every enormous accomplishment achieved by the Chinese people in building their own country.\textsuperscript{58}

For a regime that was diplomatically isolated and officially recognized only by a small minority of the world’s countries, these declarations of foreign support had special value. Indeed, the most significant immediate consequence of Nasser’s recognition of the Beijing government was the opportunity it presented for leaders such as Bao’erhan to emphasize the international legitimacy of the CCP in domestic propaganda.

Both Ma Hanbing and Bao’erhan, however, went far beyond simply declaring that foreign nationalists recognized and supported Communist China; in addition, they tried to make their Chinese audiences feel a deep emotional connection to their Arab allies. Mao’s Communist ideology required sustained mobilization in support of the regime, and Middle

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{58} Bao’erhan, “Yafei wuguo fangwen ji [Recollections from visits to five Asian and African countries],” \textit{Bao’erhan xuanji}, 51.
Eastern causes could only rally a popular response if Chinese citizens genuinely perceived imperialism in the Middle East as a direct challenge to themselves. To strengthen the sense of interconnectedness that could make Middle Eastern issues resonate among the Chinese, Ma relied heavily on constructing a bond between the Chinese and the Arabs by emphasizing imperialism. In “An Egyptian soldier’s voice,” for example, he argued that the struggles of subjected peoples around the world united them as “brothers” and “relatives.” In his longest essay on Egypt, he repeatedly asserted that the Egyptians were the “brothers” of all Chinese. Bao’erhan championed this same notion of “brotherhood,” which he generally couched in either racial or religious imagery and terminology. He declared in both of his major essays about Egypt that Egyptians thought of themselves as the “brothers” of the Chinese because both nationalities were “Eastern people” (dongfang ren), a peculiar term that was not frequently used in Chinese political discourse at that time, when “Asian-African people” (yafei renmin) was the CCP’s preferred formulation. Bao’erhan also implicitly attributed the inherent bond between China and the Middle East to Islam, writing that Muhammad’s supposed “seek knowledge even unto China” hadith (which Bao’erhan accepted as genuine) was one of the reasons Egyptians felt such a connection to the Chinese. The idea that all Chinese citizens should think of Arabs, and Egyptians in particular, as their “brothers” gave ideological impetus to the development of Sino-Arab relations. It also bestowed license to draw more overtly on religious themes in propaganda targeted directly at Chinese Muslims.

The development of Chinese relations with Egypt and other Arab countries was a perfect opportunity for the government and national media to highlight China’s status as a

59. Ma Hanbing, “Aiji shibing de shengyin.”
60. Ma Hanbing, “Niluo hepan.”
61. Bao’erhan, “Zhongjindong geguo renmin dui woguo renmin de youyi” and “Yafei wuguo fangwen ji.”
country with a large Muslim population. When the second hajj delegation reached Saudi Arabia and Egypt in 1956, *Renmin Ribao* raved that its members were feted in Mecca and Cairo and presented with the symbols of mainstream (Arab) Islam, including traditional Bedouin clothing and gifts of Qur’ans. This formal acceptance of Chinese Muslims as “authentic” Muslims allowed the Chinese press to glorify both the government-run China Islamic Association and China’s top leaders, especially Mao, whose magnanimity had permitted Chinese Islam to flourish. 63 The national press also prominently emphasized Islam in background articles on the history of Sino-Arab relations, especially around the time of the Bandung Conference. Chinese propaganda highlighted the fact that the Hui community (according to dubious but widely believed tradition) was descended from Arab Muslims who had traveled to China in the seventh century, presenting this heritage as incontrovertible evidence that the re-establishment of Sino-Arab relations would be successful. 64 In these articles, the Chinese media never shied away from proclaiming a special and valuable role for Chinese Muslims as mediators between China and the rest of the Islamic world. Bao’erhan’s articles in the national press also made specific reference to the government’s purported support for Chinese Islam. By proposing that foreign Muslims respected the Chinese government for the complete religious freedom it cultivated, he hoped to bestow religious credence on the idea that Chinese Muslims should be satisfied with their position. 65 Part of the reason the government was so adamant about impressing foreign Muslims with its

63. For a concise description of the treatment of the Chinese hajj delegation in the Middle East, see Bao’erhan, “Zhongjindong ge guo ren min dui woguo ren min de you yi,” especially p. 61. *Renmin Ribao* printed dozens of articles throughout summer and autumn 1956 about the delegation; one representative article is “Bao’erhan zai kailuo quan zhong da hui shang xuanbu: quan zhongguo muslin zhichi aiji ren min de dou zheng [Bao’erhan declares at a mass meeting in Cairo: all Chinese Muslims support the struggle of the Egyptian people],” *Renmin Ribao*, 14 August 1956, 1. It is interesting to note that the first hajj delegation, hastily assembled after the Bandung Conference in 1955, received relatively little fanfare in the Chinese press. See “Wo yi silan jiao zhao jintuan qu shatealabo mai jia chaosheng [Our Islamic hajj delegation goes to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to perform the pilgrimage],” *Renmin Ribao*, 21 July 1955, 1.


commitment to religious freedom, one can speculate, is that its leaders hoped those foreigners would in turn endorse the CCP’s religious policy and thus pacify any lingering discontent.

Compared to the national press, publications intended specifically for Muslim audiences, especially the output of the China Islamic Association, were much more explicit in their use of Islamic rhetoric in domestic propaganda about the Middle East. In 1957, that organization began publishing Zhongguo Musilin, a monthly journal that prominently covered China’s developing relations with the Arab Middle East. The journal counted among its regular contributors all of China’s most distinguished Muslim leaders, including Bao’erhan and Da Pusheng as well as Ma Jian, who had studied at al-Azhar in Cairo and who was then engaged in translating the Qur’ān into Chinese. The journal’s stated purpose was to provide a forum for all Muslims – regardless of minzu – to exchange opinions.66 That these “opinions” were limited to those supportive of the Communist government was made clear by Bao’erhan’s publisher’s note in the first issue, which proclaimed that “patriotism is a part of faith” (yima’ne, a transliteration of the Arabic īmān) and instructed readers to appreciate the CCP’s commitment to religious freedom.67 In addition to explaining orthodox beliefs and occasionally condemning “rightist” imams, Zhongguo Musilin encouraged Chinese Muslims to take a greater interest in the Middle East. The journal asserted that the Chinese and the Arabs had been in constant contact since the spread of Islam during the Tang Dynasty and stressed the supposed Arab origins of Chinese Islam.68 It summarized political and cultural developments in the Middle East and translated “Arab” (more accurately Turkic or Central Asian, but the Chinese press would never have made this distinction) folk tales into Chinese.69 Zhongguo Musilin also lauded Chinese Muslims who actively assisted their

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66. Bao’erhan, “Fa kan ci [Publisher’s note],” Zhongguo Musilin, October 1957, 2.
67. Ibid.
69. See for example Wang Shu, “Jianjue baowei minzu duli de xuliya [Resolutely protect the national
Middle Eastern counterparts, especially by contributing money and food during the Suez Crisis or by visiting the Middle East. This affinity that Chinese Muslims were supposed to feel for the Middle East, however, was always subordinate to their loyalty to the Chinese government, which dutifully took up the cause of national liberation movements in the Middle East. Zhongguo Musilin was adamant that, since Chinese Muslims lived in a country whose liberation was complete, they should support anti-imperialist movements elsewhere out of sympathy for their less fortunate brethren. The propaganda in Zhongguo Musilin, therefore, adhered to a strict balance: Chinese Muslims could be junior partners in an Islamic community centered on the Middle East so long as they were simultaneously fully loyal to a country that perceived itself as the senior partner in a global community of anti-imperialist nations.

The limits that Chinese Communist ideology imposed on the identification of Chinese Muslims with pan-Islamic solidarity were most dramatically expressed in the dichotomy that Zhongguo Musilin established between “Islamic” and “Arab” identities. In the convoluted minority policy adopted by the CCP, which relied on a quasi-Stalinist conception of shared ancestry and shared culture when designating minzus, ethnicity generally trumped any notion of religious identity. The China Islamic Association was willing to assert that members of the ten Muslim minzus should feel an affinity with each other because of common religious beliefs, but it simultaneously reinforced the distinctions among the different Muslim groups.

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70. Wang Keqin, “Zhong’ai liangguo shenhou de youhao guanxi [Deep friendly relations between China and Egypt],” Zhongguo Musilin, November 1957 25-27. In typical fashion, Wang reinforced Chinese nationalism by noting that Bao’erhan’s delegation was received in Cairo by crowds chanting “long live people’s China.”


72. See Bao’erhan, “Fa kan ci,” Zhongguo Musilin, October 1957, as well as the monthly articles that introduced each Muslim minzu in turn. The China Islamic Association’s Qianjin zhong de zhongguo musilin [Chinese Muslims in progress] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1957) also declared that China’s Muslim minzus
The Chinese government took a similar approach to categorizing Muslims from different countries, whom it believed to be united by faith but separated by nationality. Accordingly, Zhongguo Musilin implied that Chinese Muslims, by virtue of their belief in Islam, should be particularly supportive of the Arab anti-imperialist cause. At no point during the 1950s would the China Islamic Association have countenanced any notion of an Islamic cause, even though it encouraged increased contact between Chinese and foreign Muslims. Zhongguo Musilin used “Arab” as a term to refer to individual Arab countries, always making sure to specify that it supported different national liberation movements in each Arab country, rather than a single movement encompassing the Middle East as a whole. Throughout its history (and continuing to the present), the Chinese government has based its foreign policy on individual countries, even when advocating transnational ideologies such as Islamic, Arab, Asian-African, or Third World solidarity. According to this perspective, Chinese Muslims could be encouraged to build connections with their Arab co-religionists, but only so long as their ultimate loyalty to their nation remained unadulterated.

Since Chinese nationalism was the guiding principle behind this propaganda campaign, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Beijing’s willingness to promote global Islamic unity reflected a “pan-Islamic” ideology. The most widely accepted definition of pan-Islamism requires that an ideology advocate the political unification of all the world’s Muslims in order to be termed pan-Islamist – the exact opposite of the Chinese government’s goal. It would

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73. Ma Jian, “Zhongguo yu alabo geguo zhijian you gulao you nianqing de youyi,” Zhongguo Musilin, January 1958 made the most specific call for support for “Arab” causes, although this same logic permeated the many articles in 1957 and 1958 that focused on specific Arab countries such as Egypt or Syria.

74. See for example Wang Shu, “Jianjue baowei minzu duli de xuliya,” Zhongguo Musilin, December 1957; Ma Jian, “Zhongguo yu alabo geguo zhijian you gulao you nianqing de youyi,” Zhongguo Musilin, January 1958; and Wang Keqin, “Zhong’ai liangguo shenhou de youhao guanxi,” Zhongguo Musilin, November 1957. The Chinese government’s attitude to pan-Arab nationalism was somewhat inconsistent; by the time of the Iraqi Revolution of July 1958, the Chinese Foreign Ministry was generally willing to accept the idea that Arab countries aspired to some sort of unity and to voice its support for the Arab nationalist cause. See “Zhongdong xingshi ji kanfa [The situation in the Middle East and our view of it],” 18 July 1958, 107-00295-01, CFMA.

75. In particular, Jacob M. Landau, The Politics of Pan-Islam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) has emphasized the
not, however, be a stretch to assert that the logic behind Beijing’s strategy was pan-Islamic. The Chinese government assumed the existence of a global community of Muslims, joined by a common faith and inherently interested in the plight of their co-religionists many thousands of miles away. It also accepted, and even promoted, the idea that this community was centered in the Middle East, whose Arab inhabitants could claim natural authority over religious issues. Most important, the Chinese state endorsed the idea that the world’s Muslims were bound by a commitment to a joint cause, in this case an anti-imperialist struggle for total independence from the West. When the Chinese government declared that certain actions helped or hindered the mission of global Islam, it was accepting the fundamental logic of such pan-Islamic ideological pioneers as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who had been among the first intellectuals to muster modern political vocabulary to champion this idea that all Muslims innately shared a common interest in opposing imperialism. By asserting that the pan-Islamic cause of liberation from imperialism would be achieved through a nationalist framework, the Chinese government was following in the footsteps of many previous Muslim regimes that had used the logic of pan-Islamism to bolster national sovereignty. For example, in the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II, having co-opted many of al-Afghani’s ideas, revived the religious title of Caliph and sought recognition from foreign Muslim leaders in large part as a means to legitimize his control over his own Ottoman Muslim subjects. While Abdülhamid was certainly not a nationalist, one can identify remarkable parallels between his attempts to use the rhetoric of global Islamic unity to appeal to his own Muslim subjects and Chinese Communist attempts to use their support for Arab Muslims to appeal to Chinese Muslims. The willingness of the Chinese government to accept the logic of pan-Islamism in its campaign for the incorporation

importance of central leadership (generally in the form of a Caliph) in pan-Islamist movements; obviously, any centralized authority over global Islam was entirely antithetical to the Chinese Communists.
of Muslims into the Chinese nation illustrated how far the CCP was willing to go to inculcate its nationalist ideology.

Mass Politics and the Suez Crisis

Just two months after Egypt officially recognized Communist China in May 1956, the outbreak of the Suez Crisis afforded Beijing its most dramatic opportunity to express unconditional support for Arab anti-imperialism. The zeal with which China embraced the Egyptian cause reverberated around the world. When the Chinese government, like that of the Soviet Union, threatened to send thousands of “volunteers” to fight on behalf of Egypt, British and American journalists, mindful of the bloody stalemate that Chinese volunteers had forced in Korea, took notice notwithstanding the obvious impracticality of direct military intervention.76 After the crisis eventually culminated in the invasion of Egypt by the United Kingdom, France, and Israel, China contributed 20 million Swiss francs to subsidize the Egyptian war effort – a token gift, perhaps, but in light of China’s poverty a generous one nonetheless.77 In his memoirs, Mahmoud Fawzi directly connected Sino-Arab rapprochement and the beginning of the Suez Crisis, arguing that Nasser’s budding friendship with Zhou Enlai partly inspired the Egyptian president’s subsequent bold stands in support of anti-imperialist causes.78 Yet despite China’s increasing role in world politics in the mid-1950s,

77. Telegram from Zhou Enlai to Gamal Abdel Nasser via the Egyptian embassy in Beijing, 10 November 1956, 107-00028-04, CFMA. 20 million Swiss francs were worth approximately $4.6 million in 1956; adjusted for inflation, the Chinese financial support for Egypt works out to approximately $39 million in today’s currency.
78. Mahmoud Fawzi, Suez 1956: An Egyptian Perspective (London: Shorouk International, 1987), 13-17. Fawzi claimed that Zhou and Nasser spent a large amount of time together at the Bandung Conference. Fawzi called Zhou “soothing, though intensely interesting” and singled out the Chinese premier as one of the key figures in Bandung. According to Fawzi, “Bandung opened new vistas for Abdul Nasser” and gave him “a new
Western historians of the Suez Crisis have almost uniformly discounted Chinese involvement in the conflict.\textsuperscript{79} This oversight, while understandable, is disappointing; although China’s ability to influence the outcome of any international incident was limited, the Suez Crisis still resonated in Chinese society, as it did in many other postcolonial countries. The invasion of an independent country by its former colonial masters was the sort of event that could inflame anti-imperialist passion among the Chinese. The Beijing government, therefore, took full advantage of this smoldering popular anger to stage-manage an opportunity for mass political participation in support of the Communist state.

The Chinese government wasted little time in bestowing its official blessing on the Egyptian decision to nationalize the Suez Canal, which the Chinese interpreted as a principled anti-imperialist stance. Just four days after the nationalization, the Chinese ambassador in Cairo, Chen Jiakang, met with Fawzi to assure him that Egypt had undertaken the “correct” action (\textit{nimen zuode hendui}).\textsuperscript{80} On 5 August, Chen declared unequivocally to Egyptian Defense Minister Abdel Hakim Amer that “China supports you because you are undertaking a heroic struggle” (\textit{yingyong de douzheng}).\textsuperscript{81} Soon thereafter, a Foreign Ministry bureaucrat studying the crisis recommended to Zhou that China offer “support and help” to “Egypt’s struggle against imperialism” (\textit{aiji de fandi douzheng}) and enumerated particular gifts in money and goods that might be appropriate. China’s most important goal, the memorandum reiterated, was to “express our concern for Egypt’s struggle against

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\item injection of self-confidence and whetted his appetite for bold policies and for adventure” – clearly a reference to the risky decision to nationalize the Suez Canal the following year.
\item 79. For example, one comprehensive recent analysis, Keith Kyle, \textit{Suez: Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East} (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2003), did not mention China at all. David Carlton, \textit{Britain and the Suez Crisis} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 32 surmised only that the Egyptian recognition of Communist China was one of the factors that induced Dulles to block funding for the Aswan Dam. Similarly, a recent edited volume purporting to analyze the Suez Crisis from a “broad perspective” made no mention of China in any article. See David Tal, ed., \textit{The 1956 War: Collision and Rivalry in the Middle East} (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 11-12.
\item 80. Chen Jiakang’s report on his meeting with Mahmoud Fawzi, 2 August 1956, 107-00057-04, CFMA.
\item 81. Chen Jiakang’s report on his meeting with Abdel Hakim Amer, 8 August 1956, 107-00057-04, CFMA.
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imperialism.” On 3 October, Mao wrote a letter to Nasser declaring that the Chinese government was “resolutely opposed to any plot to encroach on the independence and sovereignty of Egypt” and that Sino-Egyptian “unity and mutual support” were essential to “the struggle to defend world peace and oppose colonialism.” In their rhetoric, Chinese officials always tried to internationalize the conflict in Egypt by depicting it as a threat to the entire postcolonial world. For example, when Zhou sent China’s gift of 20 million Swiss francs to Nasser, he attached a note declaring that the British and French were “opposed by the people of the whole world and the overwhelming majority of countries and are thus utterly isolated and morally bankrupt.” In his letter, Zhou likened Egypt’s struggle against the United Kingdom and France to China’s antagonism toward the United States by referring to the Anglo-French invasion as “bankrupt gunboat policy” (a phrase reminiscent of the “gunboat diplomacy” used by Western powers to secure concessions from the Qing government) and by accusing the United States of masterminding the British and French aggression. The Chinese government thus presented itself not as an isolated supporter of the Egyptian cause, but as part of a much broader global movement in which all former victims of imperialism had a common stake in Egypt’s future.

The domestic propaganda campaign that the Chinese government launched soon after the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal was a deliberate and centralized operation. The decision to use the media to manipulate popular sentiment during the Suez Crisis came directly from the highest echelon of the Chinese government, most likely from Mao himself. An internal memorandum from the “central” government, preserved in the Foreign Ministry Archives, instructed the entire Chinese bureaucracy to continue to emphasize the popular

82. Response to a request for instructions regarding Egypt, 11 August 1956, 107-00028-04, CFMA.
83. Mao Zedong’s reply to Gamal Abdel Nasser, October 1956, 107-00021-02, CFMA.
84. Telegram from Zhou Enlai to Gamal Abdel Nasser via the Egyptian embassy in Beijing, 10 November 1956, 107-00028-04, CFMA.
committees formed to support Egypt when making public statements about the crisis. The
government stressed that these committees, which had been formed on a local level, were
comprised of “Chinese people” (zhongguoren) coming together to oppose the invasion. As
was frequently the case in Communist China, these provincial and local organizations took
their orders not from explicit directives, but from editorials in national government-run
newspapers, especially Renmin Ribao. Accordingly, in the city of Lanzhou, the capital of
Gansu province, the Lanzhou City People’s Committee for Supporting Egypt’s Resistance of
the Invasion officially adopted the Renmin Ribao editorial of 9 November as the basis for the
interpretation of the Suez Crisis it would present to the local population. The Lanzhou
committee pledged to promulgate Renmin Ribao’s expansion of the goals of the Anglo-
French invasion, the situation in Hungary, and the role of the United States in the crisis. The
editorial reserved its harshest criticism for the United States, which it accused – despite
that country’s avowed support for a cease-fire – of manipulating the situation to “achieve [its]
goal of controlling Egypt” (dadao kongzhi ai ji de mudi). Renmin Ribao lambasted the
Eisenhower administration for its plan to replace British, French, and Israeli troops with a
United Nations peacekeeping force, which, the newspaper editorialized, was merely a tactic
to establish effective American control over the Middle East.

The Chinese government not only used the media to define public opinion, but also to
incite and encourage demonstrations on behalf of Egypt in China’s largest cities. Soon after
the invasion of Egypt, workers gathered en masse on Shanghai’s Weishan Wharf to denounce
the United Kingdom, France, and Israel. The same day, the Shanghai Trade Union Council

85. Foreign Ministry circular regarding support for Egypt, 15 November 1955, 107-00057-05, CFMA.
86. Gansu sheng, lanzhou shi renmin zhiyuan ai ji fankang qinlüe weiyuan hui gongzuojhui [Working plan of
the Lanzhou City, Gansu Province People’s Committee for Supporting Egypt’s Resistance of the Invasion],
undated [November 1956], Gansu Provincial Archives (henceforth abbreviated GPA).
87. “Zhiyuan ai ji renmin ba qinluezhe gan chuqu [Assist the Egyptian people in driving the invaders out],”
Renmin Ribao, 9 November 1956, 1.
issued a statement on behalf of its million members declaring that the “just struggle” (zhengyi douzheng) against colonialism would inevitably succeed.88 Demonstrations in favor of Egypt were not spontaneous eruptions of popular anger, but rather were carefully organized by municipal authorities. In Lanzhou, for example, the official committee required that people in “every location and every work unit” should take part in the protests and demanded that every existing political party and popular organization mobilize its members.89 In all, a total of eighteen work units, comprising an official tally of 5,215 people, took part in the general meeting in Lanzhou to denounce the invasion of Egypt.90 In China’s biggest cities, massive crowds turned out to condemn the United Kingdom and France. Renmin Ribao claimed that, on the night of 3 November, more than 400,000 marchers took to the streets of Beijing in protest.91 Eventually, protestors completely filled Tian’anmen Square for a mass rally that was subsequently to become the international symbol of China’s support for the Middle East.92 The municipal government of Shanghai estimated on 3 November that one crowd of protestors in that city numbered more than 100,000, including as many as 15,000 who had “volunteered” to go to Egypt to join the war effort.93 Notwithstanding the CCP’s careful scripting of popular expression during the 1950s, these protests did provide a means for ordinary Chinese citizens to participate personally in the anti-imperialist cause. These demonstrations were exercises in mass politics, an essential component of Mao’s political

88. “Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin gejie qun qing jifen [The masses from all walks of life in Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin are enraged],” Renmin Ribao, 2 November 1956, 4.
89. Working plan of the Lanzhou City, Gansu Province People’s Committee for Supporting Egypt’s Resistance of the Invasion, GPA.
90. Working report on the mass meeting of eighteen work units in Donggang District, Lanzhou, of the Lanzhou medical school and others in opposition to the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, GPA.
92. A photograph showing the massive crowds present for that rally was distributed to Arab readers as the final page of the China Islamic Association’s Qianjin zhong de zhongguo muslin.
ideology, which recognized direct, popular participation as a means to legitimize official policy and radicalize the citizenry in support of the CCP and its government.

Throughout the Suez Crisis, the Chinese media paid disproportionate attention to the comments of Chinese Muslims and to the rallies they organized and attended. China’s officially atheist Xinhua news agency unabashedly disseminated prayers such as the appeal “to Allah” by Jing Wangxin, a Muslim engineer at Shanghai’s Machine Tool Plant, “that the just people of Egypt will be victorious.”\(^{94}\) In a flurry of press releases, Xinhua also highlighted the condemnation of the British and French by the China Islamic Association, the Shanghai Association for the Promotion of Hui People’s Culture, a group of eighteen imams in Shanghai, a group of twenty-seven imams in Tianjin, a Muslim leader in Harbin, and a group of two thousand Muslims who gathered outside the Egyptian embassy in Beijing.\(^{95}\)

The invasion of Egypt also prompted protests in areas with significant Muslim populations, including Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, where protest meetings approved a series of resolutions criticizing the British and French, all of which were reported in the national Chinese press.\(^{96}\) *Renmin Ribao* printed the views of one Uyghur leader within the China Islamic Association, speaking on behalf of local Muslims who had previously visited Egypt, who declared that “Islamic scripture tells us that Muslims must assist peoples who are oppressed or invaded, and we Muslims in Xinjiang resolutely support the righteous struggle of our Egyptian brothers.”\(^{97}\) On 5 November, as many as 50,000 protestors “of various nationalities” took to the streets in Urumqi, while 10,000 Muslims demonstrated

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97. “Gedi renmin jihui youxing zhiyuan aiji renmin de zhengyi douzheng [People from all places gather to march in support of the righteous struggle of the Egyptian people],” Renmin Ribao, 4 November 1956, 4.
simultaneously in Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. In the traditionally Muslim city of Lanzhou, the committee established to organize local reaction to the events in Egypt declared that its primary mission was to publicize the crisis among the “masses” (qunzhong) of the city, many of whom would have been Muslims. The general meeting of work units in Lanzhou made special mention of Muslims who had spoken out against the Anglo-French invasion, including a group of Hui school children who were singled out for praise. The Suez Crisis allowed Chinese Muslims to assume a salient role in domestic Chinese politics as the strongest bond between China and Egypt. Yet in expressing solidarity with Egyptian Muslims, Chinese Muslims were participating fully in the same demonstrations as the Han majority; thus, shared passion for a situation beyond China’s borders bound Han, Hui, and Uyghur together into one cohesive Chinese nation.

The mainstream, national Chinese media explicitly employed the rhetoric of global Islamic unity in reporting on these rallies. The Chinese state advanced publicly and openly the idea that Chinese and Egypt Muslims were “brothers” who shared an inherent connection because of their religion. In a 6 November 1956 article praising the participation of Muslims in the pro-Egypt rallies, Renmin Ribao afforded Chinese Muslims a privileged role in the discourse concerning the Suez Crisis:

Followers of Islam throughout the entire country expressed the most possible care for their Muslim brothers in Egypt. In recent days, many cities have continuously hosted gatherings for hundreds of thousands of Muslims. Inside mosques, they have said prayers one after another for the righteous struggle of the Egyptian people and have also prayed for peace. Even at night, some old Muslims have not been able to sleep soundly. They say that all Muslims are

99. Working plan of the Lanzhou City, Gansu Province People’s Committee for Supporting Egypt’s Resistance of the Invasion, GPA.
100. Working report on the mass meeting of eighteen work units in Donggang District, Lanzhou, of the Lanzhou medical school and others in opposition to the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, GPA.

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brothers in arms; when one is in pain, the other also feels it. We cannot stand aside with folded arms. Chinese Muslims absolutely must use their utmost strength to support Egyptian Muslims and to defeat the invaders.\footnote{101}

It was perhaps surprising that the national newspaper of an officially atheist country would endorse Islamic prayer in this manner, but such a statement was fully consistent with the Chinese government’s policy toward Islam at this time. Beijing was happy to use its relations with Egypt to carve out a special position for Muslims, so long as that position affirmed the universal support of Chinese Muslims for the policies enacted by the Communist regime.

By protesting the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, those who demonstrated in the streets of cities across China were likewise cheering their own government’s support for the Egyptian people. The workers who gathered not only adopted resolutions criticizing the British and the French, but also registered their approval of how Beijing was handling the crisis.\footnote{102} In Lanzhou, local citizens signed a telegram to Nasser that declared their support for Egypt and explicitly endorsed the Chinese government’s reaction to the crisis.\footnote{103} Similarly, at the general meeting of Lanzhou work units, the organizers made sure that the masses officially proclaimed their support for the policies of both the Chinese and Soviet governments during the crisis.\footnote{104} Perhaps the most explicit manifestation of Chinese nationalism during the campaign on behalf of Egypt came at the height of the crisis when an Egyptian visiting professor at Beijing’s Institute of Islamic Theology led an enthusiastic crowd that included many Muslims in chanting slogans, including “long live China and

\footnote{101. “Zhiyuan aiji, fandui qinlùe, baowei heping: quanguo renmin tongsheng chize ying fa diguozhuyi zai zhongdong ran qi zhanhuo [Support Egypt, oppose the invasion, preserve peace: all of China’s people denounce with one voice the conflagration ignited by Anglo-French imperialism in the Middle East],” Renmin Ribao, 6 November 1956, 2.
103. Telegram sent to Nasser in support of Egypt, 29 November 1956, GPA.
104. Working report on the mass meeting of eighteen work units in Donggang District, Lanzhou, of the Lanzhou medical school and others in opposition to the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, GPA.}
Egypt” – a vivid reminder that expressions of patriotism and loyalty to the Chinese state were a necessary part of any mass political gathering in Mao’s China. The Suez Crisis presented the CCP with a particularly fortuitous opportunity to convince Chinese Muslims that their government acted in the best interests of Islam worldwide. Consequently, China’s support for Nasser’s government also served the Chinese government domestically. Not only did Muslims become further incorporated into the Chinese nation, but the Suez Crisis also reinforced the premise that the CCP was unambiguously the champion of the nation’s aspirations and that the interests of Chinese Muslims coincided with those of the Chinese nation as a whole.

Beyond the “Islamic Card”

To assert that China’s elite policymakers were mindful of the relevance of Sino-Egyptian relations to their ongoing project of instilling the CCP’s national ideology in Chinese Muslims is not to argue that domestic considerations were China’s only motivation for its policy of support for Egypt. In fact, there is no archival evidence that domestic factors were explicitly discussed by those who crafted China’s foreign policy (although, as previously explained, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives do not make available the documents that would be necessary to address this issue definitively). Chen Jian has claimed with similarly scant archival support that China’s approach to the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958 can only be explained by Mao’s interest in domestic mobilization, but this thesis does not need to reach such a bold conclusion to make a meaningful contribution to historians’ understanding of Chinese foreign policy. Rather, it is enough to say that, in 1955

106. Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 202-203.
and 1956, China’s national and international goals were so closely aligned as to be inseparable. In order to allay the fears of Egypt and other Arab countries during and after the Bandung Conference, the Chinese government had to demonstrate not only that it did not mistreat its Muslim population, but also that it actively worked to ensure those Muslims were fully connected to the Islamic world. The public support Nasser’s government gave to the Chinese Communists then became a propaganda tool to improve the government’s relations with its Muslim citizens. In turn, this engagement with the Muslim population strengthened China’s position when courting the Egyptians.

The mutually reinforcing relationship between China’s domestic and international programs permitted a surprisingly broad scope for marginalized communities such as China’s Muslims to participate in foreign policy initiatives. Even Gladney, one of the few scholars to have recognized their international role, has not fully done justice to the significance of Sino-Arab relations for Chinese Muslims during the 1950s. His “Islamic card” framework implies disingenuousness on the part of the Beijing government, essentially proposing that Beijing’s goal was simply to trick the Egyptians into believing that Muslims were a more prominent and more valued part of Chinese society than was actually the case. While it is true that the Communist regime denied certain rights to Muslims during the 1950s and that the CCP’s minority policy was not nearly as enlightened as its propaganda tried to make the Egyptians believe, a cynical interpretation of China’s foreign policy obscures several of its most important features. First, this approach ignores the fact that Muslims were directly involved in Chinese diplomacy and were not merely represented by the non-Muslim regime. The China Islamic Association was a state-run organization, but its leaders were nationalist Muslims who adamantly believed – as the central government asserted – that Chinese Muslims ought to have much more contact with the Middle East. The strategy of using Muslims to carry out diplomacy with Arab countries during the 1950s cannot be so easily
dismissed as a government propaganda project because it resulted in the establishment (or, in the case of the hajj, re-establishment) of genuine cultural connections between Chinese and Arab Muslims. Second, the Islamic card framework understates the extent to which national and transnational ideologies were interrelated in the postcolonial era. Beijing appealed to both Egyptian and Chinese Muslims with the logic of pan-Islamism by asserting that all Muslims constituted a single global community and that the Chinese government was working for its benefit. By invoking a transnational ideology to reinforce loyalty to the Chinese nation, Beijing was subverting this logic for its own ends. It is impossible to write about transnational linkages in the 1950s without recognizing the abiding power of nationalism. Not only could nationalism be reconciled with global ideologies popular during the era of the “Bandung spirit,” but it was – more often than not – the driving force behind them.
CHAPTER TWO: THE MEANING OF CHINA IN EGYPTIAN POLITICS, 1955-1957

Before 1955, a literate, politically-minded Egyptian who thought about China – if indeed he or she thought about China at all – would most likely have considered it largely irrelevant to Egyptian affairs. Egyptian publishing houses had printed a few books introducing modern China to an Arabic-speaking audience, but these were rare and not widely read. They focused on China’s Republican era, especially the triumphs of Sun Yat-sen, and said little if anything about the Communist regime installed in 1949.1 Particular leftist activists such as Young Egypt founder Ahmad Husayn occasionally expressed approval of Chiang Kai-shek’s overthrow or praised China’s intervention in the Korean War.2 Such statements, however, were necessarily thin on facts. No Egyptian journalist visited Communist China between 1949 and 1955, a period during which the Egyptian government recognized Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist regime but did not maintain an embassy in either Taipei or Beijing. After 1955, when Egyptian journalists began to travel to China, the most common metaphor they employed was that they had glimpsed life “behind the Great Wall.” China, it was assumed, was so remote from Egypt and so isolated from the rest of the non-communist world as to be all but unintelligible to the Egyptian public. Consequently, when the Chinese government launched its campaign to promote itself in Asia and Africa in 1955,

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2. Ahmad Husayn, “Al-Hukuma allati latuharab al-fasad...wa-l-rashwa...wa-l-inhilal hukumah maqdi ‘alayha bi-l-i’dam wa-l-nizam alladhi tumathiluhu bi-l-fana” [The government that is not fighting corruption, bribery, and decay is a government doomed to death...and the system that it represents is doomed to annihilation],” Al-Ishirakiiyya, 28 July 1950. P.J. Vatikiotis, Nasser and His Generation (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 77 cited Husayn’s continued attention to the Korean War as evidence of Young Egypt’s increasing militancy in foreign affairs.
its audience in Egypt, as elsewhere, was predisposed to think of China as impenetrably foreign.

It was against this backdrop that the Bandung Conference sparked a frenzy of interest from the Egyptian media in China and Chinese politics. Zhou Enlai’s every movement in Bandung was observed, reported, and analyzed. Aside from Nasser, Egyptian newspapers paid more attention to Zhou than to any other leader in attendance. Inevitably, much of this coverage sensationalized Zhou’s fortuitous change of plans before the Kashmir Princess, the plane that was originally designated to fly him to Indonesia, exploded en route over the South China Sea. That conspiracy, which was almost certainly masterminded from Taipei, was ironically the perfect catalyst to fuel interest in China throughout Asia and Africa. Zhou also attracted attention for his own performance at the Conference, during which his affable personality and relentlessly reasonable public statements dispelled the widespread notion that China was governed by an arbitrary and irrational regime. Following the Conference, the Egyptian press was confused about what to make of the Chinese. A June 1955 caricature in the Egyptian weekly Akhbar al-yawm encapsulated this uncertainty. In that cartoon, Nikita Khrushchev and Dwight Eisenhower examine Zhou with a magnifying glass, both utterly perplexed by the Chinese Premier. The caption summarized the Chinese enigma that Zhou embodied:

Some people consider him the greatest threat to Russia, and some people consider him Russia’s servant. Former American Secretary of Defense George Marshall described him as “an excellent and rational personality,” while an important French writer described him as a butcher and a killer. But

3. For a nuanced discussion of the many theories explaining the Kashmir Princess bombing, see Steve Tsang, “Target Zhou Enlai: The ‘Kashmir Princess’ Incident of 1955,” The China Quarterly 139 (1994). Tsang has concluded that there is no evidence that the American Central Intelligence Agency was complicit in the bombing, as the Chinese government alleged, though this question has still not been fully resolved.
he is a charming and pleasant person who makes friends easily, and he wins battles by winning friends.4

The captivation of the Egyptian media with Zhou was also tinged with fear of China’s unknown power, which was reflected in other depictions of China as threatening or capricious. During the Bandung Conference, Akhbar al-yawm’s cartoonist caricatured Mao as a scowling, bayonet-wielding yellow man.5 Another unflattering cartoon showed a yellow hand slipping a grenade labeled “Formosa” into a dove’s nest that represented Asian-African solidarity.6 This befuddled fascination with China’s unfamiliar culture and potentially dangerous government was a hallmark of the Egyptian media’s coverage of China during the mid-1950s, and this widespread anxiety continued to temper popular enthusiasm as diplomatic relations between the two countries first emerged.

Political engagement between the governments of China and Egypt cannot be understood without appreciating how China was perceived and represented in the Egyptian media and Egyptian public discourse. Just as the Chinese government paid close attention to how all its citizens, especially Muslims, reacted to the strengthening of its ties to the Middle East, so too was Nasser’s government cognizant of the domestic ramifications of its budding relationship with China. Like the CCP, Nasser was still in the process of consolidating his authority throughout the 1950s. He faced particular opposition domestically from two segments of the population: the Islamists of the recently outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and the increasingly oppressed members of various communist organizations. Because China was a communist country with a large Muslim population, both of these groups inevitably took a keen interest in each Egyptian overture to China. If Egyptians, accustomed to the

portrayal of Mao as an unstable, bayonet-wielding maniac, were to accept closer relations with China, they would first have to be convinced that Chinese Communists would make suitable allies. Many pious Muslims, including some members of the government, were concerned about China’s treatment of its own Muslim population.⁷ Leftists, by contrast, welcomed closer links to the Communist bloc, although for the most part they paid far more attention to the Soviet Union than to China. Not only did Nasser have to navigate a thorny geopolitical context in which his association with China complicated his relations with Moscow and Washington, but he also had to consider these domestic constituencies. Between 1955 and 1957, the significance of Communist China was negotiated and contested in Egyptian public discourse. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in May 1956 had little immediate practical effect for either side. The process of how Egyptians came to understand China, however, can reveal much about Egyptian domestic politics.

The most interesting discussions of China in mid-1950s Egypt were the writings of those statesmen and journalists who actually visited China. In spring and summer 1955, after al-Baquri returned from his journey, the official weekly of the Free Officers, Majallat al-tahrir, published the government-sanctioned accounts of his visit.⁸ Thereafter, many Egyptian journalists also accepted invitations to travel to China and write about that country. The most prominent of these journalists were Muhammad al-Bili and Isma‘il al-Habruk, who both wrote for the leftist weekly Ruz al-yusuf, and ‘Ali Hamdi al-Jamal, who was at the time a deputy editor of the mainstream daily Al-Akhbar. The Egyptian public also had access to

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the works of ʿAbd al-Salam al-Adhami, a staunch Lebanese supporter of Nasser who published a book about China in 1954, and ʿAbdallah ʿUbayd, a member of the Sudanese Communist Party who published his memoir of China in Cairo in 1956. Finally, Muhammad ʿAwda and Ihsan ʿAbd al-Quddus were two outspoken social commentators who joined the debate about China in 1955 despite not having personally visited that country. Together, all of these writers crafted a consensus interpretation of China as a progressive, revolutionary country. They portrayed the CCP as a benign party that had masterminded an economic miracle. They also acclaimed the development of Chinese nationalism, both because the CCP had rebuffed Western imperialism and because it had supposedly unified the Chinese nation in perfect harmony behind its government. Most remarkable, Egyptian writers universally denied that the CCP was truly a communist organization or that China was a fully communist country, preferring instead to interpret the Beijing regime as a sober and conscientious government that could even serve as a model for Egypt.

Classifying China as a suitable ally thereby permitted Nasser to seek closer relations with a communist government that might otherwise have been deemed threatening. Once al-Baquri and others had dispelled fears that the Chinese mistreated their Muslim minority, then Nasser could confidently sell the recognition of Communist China to the Egyptian public. Yet the process of redefining China was not just about allaying concerns. In Egyptian political discourse, China became a symbol of modernization and national revolution that could be invoked by those who advocated a more radical – and more authoritarian – approach to economic, social, and political reform. Comparisons to China legitimized the idea of a revolutionary society in Egypt, even if what was meant by “revolution” was hardly ever clear. In general, Egyptian commentators separated China’s economic and political development from its official communist ideology and instead portrayed China’s resurgence as a triumph of anti-imperialist nationalism mixed with a strong commitment to
modernization. In so doing, they idealized China in order to promote these same qualities in Egypt. From a diplomatic perspective, Nasser’s decision to recognize Communist China can be viewed as part of Egypt’s reorientation toward a bolder and more independent foreign policy, since it infuriated the American government and signaled his willingness to engage with the Communist bloc. At the same time, some of the most significant consequences of improving relations with China were felt at home, where embracing China’s revolution as a vision for Egypt’s own political development was part of an equally profound ideological reorientation.

**Beyond the Search for Arms**

When Nasser decided to recognize China’s Communist government in May 1956, most analysts assumed that he did so because of his desire to acquire Soviet-made weapons from the communist bloc. Egypt’s first major purchase of Soviet arms from Czechoslovakia in September 1955 stunned Western observers, who had not expected Nasser to seek Soviet support so suddenly or so brazenly. As a result, it was inevitable that many contemporary policymakers interpreted the Czech arms deal and the subsequent recognition of Communist China as two related components of Egypt’s turn toward Moscow. Both the British and American governments, for example, unquestioningly assumed that Nasser was continuing the search for weapons he had begun the previous year. A bureaucrat in the British Foreign Office even smugly surmised that Egypt’s decision to establish diplomatic relations with China was “mistimed and miscalculated,” since China was “a distant and untried purveyor of arms.”

Many recent historians, however, have abandoned this skepticism, instead proposing that Zhou indirectly facilitated the Czech arms deal, either at the Bandung Conference or

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9. W.C. Symon, Memorandum in the front matter of FC 10316/8, 12 June 1956, FO 371/120885, UKNA.
immediately before it in Rangoon. These scholars have based this claim on the writings of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a member of Nasser’s inner circle who attended the Conference. In one book, Heikal recalled that Nasser and Zhou discussed the possibility of funneling arms through China at their very first meeting in Rangoon. Since the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives have not declassified any record of this conversation, Heikal’s recollection of it cannot be challenged. It is not, however, accurate to contend that Zhou played any substantial role in mediating the Czech arms deal; recent evidence from Soviet and Czech archives makes clear that those negotiations began as early as 1953 and gained increased urgency after Israel’s raid on Gaza in February 1955. Thus, most authors appear to have overstated the relevance of Sino-Egyptian relations to Nasser’s initial search for weapons.

A more accurate theory is that Nasser hoped China could be a source for Soviet arms in the event that the United Nations imposed an arms embargo on the entire Middle East, since China was not a member and could not be bound by such a resolution. Heikal himself offered this explanation for Nasser’s interest in recognizing Communist China in his study of Egypt’s relations with the Soviet Union, even though this claim was not consistent with his earlier comments about Nasser’s first meeting with Zhou. Another insider in Nasser’s government, Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, corroborated this assertion, explaining that Nasser considered the possibility of an arms embargo against the whole region quite realistic.

Following the establishment of Israel, the United Nations had imposed periodic arms


embargos on the principal antagonists in the Arab-Israeli conflict, although the Soviet Union had generally flouted these restrictions even after agreeing to them. In the aftermath of the Czech arms deal, the American and British governments exerted renewed pressure to find a lasting solution to the arms race in the Middle East. Nasser was remarkably open about his intention to circumvent such restrictions should they be imposed. He even told the British ambassador in Cairo, Humphrey Trevelyan, that “the decision [to recognize Communist China] was taken solely in order that the Egyptian government might have an alternative source of supply of arms if a Middle Eastern arms embargo were proposed by the United Nations.” Trevelyan also speculated that Soviet leaders, including Khrushchev and Premier Nikolai Bulganin, had informed Nasser they might be compelled to agree to such a measure. At the very least, it is clear that concern for access to weapons significantly influenced Nasser’s decision-making with regard to his improving relations with China; one can even surmise that his recognition of the Beijing government might have been what motivated the Western powers to abandon their immediate plans for a region-wide arms embargo.

Despite the substantial evidence that Nasser was chiefly motivated by his pursuit of arms, it is important not to lose sight of the other reasons why establishing closer relations with China made sense for his government. For example, Egyptian leaders might have hoped to benefit from developing economic ties to China, whose large population made it an attractive market for Egyptian cotton. Although China faced daunting economic challenges in the 1950s, its leaders were nonetheless eager to foster commercial contacts whenever possible, as demonstrated by their interest in pursuing a trade agreement with Egypt in the summer of 1955. Heikal even claimed (with characteristic flair for the dramatic) that Zhou’s first

16. W.C. Symon, Memorandum in the front matter of FC 10316/8, 8 June 1956, FO 371/120885, UKNA.
overture to Nasser during their meeting in Rangoon was to point out that “China could take all the cotton that Egypt produced simply by ordering every Chinese to lengthen his coat by five centimeters.”

Another potential explanation for Nasser’s attraction to China was his personal affinity for China’s leaders, especially Zhou. After all, there is no reason to assume that Nasser’s avowed support for the Chinese cause was cynical or disingenuous. At the same time, it is important to appreciate that Egypt stood to enhance its prestige both regionally and nationally by becoming the first Arab country to align itself with the Chinese Communists. Dulles’ fears that Egypt might inspire other Arab countries to back Beijing were well-founded, especially at a time when Nasser was vying with Iraq for leadership in the Arab world. If Nasser could succeed in identifying support for Communist China with the anti-imperialist cause, he would embarrass the Hashemite monarchs, who were far too dependent on the West to consider recognizing the Communist government. He could also foster his nascent relationship with the Soviet Union, whose support he needed in order to challenge American and British dominance in the region. It is this last reason – Nasser’s attempt to navigate the perilous environment of the Cold War – that most intrigued previous historians of Sino-Egyptian relations.

Egypt’s improving ties to China were one aspect of a larger campaign to secure the allegiance of the Soviet Union and the rest of the Communist bloc. Both historians of Sino-Egyptian relations and historians of Soviet-Egyptian relations have interpreted Egypt’s overtures to China as part of this new foreign policy initiative. Surprisingly, authors who

17. See the multiple discussions of economic ties in Mon‘im Nasser-Eddine’s Arab-Chinese Relations.
19. Al-Baghdadi, for example, presented the recognition of Communist China as a way to pursue a policy of “neutrality and Non-Alignment” in the Cold War, by which he meant that Egypt should establish relations with the Communist bloc as well as the West. See ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, Mudhakkirat ‘abd al-latif al-baghdadi, vol. 1, 316.
have specifically studied Egypt’s relations with China have not generally attempted to
distinguish Egypt’s attitude toward China from its attitude toward the Soviet Union. Both
Shichor and Harris, for example, were careful to distinguish China’s foreign policy from that
of the Soviet Union, but they made no effort to explore nuances in how the Egyptians
perceived individual countries within the communist bloc.\(^\text{20}\) Even Nasser-Eddine, who
focused on Egyptian politics, subordinated Nasser’s interest in China to his goal of winning
Soviet support.\(^\text{21}\) Similarly, studies of Soviet-Egyptian relations have tended to ignore
China’s involvement in the Middle East prior to the 1960s, when Beijing and Moscow began
to compete for influence in the region.\(^\text{22}\) Those few authors who have mentioned Nasser’s
recognition of China characterized that decision as little more than a ploy to please the Soviet
Union. The Israeli-American historian Walter Laqueur exemplified this trend; he interpreted
Nasser’s positive attitude toward China solely as a consequence of his more significant
interest in the Soviet Union. Laqueur justified this outlook by noting that the Chinese and
Soviet governments were consistent in their policies toward Cairo in 1955 and 1956,
suggesting that they had coordinated their overtures and were not competing for influence in
the Middle East at that time.\(^\text{23}\) While it is true that Beijing and Moscow were close allies in
the 1950s, at least in terms of foreign policy, it is misguided to assume that Egyptian
policymakers necessarily saw no difference between the Chinese and Soviet brands of
communism.

\(^{20}\) Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*; Yitzhak Shichor, *The Middle East in China’s
Foreign Policy*.


\(^{22}\) For example, Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War II to Gorbachev*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) does not mention the Egyptian recognition of Communist
China. Alexei Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to Pragmatism* (Reading, UK:
Ithaca Press, 1993), 34 commented only that Nasser’s decision enraged the West. Karen Dawisha, *Soviet
Foreign Policy Towards Egypt* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), 125-126 noted only that the Soviet
Union encouraged China’s overtures to the Middle East and propagandized on behalf of Beijing prior to 1958.
In general, historians of Soviet-Arab relations have not considered China to have been relevant to the politics of
the Middle East prior to the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s.

Indeed, Egyptian intellectuals and policymakers certainly did perceive an ideological distinction between China and the Soviet Union. Because the Soviet Union was the heir to a history of Russian imperialism, while China was a Third World country with a colonial past similar to Egypt’s, Egyptian thinkers portrayed their respective brands of communism in different ways. Consequently, in contrast to scholars of Egypt’s foreign relations, some historians of Egyptian domestic politics have recognized China’s prominence in Egyptian public discourse. Left-wing politicians in Egypt paid a surprising amount of attention to the development of Communist China, which they discussed and debated beginning in 1955. Some historians who have focused on the ideological evolution of Egyptian leftist movements have appreciated China’s unique appeal. For example, both Roel Meijer and Joel Beinin discussed how Egyptian intellectuals were inspired by Mao’s application of Marxist theory to non-Western, non-industrial nations. Meijer hinted, albeit only obliquely, that Chinese Communist thought played a role in endowing the revolutionary aspirations of the Egyptian left with theoretical legitimacy. Rami Ginat was more explicit in establishing the significance of China as a model for Egyptian politics. In his study of the left-wing journalist Lutfi al-Khuli, Ginat proposed that non-communist (or ex-communist) thinkers such as al-Khuli were more interested in the lessons of progressive politics in China, Yugoslavia, and India than in the history of the Soviet Union. Additionally, in Ginat’s opinion, Nasser’s interactions with Zhou (as well as Nehru and Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito) were


25. Roel Meijer, The Quest for Modernity, 102. Meijer noted the interest of Egyptian leftists in Mao’s “description of China as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society” in his 1940 essay On New Democracy, since Egypt was in a similar stage of historical development.

26. Although Ginat insisted that al-Khuli was particularly inspired by China, India, and Yugoslavia, he also recognized al-Khuli’s interest in certain aspects of Soviet communism, particularly rapid industrialization and support for national liberation movements. See Rami Ginat, Egypt’s Incomplete Revolution: Lutfi al-Khuli and Nasser’s Socialism in the 1960s (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 74.
experiences that enabled Nasser “increasingly to articulate a crystallized agenda” for both Egypt’s domestic and foreign policies.\textsuperscript{27} The fact that recent scholars of left-wing Egyptian politics have recognized China’s influence makes it all the more perplexing that this topic has been almost entirely neglected by historians of Egyptian foreign relations.

One must analyze how the ideological evolution of Nasser’s Egypt influenced the manner in which China was perceived by Egyptian intellectuals and policymakers to offer a complete explanation for the development of Sino-Egyptian relations. At the time Nasser and Zhou first met, Egyptian society was undergoing profound changes as Nasser strove to consolidate power. Most important were his efforts to articulate a unifying national ideology to legitimize his regime. When the Free Officers took power in a coup in 1952, they were not committed to any particular political stance besides their opposition to the monarchy and its conservative allies. The most insightful studies of Egyptian domestic politics during the 1950s and 1960s have recognized the importance that Nasser and leading pro-regime intellectuals placed on articulating an ideology that could unite ordinary Egyptians behind their government.\textsuperscript{28} This process took many years and involved repeated false starts, but on the whole it was remarkably successful at undermining Nasser’s most powerful opponents. An apt illustration of this trend was the incorporation of leading communists into the regime in 1955 and 1956. Most analysts of left-wing politics in Egypt have identified Nasser’s nationalist foreign policy and his overtures to the Soviet Union as the main reasons why he was suddenly so successful at converting former antagonists – whom he had been imprisoning and violently oppressing for several years – to his growing coalition.\textsuperscript{29} Egypt’s

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\bibitem{ibid} Ibid., 5.


\bibitem{rise} Selma Botman, \textit{The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 140; Joel Beinin, \textit{Was the Red Flag Flying There?}, 178; Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifaa’at El-Sa’id, \textit{The

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improving relations with China should be included in this narrative because China was an important topic of debate within the Egyptian left during this critical period. China was relevant not only as a potential source of arms, but also as a flashpoint in Egypt’s domestic politics that must be analyzed in terms of the ongoing attempts to define and negotiate Nasserist ideology.

**Investigation and Justification**

The first intellectual to analyze Communist China for the Egyptian public was al-Baquri. His official visit to China in May 1955 was an opportunity to investigate the plight of Muslims under Communist rule. Since al-Baquri was a respected Muslim who devoted his entire life to religious causes, historians have no basis to doubt the sincerity of his concern for his co-religionists in China. Depending how cynically one interprets his carefully-scripted tour of China, it is possible to claim that he was genuinely convinced Chinese Muslims were well treated, that he allowed himself to be convinced, or that he was simply deceived. Regardless, what matters most is that al-Baquri quickly became a champion of China’s Communist government. In this capacity, his chief goal was to use Islam to justify closer relations with China. Al-Baquri’s investigation of China was, first and foremost, a strategy to placate religious opposition to improving ties to a communist, officially atheist country. By asserting that the CCP stoutly defended the best interests of Chinese Muslims, al-Baquri allayed fears that China could not be a compatible ally of a Muslim country. At the same time, the Egyptian government’s official press coverage of his visit to China used this same idea of shared commitment to Islam to legitimize Nasser’s regime as a government sensitive to the plight of Muslims around the world.

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As a scholar from al-Azhar and the only member of Nasser’s cabinet who had not risen to power through the military, al-Baquri was the ideal ambassador to champion Egypt throughout the Islamic world. Before 1952, he had been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, where, along with Husayn Kamal al-Din, he had led the most moderate of the factions vying to control the splintered movement. After the Free Officers’ revolution, the pragmatic al-Baquri yielded his position in the Brotherhood for the chance to work within Nasser’s government; not only did he resign from the Brotherhood’s Guidance Council in 1952 after it voted unanimously against participating in the government, but he also willingly condemned the Brotherhood two years later when Nasser began to stifle it. In contrast to other prominent Islamists, al-Baquri apparently decided that his vision of a powerful, Islamic Egypt could best be achieved through collaboration with secular-minded politicians. That decision benefited both Nasser, whose policies gained acceptance because they had the support of a respected Muslim leader, and al-Baquri himself, whose brief ascendancy in the religious politics of Egypt was ensured by the Brotherhood’s suppression. In addition to his credentials as a devout Muslim and a respected member of the Egyptian religious elite, al-Baquri appealed to audiences beyond Egypt because he was an outspoken critic of colonialism and European rule throughout the Islamic world. In his writings, he envisioned a society free from foreign control with a strong conception of its history and Islamic identity. Such an identity, al-Baquri claimed, could come only from religion, since religion was “the only thing capable of making credible bonds [among people] and establishing ties in human society.”

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al-Baquri deeply respected non-Muslim anti-imperialist leaders such as Gandhi, whom he praised in a speech on the anniversary of India’s independence.\textsuperscript{33} Never an extremist, al-Baquri asserted that the goal of Islam was to preserve peace and denied that it was necessary for Muslims to adopt a radical course of action. Instead, he preferred to cultivate a society in which every individual had a genuine feeling of unity and belonging.\textsuperscript{34} This synthesis of moderate political beliefs with unwavering faith in an Islamic historical mission gave al-Baquri a unique ability to use his vision of a global religion in support of positive relations between distinct nation-states.

In the mid-1950s, Nasser began to exalt Egypt’s religious heritage in order to improve relations with non-Arab countries that were home to sizeable Sunni Muslim populations. Because al-Azhar had long been recognized as the preeminent educational institution in the Muslim world, Egypt enjoyed a special status as the center of Islamic learning. In his ideological tract \textit{Philosophy of the Revolution [Falsafat al-thawra]}, Nasser mused about the potential strength of all the world’s Muslims (including 50 million Chinese Muslims) if they could be united behind a common cause.\textsuperscript{35} Beginning in Kenya in 1953, the Egyptian government also called for the solidarity of African Muslims at conferences across the continent.\textsuperscript{36} As the only member of Nasser’s cabinet with an extensive religious education, al-Baquri was an obvious figurehead for government campaigns based on Islam. In 1952, Nasser asked al-Baquri to represent Egypt at the inauguration of re-elected Liberian President William Tubman, the first in a series of travels that made al-Baquri the self-proclaimed

\textsuperscript{33} Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, “Ghandi wa-l-hind [Gandhi and India],” in \textit{Khawatir wa-ahadith}, 66-70.

\textsuperscript{34} Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, “Tahiyya wa-shi’ar [Greeting and motto],” in \textit{Khawatir wa-ahadith}, 31-33. See also al-Baquri’s forward to Muhammad ʿAbd al-Hadi, \textit{Min asalib al-istiʿmar [Among the types of imperialism]} (Cairo: Dar al-kitab al-ʿarabi bi-misr, 1965).


“ambassador of the revolution to the world.” He soon became friends with the Liberian foreign minister, a man of Muslim ancestry whose father had sent him to Christian missionary schools lest Islam harm his future career aspirations. Al-Baquri reported back to Nasser in great detail about the Muslim families he met first in Liberia and later in Senegal, where a group of Lebanese expatriates tried to convince him to give the *khutba* during the Friday prayer because of his status as a religious scholar. Sometimes, al-Baquri anchored a concerted effort to assert Egypt’s religious leadership; when Pakistani Governor General Ghulam Muhammad welcomed Nasser in Pakistan en route to Bandung by stating that all Muslims respected al-Azhar, Nasser immediately introduced him to al-Baquri to reinforce that connection. In Bandung, al-Baquri was among the guests of honor at the Friday prayer in the local mosque – a service attended by all of the delegations to the Conference from Muslim countries – in which he prayed in the front row alongside Nasser, Sukarno, and Faisal. During the prayer, Nasser, according to al-Baquri, proudly acted his role as “leader of Islamic Egypt, the country of the venerable al-Azhar.” In all of these circumstances, Nasser was eager to exploit al-Baquri to promote Egypt as an Islamic power.

The selection of al-Baquri to make Egypt’s first formal overture to China, therefore, was a decision consistent with the approach of Nasser’s government to relations with Asian and African countries that had significant Muslim populations. Unlike in Pakistan or Indonesia, however, al-Baquri’s primary goal in China was not to enhance Egypt’s reputation among local Muslims, but rather to use his special status as a religious authority to interact with local Muslims and learn about their situation. When al-Baquri arrived in China in late May 1955, he maintained publicly and privately that the purpose of his visit was simply to promote

38. Ibid. The *khutba* is the sermon given in a mosque by the leader of the Friday prayer.
39. Ibid., 145-147.
40. Ibid., 163.
cultural understanding between the Chinese and the Egyptians. A transcript of one of his encounters with a Chinese Muslim, preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, records that al-Baquri insisted he was in China only to “pay a (respectful) visit” (fangwen) rather than to “investigate” (jiancha). Nevertheless, other documents make clear that, from the moment he arrived in Beijing, al-Baquri actually did intend to investigate and evaluate Communist China as a potential ally of Egypt – a verdict that depended largely on China’s treatment of its Muslim population. It is also evident that the Chinese government was determined to do everything possible to help him arrive at a favorable judgment. What ensued was a high-stakes propaganda game in which Zhou micromanaged a successful campaign to make China acceptable to a devout Muslim. The Chinese strategy in this re-articulation of China’s identity consisted of two parts: to demonstrate that Muslims were an integral and respected part of the new Chinese state and to emphasize the anti-imperialist aspects of its national ideology. Al-Baquri needed to be satisfied that Chinese Muslims enjoyed full religious freedom and that China’s Communist government would make a suitable ally in the struggle against imperialism before he would consider supporting China publicly.

Rather than accept the Chinese government’s presentation of itself at face value, al-Baquri interviewed as many Muslims as he could find in order to judge whether China truly permitted religious freedom. Al-Baquri’s insatiable curiosity about the lives of Chinese Muslims belied his claim to “visit” but not “investigate.” He declared before his arrival in China that he wanted to interview a typical family, observe the daily lives of ordinary Chinese Muslims, and tour all of China’s major cities in order to meet as many Muslims as possible.

41. Transcript of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri’s conversations, 25 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA. Mon’im Nasser-Eddine, Arab-Chinese Relations, 96 quoted similar statements that appeared in Chinese newspapers, but surmised correctly that the true purpose of al-Baquri’s trip was actually a “fact-finding tour.”
possible. As he was led to mosques throughout China, he plied the people he met with questions about their lives, their aspirations, the age and repair of their mosques, and the training of their mullahs. Al-Baquiri was also impressed by his visits to a church and a Buddhist temple, which not only reinforced in his mind that China respected religious diversity, but left him convinced that China possessed an “amazing civilization” (ḥaḍāra rāʾiʿa). During his visit, al-Baquiri spent ʿid al-fitr at the end of Ramadan with the Muslims of northwestern China and was impressed not only with the lavish all-night party thrown upon his arrival in Urumqi but also with the number of Muslims who had studied Arabic and who maintained a spiritual connection to the Middle East. He was further moved when he visited the so-called “Mosque of Longing for the Prophet” (Ar. Masjid al-shawq ila al-nabi; Ch. Huai’sheng si) in Guangzhou, which he deemed “the holiest place” in China. The mosque, he wrote, filled him with compassion and admiration for the Muslims who built it in the first century after the hijra knowing that they would never return to see Mecca. As a result, whatever doubts al-Baquiri harbored about an atheist and authoritarian China soon dissipated as he marveled at the richness of the nation’s religious heritage.

Al-Baquiri was interested not only in the freedom of Chinese Muslims to practice their religion, but also in their opportunities to seek spiritual and intellectual growth. He was particularly concerned about Chinese Muslims’ ability to receive an Islamic education. Zhou

42. Report on Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri and Mustafa Kamil’s visit to Guangzhou, 24 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA. The Chinese Foreign Ministry report noted explicitly that al-Baquiri was concerned about the attitude toward religion in a communist country and summed up the official CCP position by explaining that there is a certain “contradiction” (maodun) between religion and politics.
43. Transcript of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri’s conversations, 25 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA.
44. Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri, Baqaya dhikrayat, 175.
46. Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri, Baqaya dhikrayat, 175, 177-178. Although the caption in Baqaya dhikrayat erroneously placed this mosque in Beijing, al-Baquiri almost certainly intended to refer to the Huai’sheng Mosque in Guangzhou, which many Chinese Muslims claim was the first mosque built in China. From an objective perspective, it is impossible to substantiate claims about which mosque in China is the oldest. See Donald Daniel Leslie, Islam in Traditional China, 42-43.
played off this interest as soon as al-Baquri arrived in China by praising al-Azhar as the institution that Chinese Muslims recognized as the pre-eminent center of learning in the Islamic world. Zhou also arranged for al-Baquri to meet several Chinese-Muslim alumni of al-Azhar, including Lu Linxu, a former student of al-Baquri in Cairo who was appointed to serve as his translator.  

In addition, the Foreign Ministry happily provided whatever information about China’s educational system al-Baquri sought. Chinese officials informed him that Hui Muslims could attend their own schools and study both Arabic and English and that Beijing had at least one Muslim professor who had trained at al-Azhar. Al-Baquri was impressed by the Chinese government’s supposed willingness to offer an Islamic education to its Muslim citizens. He enthusiastically summarized a series of new proposals in a telegram back to Nasser: the Chinese government would welcome Egyptian visiting professors of Arabic, Egyptian history, and Islamic sciences; the Chinese government would be open to letting Egypt establish an Islamic institution in China; and the Chinese would happily exchange books and magazines with the Egyptians.

Despite his approval of the Chinese government’s attitude toward Islam, however, al-Baquri remained skeptical of the roles of nationalism and ethnicity in Chinese society. His questions about these topics reflected his concerns about whether the CCP’s ideology was compatible with his own beliefs. Specifically, he wanted to know whether religion was one of the criteria used in the minzu classification system and whether a minzu was the same as a race; the official answer to both questions was no, which left al-Baquri perplexed. Like the other leaders of Nasser’s regime, he viewed “Egyptians” as a single nation, a fact Mustafa Kamil declared proudly to a group of Chinese officials after al-Baquri inquired about China’s

47. Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, Baqaya dhikrayat, 165.
48. Summary of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil’s visit, May 1955, 107-00007-03, CFMA. The professor in question was Ma Jian.
49. Telegram from Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri to Gamal Abdel Nasser, 28 May 1955, 107-00007-03, CFMA.
ethnic diversity. Al-Baquiri’s feeling of kinship with his fellow Muslims worldwide was not contradictory to his strong sense of Egyptian nationalism; like Nasser, he was able to move fluidly among Egyptian nationalism, Arab nationalism, and his commitment to Islamic solidarity. In al-Baquiri’s efforts to understand how the Chinese government defined the Chinese “nation,” one can see his attempt to fit China into his own understanding of what a revolutionary, anti-imperialist country of the Third World should be: a single people that came together to throw off the yoke of foreign oppression and achieve independence for that nation.

Despite these lingering doubts about China, by the end of his visit al-Baquiri had become convinced – accurately or not – that Islam was thriving in China and that the CCP shared the same fundamental anti-imperialist values he and most other Egyptians held. In a speech just before he departed China, he told his “brothers the Chinese Muslims” that they lived a “peaceful life” under Communist rule. He devoted the majority of his speech, however, to comparing China and Egypt, emphasizing their shared leadership of the global anti-imperialist movement. The two countries, al-Baquiri declared, were home to nations that demanded “universal peace,” stood for the freedom of all the peoples of Asia and Africa, and were “confident” in their leaders and their futures. Both China and Egypt, he claimed, combined a distinguished past with a glorious present that would give moral authority to those countries in the future. Having judged China a suitable ally in the quest to advance

50. Transcript of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri’s conversations, 28 May 1955, 107-00007-04, CFMA. According to the official Chinese classification system, a minzu is made up of a community that shares common descent. Therefore, while a Western observer might think the only feature that distinguishes Hui from Han is that the former community practices Islam, to the Chinese government what is important is that a Hui person is descended from other Hui. In this system, Islam is merely a common characteristic of the Hui, and a Han person who converts to Islam today remains officially Han.

51. Speech by Ahmad Hasan al-Baquiri, 25 May 1955, 107-00007-03, CFMA. The language of diplomacy for official communications between China and most countries in Asia and the Middle East was English. As handwritten notes to Zhou preserved in the Foreign Ministry Archives make clear, however, al-Baquiri’s English was poor. In China, he spoke in Arabic and used one of his former students, Lu Linxu, as a translator. The phrases from his speech quoted here are taken from a Chinese translation recorded in the Foreign Ministry Archives rather than from the Arabic original.
Islam and fight the imperialist domination of the Third World, al-Baquiri had thus begun to redefine and re-articulate the Egyptian conception of China even before his return to Cairo.

Throughout the summer of 1955, al-Baquiri and others wrote publicly about his visit to China to emphasize China’s acceptability to pious Muslims. Jean Lacouture, a French leftist journalist who served as chief correspondent in Cairo for *Le Monde* between 1953 and 1956, reported that the Egyptian public was “very interested” in al-Baquiri’s praise for Islam in China. The official account of his journey and his impressions of China, obviously written in close association with al-Baquiri himself, was printed in the popular government-run magazine *Majallat al-tahrir* in July 1955, apparently accompanied by publicized speeches that have not survived. Al-Baquiri also recorded detailed observations about his trip to China and conveyed his admiration for both the Chinese government and Chinese Muslims in his autobiography, which presumably reflected the same sentiments he expressed in his speeches during the summer of 1955. That autobiography and the *Majallat al-tahrir* article offer a strange mix of factual inaccuracies about China, blatant propaganda in favor of the CCP, sensationalist depictions of the Orient, genuine awe at the accomplishments of Mao’s government, and celebrations of the connections between Chinese Muslims and the Arab world, particularly Egypt. It was of particular importance, from a propaganda standpoint, to present Chinese Muslims as part of the same community as Egyptian Muslims and not merely as some distant curiosity. China’s Communist government was a satisfactory regime, according to the pan-Islamic logic inherent in such writings, inasmuch as it promoted the development of contacts between Chinese Muslims and the Middle East and thus facilitated the integration of the global Islamic community. The *Majallat al-tahrir* article thus marked

the beginning of a campaign by the Egyptian government-run media to “sell” China to the Egyptian public, not only as a fellow non-Western, anti-imperialist regime, but also as a fellow Islamic power. This formula, which developed after al-Baquri’s visit, was the template for the speeches and articles by which the official press in Egypt justified the recognition of Communist China the following spring.

The most important task of pro-Chinese propaganda in Egypt in 1955, as represented by the Majallat al-tahrir article and al-Baquri’s own writings, was to prove that the Beijing government granted complete religious freedom to its Muslim citizens. One crucial first step was to dispel the myth that China was condemned by the Qur’an because of its association with Gog and Magog, apocalyptic figures who, according to Islamic eschatology, will herald the Day of Judgment. The Qur’an declares that the two will be contained by a barrier (or dam) until the apocalypse, when they will finally break through. In most traditions, Gog and Magog are usually understood to be a metaphor for a wild people of great number who will invade the Islamic world. At various times, Muslim thinkers have associated them with the Armenians, Turks, Huns, Scythians, Mongolians, and Chinese. Naturally, many Muslims associated the Great Wall of China with the barrier or dam, underscoring the interpretation that Gog and Magog represent the Chinese people. This superstition compelled al-Baquri to deny any connection between China and Gog and Magog after his return to Egypt. In addition, the Majallat al-tahrir article distinguished between the CCP and Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist government, under which Chinese Muslims “suffered” from “humiliation and tyranny,” in contrast to the freedom they had enjoyed since 1949. Under the new regime, the article claimed, Muslims were active alongside non-Muslims in all forms of agriculture and industry and enjoyed full rights. The article further asserted that the Chinese government was

55. Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, Baqaya dhikrayat, 170.
active in restoring and maintaining mosques in Muslim areas. Both al-Baquiri’s autobiography and Majallat al-tahrir prominently mentioned the many mosques that al-Baquiri visited throughout China and extolled their long traditions, presumably as a way of establishing the historical importance of Chinese Islam in much the same way that the Chinese and Egyptian governments frequently portrayed themselves as the inheritors of great “civilizations.”

Merely promoting Muslim religious life, however, was not sufficient to vindicate the Chinese regime; from an Islamist perspective, the government’s pro-China propaganda had to demonstrate that the CCP considered Chinese Muslims to be part of the global Islamic community. Consequently, Majallat al-tahrir paid special attention to the respect that all Chinese Muslims, under the guidance of the Communist government, supposedly reserved for the Arab Middle East as the center of their faith. The magazine mentioned every student al-Baquiri had met who could speak Arabic, always pointing out that the Arabic language held a particularly exalted status alongside Chinese in the daily lives of Chinese Muslims. It noted the elite status of Chinese Muslims who had studied in the Middle East or who had completed the hajj, and it also stressed the importance of the “fact” (which was not really accurate) that all Muslims studied the Qur’an and the history of the Middle East in their government-run schools. Additionally, it stretched the truth by calling Urumqi, a city that has had at least a Han plurality since an imperial garrison was first stationed there in the eighteenth century, “the greatest of the capitals of Arab and Islamic culture in China.”

58. “Ma rahu al-baquiri fi al-sin al-sha’biyya,” Majallat al-tahrir, 19 July 1955. This comment in Majallat al-tahrir should be understood as a case either of al-Baquiri or the newspaper’s editors seeing in the Chinese education system only what they wanted to see. Hui Muslims in China today often brag that the curriculum in special Hui schools is totally identical to the curriculum in Han schools – as indeed they have been throughout the history of Communist China – which makes sense given that the official distinctions among the various minzu are ethnic but not religious.
nationalist magazine, *Majallat al-tahrir* was sensitive to the topic of “Arabness” and always careful to use links between Chinese and Middle Eastern Muslims to assert the superiority of Arab and particularly Egyptian culture within the Islamic world. As a result, it was only natural to give special prominence to a quote from the deputy chairman of Xinjiang’s provincial government that “the Muslims of China consider Egypt to be their second homeland and they support the struggle of the people of the Nile in all issues.” This propaganda envisioned a special relationship between the Muslims of the world that reinforced the preeminent status of Egypt.

**Celebrating Non-Communist China**

Although al-Baquri was a dignitary who traveled to China on official business, he was also the pioneer of a genre of travel writing about Communist China that became quite popular in the years after his return. Some Arab journalists, such as Lebanese-born ʿAbd al-Salam al-Adhami, visited China before 1955 as part of tours through the Soviet Union, but it was al-Baquri who opened the door for Egyptians to journey to China over the course of the next few years. The first Egyptian reporter to file a story from China was Muhammad al-Bili, who detailed his experiences for *Ruz al-yusuf* in December 1955. In January 1956, a second journalist, Ismaʿīl al-Habruk, presented a more extensive account of his observations in the same newspaper. Thereafter, the Egyptian literate public was flooded with books

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60. ʿAbd al-Salam al-Adhami, *Al-Sin al-jadida fi zall al-istiširakiyya* [New China in the shadow of socialism] (Beirut: Dar al-ʿilm li-l-maʿālyn, 1954). Although he was Lebanese, al-Adhami was a staunch Arab nationalist who outspokenly supported Nasser. See ʿAbd al-Salam al-Adhami, *Nidal al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya* [The struggle of Arab nationalism] (Damascus: Matbaʿat al-hayat, 1959). Consequently, his perspective on China did not differ significantly from that of the Egyptian journalists who followed in his footsteps in the ensuing years.


about China. Although these books differed according to each author’s style, their content was essentially identical. The Chinese government offered foreign journalists the same meticulously scripted standard tour, during which the visitors met hand-picked locals who faithfully parroted the Communist party line. These tours were so carefully controlled that Egyptian travel writing about China from this era was predictable to the point of self-parody. Particular tropes—such as the authors’ profoundly moving conversations about nationalism with educated, beautiful young women—recur in almost comical fashion. It is naive to suppose, however, that Egyptian visitors to China merely conveyed exactly what they were told to believe; the information (and misinformation) they presented to the Egyptian public reflected what they deemed relevant and important. The overarching theme of their books and articles was a remarkable conclusion that no CCP propagandist would ever have advanced so directly: that China was not truly a communist country.

Nearly every Egyptian travelogue about China from the mid-1950s asserted, either explicitly or implicitly, that China’s commitment to communism had been exaggerated and misrepresented in the popular imagination. One of the reasons so many Egyptian writers minimized Chinese communism was that few Egyptian admirers of China were communists themselves. Moreover, China held little allure for most Arab communists, who were


64. See for example ʿAli Hamdi al-Jamal, ʿAl-ʿImlaq al-asfar, 64 and ʿAbd al-Salam al-Adhami, ʿAl-Sin al-jadida fi zall al-ishtrakiyya, 159-160.

65. The only avowed communists among the journalists discussed in this section were not Egyptians: the Lebanese Christian George Hanna and ʿAbd Allah ʿUbayd, a member of the Sudanese Communist Party who first toured China as part of a delegation affiliated with the Soviet-sponsored World Federation of Democratic
generally aligned institutionally and ideologically more with the Soviet Union. Prior to the Sino-Soviet split, Egyptian communists of course considered China an important part of the communist bloc, but Egypt never developed an independent Maoist tradition. Perhaps recognizing this lack of interest, the Chinese government never invited large delegations of Egyptian communists to visit China. (By contrast, the Chinese did extend some invitations to Levantine communist journalists, many of whom were Christians; after 1958, they also invited several communist delegations from North Africa to tour China.66) Instead, the Egyptian journalists most eager to tour China were young, secular, left-leaning non-communists. ʿAli Hamdi al-Jamal, who discussed China in his 1956 book Al-ʾImlaq al-asfar [The yellow giant] typified this group. At the time he traveled to China, al-Jamal was the political editor of Akhbar al-yawm, a major, mainstream Saturday newspaper. He always supported the political establishment, eventually rising to become editor of Al-Ahram under Anwar Sadat’s government in the 1970s. Nevertheless, al-Jamal was influenced to some degree by socialist ideas, and he adopted a populist tone in his long-running Hadith al-nass [Voice of the people] column for Al-Ahram. Al-Jamal, like other Egyptian journalists, admired China’s nationalism and its successful modernization, but not its doctrinaire communist orientation. As a result, al-Jamal and other writers took every opportunity to downplay the Marxist ideology of the CCP.

In general, non-communist Egyptian journalists were quite explicit in their assertions that China was not really communist. In his somewhat sensationalized account of China for Ruz al-yusuf, al-Bili proclaimed in large font that “People’s China is not a red country” and

66. Hanna was a member of the Lebanese Communist Party who also traveled to the Soviet Union. See Michael W. Suleiman, “The Lebanese Communist Party,” Middle Eastern Studies 3 (1967), 141. For an example of a communist group from North Africa that accepted an invitation to travel to Beijing and have an audience with Mao himself, see Transcript of the conversation during Mao Zedong’s reception of the Moroccan Communist Party delegation, 17 February 1959, 107-00195-01, CFMA. ʿUbayd’s visit to China with a WFDY delegation was another example of a North African communist touring China with a youth group.
that “there are two millionaires and several feudalists in the chamber of deputies [i.e., the National People’s Congress].” According to al-Bili, “what happened in China [in 1949] was not a complete communist coup”; instead, he insisted that the so-called “red” China was actually “a truly democratic country.” Al-Habruk was somewhat more agnostic, but he still denied that China was fully communist:

Right now, you cannot define the system of government in China. You cannot say that it is socialist, nor is it communist, nor capitalist, nor democratic, but you can say with certainty that it is a mixture of all of this.

Unsurprisingly, the few contemporary Arab travelers to China who were themselves communists, such as the Lebanese Christian George Hanna, presented a dramatically divergent interpretation of China’s government under the CCP. Hanna wrote that, prior to 1949, China’s government was bourgeois-capitalist in name and fundamentally “feudal” for all practical purposes. The overthrow of this backwards society allowed the CCP to redress a system in which the overwhelming majority of Chinese people were subordinate to a tiny elite minority. Neither al-Bili nor al-Habruk would have disputed this point, since they were both strong proponents of the social and economic changes engineered by Mao’s government, but neither would they have employed such a recognizably Marxist vocabulary to analyze it. At a time when many Egyptians were skeptical or even fearful about communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, those who promoted China in the Egyptian press had to go to great lengths to demonstrate that the CCP did not warrant the same concerns.

68. Isma’il al-Habruk, “Isma’il al-habruk yaktub min al-sin al-sha’biyya.”
69. George Hanna, Kuntu fi saybiriya wa-l-sin, 113.
In order to prove that Chinese communism was not objectionable, Egyptian writers focused specifically on the protections that the CCP supposedly afforded to landowners, industrialists, and the middle class. Al-Habruk was most concerned with the preservation of capitalism. He went so far as to ask many of his Chinese hosts whether the Chinese constitution could actually be considered “socialist” if it sanctioned private ownership in many specific contexts; in reply, every person he asked responded that reform in China was to be gradual and that the country was enmeshed in the “stage of transition.” Al-Habruk, however, remained puzzled by the government’s inconsistent approach to nationalizing industry.70 Al-Bili, by contrast, presented the maintenance of capitalism in China as part of a strategy to “build socialism.” He reassured his readers that 90% of commercial businesses in China were still owned by their original owners as of 1955 (a dubious statistic that he could not possibly have verified). He also insisted that capitalists remained an important part of the Chinese political system, with several important factory owners serving in the National People’s Congress.71 Even the Sudanese activist ʿUbayd, a communist himself, devoted an entire chapter of his account of China to a discussion of capitalism and industry, in part because his hosts took him to meet a “capitalist” who owned a factory. ʿUbayd insisted that capitalism under “particular conditions” was beneficial to help China industrialize and expand its economy. Factory owners, he had been informed during his tour, were regulated by the state, but they were free to accumulate at least some wealth. For ʿUbayd, this limited capitalism was laudable because it protected the rights of the workers and improved their working conditions while remaining productive and economically viable.72 Arab writers highlighted the existence of free enterprise in China to make the CCP appear moderate, in

72. ʿAbdallah ʿUbayd, Sudani fi al-sin al-shaʿbiyya, 44-47.
contrast to the reputation for capriciousness that sabotaged its relations with many other foreign countries. Ultimately, what these journalists deemed most admirable was China’s success at modernization and industrialization, which they depicted for readers back home as the result of bold yet pragmatic government policies.

Egyptian writers also minimized the power of the CCP by emphasizing that China permitted other political parties to function openly. It was on this topic that the Egyptians most faithfully relayed Chinese government propaganda to their audience back home. The CCP’s leaders encouraged the foundation of “rival” political parties in order to deflect criticism that they dominated a one-party state, but in actuality membership in these parties was strictly controlled and the parties’ power was carefully circumscribed by the state. These parties, which to this day are allowed to elect some members to the National People’s Congress, are entirely ceremonial. Nevertheless, Egyptian visitors to China willingly reproduced the CCP’s propaganda about democracy. Al-Jamal, for example, described the Chinese system as a functioning democracy with multiple political parties.\(^73\) Al-Bili used almost identical language to explain that China’s “true democracy” was comprised of many competing viewpoints, including those of parties besides the CCP that were full participants in the government.\(^74\) Al-Adhami quoted Mao’s theory that China should be a “democratic dictatorship,” then listed the political rights supposedly afforded to all Chinese citizens: freedom of assembly, belief, expression, and the press. He commented approvingly (if incorrectly) that China held free elections with many political parties.\(^75\) Only al-Habruk, who was slightly more skeptical on this point, noted that the CCP was totally dominant politically, although even he approved of the “democratic dictatorship of the people.”\(^76\) One of the most

\(^74\) Muhammad al-Bili, “Awwal tahqiq misri ‘an al-sin al-sha‘biyya!”
\(^76\) Isma‘il al-Habruk, “Isma‘il al-habruk yaktub min al-sin al-sha‘biyya.”
curious tropes to emerge in travel writing about China from this period was the insistence of the authors that Chinese prisoners were treated humanely, another reference that reinforced the impression of political freedom. On the whole, the image of the Chinese government that emerges from the writings of all these journalists is of a regime dedicated to giving all of its citizens a voice, even at the expense of the CCP.

As one might expect, Egyptian travelers to China were especially interested in religious affairs, although in general they focused on the question of religious freedom abstractly rather than on the lives of Chinese Muslims in particular. Nevertheless, every one of the authors highlighted in this section commented on meetings with Chinese Muslims. Some journalists, such as al-Habruk, merely expressed surprise their Chinese Muslim hosts spoke such excellent Arabic. Other Egyptian visitors were inspired by their meetings with Chinese Muslims to pen impassioned defenses of the CCP’s supposed insistence on complete freedom of belief. Al-Jamal, for example, quoted an 18-year-old female Peking University student’s comment that she was an atheist but that she respected all religions (a standard line in Chinese propaganda from the 1950s). He went on to assert, as al-Baquiri had done, that the government actively supported religious minorities through the building of temples, mosques, and schools. Al-Jamal, like other writers, considered state support for Islamic religious education via the China Islamic Association to be the single most important vindication of the Chinese government. Because their exposure to China was so limited,

77. Al-Adhami, al-Jamal, and ‘Ubayd all wrote about their tours of Chinese prisons. The Chinese government may have been copying the propaganda techniques of the Soviet Union by taking visitors to prisons. Under Khrushchev, visitors were often shown around special Gulags in order to demonstrate the contrast between Khrushchev’s supposed humanity and Stalinist brutality. See Jeffrey S. Hardy, “Gulag Tourism: Khrushchev’s “Show” Prisons in the Cold War Context, 1954-59,” Russian Review 71 (2012).
80. ‘Ali Hamdi al-Jamal, Al-‘Imlaq al-asfar, 69-73. Like al-Baquiri, al-Jamal was introduced to Ma Jian on his trip to China. Throughout the 1950s, Ma was the most common Arabic-speaking Chinese Muslim trotted out to
Egyptian journalists often made factual errors when discussing Chinese Muslims. Al-Bili, for example, noted approvingly that Chinese Muslims sometimes married up to four times.\(^81\)

In reality, polygamy was outlawed and all official marriages were civil rather than religious.\(^82\)

On the whole, the Chinese were staggeringly successful at convincing their visitors to accept the *minzu* paradigm. Egyptian writers universally and unquestioningly adopted the official position that China had exactly 56 ethnic groups, including ten distinct Muslim peoples.\(^83\)

The remarkable willingness of Egyptian visitors to accept Chinese claims about the government’s treatment of ethnic and religious minorities reflected their predilection to judge China based on its political successes.

Although Egyptian writers tended to detach their narratives of Chinese development from its communist ideology and focus instead on China’s supposedly liberal values, they nonetheless reserved their most effusive praise for the strict, centralized, almost totalitarian order that the CCP imposed on its citizens. This impulse was partly reflected in the eagerness with which Egyptian visitors portrayed China as an economic and industrial triumph; after all, no commentator resisted the urge to quote the inflated statistics about agricultural and industrial production given out by the cadres who hosted them. This emphasis on modernization was bound up with a profound admiration for Chinese nationalism, especially the success of the government in winning popular support for the idea of a national mission

\(^{81}\) See Muhammad al-Bili, “Awwal tahqiq misri ‘an al-sin al-sha‘biyya!”

\(^{82}\) ‘Ali Hamdi al-Jamal, *Al-‘Imlaq al-asfar*, 72 correctly noted that polygamy was banned. Al-Jamal also disapproved of state control over civil marriages for Muslims and expressed dismay at the fact that Islamic marriage was not permitted.

defined by the centralized state. Al-Jamal, for example, raved about the surprisingly “high morale” of the Chinese people, who had united despite the centuries of imperialist oppression in a manner that could help the whole country “look upward and forward.” In a particularly colorful metaphor that evoked the Chinese origins of the Aladdin legend, he declared that “the Chinese people are the great genie that has emerged from the bottle and will not return to the bottle again.”

Likewise, the Sudanese ʿUbayd praised the Chinese youths he met for preserving the memory of “martyrs” who had died to advance “the struggle of the Chinese people.”

He believed that the state was the manifestation of the nation, as evidenced by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officers he observed dancing with ordinary citizens at a National Day celebration in Beijing. The Lebanese al-Adhami expressed most vividly his admiration for state-sponsored Chinese nationalism after he attended the National Day celebrations of October 1953:

It is beyond the scope of any book to describe the magnitude of the celebration and of the masses that I observed carrying their flag and pictures of the leaders of all the popular democracies. The workers carried symbols of production and industrial development and boards on which were written statistics of the increase in production in the year 1953. They also had symbols of trains, cars, and modern factories as well as models of new factory buildings and social establishments. The farmers carried symbols of the increased agricultural production. Then came the students and the athletes. This display continued for four hours and included the participation of two million youths, workers, and farmers. Their ranks were tightly packed, and each rank had no fewer than 500 people. The delegations stood on the platforms that were prepared for them next to the main podium. The leader [Mao] had come to the near side from these platforms and greeted the guest delegates from all the

85. ʿAbdallah ʿUbayd, Sudani fi al-sin al-shaʿbiyya, 114.
86. Ibid., 121.
countries of the world and all parts of China, and he was met by the
delegations and the masses with applause and acclaim. Then he announced
the end of the celebration over the playing of music and the cheers of the large
crowds.\textsuperscript{87}

Al-Adhami wrote approvingly of the sublimation of the individual into the nation, as when he
quoted a 21-year-old Chinese woman who insisted that “it is very important for me to decide
that my personal future is inseparable from the future of my country, for if my country is not
happy then there is no assurance for my own future.”\textsuperscript{88} Throughout the next several decades,
Arab commentators continued to focus on nationalism and modernization as the two most
notable successes of China under Communist rule. After a visit in the 1970s, for example,
Heikal credited the “strict organization” of all parts of China as one of the principal reasons
for its “miracle” of modernization.\textsuperscript{89}

Although the National Day celebrations and the other events to which Egyptian visitors
were taken were scripted by the Chinese government, it is significant that Egyptian
journalists embraced the idea of an organized, modern Chinese nation and championed it in
their writings. This obsession with China’s social order and national mission is consistent
with Roel Meijer’s conception of authoritarian modernism as the dominant intellectual
viewpoint in early Nasserist Egypt. Meijer has argued that secular Egyptian intellectuals in
the 1950s were more interested in promoting modernization through the expansion of state
power than in preserving an independent liberal tradition. According to Meijer, this

\textsuperscript{87} \textsuperscript{8}Abd al-Salam al-Adhami, \textit{Al-Sin al-jadida fi zall al-ishhirakiyya}, 122-123. It is particularly interesting that
al-Adhami neglected to mention the militaristic feel of the celebration. As with other aspects of Chinese mass
politics, this militarism was not subtle. On National Day 1953, several tractors towed giant howitzers into the
middle of Tian’anmen Square so that Mao and Zhu De could review them. For the first time, the parade also
featured soldiers carrying huge Soviet-made Katyusha rocket launchers. See Beijing International, “National
feature_2/60th_Anniversary/History/t1082679.htm, (accessed 23 January 2013).

\textsuperscript{88} \textsuperscript{8}Abd al-Salam al-Adhami, \textit{Al-Sin al-jadida fi zall al-ishhirakiyya}, 159-160.

\textsuperscript{89} Mohamed Hasanayn Heikal, \textit{Ahadith fi asiya \textit{[Sayings in Asia]}} (Cairo: Dar al-shuruq, 2003), 21-22.
proclivity for authoritarian modernism explains why so many leading opposition figures eventually embraced Nasser’s regime. One can identify the same sentiment in the enthusiasm that Egyptian travelers expressed for the totalitarian aspects of China’s repressive government. Yet, whereas Meijer contrasted authoritarian modernism with nationalism (both Egyptian and Arab), it is clear that these two ideologies were complementary in these writers’ interpretations of China. Egyptian travelers openly admired Chinese nationalism for its effectiveness in uniting the Chinese people against foreign imperialism and in favor of the ruling government. In fact, an abiding interest in nationalism was one of the most important traits that Chinese and Egyptian politicians and intellectuals shared during this period. The establishment of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Cairo coincided with a surge of interest in China because Chinese nationalism appeared to present a model by which a Third World country with a history of colonial oppression might modernize, re-organize, and prosper. That this image of China was not a fully realistic interpretation of life under the brutal Communist government was irrelevant to Egyptian writers, who were more concerned with what China might symbolize to their readers.

Finding Revolutionary Legitimacy

If the image of China created and advanced by Egyptian and other Arab visitors was intended at least partially as commentary about the political situation in Egypt, then the question must be posed whether this presentation of China was intended to criticize or legitimize Nasser, his government, and his ideology. The answer to this question is not

90. Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity*.

91. Meijer contrasted authoritarian modernism with nationalism, which, he said, was not as important as historians of Egyptian communism such as Selma Botman, Joel Beinin, and Zachary Lockman have argued. See Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism* and Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
necessarily straightforward. Egyptian social commentators offered numerous interpretations of how the Chinese example might influence Egyptian politics, even if they had never visited China themselves. Many of these writers, unlike the majority of the traveling journalists discussed above, had some connection to formal Egyptian communist movements. Most also had ambivalent relationships with Nasser’s regime. Several of them had been thrown in jail for criticizing the government, only to emerge from prison as ideological champions of Nasserism. Sino-Egyptian relations developed in a period of remarkable ideological fluidity during which many doctrinaire communists reconsidered their opposition to Nasser. In this context, China became a symbol with a particular meaning in Egyptian political discourse: it was invoked by those who wished to legitimize the idea of a progressive, nationalist revolution that could unite and modernize Egyptian society. Inasmuch as Nasser eventually identified himself as the leader of such a revolution, discussions of China therefore also legitimized his ruling ideology. One might even argue that the increasing attention Nasser paid to China beginning in 1955 (along with his interest in other revolutionary governments such as Tito’s Yugoslavia and Nehru’s India) was part of the process by which he leveraged his revolutionary outlook in foreign policy to co-opt and incapacitate communist opposition to his government.

In the midst of the frenzy of interest in Communist China after the Bandung Conference, Muhammad ʿAwda published *Al-Sin al-shaʿbiyya [People’s China]*, a historical study of twentieth-century China that celebrated the CCP. ʿAwda’s book was the first to offer a comprehensive study of China from a historical perspective. Previously, Egyptians interested in China had access only to a small number of outdated Western works published in Arabic translation. ʿAwda’s *Al-Sin al-shaʿbiyya* thus marked a watershed in Egyptian discourse about China. His triumphalism in describing the progress of the Chinese revolution

revealed his ideological preference for a society and government forged by revolution.

ʿAwda railed against Western imperialism in China, which he depicted as a debilitating force that compelled the Chinese to rise up in revolution.\(^93\) Although ʿAwda overtly and passionately promoted Mao and the CCP as the final realization of this process, he did not fully endorse communism. Instead, he described China under the CCP as a country with a post-capitalist, part-socialist economy developed in response to the evils of imperialism.\(^94\) For ʿAwda, the CCP embodied anti-imperialism more than communism. Accordingly, he reserved his most hagiographic praise not for Mao, but for Sun Yat-sen. It was Sun who, in ʿAwda’s estimation, was most responsible for ensuring that China’s development in the first half of the twentieth century was truly revolutionary.\(^95\) ʿAwda portrayed Mao as the man who continued Sun’s revolution and brought it to its final culmination, which was the final defeat of the imperialist powers that both leaders had defied.\(^96\) Sun was not a communist, ʿAwda noted, but neither was he afraid of communism; his willingness to permit a variety of competing and complementary beliefs about how best to carry out a revolution was ultimately his greatest strength.\(^97\) In other words, ʿAwda hinted, his Egyptian readers should embrace China for its revolutionary successes irrespective of its official political system.

For ʿAwda, the real value in studying Chinese history could be found in the lessons it offered for understanding Egypt. According to his framework, the Chinese and Egyptian revolutions were interconnected and inseparable. This relationship was made even clearer in the introduction by the Marxist publishing house that printed *Al-Sin al-shaʿbiyya*, Dar al-

\(^93\) Ibid., 25.
\(^94\) Ibid., 64.
\(^95\) Ibid., 57.
\(^96\) Ibid., 69. ʿAwda asserted that Chiang Kai-shek, as Sun’s lieutenant, frustrated Mao’s revolution in the same way that various warlords and Qing loyalists had frustrated Sun’s revolution.
\(^97\) Ibid., 69.
That introduction proclaimed that the Chinese and “our Egyptian and Arab peoples” were fighting for the same cause and that, consequently, the Chinese experience was directly relevant to an Egyptian audience. The introduction railed against Ottoman, British, and French imperialism, as well as Egyptians who collaborated with foreign interests. In an exact parallel, ʿAwda devoted his first chapter to a scathing attack on the British, French, Americans, and Japanese, as well as the Chinese people – such as Chiang Kai-shek – who allegedly collaborated with them. This underlying connection between Egypt and China suggests an explanation for ʿAwda’s interest in the continuity between the Chinese revolutions of 1912 and 1949, which underscored a similar relationship between the Egyptian revolutions of 1919 and 1952. Through its comparison between Egypt and China, ʿAwda’s Al-Sin al-shaʿbiyya advocated a sustained, continuous revolution against foreign hegemony that could engender a unified, nationalist, centralized, and modern state. ʿAwda presented this vision at a time when Nasser himself was beginning to emphasize the Free Officers’ commitment to leading a revolutionary society, as expressed in 1955’s The Philosophy of the Revolution. ʿAwda’s analysis of China fit nicely into this revolutionary mold. He justified the importance of revolution and identified China as a country that had triumphed by following the same path. ʿAwda may not have intended his book to legitimize Nasserism, but it certainly reinforced the importance of Egypt’s revolutionary heritage at a time when Nasser was attempting to do the same.

Whereas ʿAwda’s enthusiasm for the Chinese model was relatively subtle, the leftist columnist Ihsan ʿAbd al-Quddus much more explicitly insisted that the Chinese Communist experience offered valuable lessons for the Egyptian people. ʿAbd al-Quddus was a novelist,

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98. While ʿAwda was not a communist himself, he chose to publish with Dar al-Nadim, which was operated by communists. See Roel Meijer, The Quest for Modernity, 102, 235.
100. Ibid., 25.
critic, and political commentator. He was also an editor for the leftist weekly *Ruz al-yusuf* (which his mother had founded) and subsequently for both *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar*. Abd al-Quddus championed Nasser’s foreign policy initiatives in Bandung, which he lauded as a major accomplishment for Egypt.\(^{101}\) From his first encounter with Zhou in Bandung, Abd al-Quddus was fascinated with the Chinese Premier, whose avowed willingness to protect religious freedom despite his own atheist beliefs Abd al-Quddus admired and praised.\(^{102}\) In a review of Abd al-Quddus’s *Al-Sin al-Sha’biyya* for *Ruz al-yusuf* in November 1955, Abd al-Quddus became the first prominent Egyptian writer to assert that the victories of China and Egypt were interrelated:

> I saw Egypt in the book *Al-Sin al-sha’biyya*. I saw imperialism establish itself in China in the same manner it was established in Egypt: by way of a weak king who granted it privileges...And I saw [Charles George] Gordon suppress the revolution of Hong [Xiuquan, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion], which arose in China against the weak foreign king, then he came – the same Gordon – to Sudan to suppress the revolution of the Mahdi.\(^{103}\)

Abd al-Quddus identified numerous parallels between Chinese and Egyptian history, some of which were so tortuous as to defy logic. For example, he likened Chiang Kai-shek to Miles Lampson, the British ambassador to Egypt who in 1942 had deployed tanks to force

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101. Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, “Khawatir wa-hawadith min bandunj [Ideas and sayings from Bandung],” *Ruz al-yusuf* 1404 (9 May 1955). An editorial in *Ruz al-yusuf* the previous week also praised the Bandung Conference, showing Nehru, Nasser, Mao (not Zhou), Sukarno, and a woman probably intended to represent Indira Gandhi riding on an elephant that was trampling imperialists and capitalists. See “Wajib al-shu’ub ba’d qararat bandunj [The obligation of the peoples after the decisions of Bandung],” *Ruz al-yusuf* 1403 (2 May 1955). Abd al-Quddus himself had reported from Bandung during the Conference. See Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, “Ihsan Abd al-Quddus yaktub min bandunj [Ihsan Abd al-Quddus writes from Bandung],” *Ruz al-yusuf* 1402 (25 April 1955).

102. Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, “Khawatir wa-hawadith min bandunj”. Abd al-Quddus devoted a surprisingly large section of his article to expressing his total confusion with the Chinese language, which he attempted to explain (mostly incorrectly) to his Egyptian readers. This fascination with Chinese was to become a standard feature of Egyptian travel writing about China.

King Farouk to appoint a more pliable prime minister. Abd al-Quddus did recognize that no two revolutions were alike, but he emphasized that all revolutions (from the French to the Chinese) were united by the fact that they toppled failed, debased regimes. Like Awda, Abd al-Quddus was particularly interested in Sun Yat-sen, whose persistence in the face of multiple failures to overthrow the Qing Dynasty he considered the most crucial lesson one could derive from the Chinese experience. Abd al-Quddus also considered Mao, who had exhibited the same persistence in leading the CCP, to be equally admirable. It was this dogged and single-minded pursuit of revolution that Abd al-Quddus celebrated most passionately.

The most important point revealed in Abd al-Quddus’ review of Awda’s Al-Sin al-shaʿbiyya was the sense that Egypt’s own revolution had not yet been fully realized. Just as Sun and Mao both made many attempts to reinvigorate China, so the forward progress of Egyptian society required sustained effort. The Chinese example, Abd al-Quddus wrote, was encouraging because it reminded Egyptians that such success was possible. He did not recommend imitating the precise policies of the CCP; instead, he claimed that studying Chinese history could help “to increase our faith in the fact that we here cannot import our principles from abroad, but must create them with our own hands.” Abd al-Quddus thus interpreted China’s revolution as a source of inspiration for an ongoing and fully autonomous Egyptian revolution. He did not address the crucial question of whether Nasser was the right man to lead such an effort. In fact, Nasser’s name did not appear anywhere in Abd al-Quddus’ review. Nasser and Abd al-Quddus had a complicated relationship. In 1954, Abd al-Quddus was briefly jailed after criticizing Nasser’s role in the March Crisis, which

104. One of Abd al-Quddus’ first prominent articles had been a vicious attack on Lampson, so it was perhaps not surprising that he would later choose to drag Lampson into his discussion of China. Abd al-Quddus probably also knew that Lampson had served as British minister to China from 1926 to 1933, prior to his appointment in Cairo.

105. Ibid.
deposed Muhammad Naguib. Yet by April 1955, \( \varepsilon \) Abd al-Quddus was openly supporting the government’s emboldened foreign policy at the Bandung Conference. At a time when Egypt’s national identity and ideology were still being formed, \( \varepsilon \) Abd al-Quddus was not the only intellectual to vacillate between being an opponent of the regime and a propagandist for it. Perhaps what can be said most definitively is that \( \varepsilon \) Abd al-Quddus supported the idea of a progressive revolution in Egypt, but not necessarily Nasser’s revolution itself. One might interpret \( \varepsilon \) Abd al-Quddus’ endorsement of China as an attempt to influence the regime to emphasize the importance of revolution. The role of China in this ongoing debate over the identity of Egypt’s new government was to become a symbol of the necessity of a continuing nationalist revolution. In this context, the actual meetings and agreements that brought Beijing and Cairo closer together were all but irrelevant.

The rhetorical strategy of linking the Chinese and Egyptian revolutions endured into the 1960s, as evidenced by Lutfi al-Khuli’s 1963 article on the Chinese revolution, published in Al-Ahram on the eve of Zhou’s first visit to Cairo.\(^{107}\) Like Awda and \( \varepsilon \) Abd al-Quddus, al-Khuli intended his celebration of China’s revolutionary successes to draw attention to Egypt’s own revolutionary heritage. At the time he wrote his article, al-Khuli was a prolific columnist for Al-Ahram and one of the principal theoretical architects of Nasser’s turn to socialism after 1961.\(^{108}\) In his article, al-Khuli praised Zhou as “one of the historical leaders of the revolution of a great Asian people against imperialism, feudalism, despotism, and backwardness.”\(^{109}\) Like Awda, al-Khuli stressed the continuity of the Chinese revolution from Sun to the Communists, but he adopted a more overtly Marxist position by giving credit


\(^{108}\) Rami Ginat, Egypt’s Incomplete Revolution.

for this “new revolutionary current” to the Bolshevik takeover of 1917. Thus, al-Khuli was able to appropriate both the Chinese and Soviet revolutions to justify Nasser’s own triumph, which – al-Khuli insisted – occurred “in the same historical stage” of Marxist development. Al-Khuli interpreted Nasser’s Egypt as part of a “global revolutionary current” blowing through “Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” China and Egypt were, therefore, the preeminent examples of “the greatest positive liberation movement in the history of the world.” According to al-Khuli, the “difference in social and political system” between China and Egypt was unimportant because they were bound by their “shared goals” and their history of mutual support. This distinction is important: al-Khuli wished to embrace only China’s revolutionary heritage without endorsing the explicitly communist ideology that went along with it. By internationalizing Egypt’s revolution as part of a larger historical moment, al-Khuli gave Nasserism added significance because he portrayed it as the inevitable outcome of a worldwide anti-imperialist force.

Al-Khuli’s interpretation of the Chinese revolution in 1963 is relevant to the discussion of Egyptian reactions to improving relations with China in the mid-1950s for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that some members of the Egyptian left retained their interest in promoting China as a proxy that allowed them to comment on Nasserism. Second, it is difficult to determine precisely what al-Khuli thought about the initial process of Sino-Arab rapprochement because he was in prison during most of that period. In many ways, al-Khuli was similar to ʿAbd al-Quddus, who was also imprisoned for opposing the Nasser regime and who also became, after his release, a mainstream newspaper editor who used the media to legitimize the same government that had once victimized him. ʿAbd al-Quddus’ and al-

110. The Chinese government adopted the “Africa, Asia, and Latin America” formulation to refer to the Third World after Castro’s revolution introduced communism to the Western Hemisphere. In this article, al-Khuli was thus borrowing one of Zhou’s frequent talking points.
111. Ibid. Al-Khuli did not bother to explain what that history of mutual support entailed, assuming that his audience would accept on faith that China and Egypt had worked together since 1955.
Khuli’s careers reflected the changing attitude of Nasser’s government toward left-wing politics, which Nasser began to permit in 1955 and finally embraced after the breakup of the UAR in 1961. These two journalists likewise exemplified the willingness of many of Nasser’s critics to renounce their opposition and become supporters of his regime. Perhaps the greatest significance of China in Egyptian public discourse was that it symbolized this accommodation. Egyptian journalists, leftists, and policymakers all generally agreed on what China represented – the triumph of a nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution similar to that of Egypt. They also agreed that this revolution deserved Egypt’s admiration and support. Because the consensus interpretation of Communist China tied together the fates of the Chinese and Egyptian revolutions, it became difficult or even impossible to express support for one while opposing the other. At a time when Nasser was seeking theoretical legitimacy for his government, a declaration of solidarity with China was a powerful tactic to internationalize the aims of the Free Officers and thereby reinforce their authority.

Although most Egyptians who wrote about China in the mid-1950s were journalists or political commentators such as ʿAwda and ʿAbd al-Quddus, certain members of Nasser’s inner circle also used the Chinese revolution to justify their own power. Foremost among these statesmen was Anwar Sadat, whose 1956 tract Qissat al-thawra kamila [The full story of the revolution] used Communist China to defend Nasser’s regime. In that book, Sadat lambasted all opponents of the Egyptian government, but he was particularly scathing in his criticism of the Egyptian left. One of Sadat’s primary goals was to defend Nasser against anyone who considered his rule dictatorial and undemocratic, especially the Egyptian communists.112 One common criticism of the government was that the ascendance of the military did not allow for popular revolution, as demanded by Marxist thought. To deflect these accusations, Sadat drew a comparison between Egypt and China. Both countries, he

said, had experienced revolutions. Like the majority of other Egyptian commentators on China, he too stressed the idea that the Chinese revolution focused on opposing imperialism and uniting all classes, rather than on being truly “socialist” or “proletarian.”

Sadat offered a fairly loose translation of the CCP’s 1939 textbook *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* to justify this assertion. That text was written jointly by many CCP members in Yan’an (the CCP’s base after the Long March) and edited by Mao, but Sadat presented it as Mao’s work alone. It stressed that “bourgeois-democratic” revolution was the “present stage” of the Chinese revolution in 1939 since China was at that point in its historical development. Sadat misleadingly reworked this passage to imply that the Chinese revolution itself was “bourgeois-democratic” and remained so in the mid-1950s. Sadat’s intent was to use this idea of a “united front” among different parties and social classes to encourage Egyptian leftists to accept the leadership of Nasser and the Free Officers. Whereas the Chinese revolution had been long, bloody, and devastating to much of China, Sadat pointed out that the Free Officers had led a bloodless coup, which achieved (in his opinion) the same revolutionary goals with far less suffering. In so doing, Sadat attempted to appropriate the legitimacy of the Chinese social transformation while simultaneously denying that the Chinese model of an avowedly communist party was suitable for Egypt.

Sadat leveled his criticism at the Egyptian communists at a time when Nasser’s government was giving more leeway to the Left in a ploy to win its support. Beginning in 1955, Nasser released many communists from prison after they agreed not to challenge his authority. He also relaxed state censorship enough for several new communist publishing

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113. Ibid., 29.
houses to print and distribute Marxist theoretical tracts. Among these publications were new Arabic translations of several of Mao’s works, including his influential On New Democracy. That essay, which outlined Mao’s theory of how a communist revolution could occur in a feudal, agrarian society such as China, proved to be his most popular work in other Third World countries, including Egypt. Previous Arabic translations of On New Democracy, including those made in the early 1950s by such leftist organizations as HAMITU and the New Dawn Group, were circulated clandestinely long before Nasser permitted its public distribution. Certain other works by Mao were also published formally during this period; for example, when the Unified Egyptian Communist Party took advantage of the government’s laxity to establish the Dar al-Fikr publishing house in 1956, one of its first books was a translation of Mao’s On Art and Literature. The state allowed this surge of interest in Mao in part because it actually benefitted Nasser. Many of the communists responsible for disseminating these writings had pledged to support the government as a condition of their release from prison, while his more ardent opponents remained incarcerated. In general, Egyptian communists also viewed favorably Nasser’s new foreign policy initiatives, including the Bandung Conference and the Czech arms deal. At a time when Egyptian theorists were trying to determine what to make of the Egyptian revolution, On New Democracy presented a theoretical justification for cooperation between radical leftists and bourgeois nationalists. In the pamphlet, which was written at the height of the

117. For the original text of that essay, see Mao Zedong, “Xin minzhu zhuyi lun [On New Democracy]” (1940), MXJ, vol. 2, 662-711.
119. See Joel Beinin, Was the Red Flag Flying There?, 178.
Sino-Japanese War, Mao discussed the need for the Chinese Communists to work together with non-communist parties, especially the GMD, in order to achieve liberation. Mao’s vision of a “United Front” was thus instrumental in bringing Egyptian communists into the government’s fold.120

The first Egyptian overtures to China also encouraged at least some Egyptian communists to soften their opposition to Nasser’s government. Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal [The Workers’ Vanguard], one of Egypt’s most influential Marxist labor associations, offers an illustrative example of how and why this ideological shift occurred.121 That organization had risen to prominence in the mid-1940s, when it agitated for textile strikes in Shubra al-Khayma.122 Although Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal never attracted more than a few hundred members at any one time, it enjoyed relatively wide influence because it incorporated both union leaders and urban intellectuals.123 In the early 1950s, it was one of the major opponents of Nasser’s harsh stance toward labor unions. Yet Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal’s leadership pulled an about-face in the spring of 1955 by pledging support for Nasser’s foreign policy. In May 1955, the central committee of Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal declared that it would support Egyptian nationalists because it agreed with the decisions of the Bandung Conference, which it believed to be an important step forward in the “struggle against global imperialism.”124 In a public declaration from February 1955, the central committee explained that the representation of China in Bandung legitimized the Conference. The committee argued for

120. Also influential was the example of Léon Blum’s Popular Front, a similarly collaborative program that first elevated the Socialists to power in France in 1936. See Roel Meijer, The Quest for Modernity, Ch. 3.

121. Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal was known by a variety of different names, in part because its members were trying to remain unnoticed by the authorities. Its first name was al-Taliʿa al-Shaʿbiyya li-l-Taharrur [The Popular Vanguard for Liberation], by which it is sometimes known in secondary literature. Throughout its existence, the organization maintained a close working relationship with the New Dawn Group, from which its membership was at various points difficult to distinguish.

122. Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, Workers on the Nile, 325.


124. Qararat al-lajna al-markaziyya li-taliʿat al-Ṣ ummal fi ijtiḥād mayu 1955 [The decisions of the central committee of Taliʿat al-Ṣ Ummal during the meeting of May 1955], May 1955, Box 5, IISG, 1.
the recognition of Communist China, citing India as an example of a country willing to
develop friendly relations with all peoples despite American meddling. Taliʿat al-ʿUmmal
remained deeply committed to the Chinese cause and issued declarations railing against
American intervention in the Taiwan dispute at a time when Taiwan received little attention
in the mainstream Egyptian press. Like all Egyptian communist organizations, Taliʿat al-
ʿUmmal generally enjoyed a closer association with the Soviet Union than with China, but its
leaders chose to use China as a means to legitimize Soviet communism to their Egyptian
audience. Soviet technical, economic, and military support for China, the central committee
argued, demonstrated Moscow’s willingness to befriend all nations. Taliʿat al-ʿUmmal
established the treatment of the Chinese Communists as a sort of test: a government that
aided them and a conference that invited them were worthy of the organization’s praise. In
the two years that followed, Nasser was to pass this test repeatedly. To be sure, members of
Taliʿat al-ʿUmmal were also motivated to support Nasser’s performance in Bandung by
Soviet support for the Conference and by their own deep-seated nationalist leanings.
Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to propose that they took Nasser’s positive attitude toward
China seriously as they began to embrace his regime.

The fact that closer relations with China could legitimize Nasser’s government
reflected the depth of the nationalist sentiment that permeated Egyptian society during the
mid-1950s. The frequent portrayals of the Chinese revolution as a non-communist victory of
a unified Chinese people over imperialism and backwardness were believable because
Egyptians longed for the same kind of triumph. Many Egyptian communists accepted this
perspective because they too were swept away in the nationalist euphoria that followed the

125. Bayan min al-lajna al-markaziyya li-taliʿat al-ʿummal hawl al-awdaʾ al-dawliyya [Declaration from the
central committee of Taliʿat al-ʿUmmal about the national situations], February 1955, Box 36, IISG, 8.
126. Ibid., 6.
127. Ibid., 4.
Bandung Conference. Nasser’s government and the Egyptian media manufactured widespread support for the idea of a “revolution,” a process in which the positive comparison to China played an instrumental role. As long as Nasser could plausibly claim that his government represented the fruition of this goal, promoting a revolutionary ideology conferred legitimacy on an already established regime. Many contemporary observers deemed the “Bandung spirit” and the concomitant development of relationships among the postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa to be a radical and threatening new trend in international politics. In fact, revolutionary governments such as those in China and Egypt were using each other’s prestige in the most conservative way possible, by bolstering their own claims to power. The Egyptian public, imbued as it was with a visceral anger toward foreign imperialism and eager to find a leader who could deliver unity and strength, proved remarkably willing to accept this initiative.

The Weakness of the Bandung Spirit

Perhaps the most striking feature of the developing relationship between China and Egypt in the mid-1950s was that no Egyptian commentator predicted or expected that his country would derive direct material benefit from it. To be sure, there were those in the government who hoped closer ties with Beijing would ensure access to Soviet weapons, but what the Chinese themselves might be able to offer was never publicly discussed. Egyptian communists were far more intrigued by the Soviet Union and had little interest in developing institutional links to the CCP. When China – but not the Soviet Union – donated financially to the war effort during the Suez Crisis, the Egyptian press all but ignored the gift. The agreement of the Chinese government to sell steel to Egypt, despite China’s inability to come close to meeting its own domestic needs, similarly elicited only fleeting notice. Egyptian reporting on the strengthening ties between China and Egypt was therefore quite inconsistent,
with newspapers preferring to speculate about China’s peculiar society than to report on the improving diplomatic relationship. Egyptian commentators implicitly understood that Sino-Egyptian relations were based only on political engagement – and that, at least to some degree, they were only theoretical. They were more concerned with what China might symbolize to an Egyptian audience than with the reality of China’s economy, politics, or society. As a result, portrayals of China in the Egyptian popular imagination did not need to be accurate so long as they were politically advantageous.

Inasmuch as the development of a closer relationship between China and Egypt offered journalists, politicians, and religious figures the opportunity to promote a vision of national unity, one can identify striking similarities between the meaning of China in Egyptian political discourse and the meaning of Egypt in China. In both countries, an image of the other was manipulated to underscore an idea of a common mission. Sino-Egyptian rapprochement also allowed both Mao’s and Nasser’s governments to proscribe domestic opposition from a key constituency and to co-opt its ideology to serve the cause of nation-building. Chinese Muslims and Egyptian leftists were the targets of these campaigns, since both groups had natural interests in the development of cultural and political ties between the two countries. In China, where the state more completely dominated the media and engaged more directly in scripting campaigns of mass mobilization, this process was far more deliberate. By contrast, Nasser’s government did not directly organize the nationalist writers who were enthralled with the example of China’s revolution, although Nasser definitely benefitted from their insistence that Egyptians should unite behind a revolutionary, anti-imperialist government as the Chinese had done. It was also clear from al-Baquri’s investigation of China and the official justifications for recognizing the Communist regime that Egyptian policymakers were acutely conscious of the potential public reaction to their overtures to Beijing. The salient feature of global politics in Asia and Africa in the
mid-1950s is that international issues were easily manipulated to advance ideological projects at home. For revolutionary countries whose governments were still in the process of consolidating authority, relations with foreign countries could never be fully independent of the domestic political context.

This preoccupation with nation-building is the most compelling explanation for the rapid disillusionment with the “Bandung spirit” just a few years after the Bandung Conference. The Conference has been so mythologized by Asian and African politicians that it is easy to forget how toothless its resolutions actually were.\textsuperscript{128} Because the Conference’s organizers wanted to present a unanimous voice to the world, its resolutions were decided by consensus rather than a vote. The final communiqué condemned imperialism in the abstract, but it only addressed a few specific situations that the delegates found uncontroversial (specifically, support for Algerian independence, reiteration of the rights of Palestinian refugees, and a denunciation of apartheid in South Africa). The results of the Conference were so vague that all sides could claim victory, both publicly and in private. (How else, after all, could the Chinese Foreign Ministry have declared the Conference to be a victory over American imperialism at the same time the American State Department declared it a blow to communism?) Overall, what mattered in Bandung, as in the foreign alliances whose development it facilitated, was simply the appearance of international support. The decisions of the Conference were, in the end, inconsequential; their symbolism, however, helped bolster newly-established nationalist governments that were desperate for whatever legitimacy could be gained by leading an international movement. Asian-African solidarity was essentially insignificant as a geopolitical force. The Bandung spirit was not a genuine commitment to Asian-African unity, as it has so often been misrepresented, but rather an

\textsuperscript{128} Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung.”
agreement that postcolonial countries could derive mutual benefit in domestic politics from the spectacle of global solidarity.

Because the pursuit of international friendship among Asian and African countries during this period became little more than a strategy to legitimate a national ideological program, Sino-Egyptian relations inevitably remained weak. Despite the fanfare over the Sino-Egyptian commercial agreement in August 1955, the two countries did not become significant trading partners until the 1990s. Nasser’s dreams of securing Soviet weapons via China also never materialized, and, in any event, the threatened United Nations arms embargo against the Middle East was never implemented. Not until after the Cultural Revolution did Cairo regain the status it had enjoyed before World War II as a center of learning for Chinese Muslims. In short, Sino-Egyptian relations in the late 1950s remained exclusively ideological. As long as close ties between Beijing and Cairo remained conducive to legitimizing their respective political establishments, Chinese and Egyptian newspapers continued to admire each other’s successes and Zhou and Nasser continued to praise each other’s accomplishments. In 1958, however, the new ideological demands posed by the Great Leap Forward and the formation of the UAR abruptly undermined the shaky foundation of Sino-Arab relations. The remarkable goodwill of the previous three years, during which the CCP had been lionized for accomplishments both real and imaginary, was abandoned almost as quickly as it had been created.
CHAPTER THREE: RADICALIZATION AND REORIENTATION, 1958-1961

In a ceremony in Beijing as part of China’s tenth-anniversary National Day celebrations in October 1959, Khalid Bakdash denounced Gamal Abdel Nasser and called for Syrian independence from Egypt. Bakdash was the president of the Syrian Communist Party and an opponent of the recently formed UAR who was, at that time, living in exile in Moscow. His visit to China had been organized by Zhou Enlai, who personally introduced his speech and arranged for it to be broadcast nationally by radio. At the main National Day celebrations in Tian’anmen Square, Bakdash was seated in a place of honor in front of some 700,000 Chinese revelers.¹ Predictably, Bakdash’s visit to Beijing sparked a firestorm of controversy. The Egyptian government withdrew its chargé d’affaires from Beijing and summoned Chen Jiakang from the Chinese embassy to make a formal protest. Faced with such vociferous criticism from a country that had been a valuable ally just a short time before, the Chinese equivocated. It was not the Chinese government that had sponsored Bakdash’s speech, Chen asserted in a 5 October meeting with Egyptian officials, but rather the CCP as a party. Bakdash had been invited not as an opponent of the UAR, but as a leader of a foreign communist party.² Neither Chen nor any other Chinese official could have expected that this tortured explanation would mollify their Egyptian critics. Outrage over this particular misadventure soon subsided, but it marked a nadir in Sino-Egyptian relations during the Bandung era. Bakdash’s speech was just one confrontation in a series of incidents beginning in spring 1959 that pitted China and the UAR against each other in a bitter war of

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² Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 25 October 1959, 107-00177-03, CFMA.
words. Chinese and Egyptian newspapers regularly traded barbs about such controversial topics as Nasser’s persecution of Arab communists, China’s alleged meddling in Arab politics (particularly in Iraq), and the repressive nature of Chinese rule in Tibet. Clearly, the camaraderie of the Bandung spirit was wearing thin.

How had the optimism of the mid-1950s given way so quickly to vituperation and recrimination? Throughout 1958, there had been signs that the Chinese government sought to carve out for itself a more outspoken and more radical role as the champion of communist revolution in the Middle East. Until March 1959, the official Chinese press gave no official indication that Beijing was becoming disillusioned with Nasser; to the contrary, whenever the Chinese media railed against Western imperialism in the Middle East, it held up Nasser and his brand of Arab nationalism as the saviors of the Arab people. Nevertheless, the tone of Sino-Arab relations changed gradually throughout 1958 and early 1959, particularly in response to the establishment of two new radical, revolutionary regimes: ʿAbd al-Karim Qasim’s republic in Iraq, formed after his military coup overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in July 1958, and the provisional Algerian government, which was founded in Cairo in September of that same year. From the outset, Beijing enjoyed close relationships with both new governments, which, for the first time, presented Chinese leaders with viable alternatives to Nasser as they reformulated their Middle East policy. Algeria in particular was a natural target for Chinese diplomacy at a time when China was convulsed by the Great Leap Forward, which demanded the immediate implementation of a fully communist society. Whereas Egypt was governed by an established nationalist regime, Algeria was in the midst of a bloody anticolonial insurrection led by militant activists who openly proclaimed their interest in socialism. It would be a gross oversimplification to propose that China abandoned Egypt to focus on developing closer relations with Algeria. Nasser, after all, had been the one who first encouraged the Chinese government to take a stand in support of the FLN when
he requested in February 1958 that Beijing condemn the scheduled execution of Djamila Bouhired, a female Algerian resistance fighter who had been captured and tortured by the French army. Moreover, the Chinese government maintained ties with Cairo throughout 1958 and into early 1959, the same time it was developing ties with the FLN. Yet China’s embrace of the Algerian cause reflected a genuine reorientation of the CCP’s priorities and a sustained attempt to rearticulate its international ideology.

It is possible to identify broad similarities between the CCP’s pursuit of close relations with Egypt from 1955 to 1957 and its interest in Algeria from 1958 to 1960. In both cases, the Chinese sought legitimacy from the assertion that a foreign government respected China’s official ideology. Throughout this time period, the Chinese government was eager to create the perception that it actively supported anti-imperialist causes in the Middle East, a goal that endured well into the 1960s. Moreover, the Chinese government was consistently interested in translating anger at foreign imperialism in the Arab world into mass political mobilization at home. There were, however, important distinctions between Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations. Because the Algerian revolution was not yet complete, the Chinese leaders who interacted with the FLN were able to adopt a much more paternalistic attitude than had been the case with Nasser and his representatives. The Chinese could never have argued that the Free Officers in Egypt had been inspired by the Chinese Communists to launch their revolution in 1952, but they were comfortable advancing similar claims about the FLN in Algeria. The Chinese government intended its relations with Algeria to export

3. In fact, the Chinese government was first asked to comment on the Bouherid case by the Egyptian newspaper Al-Masa’. The Foreign Ministry decided that Mao would not address the matter publicly, but that Zhou would give a speech opposing the execution. See Foreign Ministry circular regarding Djamila Bouherid, 8 February 1958, 107-00167-01, CFMA. The following week, the Egyptian government officially presented Bouherid’s case at the Chinese embassy in Cairo, marking the first time that the Chinese government had been formally asked to intervene in support of the FLN. The Chinese Foreign Ministry instructed its embassy to inform the Egyptian government that it was willing to express support for Bouherid on 19 February. See Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 15 February 1958, and Foreign Ministry to the Chinese embassy in Cairo, 19 February 1958, 107-00167-01, CFMA.
socialist revolution, whereas relations with Egypt (as with such countries as India and Indonesia) merely justified revolutions that had already occurred. By claiming a leadership role in the Algerian struggle for independence, the Chinese government was in effect renouncing the reputation it had cultivated at the Bandung Conference as a sober and responsible member of the international community. Zhou’s instructions to avoid any discussion of communism in Bandung for fear of offending delegates from less radical countries were all but forgotten only three years after they were issued.

China’s more strident tone in dealing with Egypt and Algeria beginning in 1958 spilled over into its relations with other African countries. When Guinea gained independence from France in October of that same year, China offered diplomatic recognition and an exchange of ambassadors, but it did not endorse Sékou Touré’s new government and did not offer its usual compliment that other African colonies should emulate Guinea’s path to independence.\(^4\) Instead, the Chinese government reserved its praise for African revolutionary groups actively engaged in armed struggle (such as freedom fighters in Cameroon) or for new leftist governments with direct ties to Beijing (such as Modibo Keïta’s socialist regime in Mali). When Mali became independent in 1960, for example, China used the opportunity not only to praise the Malian people, but to lambaste Senegal and Madagascar (neither of which recognized Communist China) for remaining part of the French Community after achieving their own independence.\(^5\) In 1962, the Chinese government conspicuously omitted Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Sudan from its list of African countries in which a national liberation movement had been successful.\(^6\) The ongoing process of decolonization in Africa gave the Chinese the opportunity to be stingy in extending their support to other countries. As each


\(^5\) “Zhuhe mali lianbang de duli [Celebrate the independence of the Mali Federation],” *Renmin Ribao*, 20 June 1960, 4.

\(^6\) Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa*, 61-62.
new African country became independent, its government was forced to choose which
Chinese government – Beijing or Taipei – it would officially recognize. This choice became
a kind of litmus test for Cold War alignment. As the tally of countries that recognized
Communist China increased, so too did Beijing’s flexibility to espouse radical positions
without fear of isolation. The pivotal step in this process was the establishment of relations
with the GPRA in September 1958. Previously, the Chinese had courted foreign countries to
prove themselves worthy of support. As al-Baquri’s visit demonstrated, the Chinese Foreign
Ministry was willing to conceal its commitment to Marxist doctrine if doing so could
facilitate the development of friendly relations. In 1958, by contrast, China was for the first
time in a position to be the country extending recognition to an isolated regime. This change
of role enabled the Chinese to champion particular international causes, rather than seek
external validation for the CCP as a whole.

Nevertheless, emphasizing the distinctions between Chinese foreign policy in the
conciliatory years of the mid-1950s and the radical years after 1958 must not obscure the fact
that China’s Middle East policy continued to be a means to legitimize China, both at home
and abroad. Developing a relationship with the FLN, which was embroiled in a fierce
conflict, permitted the Chinese government to portray itself as the ideological patron of
global revolution. The Chinese invited Algerian delegations to Beijing, then lectured their
guests at length about the proper strategy for leading a revolution. Zhou and other top leaders
took pains to avoid having to send costly military aid to the FLN, preferring to cultivate only
the perception that China was participating in the Algerian struggle. By claiming that the
Algerians were eager to adopt the “Chinese model” of revolution, the Chinese government
validated its own ideology and proclaimed its continued relevance. Declaring its unequivocal
support for Algeria also afforded the Chinese government an opportunity to mobilize
ordinary Chinese citizens to turn out for mass meetings to condemn the French and pledge
solidarity to the Algerian cause. These rallies, which followed a similar formula to the pro-
Egypt rallies during the Suez Crisis in 1956, were intended to keep Chinese citizens engaged
with the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East. In the context of the Great Leap
Forward, which depended on mobilization campaigns to carry out radical policies, these pro-
Algeria rallies were a valuable tool to motivate Chinese citizens. These rallies differed from
the pro-Egypt rallies in the past because they directly involved Algerian communists and
because their organizers rarely if ever mentioned Islam. The Algerian revolution allowed the
Chinese government to continue its strategy of using Middle Eastern politics to define and
promote Chinese Communist ideology, but it now did so in a more radical manner consistent
with the ideological demands of the Great Leap Forward.

Contextualizing the Transformation of Sino-Arab Relations

Studies of China’s international relations have generally paid scant attention to the
period between 1958 and 1960. Although the Great Leap Forward has been the subject of
extensive research, scholars have particularly focused on China’s domestic politics to the
exclusion of its foreign policy. No definitive work has yet outlined how the new emphasis
on radical development at home affected China’s relations with the rest of the world. This
gap in the historiography of modern China is somewhat surprising in light of the attention
that scholars have given to the international dimensions of the campaigns of the early 1950s.
Historians who have discussed Chinese foreign policy during the Great Leap Forward have
primarily explored China’s involvement in the Cold War or its deteriorating relations with the

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7. The most definitive recent study of China during the Great Leap Forward is Frank Dikötter’s *Mao’s Great Famine*, which is based on exhaustive research in local archives. Dikötter also used the Foreign Ministry Archives, but he used this research mostly to describe the response to the economic catastrophe within China. For example, he relied largely on Foreign Ministry documents to illustrate how Zhou tried to negotiate with capitalist countries to purchase grain at the height of the famine. See Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), Ch. 15. Dikötter did not, however, devote significant attention to Chinese foreign policy outside the context of the failed Great Leap Forward economic policies.
Soviet Union, rather than its ties with other countries of the Third World. Although one can find a diverse and sophisticated body of literature about the Sino-Soviet split, these works have tended not to focus on popular campaigns and mass politics, choosing instead to emphasize international politics at the highest levels.\(^8\) Perhaps the only international topic that historians have specifically connected to mobilization campaigns of the Great Leap Forward is the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, beginning in summer 1958, during which Mao ordered the shelling of Nationalist-controlled islands off the coast of mainland China. Several prominent scholars have even concluded that Mao decided to engage with Nationalist troops largely because he hoped to use the resulting crisis to agitate domestic opinion in a manner that would promote the Great Leap Forward.\(^9\) Yet while most historians have come to accept the links between the Great Leap Forward and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, they have been slow to investigate possible connections between other foreign policy crises and the need to stimulate domestic mobilization.

China’s angry falling out with Nasser beginning in spring 1959 is one such international development that deserves more detailed scrutiny. Previous scholars of Sino-Arab relations have generally taken one of two contradictory approaches to make sense of the quick decline of Sino-Egyptian relations: either they have neglected the topic altogether or they have greatly exaggerated the mutual anger and tension that these relations engendered. The first category includes many recent historians from China and Egypt who have preferred

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to emphasize diplomatic triumphs rather than periods of rancor. In many cases, these authors have also advocated closer ties between China and Egypt in the present day, leading them to portray the Sino-Egyptian relationship as uniformly positive and mutually beneficial. Accordingly, studies in this genre often skip directly from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1956 to Zhou’s first visit to Cairo in 1963 without regard for intervening events. Some Western scholars have also minimized the relevance of the Sino-Egyptian rift, possibly because of a Cold War fear that other countries might be led “astray” by the subversion of the communist bloc. Perhaps partly in reaction to this substandard scholarship, the most sophisticated analysts of Sino-Arab relations have tended to over-emphasize the break between Mao and Nasser. These authors, constrained by a lack of available sources prior to the end of the Cold War, were compelled to infer Beijing’s and Cairo’s decision-making strategies solely from published press sources available in the West, often in translation. Consequently, they accepted uncritically the overdramatic denunciations that filled Chinese and Egyptian newspapers beginning in March 1959. By focusing too readily on this war of words, they failed to consider the wider political context in which this conflict developed.

The need for a thorough re-examination of Sino-Arab relations between 1958 and 1960 is underscored by the inability of previous scholars to reach a consensus regarding how this era of diplomatic and ideological reorientation should be periodized. Although the Chinese government did not openly criticize Nasser before March 1959, it is clear in hindsight that the


11. A particularly egregious example of this sort of scholarship was Joseph E. Khalili’s “Communist China and the United Arab Republic,” Asian Survey 10 (1970), which entirely ignores the development of tension between China and the UAR.

12. Bruce D. Larkin’s China and Africa, Yitzhak Shichor’s The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy, and Mon’im Nasser-Eddine’s Arab-Chinese Relations all suffered from these limitations.
gradual process by which China’s leaders reconsidered their policy toward the Middle East began prior to this conclusive rupture. Remarkably, four of the most thoughtful commentators on Sino-Arab relations – Shichor, Nasser-Eddine, Halliday, and Harris – have among them identified five different dates and causes as the beginning of China’s more radical approach to Sino-Arab relations. Shichor, who wrote about China’s attitude toward the entire Middle East, viewed regional politics as the cause of China’s disillusionment with Egypt. The rivalry between Egypt and Iraq for leadership of the progressive cause in the Arab world, he asserted, gave China a viable alternative to Nasser in the region. Consequently, he highlighted “Egypt’s” attempted coup in Mosul in March 1959 as the definitive break between Cairo and Beijing.13 Nasser-Eddine, by contrast, identified late 1958 as the turning point because he focused on the Chinese government’s reaction to the persecution of communists in the Middle East.14 Particularly for those scholars who conducted their research during the midst of the Cold War, it was tempting to assume that both Beijing and Moscow cared deeply about the plight of communists elsewhere in the world, even though in practice they were frequently willing to overlook repression if an alliance with the repressors proved expedient. Halliday and Harris even more overtly adopted frameworks based on the Cold War. For Halliday, the development of Sino-Arab relations unfolded under the shadow of the looming Sino-Soviet split. As a result, he did not identify significant changes in China’s policy toward the Middle East in 1958 or 1959, but instead considered all of China’s machinations in the region dating back to 1956 to serve the same goal of demonstrating China’s ideological superiority to Moscow.15 Harris has offered competing periodizations in different publications. In one article, she adopted a similar focus

13. Yitzhak Shichor, The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy, 81. Although many of the pan-Arabists who carried out the coup attempt were overtly pro-Nasser, there is no evidence to suggest that Nasser was involved in the conspiracy.
on superpower politics, proposing a long-term approach based on China’s changing relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union that combined the entirety of the 1950s and 1960s into a period throughout which Beijing consistently demanded “ideological purity.”

In her monograph, however, Harris offered the only periodization of China’s Middle East policy in the 1950s that took domestic politics into account; she chose 1958 as a turning point in Sino-Arab relations in part because of the Great Leap Forward. Each of these periodizations is plausible in the context of the various perspectives from which these authors approached Sino-Arab relations, but ultimately none is definitive.

Because this thesis explores the relevance of the Middle East to the Chinese government’s larger attempts to shape the political identity of the Chinese people, it must adopt a periodization that reflects these goals. According to this criterion, the most logical turning point on which to focus is the radicalization of Chinese domestic politics at the outset of the Great Leap Forward in February and March 1958. One salient shift during this transition was the sudden reluctance on the part of the Chinese government to discuss issues related to Islam. The February 1958 issue of Zhongguo Musilin, the official magazine of the China Islamic Association, entirely abandoned its previous focus on the Middle East and China’s relations with non-communist Muslim countries. In light of Islam’s significant role in facilitating the development of Sino-Arab relations during the mid-1950s, this abrupt change in strategy heralded a new and more overtly ideological era. In addition, the first major rally in China in support of Beijing’s improving relations with the Algerian FLN in March 1958 also portended the coming transformation of the Chinese government’s approach toward the Middle East. By beginning the analysis of this contentious period with these

16. Lillian Craig Harris, “Myth and Reality in China’s Relations with the Middle East,” in Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice, Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). In this article, Harris did not attempt to reconcile this idea of “ideological purity” with, for example, Zhou’s instructions not to mention communism at the Bandung Conference.

17. Lillian Craig Harris, China Considers the Middle East, Ch. 6.
subtle changes in domestic politics in February and March 1958, rather than with the more public dispute between Beijing and Cairo twelve months later, it is possible to fit Sino-Algerian relations into the larger narrative of China’s evolving ties to the Arab world. The significance of Algeria in China has been ignored by students of Sino-Arab relations who have been more concerned with China’s role in the rivalry between Nasser and Qasim. Although China’s flirtation with Iraq during the late 1950s was, of course, relevant to the wider topic of Sino-Arab relations, Algeria was the Arab country with which China’s leaders could most easily identify on an ideological level, and, consequently, it was the country with the greatest potential to promote their evolving vision of China’s position in the world.

The Chinese Response to Arab Revolution

In 1955, when China surprised many observers by sending Zhou to participate in the Bandung Conference, policymakers in Beijing were severely constrained by China’s diplomatic isolation. The decision that Zhou would seek to allay fears about the CCP’s radical positions, de-emphasize his country’s doctrinaire commitment to Marxism, and make friends with non-communist leaders from across Asia and Africa was born of necessity. After all, if the Chinese government had dealt only with regimes that shared its interest in class-based revolution, it would have remained merely a junior partner within the Soviet bloc. In early 1958, however, the Chinese faced an international situation that had changed markedly in just three years. Zhou’s conciliatory diplomacy in Bandung and the broader public relations campaign it inaugurated had dramatically enhanced China’s prestige among nationalist regimes in the Third World. China’s relentless attempts to attract and impress visiting delegates from dozens of countries had left their mark; in the eyes of many, the Chinese Communists were neither quite so mysterious nor quite so frightening as they had seemed prior to the Bandung Conference. In 1958, China also gained two intriguing new
Arab allies in Qasim’s Iraq and the GPRA. At the same time, China’s relations with the
Soviet Union had begun to sour – if only in private – as Mao asserted his independence from
Khrushchev. All of these changes in the international sphere presented new opportunities
for Chinese foreign policy. Ultimately, the chief consequence of this shifting landscape was
that Chinese officials were able to promote China as the leader of a communist revolution
that was truly global in scope and radical in its commitment to immediate social and
economic change.

Because the Communist government and CCP apparatus placed such a high premium
on ideology, China’s leaders were compelled to make sense of international developments
within a rigid, dogmatic framework. Chinese foreign policy in the 1950s cannot be
understood independent of the overarching global narrative within which the country’s
leaders interpreted and explained China’s place in the world. In proper Marxist fashion, this
narrative envisioned an inexorable struggle in which progressive forces would eventually
 triumph over the evils of capitalism and imperialism. This worldview left little room for
nuance, since good and evil were clearly defined. The West, chiefly the United States,
allegedly attempted to divide the oppressed peoples of the world in order to preserve its
hegemony over them; the heroes of the story were all those who preached unity of purpose
against this conspiracy. In 1958, no one who sought influence within the Chinese state could
stray from this framework for comprehending the world. Particularly in the aftermath of the
failed Hundred Flowers Campaign, when those who had been encouraged to challenge the
government were swiftly punished for doing so, dissent was inconceivable. Domestically,
the all-consuming need to adapt reality to theory resulted in an epidemic of fudged
agricultural and industrial statistics at the provincial level, which greatly exacerbated the

18. Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine*, Ch. 2; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, Ch. 3; Donald S.
horrors of the Great Leap Forward. Chinese analysts of international affairs during this period were just as constrained by ideological expectations, albeit with less disastrous immediate consequences. Each news item from anywhere in the world had to be spun to fit the official narrative or the narrative had to be tweaked to accommodate the changing world. The government needed to be conscious of how every policy and every announcement promoted the official ideology that legitimized the CCP. Consequently, the reorientation of China’s Middle Eastern policy beginning in 1958 can best be understood as the gradual refocusing of this narrative to emphasize China’s role in an ongoing world revolution.

In February 1958, the Chinese were initially delighted by Nasser’s success in spreading his Arab nationalist ideology to Syria and beyond. When Syria joined Egypt to form the UAR, Renmin Ribao lauded the union as “advantageous to the common struggle against colonialism.” The Chinese media lost no time in integrating this new development into its conception of a Manichean conflict between progressive and reactionary forces. Renmin Ribao asserted that the union between Egypt and Syria was inevitable, since both countries shared the same political values and had the same goals of fending off imperialist encroachment. The newspaper portrayed public opinion in both Egypt and Syria as universally supportive of Nasser’s regime, even though in reality the formation of the UAR was the result of contentious divisions within Syrian domestic politics. Most important, Renmin Ribao endorsed Arab nationalism, since it proclaimed “without any doubt” that Arabs outside Egypt and Syria would be inspired to “unite even more closely under the banner of anti-imperialism.” The Chinese government was too resolutely committed to

19. The inability of the central government to obtain accurate information from provincial authorities was one of the themes of Frank Dikötter’s Mao’s Great Famine, especially Ch. 11.
21. Ibid.
respecting national sovereignty to suggest outright that such countries as Jordan and Lebanon ought to be folded into the UAR, but, caught up in the moment, it did seemingly recognize Nasser as the legitimate moral leader of all Arabs. In private, the Chinese Foreign Ministry was no less hesitant to accept Nasser as the paramount leader in the Arab world and to praise his efforts to unite rival Arab governments. By July 1958, for example, Chinese policymakers were still deferring to Nasser’s analysis of Middle Eastern politics and quoting with approval his claim to be the political champion of the inhabitants of Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan.22 In November, a Foreign Ministry memo went so far as to propose that “the central goal of the United States’ policy toward the Middle East [was] to isolate, weaken, restrict, or even overthrow” Arab nationalism.23 Consequently, it was natural that China should support Nasser wholeheartedly. According to the rigid worldview of the Chinese government, any disunity within the Arab world was the result of an Anglo-American conspiracy to undermine the ongoing revolution.24 The optimism of Nasser and his Arab supporters in the first half of 1958 fit easily into the Chinese vision of world affairs, which predicted an unstoppable drive toward the total unity of the world’s oppressed peoples. In this context, pan-Arabism was a natural cause for the Chinese government to embrace.

Similarly, China’s leaders initially had no trouble incorporating the Iraqi revolution into their conception of an ever-advancing global revolution. With the entire Chinese government and Party bureaucracy, including the Foreign Ministry, indoctrinated in an ideology that made dissent impossible, it was inevitable that the official Chinese interpretation of the events in Iraq would be naive and overly simplistic. As soon as Qasim’s coup succeeded, the Foreign Ministry declared it a victory for the global revolution and a

23. “Meiguo dui zhongdong de jiben zhengce he zuofa [Basic policy and practices of the United States toward the Middle East],” 30 August 1958, 107-00295-05, CFMA.
24. Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry and the Central Intelligence Bureau, 21 July 1958, 107-00295-01, CFMA.
stinging defeat for the United Kingdom and the United States. On 15 July, one day after the coup, functionaries in the Foreign Ministry were already confident that Qasim and his supporters were working to “implement a policy of liberating the Arab nation” (*alabo minzu*) and that their aims were fully consistent with Nasser’s goals for the UAR. In its summary of the situation in Iraq, the Foreign Ministry accepted the analysis of one Cairo newspaper that “the Iraqi nationalist movement is the same as the whole Arab liberation movement and the whole anti-imperialist movement.” Indeed, the Chinese, like much of the world, expected the new Iraqi regime to pursue a policy of close relations with Nasser’s newly established UAR. Yet the Foreign Ministry did recognize the possibility of some tension between Nasser and Qasim, noting that Nasser was displeased that Iraq’s standard of living exceeded that of the UAR. This rivalry allowed a tantalizing possibility: the Foreign Ministry declared that it was “confident” that Iraq would influence socioeconomic policy “in Syria and even in Egypt.” As the Chinese were celebrating Nasser’s regional ascendancy, they were simultaneously predicting – without any evidence to justify such optimism – that the accelerating pace of revolution would force leftist reforms upon China’s foremost non-communist ally in the region. These expectations, bolstered by Qasim’s expedient alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party, explained the Chinese government’s brief but intense interest in revolutionary Iraq beginning in July 1958. The Iraqi Revolution energized China’s leaders, who convinced themselves that it augured not only the demise of imperialism in the Middle East but also the inevitable ascendancy of leftist politics.

As the political situation became more volatile in both China and the Middle East in the summer of 1958, the Chinese government claimed for itself a direct role in facilitating the

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27. Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry (a), 14 July 1958, 107-00153-03, CFMA.
Arab revolutions. Because CCP ideology envisioned China as a leader in the fight for global justice, it required China to participate in any genuine revolution. The deployment of American marines to Lebanon and of British soldiers to Jordan in July 1958 in support of those countries’ conservative governments enabled the Chinese media to reconcile the Arab revolutions neatly into its Cold War framework. Just as Chinese propaganda had insisted that the British, French, and Israeli invasion of Egypt during the Suez Crisis was part of the same American imperialist machinations that prevented Taiwan’s reunification with China, so Beijing’s official line in 1958 envisioned a global American conspiracy. In a fiery article published on 25 July, *Renmin Ribao* demanded that the United States withdraw its troops from the Middle East, South Korea, and Taiwan. The article asserted that “American imperialism” had “aroused the unmatched indignation of all the officers and soldiers in the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army.”

Mentioning the People’s Volunteer Army, which was formed from the PLA in 1950 in order to intervene in the Korean War and which at the time was still deployed in North Korea, was a powerful propaganda tactic, since the goal of the article was to compare the intervention of the United States in Lebanon to its more direct opposition to China in Korea. Because of China’s own experience as a victim of imperialism, the article explained, patriotic Chinese people “could not ignore” American aggression, but instead must “continue to bear weapons” in order to “teach a lesson” to the United States. One Chinese scholar who has extensively analyzed archival documents related to the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis concluded that Mao initially formulated his plan to shell Jinmen in August 1958 as a way of responding to the American presence in Lebanon, although the crisis in the Middle East subsided before the shelling began. Throughout

30. Ibid.
August and September, *Renmin Ribao* continued to depict the Taiwan and Middle Eastern crises as parts of the same conflict, with American aggression in Lebanon necessitating a Chinese response closer to home.\(^{32}\) The notion that Chinese citizens should identify with Arab victims of imperialism and interpret foreign encroachment on the Middle East as a direct threat to China had been a hallmark of Chinese propaganda during the Suez Crisis. In the summer of 1958, however, China’s leaders responded much more militantly to such provocation by launching a massive military retaliation of their own. The Taiwan Strait bombardment indicated just how far Mao was prepared to go to promote his conception of China as a key player in an interconnected community of anti-imperialist nations.

The Chinese government’s more assertive strategy of promoting its relevance within the Third World was perhaps best exemplified by its new slogans about worldwide revolution. In the wake of the Bandung Conference, the Chinese media had relentlessly promoted the cause of “Asian and African” countries in winning national independence from their colonial masters. In August and September 1958, *Renmin Ribao* suddenly added “Latin America” to this standard formulation. Thereafter, every successful cause endorsed by Beijing – including, for example, the Iraqi revolution – was lauded as an unequivocal victory for “the peoples of each country of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.”\(^{33}\)

To be sure, the Chinese media had occasionally recognized the countries of Latin America as fellow victims of American economic imperialism throughout the 1950s, but it began to pay significantly more attention to Latin American leftist movements in the late summer of 1958. This new interest coincided with Fidel Castro’s rise to power in Cuba, although Castro’s forces did not

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\(^{32}\) A representative example was “Zhong yi liangguo renmin xin lian xin [The hearts of the peoples of China and Iraq are side by side],” *Renmin Ribao*, 30 September 1958, 2. Although this article was ostensibly about Chinese support for the people of Iraq, it established a connection between the two countries by railing against American intervention in Taiwan: “During our people’s fierce struggle against the American invasion and occupation of our country’s territory of Taiwan and against the expanded encroachment on our country’s coastal islands, the peoples of the Arab countries have stood beside us.”

occupy the entire country until early the following year. Not only did Renmin Ribao prominently cover the Cuban revolution, but it sought out Latin American Marxists from other countries to emphasize the connections among all Third World peoples. Colombian author Jorge Zalamea summed up the Chinese position well, writing in an October 1958 opinion piece that, “at present, we have already achieved all of the conditions necessary to advance the common struggle of the peoples of all the Asian, African, and Latin American countries, since the peoples of these countries have suffered imperialist encroachment and pressure most directly and for the longest time.” 34 The Chinese media’s new strategy of emphasizing the immediacy of revolution throughout the entire Third World reflected the changing priorities of the country’s top leaders, who were now convinced that the long-awaited establishment of true communism was indeed imminent, both within China and throughout the rest of the developing world.

The other driving force behind Beijing’s efforts to emphasize its solidarity with other Asian, African, and Latin American countries was its escalating rivalry with the Soviet Union. By presenting China as a leader of the global revolution centered on the Third World, the Chinese government demonstrated its independence from Moscow. When the Great Leap Forward began, Mao was eager to prove that the CCP was more genuinely committed to radical change than was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In a famous speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow in November 1957, Mao made this position clear – and terrified Khrushchev in the process – by declaring that China would be willing to see half the world’s population annihilated in nuclear war if it would result in the ascendance of the communist bloc over the United States. 35 Mao intended his saber-rattling to contrast with Khrushchev’s more cautious

35. This speech and its relevance to the Great Leap Forward were described at length in Frank Dikötter, Mao’s
attitude. Khrushchev’s policy of “peaceful co-existence” with non-communist countries, which he first articulated in February 1956 at the CPSU’s 20th Party Congress, meant that China’s hardline stances in support of communist revolution in the Third World posed an overt challenge to Soviet supremacy. As the Chinese exulted in public and in private over Qasim’s coup in Iraq, Khrushchev furiously summoned Nasser to Moscow to explain why the revolution had occurred without Soviet knowledge and consent. Beijing was also much quicker than Moscow to endorse the FLN’s decision to establish a provisional Algerian government. Zhou, with Mao’s explicit approval, formally recognized Abbas and his cabinet without first clearing his plans with the Soviet ambassador. In so doing, the Chinese were boldly staking their claim to be the true arbiter of revolutionary progress in the Third World. The growing rivalry between China and the Soviet Union reinforced the notion that China ought to be a leader among developing countries. In turn, Mao’s government supported more radical revolutionary groups in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in order to prove that China fully embraced this role.

Consequently, by the beginning of 1959, China’s political circumstances had been dramatically transformed. With the Great Leap Forward in full swing, the CCP matched its

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Great Famine, Ch. 2.

36. Khrushchev demonstrated his commitment to pursuing more positive relations with non-communist countries by abolishing the Cominform, thereby symbolically renouncing Moscow’s desire to spread communism around the world. One of Khrushchev’s motivations for abolishing the Cominform may have been Nehru’s harsh criticism of that organization, which the latter described in 1955 as “not compatible” with the principles of non-interference promoted at the Bandung Conference. See Geoffrey Jukes, The Soviet Union in Asia (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 111 and Jeremy Friedman, “Reviving Revolution: The Sino-Soviet Split, the ‘Third World,’ and the Fate of the Left” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2011), 34.

37. Mohamed Hasanayn Heikal, The Cairo Documents, 131-132. Karen Davisha, who cited the same passage from Heikal’s Cairo Documents, suggested that Nasser chose to go to Moscow to consult with Khrushchev, rather than that Khrushchev summoned him. See Karen Davisha, Soviet Foreign Policy Towards Egypt, 20. Either way, it is worth noting that Nasser was in Belgrade when Qasim launched his coup, a visit which strained Soviet-Egyptian relations. The gradual falling out between Nasser and Khrushchev in 1958 is described in more detail in Rami Ginat, “Nasser and the Soviets: A Reassessment,” in Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt, Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, eds. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 238-241.

38. ZNP, vol. 2, 174-175.
commitment to total revolution at home by adopting an equally aggressive foreign policy. What had begun as a gradual shift in China’s priorities in the Arab world soon constituted a full-scale reorientation of Chinese policy toward the entire Third World. In quick succession, the formation of the UAR, Qasim’s coup in Iraq, the American and British interventions, and the establishment of the GPRA had inspired in the Chinese government unbridled optimism that the Marxist narrative of world revolution was unfolding exactly as predicted. With each new development, the Chinese government and the state-run media ever more boldly highlighted the most militant aspects of communist ideology, which they had been happy to downplay in the cautious years immediately after the Bandung Conference. China’s independent leadership of Third World communism, its commitment to immediate revolution, and its claim to operate within a global purview were now the hallmarks of its foreign and domestic propaganda. The perhaps inevitable result of this heady optimism was a sort of cognitive dissonance on a national scale: the CCP’s agenda as it was now articulated could not accommodate the many setbacks that wracked the Arab revolutionaries in the years following 1958.

Because the Chinese put so much faith in the supposed unity of all peoples committed to revolution, Beijing was placed in an untenable position when that unity unraveled. As the fault lines of a new regional power struggle in the Middle East emerged, China was increasingly drawn away from Nasser and toward newer, more radical regimes. When members of the Iraqi Communist Party skirmished with nationalist, pro-Nasser military officers in the streets of Mosul in March 1959 following a failed assassination attempt on Qasim, the Chinese media took sides by chastising Nasser for his supposed complicity. The

39. This complicated period is discussed at length in Mon’im Nasser-Eddine, Arab-Chinese Relations, 216. The truth about how much Nasser was involved in the Mosul Incident remains unclear. Rumors of the UAR’s involvement stemmed from the fact that the Ba’th Party operatives who planned the assassination attempt on Qasim openly supported Nasser. The Chinese Foreign Ministry interpreted this event as an attack by Nasser on the pro-communist Qasim. This interpretation was certainly oversimplified, if not outright inaccurate. More information on the Mosul Incident can be found in Hanna Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary
following month, the CCP propagandist You Zhaoli openly accused Nasser in the pages of *Hongqi* of betraying the national liberation movement in the Middle East.\(^{40}\) The government of the UAR responded to this criticism by attacking both China and the Soviet Union in newspaper articles denouncing communism and pamphlets criticizing repression in Hungary and Tibet.\(^{41}\) In July, the Chinese government was outraged when Nasser expressed in an essay for *Life* magazine his frustration with the Chinese media’s negative portrayal of the UAR.\(^{42}\) Thereafter, officials in Cairo were unabashed in protesting both China’s meddling in the Middle East and its heavy-handed policies in Tibet.\(^{43}\) The UAR’s Foreign Ministry confronted a political officer in the Chinese embassy in Cairo in October 1960 and accused him of distributing propaganda in Egypt on behalf of the Iraqi Communist Party. The Chinese Foreign Ministry categorically denied that it distributed any such material to Egyptian citizens, but this issue was not resolved and the relationship between China and the UAR remained fragile.\(^{44}\)

Despite the viciousness with which Chinese and Egyptian newspapers impugned each other’s governments, it is important not to overstate the antagonism between Beijing and Cairo. The tone of politics in both countries was necessarily quite shrill, since each new government press release was magnified by an obsequious propaganda machine that relied on global conflict to promote the regime and distract from its domestic failings. There is no doubt that many politically minded Chinese were genuinely angered by the intensified

\(^{40}\) You Zhaoli, “Imperialism is the sworn enemy of Arab national liberation,” *Hongqi* 7 (April 1959).


\(^{42}\) Gamal Abdel Nasser, “Where I Stand and Why,” *Life*, 20 July 1959, 96-110. In this article, Nasser made no distinction between China and the rest of the Communist bloc. He also insinuated that Khrushchev was partly behind the attacks on the UAR in communist newspapers worldwide, something which certainly was not true in the case of the Chinese press. See also Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 16 July 1959, 107-00321-04, CFMA.

\(^{43}\) See Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 23 January 1960, 107-00204-03, CFMA.

\(^{44}\) Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 5 October 1960, 107-00204-08, CFMA.
persecution of communists in the UAR, just as many Egyptians really did sympathize with
the plight of Tibetans. Yet those scholars who have accepted militant editorials in official
newspapers at face value have vastly overstated the magnitude of China’s falling out with
Egypt. In fact, despite their differences, relations between China and the UAR remained
remarkably cordial. For example, just one day after Bakdash denounced Nasser in Beijing,
Mahmoud Fawzi and several other top Egyptian officials attended Chen Jiakang’s press
conference at the Chinese embassy in Cairo to congratulate the Chinese on the tenth
anniversary of their country’s establishment. In an atmosphere that the embassy reported to
be completely “friendly,” the Egyptians demanded that Communist China be admitted to the
United Nations and called for positive relations between their countries.45 By the early
1960s, the conflict between China and the UAR had dissipated to the point that the Egyptian
media was once again portraying the Chinese government as a reputable regime that shared
Egypt’s core values.46 It is also worth noting that in 1960, with China still immersed in the
Great Leap Forward, China and the UAR successfully negotiated a significant $60 million
trade deal, which was replaced the next year by a new agreement worth $100 million.47 The
Sino-Egyptian conflict of the late 1950s ought not to be ignored, but dwelling on the
temporary anger of the two countries’ governments reveals only so much about how the CCP
used the Arab world to reformulate its vision for China’s identity during the radical years of
the Great Leap Forward. After 1958, Sino-Egyptian relations ceased to be Beijing’s first
priority in the Middle East. Instead, China’s leaders found the best opportunity to articulate
their new agenda was through strengthening ties with the Algerian rebels.

45. Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 2 October 1959, 107-00370-04, CFMA.
46. Most effusive in its praise for China was Lutfi al-Khuli’s article on the eve of Zhou’s 1963 visit to Cairo.
Exporting Maoism to Algeria

In 1965, the Palestinian-born journalist Nasir al-Din al-Nashashibi published ʿArabi fi al-sin [An Arab in China], his contribution to the genre of Arab travel writing about China that had become popular in the previous decade. Like ʿAli Hamdi al-Jamal and Ihsan ʿAbd al-Quddus before him, al-Nashashibi was also a prominent editor of a mainstream Egyptian newspaper, in this case the state-owned daily Al Gomhuria. Al-Nashashibi, who resolutely backed Nasser because of the latter’s consistent sympathy for the Palestinian people, was not known for an understated writing style. Just as previous Arab journalists had done in the mid-1950s, he made no effort to temper his enthusiasm for the Chinese regime’s successes in transforming China’s economy, proclaiming that going to “China is not just a trip to the farthest reaches of the East; it is a way of life that cures poverty with production, conquers hunger with work, fights nature with diligence, and defeats backwardness with faith.”48

While most of al-Nashashibi’s comments about China closely resembled Arab travel writing from the mid-1950s, his appreciation for China’s commitment to spreading revolution revealed the profound change in priorities that had occurred since 1958. When al-Nashashibi proclaimed that China was “not merely a country one visits, but a school that teaches mankind how to live revolutions,” he was embracing China’s claim to be a leader among progressive Third World countries.49 Since 1958, the Chinese government had aggressively promoted its own history as a model for other countries seeking liberation from imperialist or neo-imperialist control. This notion of a successful “Chinese model” for revolutionary change dominated Sino-Arab relations after 1958 and transformed the strategies that top

48. Nasir al-Din Nashashibi, ʿArabi fi sin, 205.
49. Ibid.
Chinese leaders employed in their conversations with their Arab counterparts – and particularly in their dealings with the FLN.

Algeria’s chief attraction for the Chinese was the FLN’s claim to lead a mass-based popular uprising against French imperialism, which the Chinese identified as a similar goal to that of the CCP prior to 1949. The FLN relied on the support of peasants in rural areas and sought to engage all segments of Algerian society in the nationalist cause. Moreover, many – but not all – of the FLN’s most influential members spoke openly about their interest in socialism. In contrast to Nasser’s technocratic regime dominated by Egypt’s military elite, the FLN promised a broad-based revolution that could transform an entire society radicalized by sustained conflict. In light of these conditions, it is not surprising that many Chinese observers believed that the FLN was conducting a revolution in the Chinese style. As Beijing strengthened its ties with Algerian nationalists in 1958, a mutually beneficial relationship quickly developed. The Chinese gained the right to consider the Algerians devotees of Maoism and to advise members of the FLN on the proper methods for conducting a revolution. They were thus able to celebrate Algeria’s supposed adherence to the Chinese model as an endorsement of the CCP. For their part, the Algerians patiently listened to their hosts, feigned gratitude to the Chinese government, and received in return international recognition of the justice of their cause. Ultimately, Sino-Algerian relations during the Great Leap Forward were based on a shared understanding of the fact that China could use its paternalistic relationship with the Algerian rebels to prove the wisdom of the Chinese revolutionary model and thereby to confer legitimacy on the CCP.

50. Many of the FLN’s leaders had developed an interest in socialism while studying or working in France, where the Socialist Party enjoyed significant popularity. Messali Hadj’s Etoile Nord Africaine, arguably the first Algerian nationalist organization, had even joined the Popular Front in 1936 when Léon Blum became prime minister. Both Messali’s MNA and the rival FLN continued to espouse socialist ideals throughout the Algerian War. One study of Algerian history that emphasizes the role of socialism in the FLN’s revolutionary ideology is David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway’s Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970).
China’s interest in the Algerian revolution had actually begun long before Beijing recognized the GPRA in September 1958. As soon as the FLN launched its first attacks on local French authorities in Algiers in November 1954, the Chinese media spoke out in opposition to French colonialism.  

At the Bandung Conference the following spring, Zhou proclaimed China’s support for the peoples of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia and joined in the decision to censure French domination of those countries in the Conference’s final communiqué. Although the Conference delegates stopped short of demanding full independence for the North African countries under French control, the Bandung Conference established a precedent for international support for the Algerian cause, which the Chinese were able to exploit in the ensuing years. Some scholars have suggested that China’s interest in creating direct ties with the FLN dictated Beijing’s entire strategy toward North Africa throughout the 1950s, even going so far as to suggest that the Chinese government courted the Moroccan monarchy solely as a means to get closer to the Algerians. While this claim has been exaggerated, it is true that the Chinese were interested in fostering more direct


53. The final communiqué declared that the Conference attendees “took note” of colonialism in North Africa and specifically complained that “the basic right of the people to study their own language and culture has been suppressed” by French rule in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

54. See for example Donovan C. Chau, “The French-Algerian War, 1954-1962: Communist China’s Support for Algerian Independence,” in Military Advising and Assistance: From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815-2007, ed. Donald Stoker (London: Routledge, 2008), 113-114. Chau has uncritically followed the ideas put forth in Fritz Schatten’s Communism in Africa (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1966), 198. According to Chau, the establishment of trade relations between China and Morocco in October 1957, followed a year later by full diplomatic relations, facilitated the supply of the FLN. Chau’s citations to Schatten’s study of this topic do not justify this claim, since Schatten was more interested in Morocco’s role as an intermediary in supplying Algeria after the breakdown in China’s relations with the UAR in the autumn of 1959. Chau’s claim that China was more interested in Morocco for strategic reasons than for reasons of economic development was almost certainly correct — after all, Beijing repeatedly demonstrated throughout this period that it was willing to implement disastrous trade policies for political reasons — but Chau’s unsupported claims that China used Morocco primarily to supply the FLN during the late 1950s never rose beyond the level of speculation.
contacts with members of the FLN. Beginning in autumn 1957, the Chinese government also worked to incorporate Algeria into its domestic propaganda, culminating in mass demonstrations to celebrate a “national day of solidarity with the Algerian people” that November. Despite this gradual build-up in Chinese interest in Algeria, however, it was not until spring 1958 that the Chinese government began to focus on the Algerian cause in earnest, as represented by a massive campaign in March to mobilize domestic support for the FLN. This celebration coincided with the first of a series of widely promoted visits by Algerian dignitaries to China, the most significant of which were an FLN delegation including Brahim Ghafa in March 1958, an official delegation from the GPRA led by Benyoucef Benkhedda in December 1958, and a military delegation headed by Omar Oussedik in March 1959.

The Sino-Algerian relationship in the late 1950s was based primarily on ideology. The Chinese government and the FLN cooperated because doing so bestowed ideological legitimacy on both regimes. It is true that China provided the FLN with much-needed weapons with which to conduct military operations against the French, but it is important not to let this strategic relationship distract from the political reasons behind their alliance. On the whole, Western scholarship has exaggerated the military commitment that China made to the FLN, a legacy of Cold War-era hysteria exacerbated by the alarmism of the French government. French officials were adamant that other Western countries, chiefly the United States and the United Kingdom, should support France because of the supposed threat that China’s alleged interest in Algeria posed to the West. French conspiracy theories about Chinese “subversion” verged on the absurd. The French government insisted that Chinese touring acrobats and migrant chefs were the vanguard of a nefarious plot to dominate Africa. Prime Minister Guy Mollet insisted to an American senator in 1956, fully two years before the Chinese government began communicating directly with the FLN, that Algerians were
enamored with Mao. Gradually, skittish American observers came to accept the French position that Chinese “subversion” in North Africa posed a dramatic threat to Western dominance that must be immediately curtailed. Typical of this genre was a 1959 article in the prominent American news magazine *The Reporter*, which proclaimed that “the Chinese invasion of North Africa” had begun. The *New York Times* also espoused hysteria over Algeria’s alleged ties to Beijing, generally without hard facts to support its wild assertions. These fanciful claims, which have persisted in English-language scholarship about Sino-Algerian relations, must be carefully examined for the nature of China’s relationship with the FLN to be understood more completely.

The Chinese government certainly gave some military aid to the FLN between 1958 and 1962, but without full access to PLA or FLN records it is impossible to estimate how much. The French government was eager to keep track of Chinese weapons shipments to Algeria, but the clandestine nature of these deliveries, as well as the fact that arms had to be delivered through Egypt, Tunisia, or Morocco, meant that French bureaucrats could only guess. When the first FLN delegations traveled to Beijing in 1958, the French government

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55. Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35-36. Connelly dismissed these and other French concerns as “ridiculous,” but noted that “even ridiculous ideas can have an influence, especially when they are entertained at the highest levels.”


58. See for example Donovan C. Chau, “The French-Algerian War” and David H. Shinn, “Military and Security Relations: China, Africa, and the Rest of the World,” in *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 156. Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa*, 39 was particularly bold in declaring that there was “little doubt that Chinese material support” for Algeria was “substantial” after 1958, even though Larkin admitted that he could not find specific sources to support this claim. Mon’im Nasser-Eddine, *Arab-Chinese Relations*, 203 did not focus specifically on Algeria, but it perpetuated the usual framework of analysis by citing Edmond Taylor’s questionable article in *The Reporter* as its only evidence that Arabs across North Africa were enamored with China’s military potential.

correctly assumed that the Algerians asked the Chinese government to supply arms, but they incorrectly believed that Zhou promised as much aid as the FLN required “without restrictions or conditions.”60 As the Algerian War dragged on, French officials began to attribute more and more ambitious plans for intervention to the Chinese government. A May 1960 report circulated within the French Foreign Ministry, for example, alleged without evidence that Beijing wanted to send Soviet MiG fighters to the Algerian rebels, but that Moscow had demurred.61 Ultimately, Chinese military assistance did help the FLN to sustain its war against the French. One historian who conducted interviews with many FLN members concluded that aid from China was the most important factor in the modernization of the Algerian forces after 1958. In total, he estimated that the Chinese supplied as much as $30 million worth of material aid to the FLN by the end of 1959.62 While there is no doubt that Chinese backing had a substantial impact on the Algerian war effort, it is necessary to keep such statistics in perspective. One relatively level-headed French official in Hong Kong noted in 1959 that China delivered weapons only in small quantities that were more useful for China’s propaganda than for the FLN’s military initiatives.63 Benkhedda subsequently admitted in an interview that Chinese promises of support were important mostly because they raised the morale of Algerian troops, not because of the actual number of weapons shipped to the FLN.64 Despite the uproar that China’s supposed support for the FLN caused in the Western press, historians must be careful not to overstate its military significance.

61. B. de Menthon, French ambassador in Lisbon, to Foreign Ministry, 21 May 1960, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
63. Gérard Raoul-Duval, French consul general in Hong Kong, to Foreign Ministry, 15 March 1959, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
It is particularly important to dispel the enduring notion that the Chinese government supplied trained “volunteers” to the FLN to participate directly in the fight for independence. Although the French government was perpetually preoccupied with rumors of the impending arrival of Chinese soldiers, this threat never materialized. As early as December 1958, some French Foreign Ministry officials were convinced that China was sending men as well as money through its contacts in Egypt and Morocco.65 French reports on the visits of FLN delegations to Beijing between 1958 and 1960 almost universally stated that the Algerians were asking the Chinese to send soldiers to help them, an assertion that is not corroborated either by Chinese Foreign Ministry documents or by the memoirs of the Algerians who undertook these missions.66 In reality, it was not until autumn 1960 that Ferhat Abbas formally requested Chinese technicians and experts.67 Even then, top Algerian officials, especially Abbas and Belkacem Krim, did not fully agree whether their appeals for Chinese assistance should be intended literally or as a tactic for putting international pressure on the French government; as a result of their inconsistent demands, Mohammed Harbi (an FLN member who subsequently became a prominent historian) reported, Mao was confused and thus not eager to commit troops to Algeria.68 Nevertheless, French policymakers continued to obsess over reports of Chinese volunteers. By June 1960, the French government was trying unsuccessfully to substantiate American rumors that the corpse of a dead Chinese

soldier had been discovered on the battlefield. In November, French officials fretted over the possibility of “Chinese hordes” passing through Tunisia, although the Tunisian government insisted that it would not permit such an incursion. The following month, the French Foreign Ministry reported that a contingent of Chinese soldiers bound for Algeria had reached Albania. Widespread fear of communist “subversion” in North Africa spurred these rumors, which quickly became part of the popular imagination. Even today, they distract from a more measured interpretation of Chinese assistance to Algeria, which was never as substantial as contemporary policymakers and subsequent historians have been quick to assume.

Documents preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives reveal how Zhou and other Chinese diplomats went to great lengths to deny the FLN’s requests for material support while still preserving their country’s relations with the Algerian government in Cairo. Prior to the first visit of FLN representatives to Beijing in March 1958, the Foreign Ministry contrived a pretext to avoid supporting the Algerian cause directly, saying that Chinese military support for Algeria would give the United States an “excuse” to intervene and suppress the Algerian revolution. Zhou bluntly told his visitors:

We are not not supporting you. The fire in our hearts is hot. But we think not helping you is better than helping you. Supporting you will give you many more difficulties. Of course, we will always support you politically and morally.

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69. Hervé Alphand, French ambassador in Washington, to Foreign Ministry, 14 June 1960, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
70. Gérard Raoul-Duval, French ambassador in Tunis, to Foreign Ministry, 17 November 1960, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
71. Guy de Girard de Charbonnières, French ambassador in Athens, to Foreign Ministry, 10 December 1960, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
72. “Guanyu jiejian aierjiliya minzu jiefang junxian fuzeren shi [Materials regarding the people in charge of meeting with the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale],” 27 May 1958, 107-00166-03, CFMA.
73. “Canjia ‘zhi a ri’ waibing huodong qingkuang huibao [Report on the circumstances and activities of the
Zhou’s suggestion was that the FLN ought to ask Nasser for aid rather than rely on China; the Chinese would in turn be able to give some assistance to the UAR if absolutely necessary.\(^{74}\) Ghafa, on behalf of the FLN, responded by telling Chen Yi that he accepted the plan to communicate with Cairo rather than directly with Beijing.\(^{75}\) The Chinese Foreign Ministry also hoped that observing “Algeria Day” would satisfy the FLN without requiring China to make a costly donation of weapons.\(^{76}\) A year later, the Chinese were still trying to evade Algerian requests for supplies. Defense Minister Peng Dehuai told the FLN’s military delegation in April 1959 that the Algerians were in a stronger position than the Chinese had been prior to 1949 because they already had better access to weapons. Peng then repeated Zhou’s excuse from a year prior about not wanting to attract the attention of the American government by arming the FLN.\(^{77}\) Perhaps surprisingly, the Algerians were generally resigned to accept this explanation. The members of the military delegation that met with Peng later told a group of Chinese diplomats in Moscow that they “got a lot out of this visit to China” because they “studied much of China’s valuable experience” in leading a revolution.\(^{78}\) For the Algerians who toured China, acquiring weapons became a secondary interest.

Instead of providing substantial direct military aid to the FLN, the Chinese government offered the Algerian rebels what it considered to be invaluable ideological support. Top Chinese officials met with all the Algerian representatives who came to Beijing to teach them, often in a remarkably patronizing manner, how best to carry out a revolution. The Chinese government hoped that these meetings would establish China as the paramount

\(^{74}\) Guanyu jiejian aerjiliya minzu jiefang junxian shi,” 27 May 1958, 107-00166-03, CFMA.
\(^{75}\) Summary of Ataf Daniyal and Brahim Ghafa’s visit to China, 25 March 1958, 107-00166-06, CFMA.
\(^{76}\) Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 10 March 1958, 107-00166-01, CFMA.
\(^{77}\) Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
\(^{78}\) Foreign Ministry memorandum regarding the reaction of the Algerian military delegation to its visit to China, 13 May 1959, 107-00190-05, CFMA.
ideological authority on Third World revolution. In March 1958, for example, Zhou personally addressed Ghafa’s delegation for two hours and fifteen minutes about “the basic problems of running a revolution” (including a forty-five-minute digression about the dangers of Eisenhower’s positive relations with Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba). Zhou also took time out of his schedule in September 1958 to expound in an interview with a group of Algerian students on the merits of learning from China’s revolutionary experience. Peng justified his own extended discourse about Chinese communism to the FLN’s military delegation by pointing out that triumphs in both China and Cuba proved that a leftist guerrilla uprising could be successful. Both Mao and Zhou also met the same delegation to present their own opinions about how to lead a military struggle. The goal of China’s leaders during these encounters was simply to be perceived as the ideological champion of the Algerian cause; as such, their actual content mattered little to the Chinese effort to foster the idea that they were taken seriously by revolutionaries in Africa.

According to the Chinese officials responsible for meeting visiting dignitaries from the FLN, the most important similarity between the Chinese and Algerian revolutions was that both were carried out primarily by poor peasants who were much weaker than their well-armed enemies. In order to overcome these disadvantages, it was necessary to be entirely self-reliant. Zhou highlighted this theme in his March 1958 meeting with Ghafa’s delegation, informing his guests that the FLN was following the exact path of the CCP, which had received little outside assistance during the Chinese Civil War. Zhou repeated these

79. “Canjia ‘zhi a ri’ waibing huodong qingkuang huibao,” 2 April 1958, 107-00166-06, CFMA.
80. Transcript of the conversation between Zhou Enlai and Algerian student representatives, 25 September 1958, 107-00167-06, CFMA.
81. Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
82. Transcript of Zhou Enlai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 5 May 1959, 107-00191-06, CFMA; Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.
83. “Canjia ‘zhi a ri’ waibing huodong qingkuang huibao,” 2 April 1958, 107-00166-06, CFMA.
comments in his September 1958 meeting with the Algerian students, with whom he discussed the importance of relying on peasant farmers rather than foreign support. Mao was even more adamant about the importance of human perseverance in the face of adversity. He told the FLN’s military delegation in March 1959 that they did not need airplanes to fight back against the full might of the French military, since in his experience even a single guerrilla fighter with a rifle could shoot down a fighter jet if he was sufficiently dedicated.

Mao preached resourcefulness, frugality, and tenacity as the defining qualities of a true national revolutionary spirit. These themes echoed a 1945 speech to model Chinese workers, to whom Mao had declared, “We stand for self-reliance. We hope for foreign aid but cannot be dependent on it; we depend on our own efforts, on the creative power of the whole army and the entire people.” In the late 1950s, his and Zhou’s repeated entreaties to their Algerian visitors to be self-reliant served three related goals: they justified China’s reluctance to provide significant military support to the FLN, magnified the accomplishments of the CCP prior to 1949, and reinforced the Maoist notion that people power could triumph over technological superiority. This last notion was a crucial aspect of the ideology the Chinese were presenting to the Algerians because it was a central tenet of the ongoing Great Leap Forward, in which the Chinese government implored its citizens to overcome their country’s economic backwardness simply by working harder.

In a sense, by declaring their confidence in the ability of the Algerian masses to succeed despite long odds, China’s leaders were internationalizing the ideology that drove the Great Leap Forward.

84. Transcript of the conversation between Zhou Enlai and Algerian student representatives, 25 September 1958, 107-00167-06, CFMA.
85. Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.
87. For example, Mao and other leaders insisted on the building of dams and large-scale irrigation projects without proper planning or equipment. See Frank Dikötter, Mao’s Great Famine, 27.
The Chinese also advised their Algerian pupils that a true revolution could only be achieved through the unwavering commitment of all Algerians to a long and arduous struggle. As Zhou explained to the visiting Algerian students, the most important condition that assured the success of their revolution was the total unity of the Algerian people. China’s leaders insisted that the FLN should take advantage of this unity and mobilize the peasantry to defeat the French by conducting ideological education both inside the military and among the general population. In his meeting with the FLN’s military delegation, Peng outlined how the Algerian rebels should be indoctrinated with the proper revolutionary sentiment. The PLA, he explained, carried out “political work” in order to strengthen the solidarity between the soldiers and the officers, to increase the understanding between the military and the ordinary people, and to root out enemies. Peng also mentioned the Korean War, during which he had commanded Chinese forces, as a time in which the PLA’s ideological education schemes had been particularly successful. Peng avoided more specific suggestions for ideological indoctrination in the military, but his general message was clear: he and others in the Chinese government expected the FLN to adopt the Chinese strategy for organizing their struggle against French rule. The particularly heavy-handed approach that the CCP employed in its attempts to mobilize its citizens in support of the official Maoist ideology was one of the most significant factors distinguishing Chinese communism from other anti-imperialist regimes. Whereas the Chinese could never have insisted that Nasser adopt this model within Egypt, the more radical and more desperate FLN provided an ideal opportunity for Beijing to adopt a receptive foreign pupil.

88. Record of the conversation between Zhou Enlai and Algerian student representatives, 25 September 1958, 107-00167-06, CFMA. Zhou, like other Chinese leaders steeped in the nationalist mindset of the time, would never have considered the possibility that the Algerian people might not actually be fully unified in their support for the FLN or their opposition to the French.

89. Record of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
The officials in the Chinese government tasked with analyzing the political situation in Algeria were so blinded by the ideological rigidity of the Great Leap Forward era that they could not perceive any significant difference between the experience of the early CCP and the present circumstances of the FLN. Both Foreign Ministry functionaries and elite leaders such as Mao and Zhou understood the FLN to be a fully socialist organization leading a Chinese-style revolution. The Chinese were heartened by the cooperation of the fledgling Parti Communiste Algérien (PCA) with the FLN, which had subsumed the nascent Algerian communist movement at the Soummam Congress in August 1956, forming what the Chinese recognized as a united front. The Chinese maintained contact with the former leaders of the PCA even after they disbanded their organization. Those Algerian communists occasionally wrote letters to Chinese leaders urging them to back the FLN. The PCA responded to the Chinese recognition of the GPRA by praising the Chinese for helping to sustain “the fight against imperialism” and promoting “national independence and dignity.” Nevertheless, Chinese leaders rarely discussed socialism directly with the Algerian delegations who came to visit Beijing in the late 1950s, preferring instead to focus on the military similarities between their struggle for supremacy in China and the FLN’s campaign against the French. Chinese officials assumed that the FLN would have to overcome precisely the same obstacles that the CCP had faced prior to 1949. Both Mao and Zhou repeatedly insisted in their separate conversations with the FLN’s military delegation in April 1959 that the Algerians

90. The Algerian Communist Party was weakened by its links with the French Communist Party, whose members explicitly supported the idea that Algeria should be part of France and voted in favor of legislation intended to suppress Algerian insurgents. Consequently, members of the Algerian Communist Party were, in a sense, compelled to choose between nationalism and communism. In July 1956, they voted to suspend their own party and join the FLN. See John Ruely, Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 165. The circumstances that forced Algerian leftists to focus primarily on nationalism to the exclusion of communism are also described in much greater detail in Emmanuel Sivan, Communisme et nationalism en Algérie, 1920-1962 [Communism and nationalism in Algeria, 1920-1962] (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1976), 227-241.

91. Central Committee of the Algerian Communist Party to the Central Committee of the CCP, 29 September 1958, 107-00162-05, CFMA.
would likely have to fight at least as long as the CCP – that is, 22 years – in order to win their own independence.\textsuperscript{92} According to the Chinese model, revolution was a transformative process that could not be abbreviated. The Chinese government refused to concede that Algeria’s circumstances might differ from those in China. By repeatedly emphasizing that the Chinese experience was entirely applicable to the Algerian context, it established China as the senior partner in its developing relationship with the FLN.

The Algerians, for their part, were fully willing to accept the Chinese characterization of the FLN as the ideological heir to the CCP. It became common for Algerian representatives to praise China publicly for the “moral support” its leaders conveyed through their dialogues with Algerian visitors.\textsuperscript{93} On occasion, Algerian visitors to China were even willing to ingratiate themselves with their hosts by suggesting that they were leading a socialist revolution as well as an anticolonial one. In a remarkable statement in December 1958, Benkhedda told his Chinese hosts that the establishment of socialism was “the purpose of the [Algerian] revolution.”\textsuperscript{94} More commonly, however, the members of the FLN’s delegations simply tried to establish a rapport with the Chinese government by praising it at every turn. The Chinese were doubtless ecstatic that their visitors – for example – expressed such fawning optimism at the potential of backyard steel furnaces, so enthusiastically praised the newly established communes, and appeared awed by the rising standard of living for Chinese workers.\textsuperscript{95} Representatives of the Algerian provisional government were quick to

\textsuperscript{92} Transcript of Zhou Enlai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 5 May 1959, 107-00191-06, CFMA; transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.

\textsuperscript{93} For example, Ahmed Ben Bella thanked Chinese ambassador to Algeria Zeng Tao for such moral support when he received his credentials in 1962. See Zeng Tao, “Wo de shouren dashi shengya,” 70.

\textsuperscript{94} Summary of the Algerian provisional government’s visit to China, 15 December 1958, 107-00165-02, CFMA. The context for this assertion was Benkhedda’s anger that the Soviet Union and other communist countries in Eastern Europe had not followed the Chinese lead in accepting the FLN and recognizing the GPRA.

\textsuperscript{95} Chinese embassy in Hanoi to the Foreign Ministry, 15 December 1958, 107-00163-02, CFMA; report from the Foreign Ministry’s national visitor reception office, 4 December 1958, 107-00165-02, CFMA.
flatter Mao and the rest of the CCP, whom they lauded as the champions of “one of the
greatest revolutions that history has ever known.”96 The Algerians who visited China in
December 1958 declared that Mao and Zhou cared so intensely about the Algerian cause that
it was “truly an honor” to listen to them in Beijing.97 All of the Algerian visitors to China
expressed gratitude for the lengthy lectures they received from top Chinese officials. After
Zhou’s two-hour, 15-minute lecture in March 1958, his Algerian listeners thanked him
tociferously for his candid advice.98 The members of the FLN delegation who visited China
in December 1958 stated several times that they wanted to be lectured by the Chinese about
how to lead a revolution because they believed that the CCP’s experience would be useful to
imitate.99

One can identify three particular reasons why the Algerian visitors to China were so
happy to accept the paternalistic treatment they received from their Chinese hosts and to
endorse the notion that the Chinese revolution could provide a model for the FLN. First, it is
important to note that many of the men the FLN dispatched to China were already
sympathetic to communism. Both Benkhedda and Oussedik, for example, had been members
of Messali Hadj’s socialist Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA) and had served on the central
committee of that party’s successor, the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés
Démocratiques (MTLD).100 Second, the Algerians hoped to flatter the Chinese into providing
them with military aid. While the FLN tended to accept the Chinese government’s excuses
as to why it could not comply with its requests, Algerian visitors to China nonetheless kept

96. Statement by the Algerian delegation in Cairo, 27 November 1958, 107-00165-04, CFMA.
97. Report from the Foreign Ministry’s national visitor reception office, 4 December 1958, 107-00165-02,
CFMA.
98. Report on Ataf Daniyal and Brahim Ghafa’s visit, 3 April 1958, 107-00166-06, CFMA.
99. Report from the Foreign Ministry’s national visitor reception office, 4 December 1958, 107-00165-02,
CFMA.
100. Benjamin Stora, Dictionnaire biographique de militants nationalistes algériens: ENA, PPA, MTLD,
Harmattan, 1985), 274, 301.
pressing for more direct Chinese support. In March 1958, for example, Ghafa graciously accepted the Chinese refusal to provide the FLN with weapons, but he insisted that Algerian nationalists be able to put their requests for aid directly to Chen Jiakang at the Chinese embassy in Cairo rather than have to rely on Nasser as an intermediary. The following December, the FLN requested 57mm and 67mm artillery. Ultimately, perhaps the most important reason why the FLN accepted China’s ideological superiority with such deference was that it desperately needed the legitimacy conferred by its relationship with the CCP. As Matthew Connelly has argued, Algeria did not win independence primarily because of the military struggle of the FLN, but through a “diplomatic revolution” by which the FLN gained the recognition of the international community in order to compel the French to grant concessions. In this context, the willingness of the Chinese to express ideological solidarity with the FLN and to give a public voice to the Algerian cause might have been even more valuable than the small amount of military aid it could have afforded.

Both the Chinese government and the FLN, therefore, stood to benefit from negotiations which, on the surface, may have seemed contrived, one-sided, and unproductive. Looking beyond the conversations about military aid can reveal an ideological dimension to Sino-Algerian relations that mattered much more to Beijing. By declaring itself the political patron of the FLN, the CCP advanced a central international role for China as the leader of revolutionary movements within the developing world. Its logic was simple: if the Algerians embraced the Chinese model of revolution and pledged to adopt it in their own struggle, then the CCP would gain prestige and legitimacy both at home and abroad. When the Chinese

101. Report on Ataf Daniyal and Brahim Ghafa’s visit, 3 April 1958, 107-00166-06, CFMA.
102. Report from the Foreign Ministry’s national visitor reception office, 4 December 1958, 107-00165-02, CFMA. Field artillery of these calibers were commonly used by both the Soviet and Chinese armies during this time period. The Algerians would have been familiar with Soviet S-60 anti-aircraft guns and ZiS-2 anti-tank guns, both of which had calibers of 57mm.
103. Matthew Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution.
government committed itself to pursuing positive relations with Arab countries at the Bandung Conference, it was not in a position to lecture Nasser’s government so forthrightly or so dogmatically. By contrast, the combination of the FLN’s commitment to radical military struggle and its isolation in the international community created the perfect opportunity for the Chinese government to articulate a new vision for its own relevance beyond China’s borders. The FLN was not the only African independence movement that China patronized in the years after 1958. Leftist anti-imperialist movements in Cameroon, Mali, and Tanzania all attracted Chinese attention as Beijing sought to deepen its connections with the African continent. This renewed interest in radical revolution fit the Chinese political agenda. With the country embroiled in the Great Leap Forward, during which Mao and other leaders demanded that the entire population mobilize to realize a true revolution, China’s relationship with the rest of the world had to adapt to reflect this uncompromising urgency. Consequently, the evolution of China’s support for the FLN must be interpreted as part of the Great Leap Forward.

**Algeria and the Great Leap Forward**

Although Beijing now placed much greater emphasis on violent revolution than it had during the Suez Crisis, the Chinese government’s approach to its relations with the Arab world remained fundamentally the same; between 1958 and 1961, the primary audience for China’s foreign policy initiatives was – as before – a domestic one. The rapid development of China’s relations with the FLN beginning in 1958 gave the Chinese government an opportunity to mobilize its citizens in support of the CCP. The ideological and political demands of the Great Leap Forward accorded extra significance to Mao’s long-professed goal of rousing ordinary Chinese citizens to action. Domestic mobilization was the hallmark of Mao’s vision for the Great Leap Forward, during which all levels of the government
bureaucracy used mass campaigns to coerce peasants and workers to strive to meet impossible production targets and construct a communist utopia seemingly overnight. China’s foreign policy was subsumed into this all-consuming drive for immediate economic and political transformation. Through rallies, speeches, propaganda, and state-organized campaigns, the Chinese government attempted to cultivate and channel popular anger at imperialist control of Algeria in order to ratify the successes of the CCP. This process followed almost exactly the principles of domestic mobilization employed during the Suez Crisis, especially the extreme hierarchical structure by which the central government micromanaged the circumstances under which its citizens could express themselves politically. Yet while the pro-Algeria demonstrations during the Great Leap Forward thus represented the continuation of the pro-Egypt rallies of 1956, their tone differed in two subtle but significant ways. First, the campaigns launched after 1958 offered slightly more scope for the direct participation of Arab communists. Second, in 1958, the Chinese government almost completely abandoned its previous strategy of using the triumphs of Sino-Arab relations to appeal to Chinese Muslims. Instead, the organizers of these rallies kept references to Islam to a minimum and focused solely on Algeria’s status as a fellow victim of Western imperialism.

The Chinese government highlighted the plight of the Algerian people during at least four mass gatherings in the late 1950s and early 1960s: “Support Algeria Day” on 30 March 1958, “Support Algeria Week” in March and April 1959, the National Day celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Communist state in October 1959, and a series of gatherings to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the Algerian War in November 1961. The first of these events, March 1958’s “Support Algeria Day,” was planned to coincide with the first visit of FLN representatives to Beijing so that they could attend the rally. In addition to these three mass meetings, the Chinese government
planned a variety of smaller demonstrations to reinforce its message about Algeria, such as one in support of a visiting Algerian artistic troupe in September 1960. Each of these events was accompanied by a concerted effort to educate the Chinese people about the Algerian cause. The state-run media relied primarily on newspaper articles to inform the public, but the central government also organized photography exhibitions and films to accompany some of the rallies. In November 1961, the Chinese government screened three Algerian films for a large audience in Beijing, broadcast one of them a second time on state-run television, and devoted many hours of the state-run radio channel to the Algerian War. The Chinese government always insisted on involving actual Algerians in its rallies, a practice reminiscent of how it had given center stage to an Egyptian professor in Beijing during the largest of the Suez Crisis protests. Not only did the presence of Algerian representatives humanize the FLN’s struggle in the eyes of the Chinese masses, but these men invariably thanked their Chinese hosts profusely for supporting Algeria, thereby endorsing the CCP’s revolutionary ideals before a mass gathering of Chinese citizens.

The “Support Algeria Week” celebrations of March and April 1959 offer a particularly clear glimpse into how the Chinese government organized the domestic response to the Algerian revolution. As always, the elite hierarchy of the central government laid out specific directives for other national and local offices and committees to follow to ensure that the event went according to plan. The timing of the week was chosen to coincide with the visit of the FLN military delegation, whose leader, Oussedik, was assigned to give the third
address of the day. With the exception of Oussedik’s speech, the Chinese government carefully delineated the times that would be allotted to each speaker. The vice chairman of the Chinese Asian-African Solidarity Committee, Li Dequan, was allotted five minutes to open the meeting. He was followed by the main address, for which the novelist and poet Guo Moruo, in his capacity as chairman of the Chinese People’s Committee to Preserve World Peace, was given twenty minutes. After Oussedik, the floor was ceded to representatives of China’s workers, women, Muslims, and youth organizations for a series of five-minute speeches. The attendees at the rally then approved a pre-written telegram of support to send to the Algerian people and were rewarded with the opportunity to watch a film. The government demanded that the event be attended by 1,500 people – a tiny number compared to the rallies that had filled Tian’anmen Square at the height of the Suez Crisis, but nevertheless a sizeable crowd for a mass meeting. Just as it had done during the Suez Crisis, the central government determined the slogans that demonstrators were allowed to chant during the meeting: “Welcome to the Algerian people who are bravely struggling for national independence,” “Long live the victory of the Algerian people’s struggle for national independence,” “Imperialism must get out of Africa,” and “Long live the solidarity of the Asian and African peoples.”

The high degree of official control over this rally followed a precedent established long before the beginning of the Great Leap Forward. On the whole, most aspects of the domestic response to Sino-Algerian relations did not differ noticeably from the similar reaction to the establishment of the Chinese alliance with Cairo.

One change that did result from the radical political context of the Great Leap Forward, however, was that the Chinese government emphasized communist development in the pro-Algeria demonstrations to a much greater degree than it had done in the rallies inspired by the Suez Crisis. Even so, it is important to note that explicit references to Marxism remained

rare both during the pro-Algeria rallies and in the official reports about them in the state-run press. Although one might have expected the CCP to draw attention to its ongoing projects to collectivize agriculture or to stimulate China’s industrial economy, the organizers of pro-Algeria events steered clear of economic issues entirely. Chinese speakers at these rallies generally only mentioned communism while declaring that the Algerian rebels had pledged total solidarity to the communist bloc, including the USSR and the “socialist” countries of Europe – even though the Chinese were well aware that Moscow did not plan to recognize the GPRA and that key members of the FLN had become extremely frustrated with Khrushchev.108 The most provocative reference to communism at rallies after 1958 was the official participation of members of Arab communist parties. For example, the organizers of the National Day celebrations of October 1959 invited not only Khalid Bakdash of the banned Syrian Communist Party, but also two members of the defunct PCA. Larbi Bouhali, the Party’s former general secretary, and Rachid Dalibey, a former member of its Politburo, both traveled to Beijing from Eastern Europe, where they were living in exile.109 Bouhali and Dalibey were happy to visit China, even though they understood fully that the Chinese were interested in them mostly because they could be the objects of propaganda within China.110

By prominently featuring Arab communists at major Chinese events, the Chinese government was breaking with its previous policy of dealing only with the ruling leaders of Arab states.

108. As early as 20 September 1958, just one day after Abbas announced the formation of the GPRA, the Chinese embassy in Cairo was informed by the Iraqi ambassador to the UAR that the Iraqi government did not expect the Soviet Union to recognize the Algerian government in the immediate future. See Chinese embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Ministry, 20 September 1958, 107-00162-01, CFMA. The Chinese Foreign Ministry’s own analysis of the Soviet position agreed that Moscow was not in a position to support the Algerians formally. After the Soviet government was informed of China’s decision to recognize the GPRA, the official Soviet response accepted that the two communist countries were in different situations and declared it acceptable that Moscow and Beijing were adopting different policies on this issue. See Chinese embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 19 September 1958; Chinese embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 23 September 1958; and Asia-Africa department of the Foreign Ministry to the Chinese embassies in Moscow, Cairo, and Baghdad, 26 September 1958, 107-00162-08, CFMA.

109. Chinese embassy in Prague to the central government, 16 September 1959, 107-00360-01, CFMA.

110. Central Committee of the PCA to the Central Committee of the CCP, 29 September 1958, 107-00162-05, CFMA.
An even more significant departure from the strategies by which Beijing had once courted Nasser was the remarkable lack of emphasis that the Chinese government placed on Islam in its dealings with the FLN. The foremost members of the China Islamic Association – particularly Bao’erhan and Da Pusheng – continued to have a role in China’s public diplomacy, but that role was dramatically curtailed. The China Islamic Association was still tasked with winning over potential Arab allies, but it no longer made Sino-Arab relations a significant part of its domestic propaganda. When Bao’erhan traveled to Iraq in spring 1959 as part of a cultural delegation that supported Qasim’s revolutionary government, his trip received scant attention in the Chinese media, in contrast to the fanfare that had accompanied his first two tours of Egypt and the Levant. In a March 1959 rally during Support Algeria Week, Da was allotted only five minutes of speaking time toward the end of the event, and the content of his speech was not widely disseminated. By contrast, at the largest pro-Egypt protests in November 1956, Muslims were accorded prominent roles throughout China and were featured at length in press reports on the demonstrations. The pro-Algeria rallies of 1958 and 1959 were also restricted to China’s most populous cities,

111. Just as the Foreign Ministry had arranged for al-Baquri to tour as many mosques as possible during his visit to China, it remained standard practice in 1958 and 1959 for the Chinese government to take its foreign Muslim visitors to religious events. For example, the Chinese government took Ghafa and Daniyal on a tour of the China Islamic Association’s Qur’anic school in March 1958, where both addressed a meeting of Chinese Muslim dignitaries. It should be noted that Daniyal was invited to participate in this event even though he was a Christian, underscoring the inherently secular perspective from which the Chinese government approached issues of religious affiliation. This gathering was reported only briefly in the Chinese press. See “Zhongguo yisilanjiao jingxueyuan he huimin xueyuan jihui huanying bulaxin jifan he dani’er [A gathering of the China Islamic Association’s Qur’anic studies college and the Hui people’s college welcomes Brahim Ghafa and Ataf Daniyal],” Renmin Ribao, 1 April 1958, 4.

112. Outside of China, however, Bao’erhan’s visit to Iraq has been the topic of considerable controversy in scholarship on the Cold War in the Middle East. Because Bao’erhan’s trip occurred just a few months before the Politburo of the Iraqi Communist Party agreed to adopt a slightly more strident position toward Qasim, some observers have seen a link between Chinese influence and the radicalization of the Iraqi Communist Party. Hanna Batatu, the foremost historian of leftist politics in Iraq, however, found no evidence whatsoever of a link between Bao’erhan’s visit, which ended in April, and the Politburo decisions made in July. See Hanna Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, 910. These same claims are also analyzed and dismissed in Yitzhak Shichor, The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy, 87-88.


114. See for example “Zhiyuan aiji, fandui qinlu, baowei heping,” Renmin Ribao, 6 November 1956.
especially Beijing and Shanghai, whereas in 1956 the government had organized some of the largest gatherings in provincial capitals with sizable Muslim populations, such as Lanzhou and Urumqi. On the whole, despite the Beijing government’s nominal efforts to involve the China Islamic Association in its efforts to engage with the FLN, the emphasis on Islam that had characterized the Suez protests two years prior vanished just a few months into the Great Leap Forward.

The pages of Zhongguo Musilin, the magazine of the China Islamic Association, made particularly clear how the radicalization of the Chinese government during the Great Leap Forward transformed the state’s attitude toward its Muslim citizens. Beginning with the February 1958 issue, the magazine abruptly ceased publishing articles trumpeting the existence of an inviolable connection between Chinese and Middle Eastern Muslims. Gone were the frequent articles celebrating China’s progress in establishing contact with Arab leaders. Gone even were the “Arab” folk tales that had added light-hearted humor to the magazine throughout 1957. Instead, on the rare occasions when Zhongguo Musilin did mention the Middle East, it was always divorced from the context of Islam. Da Pusheng’s February 1958 account of his attendance at an Asian-African congress in Cairo the previous December, for example, extolled Asian-African solidarity and included a photograph of Nasser, but it said nothing whatsoever about religion. As the Great Leap Forward intensified, the articles in Zhongguo Musilin became more strident in tone, praising those imams who had done their part to advance the campaign and calling out those who clung to “rightist” attitudes. By 1959, it was also common to find for the first time in the magazine’s pages articles about non-Muslim countries, such as a February 1959 celebration of Castro’s revolution in Cuba. The “pan-Islamic” logic that had governed the content of the Chinese

116. Yang Ying, “Guba, gangguo, women jianjue zhichi nimen [Cuba, Congo, we resolutely support you],”
government’s domestic propaganda prior to the Great Leap Forward was no longer evident; instead, the China Islamic Association promulgated a vision of Islam in which religious identity was to be sacrificed for the communist cause.

The Chinese government’s newly cautious attitude toward transnational Islamic solidarity was aptly illustrated by a long and didactic article by one Ma Feilong in the March 1958 issue of Zhongguo Musilin. That article, whose title boldly insisted that “the entire Islamic community is carrying out a big debate about socialism and thoroughly engaging in the anti-rightist struggle” at an Islamic conference in Gansu, was intended to correct supposed misconceptions held by certain Chinese imams. Ma specifically addressed the reasons why some Chinese Muslims remained skeptical of the CCP and of its attempts to construct socialism. The most revealing section of the article concerned the relationship between the CCP’s policy permitting complete religious freedom and the responsibilities incumbent on all Chinese Muslims as members of the Chinese nation. According to Ma, too many imams had not yet fully grasped the nuances of the minzu paradigm, which established an inviolable distinction between religion and ethnicity. While the Chinese government wholeheartedly encouraged the practice of Islam, religion was only one distinct component of Chinese Muslims’ multivalent identities. Since Hui people belonged to a minzu that traditionally spoke Chinese, they should strive to maintain that tradition. Consequently, Ma sharply criticized the idea that members of the Hui minzu ought to study Arabic in school or write with the Arabic script:

We also found that there are some imams who are still relatively unsure of the concepts of minzu and religion and of the view of the Hui people’s script-writing question. In the course of the debate, everybody unanimously believed that minzu and religion should be two separate things that should not

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Zhongguo Musilin, February 1959, 11-12.
be spoken of together. The Qur’an was sent down in Arabia and was written in Arabic script; this was to make sure that Arabs understood it. Our Muslims respect the Qur’an, so they also respect the writing of Qur’anic verses in Arabic. But we definitely should not regard Arabic as the Hui people’s script just because they believe in Islam. For this reason, the imams undertook to criticize the unrealistic opinion of certain people who requested that an Arabic course should be added to the primary school curriculum. They believed that advocating the Arabic script as the script for the Hui people [...] was neither beneficial nor necessary. The imams also pointed out that the fact that the Arabic script was not the script of the Hui people did not mean that they could not study it and should not imply that the government does not support the reading of scripture. If there are still problems in understanding this, we should explain this question clearly to the masses so as to avoid misunderstandings.\footnote{Ma Feilong, “Gedi yisilanjiao jie jinxing shehuizhuyi da bianlun, shenru fan you douzheng [The entire Islamic community is carrying out a big debate about socialism and thoroughly engaging in the anti-rightist struggle],” Zhongguo Musilin, March 1958, 7-8.}

In other words, Ma hoped to fight back, on behalf of the CCP’s religious bureaucracy, against the notion that Chinese Muslims could create an alternative ethno-linguistic identity, rooted in their kinship with Middle Eastern Muslims, that downplayed their integration into the Chinese nation. This interpretation of the minzu paradigm may not have directly contradicted any public position that the China Islamic Association had taken in the mid-1950s, but Ma’s explicit condemnation of Arabic language study would certainly have seemed out of place in earlier issues of Zhongguo Musilin. Beginning with al-Baquri’s visit to China in May 1955, the Chinese media had celebrated those Chinese Muslims who read and spoke competent Arabic. At that time, the government relied on Hui scholars who had studied in Cairo before 1949 to lead its diplomatic efforts in the Middle East. Privately, officials in the Chinese Foreign Ministry had insisted to al-Baquri that all Chinese Muslims could study Arabic as
well as Chinese in their own schools.\textsuperscript{118} As a result of these conversations, the Egyptian press had proclaimed (incorrectly) upon al-Baquri’s return to Cairo that Chinese Muslims studied the Qur’an and Middle Eastern history in state-run schools.\textsuperscript{119} At the height of the Great Leap Forward, however, the China Islamic Association was prepared to renounce this particular connection between the Chinese and Arab cultures because the political pressures of the day placed far greater significance on emphasizing secular rather than religious identity.

The attempts of the Chinese government in 1958 to excise the Islamic component of Sino-Arab relations reflected its anti-religious attitude during the Great Leap Forward. Whereas the CCP had protected and even promoted various religions in China throughout the early 1950s, the Great Leap Forward brought a radical reversal of this policy. The CCP’s collectivization efforts, which forced peasants out of their homes and into communal barracks, all but destroyed traditional customs. Throughout China, ancestral places of worship were turned into commissaries or storage areas to serve the communes; in some cases, celebrated temples were even dismantled to provide fuel for small-scale industrial projects.\textsuperscript{120} The forward march of “progress,” at least according to the local bureaucrats under intense pressure to implement the ideals of the Great Leap Forward, made no exceptions for minority cultures. Non-Han areas were among the hardest hit by the country-wide famine that these new policies created. For example, in the multi-ethnic but predominantly Muslim parts of Gansu south of Lanzhou, particularly in the autonomous county around Linxia, the appalling conditions drove some peasants to cannibalism.\textsuperscript{121} The combination of mass starvation and the violation of traditional religious practices inspired the

\textsuperscript{118} Summary of Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri and Mustafa Kamil’s visit, May 1955, 107-00007-03, CFMA.
\textsuperscript{120} Frank Dikötter, \textit{Mao’s Great Famine}, 167-168.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 321-322.
formation of small-scale resistance groups among Muslims and Buddhists in devastated areas of China’s most remote provinces. The main Tibetan Rebellion of 1959, which ended when the PLA brutally re-established control in Lhasa and the Dalai Lama fled to India, had begun before the Great Leap Forward; a smattering of other more localized Tibetan revolts, however, particularly in areas with many ethnic Tibetans that had been attached to Sichuan and Qinghai, were directly precipitated by the ruthless ways in which the CCP implemented the reforms of the Great Leap Forward in those areas.\(^\text{122}\) When the CCP’s harsh treatment of religious minorities provoked open dissent, it was inevitable that the government would clamp down even more tightly on expressions of religion.

As the Chinese government shifted away from its previous emphasis on Islam in domestic propaganda regarding Sino-Arab relations, pursuing closer relations with Algeria made perfect sense. While the leaders of the FLN were pious Muslims who did rely to some extent on Islam to rouse the Algerian masses behind their cause, their simultaneous commitment to socialism made it easy for the Chinese press to de-emphasize the relevance of Islam to Algerian nationalism. After three years of highlighting the shared cultural heritage of Chinese and Egyptian Muslims, the increasingly anti-religious Chinese government needed a different ally. One might object that, by 1958, Nasser’s Free Officers and the Algerian FLN advocated very similar ideologies: both had subsumed the most significant communist opposition into their ruling coalition, both openly espoused certain leftist ideals, and both incorporated references to Islam into their overall nationalist frameworks. These similarities, however, were of little relevance to the Chinese. What mattered was how the Chinese government could define Algeria in Chinese discourse. As the Great Leap Forward

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shattered the political logic of the past, focusing the domestic response to Sino-Arab relations on the Algerian struggle for independence gave China a fresh start.

Searching for Continuity in Sino-Arab Relations

It is often tempting to conceive of modern Chinese history, and of the history of Communist Chinese foreign policy in particular, as a series of divergent policies punctuated by abrupt and sometimes contradictory changes in strategy. The need to explain so many radical shifts in direction, including such self-destructive initiatives as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, has compelled historians to focus on the many turning points at which China’s foreign policy was fundamentally transformed. This historiographical perspective has influenced most Western scholarship on China’s relations with the Middle East, which has almost universally portrayed Beijing’s willingness to antagonize Nasser in 1959 as the complete abandonment of its conciliatory policies during the Bandung era. If one accepts this characterization, it is logical to ask which approach – the tolerance of the mid-1950s or the militance of the late 1950s – more genuinely represented the international aspirations of the CCP. Not only is this question impossible to answer satisfactorily, but it is in some ways reminiscent of the outdated biases of the crudest Cold War-era scholarship, which purported to reveal the “real” China as a dangerous regime lurking behind a temporary facade of rationality. Regardless, it is more profitable to pose the opposite question: in what ways did China’s relations with the Arab world remain constant before and after the inception of the Great Leap Forward? After all, it was the very same men at the top of the CCP hierarchy – especially Mao and Zhou – who bore the ultimate responsibility for guiding Chinese diplomacy throughout the entire decade. The most sophisticated recent scholarship on modern Chinese history has identified remarkable continuities underlying much of the past century, in some cases stretching even across the
1949 divide. Just as Chen Jian has challenged the conventional wisdom that 1955 marked a definitive break with previous Chinese foreign policy, it is wise to treat with skepticism the notion that the first years of the Great Leap Forward heralded an equally definitive return to the past.

On the most fundamental level, the individuals and institutions that the Chinese government had chosen to promote Sino-Arab relations in 1955 continued to carry out the most important initiatives of China’s public diplomacy in the Middle East. The China Islamic Association, under the leadership of Bao’erhan and Da Pusheng, was still charged with presenting China as an integral part of the Islamic world. Although China’s domestic propaganda de-emphasized Islam beginning in 1958, Beijing never abandoned the institutional connections that the China Islamic Association had established with the Arab Middle East. Even at the peak of the anti-religious fervor of the Great Leap Forward, Da still greeted Arab visitors on behalf of all Chinese Muslims and still represented Muslims at official rallies, albeit with a significantly reduced role. Moreover, Bao’erhan’s 1959 tour of Iraq was, for all intents and purposes, a reprisal of his 1956 visits to Egypt and the Levant. Indeed, on the whole, for at least the first year after Qasim’s coup, the Chinese government treated republican Iraq in much the same manner as it had treated Nasser’s Egypt in 1955.

Another institution that retained its prominence during the Great Leap Forward was the national Asian-African People’s Solidarity Committee. Chaired for many years by Guo Moruo, the committee continued to promote China to both foreign and domestic audiences as a champion of all non-communist opponents of Western imperialism. This committee was part of a global network established in the aftermath of the Bandung Conference. Well into the 1960s, the Chinese government continued to patronize the cultural programs these

123. For a discussion on the question of continuity in Chinese history, see Paul A. Cohen’s China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), Ch. 5.
institutions fostered, such as international gatherings of writers (including Guo) and of young people. Despite its mounting frustration with some countries that had participated in the original Bandung Conference, the Chinese government never ceased celebrating the achievements of Bandung or employing the rhetoric of Asian-African solidarity that had gained currency because of it.

Perhaps the most important continuity in China’s Middle East policy before and after 1958 was the enduring consensus that developments in Sino-Arab relations could and should be manipulated to encourage domestic mobilization. While the mass rallies in Beijing and other Chinese cities in support of Algeria did not involve as many people or reach as many cities as the Suez protests of 1956, they did reveal the Chinese government’s sustained interest in channeling widespread popular anger at foreign imperialism into political expression at home. In addition to the several “Support Algeria” events throughout the late 1950s, the Algerian cause was incorporated on several occasions into Chinese National Day celebrations, which marshaled the largest audiences of any Chinese rallies during this period. Pro-Algeria gatherings continued well into the 1960s; even in 1963, a full year after Algeria finally gained full independence, the Beijing municipal government was still organizing mass meetings in support of Algeria. The idea that events in the Middle East could provoke a domestic political response remained an important component of the Chinese Communist regime’s strategy for engaging with the Arab world. One might even view the decision to include Bakdash in the 1959 National Day celebrations as part of this same impulse; although his speech indicated the end, at least temporarily, of the efforts of China’s leaders to

124. Guo participated in the first Asian-African Writers’ Conference in Tashkent in October 1958 and in the organization established at that conference, the Permanent Bureau of Asian and African Writers. For a more detailed list of all these minor conferences, see Bruce D. Larkin, China and Africa, 46.

125. These meetings included one to greet a visiting Algerian workers’ delegation in May 1963 and one to greet a government delegation in October.
ingratiate themselves with Nasser, it was nevertheless yet another attempt to employ Arab politics in the endless quest to incite ordinary Chinese citizens to demonstrate and mobilize.

Despite the unpredictability of international politics in the late 1950s and the ups and downs in its relationship with Cairo, the Chinese government never wavered in its belief that Sino-Arab relations could be manipulated in a manner that reinforced or re-articulated Chinese nationalism. Ultimately, China’s Middle East policy was designed to sell a vision of China as a powerful and unified country that stood up for its progressive allies around the globe. The Great Leap Forward compelled the Chinese government to adapt this vision to more radical circumstances by underscoring that the Chinese could teach the rest of the world how to accomplish a leftist revolution. When the government utilized Sino-Arab relations to emphasize China’s radicalism rather than its internal unity, it was tweaking but not abandoning its nationalist message. The supposed success of the Chinese revolutionary model was something of which Chinese citizens were proud. The fact that the FLN was willing to adopt that model – or, at least, to make public statements about how much its leaders hoped to learn from the Chinese Communist experience – was an endorsement of the CCP’s leadership within China. The goal of instilling a sense of pride in the Chinese nation was a consistent aspect of Chinese foreign policy that transcended all domestic political upheavals. In mid-twentieth-century China, as in other postcolonial countries, foreign policy was never independent of the constant project of defining the nation.

When Zeng Tao arrived in Algiers in 1962 to take up his appointment as China’s first ambassador to Algeria, he was delighted to find a country where many people professed great interest in Chinese culture and society. Zeng was particularly heartened to meet a governor of a remote Algerian province who had studied a French edition of Mao Zedong’s collected writings and who was eager to discuss its contents with his Chinese guest. The Chinese media jubilantly reported that people in all parts of Algeria, whether urban or rural, knew Mao’s name and admired his theories. One journalist recounted in Renmin Ribao that, on a May 1962 visit to Tlemcen, he was swarmed by Algerians who shook his hand and asked him to convey their greetings to Mao. The same reporter interviewed an Algerian who insisted that his greatest life goals were to visit China and Cuba to study the “revolutionary experiences” of those countries. He explained that he and all his Algerian colleagues had read Mao’s collected works while imprisoned by the French army during the war. The Chinese leaders who interacted with visiting Algerian dignitaries, beginning with the first contacts between the Chinese government and the FLN in 1958, seem to have genuinely believed that the Algerian people were eager to adopt certain aspects of Mao’s ideology. Indeed, this notion that Algerians were interested in learning from Communist China was not merely propaganda. Many Algerians, including some key figures within the FLN, were genuinely intrigued by the Chinese revolution and by Chinese communism. Benyoucef Benkhedda, who served as president of the second iteration of the GPRA from 1960 to 1962,

earned the moniker “the Chinaman” because he regarded China with such enthusiasm. In contrast to Egypt, where even the most avid defenders of China never truly engaged with the intricacies of Maoist doctrine, Algeria appeared to many to be a setting in which Chinese-style communism had the potential to flourish.

Yet despite this widespread interest in Chinese culture and ideology, Algeria never produced any significant political faction whose members would have willingly characterized themselves as Maoists. After independence, as in Egypt, Algerian leftists steered clear of Chinese communism and primarily advocated Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism as a more useful model for Algeria’s development. Both during and after the Algerian War, the leaders of the FLN were selective in their appropriation of Chinese ideas, and certainly none would have proposed that Algerians should attempt to import Maoist ideology in its totality. Moreover, no Algerian party or movement ever became identifiably “pro-Chinese,” as was the case in leftist politics in both Palestine and Oman in the late 1960s and 1970s. The lack of an overt ideological relationship between China and any particular Algerian faction does not mean, however, that there is no profit in understanding the effect of Chinese communism on Algerian politics. By 1958, Algerian nationalists were eager to interact with foreign governments to glean new ideas from around the world. In part because Mao’s government was so consistent in its support for the FLN, China was one of the countries that had a particularly profound influence on Algerian political discourse. Algerians perceived Mao’s China to be relevant to their own plight for two particular reasons: it illuminated a potential path to military victory and it symbolized the order and unity that the FLN’s leaders hoped to impose upon their own country. With the war against France going badly and Algerian society deeply divided, China became an especially attractive ally.

The FLN began to pursue positive relations with China at a time when it was on the defensive. Charles de Gaulle’s new government in Paris had reorganized French military operations in Algeria, which severely weakened the fighting power of the FLN. In September 1958, the political fortunes of the FLN reached their nadir as well. Most telling, just nine days after the formation of the GPRA, the FLN was unable to incite Algerian civilians to boycott de Gaulle’s referendum to approve the constitution of the new Fifth Republic; the 79.9% turnout by the Muslim population embarrassed the nationalist movement as a whole and demonstrated that the FLN no longer commanded the same prestige it had once enjoyed. With the authority of the FLN in doubt, the door was open for other Algerian organizations to challenge its claim to be the sole representative of the Algerian people. The FLN’s biggest rival was the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) of Messali Hadj. The MNA had grown out of Messali’s Étoile Nord-Africaine and the left-wing PPA, both of which Messali had founded in Paris, and it enjoyed considerable support among Algerian expatriates in France. Throughout the Algerian War, the FLN and the MNA carried out a fierce and bloody guerrilla conflict that at times was even more brutal than the fighting between the FLN and the French army. Animosity between the two Algerian factions peaked in May 1957, when FLN fighters massacred 374 villagers in the town of Melouza. While the FLN ultimately prevailed militarily over the much weaker MNA, Messali continued to challenge the FLN’s claim to enjoy widespread support from the Algerian people. One of the reasons that the FLN went to such effort to earn recognition from foreign countries for the GPRA was that it hoped international endorsements would confirm its right to speak for all Algerians.

Declarations of support from the Chinese government also helped the FLN to incorporate Algerian communists who had previously been members of the PCA into their...
organization. When the leaders of the PCA agreed to subsume their party under the umbrella of the FLN in summer 1956, they did so because they believed in the importance of unity in the nationalist struggle. At the Soummam Congress that August, the FLN declared the dissolution of all previously existing political organizations in Algeria and asserted that the FLN alone would represent the Algerian people. The incorporation of the Algerian communists into the nationalist movement mirrored the experience of communist parties in other Arab countries, particularly in Egypt, where Nasser’s nationalist foreign policy inspired several communist groups to disband in support of Nasser’s Revolutionary Command Council. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, leftist organizations in the Arab world wrestled with the tension between their commitment to Marxism and their stalwart support of either pan-Arab or state-based nationalism. Non-communist nationalist leaders such as Nasser and the top members of the FLN had to tread carefully in order to secure the allegiance of these former leftist groups. In Algeria, as in Egypt, pursuing relations with Communist China was one strategy to ensure that the government’s leftist credentials were intact, thereby co-opting the ideological message of their potential domestic rivals. In Algeria, Chinese support was particularly important because it emphasized the value of Algerian nationalism. The PCA had traditionally enjoyed strong ties to French communists, but the latter focused on class warfare at home and refused to support the liberation movement in Algeria. The FLN’s association with China’s communist government allowed the former to promote an ideology that was both leftist and nationalist, which therefore could appeal to wary Algerian communists without diluting the FLN’s nationalist message.

The internecine feuds within Algerian politics went a long way toward explaining why members of the FLN who visited Beijing in the late 1950s and early 1960s were so willing to

offer public praise to the Chinese government, even though they received only a small amount of military aid in return. Relations with China afforded the FLN an ideological basis on which to promote Algerian unity. Chinese history outlined a scenario by which the FLN, following the Chinese model of total unity and relentless guerrilla warfare, could defeat the stronger French military and establish a sovereign nation-state. This vision for Algerian independence lent credibility to the FLN where it needed it most: within Algeria. It roused reluctant adherents to the nationalist struggle and indoctrinated supporters with a sense of mission. Just as Nasser and other nationalist Egyptian commentators had found Sino-Egyptian relations in the mid-1950s useful for mobilizing Egyptian support behind Nasser’s revolution, so too the FLN’s leaders relied on their burgeoning relationship with the Chinese government to portray their organization as the sole legitimate exponent of the Algerian nationalist movement.

The Internationalization of the Algerian Revolution

When the FLN’s leaders began to pursue closer relations with foreign countries, they paid deliberate and meticulous attention to the effects of those new relationships on the struggle against the French. The GPRA’s Minister of the Interior, Lakhdar Bentobbal, made clear how significant the FLN considered its foreign policy in his oft-quoted November 1960 plan for the political organization of the GPRA. “Each of our organs,” Bentobbal admonished his colleagues, whether “military, political, diplomatic, social, cooperative, or otherwise,” was instructed to “pursue its area of concern with the same objective: INTERNATIONALIZATION.”

Despite the intensity with which members of the FLN sought to establish relationships with countries around the world, however, the relevance of

its foreign policy remained underappreciated in Western scholarship for decades. Matthew Connelly finally brought this topic into the foreground in his 2002 study *A Diplomatic Revolution*, which helped to shift the attention of historians onto the final five years of the Algerian War. Connelly argued that the FLN was successful at securing independence for Algeria in part because its foreign policy created an international consensus that Algeria constituted a distinct nation. More recently, Jeffrey Byrne’s doctoral research has built upon Connelly’s book by analyzing how the FLN’s own ideology evolved as a result of its external relationships. In particular, Byrne explained how the FLN came to place much greater importance on its own role in promoting global revolution as a result of its diplomatic efforts. Together, Connelly’s and Byrne’s analyses of the international history of the FLN demonstrated the significance of foreign policy in shaping the course of the Algerian War.

As the FLN interacted more and more with foreign countries, its leaders encountered a multitude of international influences, which helped them to hone and articulate a revolutionary agenda for Algeria. One of the first historians to link Algeria’s political development to the international context that helped shape it was Robert Malley, who presented a particularly fluid notion of Algerian ideology. His chief concern was to explain the attraction and eventual decline of Third Worldism in Algeria and elsewhere from the 1950s through the 1980s, by which time any notion of Asian-African solidarity had been thoroughly discredited. Unlike Connelly and Byrne, Malley did not attempt to analyze the international relations of either the FLN or independent Algeria, instead focusing on how the country’s intellectuals interpreted global politics. Malley asserted that Algerians first took an interest in Third Worldism at a time when they were in close contact with other cultures, both European and non-Western. He traced the development of Third Worldism as an attempt to

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negotiate competing socialist, assimilationist, and traditionalist impulses among the Algerian elite. By appreciating the complex and sometimes contradictory origins of this ideology, Malley depicted a society willing to explore and experiment, rather than one whose political identity was set in stone. Building on Malley’s conclusions, Byrne adopted a similar perspective by taking special care to portray the leaders of the FLN as a group of individuals consciously searching for an effective guiding ideology. Byrne completely rejected the Cold War-era focus on definitive and prescriptive labels and sidestepped the question of whether the FLN could be interpreted as a “communist” organization. Instead, he recognized that multiple versions of Marxist dogma – French, Soviet, Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban – were all deeply influential to certain FLN members at certain times. Byrne depicted the FLN’s political coming of age in the international arena as a long process of trying to reconcile the Marxist, nationalist framework it had inherited from Messali with the multitude of new ideas its members encountered from their contacts across the globe. By asserting that the FLN’s ideological development was the result of a sustained and purposeful search for useful new ideas, Byrne ascribed to the Algerian people great creativity in appropriating potentially useful foreign concepts. His presentation of Algerian ideology as an eclectic collection of differing concepts that evolved according to the needs of the nationalist movement is an apt starting point from which to analyze Algerians’ fascination with Chinese communism. Byrne’s work is a reminder that Algerians were interested in appropriating specific foreign ideas without adopting their entire political philosophies and that historians

must focus on the specific value that individual Chinese symbols and concepts offered to the Algerians who admired them.

China’s relationship with Algeria has not received nearly as much attention as the contemporaneous relations between China and Egypt, which have been chronicled in great detail by previous historians. Pre-independence Algeria, on the margins of the Arab world, appeared only incidentally in the most important studies of China’s broader involvement in the Middle East. For example, Yitzhak Shichor was only interested in the Egyptian government’s response to China’s support for Algeria, not in the reactions of the Algerians themselves. Similarly, Lillian Craig Harris summarized the significance of the Algerian War for China’s campaign to portray itself as a supporter of radical movements, but she paid no attention to what Chinese support meant for the Algerian cause. Harris, like most historians of Sino-Arab relations, was too preoccupied with Chinese military aid to the FLN to consider the political dimensions of their relationship. Algeria has been given more prominent status by historians of China’s relations with African countries, since the FLN was one of the first liberation movements on that continent to develop close ties to Beijing. Nevertheless, these historians have also focused on China’s policy toward Algeria rather than the Algerian response; in so doing, they have described China as a dynamic actor on the international stage and the FLN as a passive, desperate organization reduced to begging for weapons and recognition. Bruce Larkin, for example, interpreted China’s quick recognition of the GPRA as an indication that China was pursuing a policy independent from that of the Soviet Union, but he made no attempt to analyze what Chinese recognition might have meant.

11. Post-independence Algeria has received more attention in scholarship about Sino-Arab relations because of Zhou’s visit to Algiers in December 1963.
12. Yitzhak Shichor, The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy, 98.
13. Lillian Craig Harris, China Considers the Middle East, 115.
for the FLN. The vast majority of historical literature about Algeria, which one might expect to analyze foreign support for the FLN in greater detail, disregards most of the FLN’s external initiatives and mentions China only in passing, if at all. Only recent scholars of Algeria’s international history, principally Connelly and Byrne, have presented China as a major influence on the Algerian nationalist movement. Although this research represents an important first step in the process of understanding the FLN’s interest in Chinese communism, a more specific and sustained focus on Sino-Algerian relations is required to unpack fully the significance of this relationship.

By focusing intently on a single country’s relevance to the FLN, this chapter complements Byrne’s conclusions and helps complete the picture of Algeria’s political development he offered. On the most fundamental level, Byrne structured his study of the FLN’s foreign relations in the opposite direction. Like Connelly, Byrne focused on the FLN’s need to negotiate the difficult external context within which it operated. He viewed the development of ties with foreign countries as a strategy both to outflank France and to manipulate the tensions of the Cold War in a manner that promoted Algeria’s sovereignty. Byrne’s chief goal was to demonstrate how the foreign policy needs of the FLN gradually transformed it into a determined proponent of global revolution beyond Algeria. He argued that the leaders of both the FLN and the Algerian state after 1962, convinced that “their revolution was too weak to survive alone,” increasingly believed in the importance of promoting worldwide revolution in order to weaken Western-dominated power structures and secure their own position. The ideological changes that Byrne identified within the Algerian nationalist movement, therefore, were reactions to a perceived threat that came from

16. Ibid., 8-9.
abroad. To be sure, at the height of the Cold War, Algerian leaders keenly grasped these external dangers and were eager to do everything possible to safeguard their position in the international community. It is also important, however, to consider how the FLN responded internally to domestic challenges as it struggled to unite the Algerian people behind its leadership. In order to convince Algerians that the GPRA represented their interests, the FLN had to reassure potential supporters of its military effectiveness and its political viability. As the FLN’s leaders crafted their organization’s legitimizing ideology through their contacts with foreign governments, these two concerns were always at the forefront. The precarious domestic position of the FLN was one of the key factors driving the internationalization of the Algerian revolution, which in turn spurred the maturation of the Algerian nationalist movement.

The Allure of Non-Soviet Communism

An Algerian intellectual surveying the international landscape of the 1950s would have observed a world in transition. As the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa accelerated, it became possible to find viable alternatives to European political norms. Accordingly, throughout their war for independence, Algerian freedom fighters sought guidance and inspiration from other non-Western countries. Prior to 1954, the Algerian nationalist movement – then dominated by Messali – had enjoyed close links to French leftists, particularly the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). Algerian migrants living in France, who formed Messali’s original constituency, employed Marxist ideas gleaned from the PCF in order to articulate a modern conception of Algerian identity. After 1954, however, the refusal of the PCF to support independence for Algeria, combined with the reluctance of the Soviet Union to back the Algerian cause wholeheartedly, compelled more radical Algerian nationalists to reconsider their Marxist heritage as they searched for an
ideology that would confer greater legitimacy on their struggle against the French. By the time the GPRA was established in 1958, the leaders of the FLN had begun to formulate such a program, in large part by drawing on themes and ideas found in non-Soviet forms of communism. Many Algerians became interested in Vietnamese, Cuban, and Chinese communism, all of which fused Marxist theories with strident anti-imperialism. By pledging solidarity with the communist movements in these countries and appropriating certain aspects of the ideologies that legitimized their governments, Algerian nationalists portrayed their own revolution as part of a global historical moment. By casting themselves as heirs to a revolutionary tradition that had been successful elsewhere in the Third World, the FLN’s leaders were attempting to foster a sense that Algerian independence was inevitable. While it would be inaccurate to suggest that any elite member of the FLN ever fully adopted the political ideology of Ho Chi Minh, Castro, or Mao, it is important to note the allure that all three of these men held for Algerians who were seeking new ideas at a critical juncture in their revolution.

Despite the unwillingness of any of the top leaders of the FLN to identify themselves as communists, they did not hesitate to present the Algerian nationalist movement as a supporter of the communist bloc in the Cold War. Communist countries proved the best sources of military, moral, and diplomatic support available to the FLN, which increasingly came to depend on its relationships with communist governments in order to carry out its operations against the French. Despite this connection, the leaders of the FLN did not wish to alienate the United States, especially after June 1956, when then-Senator John F. Kennedy introduced a resolution chastising the Eisenhower administration for failing to support self-determination in Algeria.17 Nevertheless, some FLN members recommended the risky

17. For more on Kennedy’s support for the Algerian cause, see Miloud Barkaoui, “Kennedy and the Cold War Imbroglio: The Case of Algeria’s Independence,” Arab Studies Quarterly 21 (1999), 31-33.
strategy of “playing Russian blackmail” (jouer au chantage russe): pursuing closer ties with the Soviet Union in order to compel the American government to put pressure on the French. After the GPRA was formed, its leaders became remarkably bold about taking sides in the Cold War – especially in the privacy of their closed-door conversations with communist officials. In a discussion with Soviet Second Secretary Mikhail Souslov in Moscow in October 1959, for example, Benkhedda insisted that the FLN was fighting both the United States and West Germany, both allies of France, and thus that “the Algerian people and the socialist camp [had] a common enemy.” Similarly, Oussedik blamed American weapons supplied to the French government for a grossly inflated 80% of the FLN’s battlefield casualties. The Chinese government, which had long insisted that the United States conspired with France and the United Kingdom to exert colonial influence throughout the Middle East, doubtless appreciated Oussedik’s attempt to portray the French-Algerian conflict as part of the larger Cold War. Perhaps the most forthright declaration from official representatives of the GPRA that they considered themselves to be on the same side of the Cold War as the Soviets and the Chinese came in December 1958, when members of Benkhedda’s delegation told their Chinese hosts that Moscow ought to recognize the GPRA because implementing socialism was one of the goals of the Algerian revolution.

20. Record of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.
21. Chinese officials also considered the United States to be the true enemy of the Algerian people. Zhou’s comments to Oussedik in Beijing in May 1959 reflected this theme: “Today, you are mainly dealing with France, but you must see that the United States is right behind.” See the transcript of Zhou Enlai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 5 May 1959, 107-00191-06, CFMA.
22. Summary of the Algerian temporary government’s visit to China, 15 December 1958, 107-00165-02, CFMA.
1960, the new foreign minister of the GPRA, Belkacem Krim, decided that he should no longer present Algeria as a potential ally of the United States and that he should definitively take sides in the Cold War as a matter of strategy. As the war against the French dragged on, the leaders of the FLN consistently proved willing to manipulate international tensions to their advantage, even if doing so meant explicitly declaring their allegiance with the communist bloc.

Any attempt by the FLN to portray Algeria as a willing member of the communist bloc was complicated by its ambiguous relationship with the Soviet Union. Much to the consternation of the Algerians, Moscow rebuffed many of the FLN’s overtures. The Soviet regime was not willing to risk its improving relationship with de Gaulle by recognizing the GPRA, nor was it consistently willing to offer public support. Algerian representatives sometimes complained that the Soviet government refused to establish formal ties with the FLN, but they understood that the complexities of Cold War politics prevented Khrushchev from exercising a free hand with regard to the Algerian conflict. By 1956, key figures within the FLN accepted that Soviet-French relations would be an impediment to securing active Soviet support for the Algerian cause. After the establishment of the GPRA, both Mohammed Harbi and Krim, among others, complained that the Soviets would not openly declare their support for the new Algerian government-in-exile, but they both accepted the idea that Algeria enjoyed “de facto” recognition by Moscow. In an outburst of frustration, members of Benkhedda’s GPRA delegation to China asked their Chinese handlers, “Why does the Soviet Union not recognize us?” Nevertheless, they also knew the answer to their own question; a Chinese Foreign Ministry memorandum reported that the Algerian

25. The vagaries of Khrushchev’s cautious foreign policy were detailed in Gilbert Meynier’s Histoire intérieure du FLN, 608-612.
representatives were well aware of the international pressures that constrained Khrushchev and did not expect the Soviet Union to alter its cautious policy. Gradually, it became apparent that de facto support from the Soviet Union, however irritating, was better than nothing. In April 1960, Khrushchev’s deputy, Anastas Mikoyan, contended during a press conference in Baghdad that formal recognition was a meaningless distinction, since the Soviet Union had given more material support to the FLN than countries that had accorded it diplomatic recognition. When Khrushchev symbolically embraced Krim at the United Nations in autumn 1960, he was suggesting that the Soviet Union was finally ready to declare openly its backing for Algerian independence – yet he continued to resist officially recognizing the GPRA.

Although the leaders of the FLN understood that Khrushchev needed to toe a fine line in public by not taking any conclusive step that would doom his relationship with de Gaulle, they were frequently disheartened that the Soviet government refused to treat them with respect even in private. What particularly irked many Algerians was that Khrushchev and other top Soviet officials did not seem to take seriously the Algerian delegations that passed through Moscow. The FLN treated all communist countries as part of a single bloc, which meant that most of their delegations to communist countries traveled to both Moscow and Beijing (and sometimes to Hanoi as well). Such an itinerary gave ample opportunity for FLN representatives to compare and contrast their lavish receptions in Beijing with the

26. Summary of the Algerian temporary government’s visit to China, 15 December 1958, 107-00165-02, CFMA.


28. After Algeria’s independence in 1962, the country’s Foreign Ministry continued to divide the world into “the West,” “the socialist countries,” “the Arab world,” “Africa,” and “Latin America/Asia,” a worldview analyzed in Jeffrey James Byrne, “The Middle Eastern Cold War: Unique Dynamics in a Questionable Regional Framework,” _International Journal of Middle East Studies_ 43 (2011), 320. This arrangement, again with China and North Vietnam grouped with the socialist countries rather than with other Asian and African countries, is reflected in the organization of Harbi’s _Les Archives de la révolution algérienne._

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subdued treatment they received from the Soviet government. With tensions between Mao and Khrushchev mounting, it was hardly surprising that the Chinese government went out of its way to ensure that Algerian visitors were given a grander reception in Beijing than in Moscow. It is nevertheless surprising that so many Algerians reacted negatively to their experiences in the Soviet Union. Si Azzedine reported that the Chinese greeted his delegation with pomp, including the playing of the new Algerian national anthem; the Soviet government, on the other hand, tried to avoid any serious discussions and instead arranged for the Algerians to be shepherded innocuously to a series of patriotic museums.29 Saad Dahlab (an important decision-maker within the FLN who later rose to the position of foreign minister in the third iteration of the GPRA) explained that, during a stop in Moscow on the way home from China, GPRA Armaments Minister Mahmoud Cherif engaged Mikoyan in a shouting match over the Soviet government’s perceived unwillingness to support the FLN. After Mikoyan tried to blame Nasser for not distributing Soviet arms donations to the Algerian fighters, an exasperated Dahlab could only comment that “we knew absolutely nothing of the game of the USSR.”30 The Chinese Foreign Ministry noted in May 1959 that Oussedik’s military delegation had been impressed by a grand tour of the Moscow subway system, but it exulted that the Algerians had not had the opportunity to form as “intimate” (qinmi) a relationship with the Soviet government as with the Chinese.31 For Algerians who visited both Beijing and Moscow, the contrast between the two communist powers was unmistakable.

The frustration of FLN members with the Soviet government went a long way toward explaining why so many Algerians found China appealing. The Chinese government’s chief

31. Foreign Ministry memorandum regarding the reaction of the Algerian military delegation to its visit to China, 13 May 1959, 107-00190-05, CFMA.
asset in its negotiations with Algerian leaders was its reputation for forthrightness. Whereas the Soviet regime was constrained by its complex relations with the West, including both France and the United States, Mao and other Chinese leaders could adopt much bolder positions.\(^3^2\) As a result, many Algerians associated China with action and the Soviet Union with caution. Nowhere was this anger toward the Soviet Union more apparent than during a heated encounter in Moscow in October 1960 between GPRA Minister of the Interior Lakhdar Bentobbal and Soviet Vice Premier Alexei Kosygin. When Bentobbal accused Kosygin of not doing enough to aid the Algerian cause, a horrified Ferhat Abbas tried to defuse the tension by blaming Bentobbal’s abruptness on his lack of formal education. In particular, Abbas invoked Victor Hugo and Alphonse de Lamartine as writers whom Bentobbal might have studied had he received a proper French education. Indignantly, Bentobbal snapped, “Perhaps I do not know these authors, but I know what I am talking about when I speak in the name of the revolution.”\(^3^3\) Bentobbal’s spirited rebuke of both his own president and a key Soviet policymaker encapsulated the disaffection of many Algerians with Soviet equivocation. What Bentobbal and others wanted was an unambiguous demonstration of support, something only non-Western governments such as that of China had thus far been willing to provide. Just as important, Bentobbal’s comments demonstrated

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32. The FLN’s leaders recognized that one of the key differences between their rocky relationship with the Soviet Union and their consistently positive ties with China was that Moscow, but not Beijing, was constrained by political and military challenges in Europe. See “Complément de l’exposé fait par le docteur Lamine Debaghine, Ministre des Affaires Extérieures, à la conférence, tenue à Damas, des représentants du GPRA dans les pays arabes [Supplement to the presentation made by Dr. Lamine Debaghine, Minister of External Affairs, at the conference, held in Damascus, of GPRA representatives in the Arab countries],” 14 November 1959, in Mohammed Harbi and Gilbert Meynier, eds., Le FLN, documents et histoire, 1954-1962 [The FLN, documents and history, 1954-1962] (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 803.

33. Redha Malek, L’Algérie à Evian: histoire des négociations secrètes, 1956-1962 [Algeria to Evian: History of the secret negotiations, 1956-1962] (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995), 72. Bentobbal was also relevant to the history of Sino-Algerian relations for a comical reason. Because of his dark hair and the shape of his face, Bentobbal was often mistaken for a Chinese person. As a result, during a visit to Beijing, Bentobbal was the only Algerian who was not greeted with a bouquet of flowers because the Chinese did not realize he was a foreigner. On another occasion, an American journalist was alarmed to see that Abbas was frequently consulting a “Chinese” advisor, though in the end that advisor turned out to be Bentobbal. See Ibid., 59; Muhammad Abbas, Al-Thawra al-jaza’iriyya: nasr bi-la thaman, 1954-1962 [The Algerian revolution: priceless victory, 1954-1962] (Algiers: Dar al-qasaba li-l-nashr, 2007), 563.
the impatience among many in the FLN with any kind of abstract analysis. By declaring during a meeting with a top Soviet leader that he could lead a revolution without worrying about books or ideas, Bentobbal was also announcing his skepticism of Marxist ideology. Much of China’s appeal to Algerian nationalists, particularly when compared with the Soviet Union, resulted from the fact that its leaders were willing to dispense with pedantic theorizing and focus instead on discussing the practicalities of waging a guerrilla war. This contrast between China and the Soviet Union reflected the crux of the FLN’s goal for its relationship with the communist bloc. The Algerians wished to position themselves under the umbrella of legitimacy that the communist bloc offered by virtue of its status as the dominant challenger to the West, but they wished to share in this legitimacy without fully accepting the abstract Marxist ideology that accompanied it.

In this context, non-Soviet communist countries were particularly useful allies for Algerians who were skeptical of Marxism but who desperately needed communist support. To a great extent, Algerians’ enthusiasm for non-Soviet communism mirrored the evolving beliefs of those French communists who were also disaffected with both the Soviet Union and the mainstream faction of the PCF. Although the PCF had midwifed the creation of the Algerian nationalist movement in the form of the Etoile Nord-Africaine in the 1920s, the party continued after 1954 to assert that Algeria was part of France. As a result, members of the PCF who were sympathetic to the Algerian cause began to seek alternatives to conventional forms of European communism that would place greater emphasis on the fight against Western imperialism. Many of these anti-imperialist French leftists came to appreciate non-Soviet approaches to communism, especially Maoism. The split among French Marxists between those who identified with the PCF (and thus with the Soviet Union)

34. Bureaucrats in the French Foreign Ministry understood that the frustration of the FLN’s leaders with Soviet “dogmatism” inclined them to view China more positively. See Direction générale des affaires politiques, 8 January 1959, AO, dossier 523, MAE.
and those who denounced the PCF as an imperialist party intensified as the fighting in Algeria continued. Some of the most outspoken opposition groups within the French left published Chinese texts as part of their quest to escape the stolid atmosphere of mainstream communism.\textsuperscript{35} Algerian intellectuals, who were in constant contact with the French left even in the midst of the bloody conflict, thus had the opportunity to observe firsthand this search for a new ideology that more adamantly rejected French imperialism. Together, anti-imperialist French leftists and nationalist Algerians who took an interest in non-Soviet forms of communism represented the beginnings of a nascent global movement to reconsider Marxist philosophy and its relationship to the non-Western world.

As Algerians turned toward the communist bloc for inspiration, they found that they had much in common with North Vietnam, which had also been colonized by France. Algerian and Vietnamese nationalists had long shared an affinity because of this mutual experience. In the wake of World War I, students from various French colonies mingled in Paris, where the organizations they founded frequently came into contact with one another, often through the mediation of the PCF.\textsuperscript{36} The unequivocal victory of the Viet Minh over the French army at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in spring 1954, just a few months before the beginning of the Algerian War, elated the Algerian people. Just as Japan’s defeat of a colonial power in the Russo-Japanese War had energized an earlier generation of anti-colonial advocates, news of the forced withdrawal of the French from Indochina reverberated throughout other French colonies, shattering the illusion of French military superiority. Particularly inspirational were the stories of Algerian conscripts in the French army who, in the days before the battle, had refused to fight on the side of the imperialists and had deserted; FLN representatives who visited Hanoi in subsequent years sometimes met with


\textsuperscript{36} Robert Malley, \textit{The Call from Algeria}, 52.
these men and promised to help repatriate them to Algeria after independence. Many Algerian intellectuals felt a powerful attraction to North Vietnam, a country whose own struggle for independence they lauded in their writings. One such author was the communist novelist and playwright Kateb Yacine, who began writing a play about Vietnam during the 1950s. Yacine celebrated the Battle of Dien Bien Phu as a call to arms for his own society:

For the Algerian people, for all oppressed peoples, Dien Bien Phu exploded like a bolt of lightning in a stormy sky. A colonized people had just vanquished the great colonial power, reputed to be invincible, on the field of battle. For all peoples still suffering slavery and humiliation, Dien Bien Phu was both October and Stalingrad: a revolution of global proportion and an irresistible call to the wretched of the Earth.

Yacine finally completed his play after he traveled to North Vietnam in 1967. The resulting The Man with the Rubber Sandals [L'homme aux sandales de caoutchouc] was a satirical indictment of French colonialism that immortalized the long and arduous Vietnamese nationalist movement led by Ho Chi Minh. For Yacine, like other Algerian intellectuals, glorifying North Vietnam was a way to rouse Algerians to action and to give them hope that an anti-imperialist campaign could ultimately prevail.

Whereas North Vietnam symbolized the possibility of military victory, Fidel Castro’s rise to power in Cuba was viewed as a particularly compelling illustration of the global linkages that the FLN’s leaders wished to construct. Algerian nationalists envisioned a world in which countries throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America banded together to secure their collective independence from Western suzerainty. Because the FLN sought legitimacy

37. Si Azzedine, On nous appelait fellaghas, 261-262.
by promoting the notion that it was intimately connected to revolutionary movements in other countries, its leaders were particularly interested in contemporaneous movements that were simultaneously achieving success. Castro’s final push to win control of Cuba in late 1958 exhilarated Algerians, who understood Castro’s campaign as an example of the power of nationalist sentiment. It is important to note that it was not until 1961, when Castro solidified his relationship with the Soviet Union, that the FLN’s top officials began to perceive the Cuban revolution as a socialist transformation. Like the FLN, the new Cuban government hoped to present itself as a champion of revolution abroad, setting the stage for a productive relationship between Cuba and the FLN. Public opinion in Cuba strongly backed the FLN, in part because Cuban opposition newspapers prior to 1959 had attacked French excesses in Algeria as an indirect way to criticize Fulgencio Batista’s authoritarian regime. In 1961, Castro abandoned any possibility of normalizing relations with France and dispatched the head of Prensa Latina, the Cuban news agency, to Tunis with an offer to aid the FLN. Thereafter, Cuba became arguably Algeria’s closest ally, a fellow new country that was eager to prove its unqualified support for anti-imperialist causes around the world. In addition to occasional shipments of weapons, Cuba offered the FLN the opportunity to demonstrate that the Algerian revolutionary spirit could transcend national and cultural boundaries. Ben Bella told his biographer that, when he visited Havana for the first time in October 1962, he felt an immediate emotional connection with the Cuban people: “We began talking all at once, and I do not know in what language, since they did not speak Arabic and I knew only a little Spanish...but friendship overcame all.” Both sides played up the supposed similarity

42. Ibid., 160-161.
between the Cubans and the Algerians as the leaders of the world’s “youngest” revolutions. By making common cause, they established themselves as part of an ongoing international movement.

Despite the relevance of North Vietnam’s victories over French imperialism and Cuba’s engagement with the rest of the Third World, it was Mao’s China that most enchanted the FLN’s leaders. The CCP embodied all of the traits that the FLN’s leaders most admired. It had triumphed in a long war against a stronger enemy, and it had done so by mobilizing a poor and mostly rural population. It steadfastly insisted on the rights of all nations to sovereignty over their own territory and condemned Western intervention worldwide. In addition to the military struggle against the Japanese and the GMD, it considered economic and political modernization of China to be integral aspects of the continuing revolution it purported to lead. Finally, it emphasized the abiding importance of national unity as the most fundamental legacy of China’s transformation after 1949. As the FLN sought legitimacy from its relations with the communist countries of the Third World, all of these perceived accomplishments established China as the ideal model for Algeria’s own development. By identifying themselves as students of Chinese communism, the FLN’s leaders associated their organization with an ideology that had been successful in China and thus reinforced their claim to be effective military and political leaders of the Algerian nationalist cause.

Mao’s Military Lessons

It was not surprising that Algerian military commanders, hard-pressed to strike back against a modern army with superior firepower, looked to the CCP’s experiences in the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War for ideas and inspiration. After all, the Chinese Communists had employed a strategy of guerrilla warfare to vanquish a similarly formidable opponent and secure undisputed control of the world’s most populous country. Even before
he assumed power, Mao had fancied himself an authority on military theory and had lectured his followers at length on the proper way to defeat both the Japanese and the Nationalists. By the late 1950s, he was eager to share his theories with the entire world. With the FLN in need of outside assistance and Mao in need of an audience, the Sino-Algerian military relationship was a perfect match. Mao and other Chinese leaders advised visiting Algerians about their experiences; the Algerians listened intently, proclaimed their gratitude for China’s tutelage, and resolved to implement these new lessons on the battlefield. While it is undoubtedly true that the Algerians who visited China genuinely hoped to learn about Chinese military theory, their interest went beyond its practical applications. By fostering the idea that the FLN was learning from the CCP, Algerian representatives could assert that they were following a model of guerrilla war that had a history of success. Declaring that Algeria was pursuing the same path as the Chinese established the Algerian revolution as part of a global cause and increased confidence, both at home and abroad, that the FLN could ultimately prevail. Adopting Chinese military theory also legitimized the FLN as the true leader of the Algerian struggle for independence. At a time when the FLN faced a sharp challenge from its rivals within Algeria, China’s endorsement of its military decisions enhanced its status and discredited its opposition.

The most intriguing aspect of the CCP’s teacher-student relationship with the FLN, however, was that the content of their discussions was all but meaningless. What advice Mao, Zhou, Chen Yi, Peng Dehuai, and other Chinese statesmen offered to their Algerian pupils was much too generic to be useful. Transcripts of discussions preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives or published in Harbi’s collection record only a series of vague platitudes and clumsy attempts to draw inexact parallels between the Chinese and Algerian experiences. Repeated admonitions from the Chinese to engage in pitched battles only with a superior number of troops did not reveal a secret or innovative formula for
military success. Mao plopped his visitors with vague reminders about the importance of learning from one’s enemy, offering as an example the fact that many communist intellectuals and soldiers had at one point studied in GMD schools.\(^{44}\) Zhou instructed the same delegation not to engage the enemy unless their forces enjoyed momentary numerical superiority, a basic principle of guerrilla warfare.\(^{45}\) Both Mao and Peng repeatedly emphasized the importance of capturing and then using French materiel, which was generally superior to the weapons that the FLN could procure for its fighters.\(^{46}\) All of these comments, of course, were merely platitudes, even though the Chinese leaders dispensed them under the guise of sage advice. When Mao and other Chinese officials lectured visiting Algerians, they simply tried to relay to their guests the history of the CCP’s military victory without ever trying to adapt those Chinese lessons into the Algerian context. Mao and others did not ask questions about the specific military problems facing the FLN; as far as they were concerned, the Chinese experience was a panacea which, if adopted unquestioningly, would ultimately lead the Algerians to victory. What is perhaps remarkable is that the Algerians who visited China consistently appeared to accept the Chinese model. Oussedik informed Mao that members of the FLN respected China for winning liberation and considered the CCP a “bright light” guiding the Algerians.\(^{47}\) He also flattered Peng by pointing out that the PLA, which had won the Chinese Civil War, was a “model” for the FLN’s own forces.\(^{48}\) By

\(^{44}\) Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.

\(^{45}\) Transcript of Zhou Enlai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 5 May 1959, 107-00191-06, CFMA.

\(^{46}\) Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA; Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.

\(^{47}\) Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.

\(^{48}\) Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
declaring that the Algerians were learning from the Chinese, Oussedik was telling his hosts exactly what they wanted to hear.

Nevertheless, the Chinese military model really did resonate among top leaders of the FLN, for whom Mao’s military theories – no matter how vague – served as a source of inspiration. In fact, some Algerian nationalists had urged their countrymen to study the successes of the CCP as early as the late 1940s, before the end of the Chinese Civil War. In 1948, Hocine Aït Ahmed, an early proponent of military insurrection, argued in a report to the central committee of the PPA that Algerians could only win independence through an armed struggle on the model of the Chinese Communists. Aït Ahmed proposed that the Algerians could draw lessons from Mao’s strategy of establishing the Jiangxi Soviet as a base from which he constructed revolutionary institutions, indoctrinated the population with his ideology, and organized his army.49 In the late 1950s, Houari Boumedienne – a longtime admirer of Mao’s writings – tried to establish such a base just across the Tunisian border at Ghardimaou. In addition to supplying Algerian fighters and launching attacks into Algeria, he set up a school in Ghardimaou for military officers to study Mao’s works, as well as the military tactics of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.50 Algerians were most intrigued by two of Mao’s military texts from the Yan’an period: On Guerrilla Warfare (1937) and On Protracted War (1938). Algerians often invoked Mao’s metaphor, first expounded in On Guerrilla Warfare, that a local fighter could blend into the villages that housed and fed him like a “fish in water,” in contrast to foreign French troops, who would not be able to locate the rebels in order to engage. Amar Ouzegane, one devotee of Mao’s fish-in-water theory, wrote that this idea was widely studied and understood by Algerian militants.51 Ouzegane,

who had been a communist prior to his expulsion from the PCA in 1948, measured the success of the FLN’s struggle against the French according to Mao’s three stages of war as outlined in *On Protracted War*: building unity against the foreign threat, strategic stalemate to exhaust and weaken the enemy, and a counter-offensive to regain lost territory. Harbi also recalled in his memoir the significance of Mao’s three-stage theory as taught to him by fellow FLN member Abdelaziz Benmiloud, who had studied Mao. Mao’s writings were so widely valued in Algeria that French soldiers began to read them in order to formulate a competent counterinsurgency strategy. As Mao’s theories of guerrilla warfare became increasingly popular among leaders of the FLN, the notion that China could exert ideological influence over Algeria, an idea that had long worried bureaucrats in the French Foreign Ministry, began to seem feasible.

Mao’s military theories were attractive to Algerian nationalists because they were well-suited to the political issues facing Algeria. Mao wrote both *On Guerrilla Warfare* and *On Protracted War* at a dire stage during the Sino-Japanese War. In both of these texts, he focused on how the Chinese people in general, and the Communists in particular, could effectively counter Japan’s overwhelming military force. It is not surprising that the Maoist tracts that proved most influential in Algeria were those that opposed the Japanese rather than

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54. One prominent French policymaker tasked with expanding and formalizing a counterinsurgency doctrine was David Galula, who had been posted to Beijing as French military attaché during the latter stages of the Chinese Civil War. Galula’s firsthand observations of Chinese Communist strategy helped him make recommendations for military and political campaigns in Algeria. See David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964). When Ferhat Abbas told Mao in Beijing in 1960 that the French army was studying his theories, Mao indignantly told the GPRA president that his theories were intended to be used by revolutionaries, not counterrevolutionaries. See Mohammed Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 322.
the GMD; the leaders of the FLN were adamant that Algeria was a distinct nation that was facing occupation by a foreign power, just as China had been invaded by the imperialist Japanese. Mao’s unwavering belief that Japanese aggression against China was doomed to fail gave hope to Algerian fighters that the French colonial presence might eventually be eradicated. According to Mao, the Japanese could not succeed because they did not have the support of the Chinese masses. Like Mao, the leaders of the FLN highlighted the importance of ordinary peasants in supporting and facilitating military campaigns. Consequently, the FLN believed that its military effort had to be accompanied by a sustained political project to rally the masses behind the Algerian nationalist cause. Because Mao had insisted that guerrilla forces could only succeed in the context of a political struggle, his theories were a convenient guide for the FLN. After all, fully a year and a half before the Chinese government began taking a direct interest in Algeria, the representatives of all the factions that comprised the FLN had agreed at the August 1956 Soummam Conference that military operations ought to be subordinate to the larger political struggle for national sovereignty. Guerrilla operations were important to the FLN, but its leaders knew that they could win full independence from France only if they succeeded in building a political consensus that Algeria deserved sovereignty. Mao’s insistence on combining the military and political struggles thus suggested a viable path to independence for the FLN to follow.

Although Chinese Communist literature was popular in both Egypt and Algeria in the 1950s, it is important to note that audiences in those two countries were interested in markedly different aspects of Maoist thought. In contrast to the Algerians, who particularly

55. See Mao Zedong, On Guerrilla Warfare, Ch. 6.
56. Mabrouk Belhocine, Le courrier Alger-Le Caire, 1954-1956, et le Congrès de la Soummam dans la Révolution [Correspondance between Algiers and Cairo, 1954-1956, and the Soummam Congress in the Revolution] (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 2000), 57. Belhocine’s summary of the events leading up to the Soummam Conference was also interesting because he titled its first part “The Long March,” presumably a reference to the fact that the FLN, like the CCP, developed into a powerful nationalist organization over a long period of time.
appreciated *On Guerrilla Warfare* and *On Protracted War* as inspiration for their military campaign, Egyptians were much more enthralled with Mao’s *On New Democracy*. It made sense, of course, that Egyptians would find a text about political development more relevant to their own society than did the Algerians, who were much more concerned with how to conduct an effective military campaign. Nevertheless, the fact that members of the FLN were, on the whole, less eager than Egyptians to embrace Mao’s most influential political treatise was revealing because it was consistent with the general reluctance of Algerian nationalists to endorse theoretical aspects of Chinese communism. As much as the FLN’s leaders admired the communist bloc as a whole, and China and North Vietnam in particular, they were not committed communists themselves. In contrast to Egyptian leftists, who found in *On New Democracy* a formula by which to reconcile their political disaffection with their enthusiasm for Nasser’s nationalist foreign policy, Algerian devotees of Mao seem to have taken little overt interest in any of his political ideas. In other words, celebrating Mao as a military genius did not mean that they had to adopt his communist framework. The FLN’s general aversion to Marxist theory was a defining characteristic of its relations with communist countries, including China, and it is crucial not to assume that Algerians’ interest in Mao’s military strategy indicated that they harbored any deeper interest in his political ideology.

Indeed, one of the reasons that some members of the FLN endorsed Mao’s approach to guerrilla warfare was that it seemed to present a workable alternative to communist dogma as it was articulated by the Soviet Union. For Algerians who claimed to be part of a revolutionary moment spreading throughout the entire Third World, Mao’s strategy offered a particularly desirable model because they perceived it as a fundamentally non-Western, anti-imperialist path to achieve independence. The FLN’s frustration with theoretical issues, as encapsulated in the anecdote about Bentobbal’s explosion at Kosygin in Moscow in 1960, led
its members to appreciate China’s supposed pragmatism. In this context, accepting and promoting Mao’s military ideas became for the Algerians a method of distinguishing their revolution from the abstract Marxist rhetoric espoused by their Soviet patrons. Ouzegane summarized these implications of Maoist military strategy most succinctly. He noted that the CCP’s early attempts to emulate the Soviet model by focusing their efforts on winning followers in China’s cities were disastrous failures, forcing Mao and other leaders to devise a better strategy for building the party. According to Ouzegane, Mao’s decision to lead a guerrilla campaign supported by peasants in a rural area represented a definitive break from the model of the CPSU: “like Christopher Columbus,” he wrote, the CCP “chose a new path, not parallel, but in the opposite direction!” Ouzegane averred that both the Chinese and Algerian nationalist movements ought to be taken seriously as legitimate contributions to world revolution, even if they deviated from the expected pattern of Marxist development:

Who would have imagined that Mao could take Marx one step further in proving that the revolution could also triumph by beginning campaigns to liberate the cities second [after the countryside]? If the originality of the Chinese method no longer constitutes an intellectual scandal for Marxist Cartesianism, then the zigzagging path of the Algerian revolution should not offend the sensibilities of the thoughtful revolutionary.57

Ouzegane’s comparison of the FLN’s experience with that of the CCP thus portrayed both Algeria and China as pioneers of a common effort in the non-Western world. He used Mao’s successes to lend credence to the FLN’s strategy, but he also distanced the FLN from any suggestion that it was beholden to Soviet ideals.

The FLN’s skeptical attitude toward Marxist theory complicated its attempts to identify with the countries of the communist bloc. Mao’s military theories offered the perfect

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57. Amar Ouzegane, Le meilleur combat, 190.
compromise to resolve its dilemma. The FLN’s self-conscious adoption of the Maoist style of guerilla warfare allowed it to appropriate only the military aspects of Chinese communism. At a stage when the FLN was struggling to fight back against the overpowering French army, the potential propaganda value of China’s endorsement was considerable. Fortunately for the FLN, China’s leaders were eager to affirm that they believed the FLN was carrying out its military strategy correctly. For example, in May 1961, Chinese Chairman Liu Shaoqi officially informed Abderrahmane Kiouane, the new permanent Algerian representative in Beijing, that the Chinese people believed the FLN and the GPRA had “valiantly pursued a protracted war of resistance” and were certain to win victory in the future. With the explicit blessing of the Chinese government, the FLN was able to claim that it was following a proven path toward military victory. As Benkhedda admitted, China’s most important contribution to the Algerian war effort was to raise morale among members of the FLN, who would have appreciated China’s endorsement because it indicated that they were headed on the path to securing independence. Moreover, the FLN aspired to be recognized as the legitimate leader of all military operations within Algeria, a status it could realize only if Algerians were confident in its leadership. Adopting Maoist military theory was therefore a way of declaring that, no matter how long the struggle against the French dragged on, the ultimate triumph of the FLN remained inevitable.

Visions of Order and Unity

In addition to their interest in emulating the military strategies by which the CCP had triumphed in China, many Algerians were intrigued by the path the Chinese government had taken after 1949. Several Algerians who represented the FLN on visits to Beijing between

1958 and 1960 were particularly inspired by Mao’s ongoing efforts to perpetuate the Chinese revolution. The vast majority of the direct encounters between FLN delegates and Chinese policymakers occurred at the height of the Great Leap Forward, a time when the Chinese government placed a high premium on revolutionary fervor. Algerians who wrote extensively about their impressions of Beijing during this period – especially Azzedine and Dahlab – were particularly attracted to the extreme precision they observed in a society where every individual seemed committed to a larger national mission. This notion of perfect order – a quality exemplified by the Chinese government’s total control over its citizens – had been a key aspect of China’s message in its propaganda toward Arab countries since the Bandung Conference. In light of the chaos and disunity within Algeria at that time, it is hardly surprising that some FLN representatives in China immediately noticed the remarkable contrast between the two countries. Their admiration of Chinese order and unity suggested that, as early as 1958 and 1959, they were already pondering Algeria’s future after independence.60 China was not only a symbol of military victory, but also an example of an authoritarian, nationalist formula for political development. At a time when the FLN was struggling to unite Algerians of disparate political beliefs behind its cause, the successes of the CCP suggested to many Algerians the tantalizing prospect of achieving a similar level of organization and stability in their own society.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was China’s rapid economic development that elicited the most effusive praise from visiting Algerians. As the Great Leap Forward’s campaigns to produce steel, collectivize farming, and complete large-scale infrastructure projects intensified, the Chinese government became increasingly eager to ensure that foreign

60. By November 1960, at least some French officials recognized that key leaders of the FLN looked to China as a guide for post-independence nation building as well as a model for how to win a military victory. See “Projets de Krim Belkacem pour une Algérie sur la modele chinois [Projects of Belkacem Krim for an Algeria on the Chinese model],” Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage, 16 November 1960, SLA, dossier 35, MAE.
visitors appreciated the supposed successes of these initiatives. China’s leaders were gratified when Oussedik was awed by the rapid development of the Chinese economy, especially the remarkable willingness of the Chinese people to exert themselves to build their country. Dahlab, by contrast, was somewhat skeptical of certain aspects of the Great Leap Forward (he even challenged the fantastic claims of one of his guides about Mao’s personal contributions to the increase in agricultural production), but on the whole he too was impressed by China’s apparent accomplishments. Dahlab wrote admiringly of seeing photographs of Zhou laboring beside poor peasants while volunteering on a collective farm. He also related the story of an arranged trip to the countryside to view what he deemed a “grand campaign of assassination” against sparrows, which Mao had identified as pests. While Dahlab retrospectively described the killing of sparrows with a somewhat whimsical tone, he nevertheless appreciated the brutal effectiveness of the campaign. Azzedine was much less reserved in his assessment of the Chinese government’s ability to transform its once-backward economy. He was particularly enamored with a large-scale road-building project outside his hotel in Beijing. One evening, a Chinese official informed him that the avenue outside his hotel would be finished by the next day. Azzedine, who considered the road to be in a “lamentable state,” exclaimed that such a feat would be impossible. The next morning, however, Azzedine looked out his window to discover that the road had not only been entirely repaved, but also meticulously landscaped with rows of full-grown trees. As the members of the Algerian delegation viewed the avenue for the first time, Azzedine reported, they were astonished by how much work the Chinese laborers had accomplished

61. Foreign Ministry memorandum regarding the reaction of the Algerian military delegation to its visit to China, 13 May 1959, 107-00190-05, CFMA.

62. Saad Dahlab, Mission accomplice, 103-104. During the campaign against agricultural pests that Dahlab observed, tens of millions of sparrows were killed throughout China. By April 1960, when Chinese officials realized that crops were becoming infested with insects that were no longer being eaten by the sparrows, the sparrow population had been driven nearly to extinction. This manmade ecological catastrophe was emblematic of the Great Leap Forward as a whole. See Frank Dikötter, Mao’s Great Famine, 186-188.
overnight. The Chinese government’s insistence that superhuman effort by its citizens could overcome any obstacle compounded the catastrophic human cost of the Great Leap Forward, but it made for an effective propaganda tool. Azzedine and his Algerian companions left China convinced that Mao and the CCP had discovered the ideal method by which to transform their undeveloped country into a global power with dizzying speed. As Algeria languished from over a century of imperialist rule, the Chinese promise of swift modernization was far too exciting to ignore.

This ability to mobilize the Chinese population on a massive scale fascinated and inspired Algerians who longed to instill a similar ethic of national unity among the citizens of their own country. The discussions in Beijing between top Chinese leaders and Algerian delegations often focused on the question of how to achieve this elusive unity. In April 1959, Peng Dehuai told the FLN’s military delegation that building a sense of solidarity among Algerians was the most important step that the FLN could take in order to prevail over the French. Peng and Oussedik agreed that this commitment could only be nurtured by a vanguard organization (such as the FLN in Algeria) that demanded the unwavering adherence of its members politically and militarily. Many members of the FLN openly looked to the CCP as a model for how to mobilize Algerians behind the nationalist cause. Therefore, it was not idle flattery when Oussedik told Peng that he respected the fact that “all of the people” in China supported the “struggle for freedom” (ziyou douzheng); this widespread zeal was in fact one of the most attractive aspects of Chinese communism. On the same visit to Beijing, Oussedik also agreed wholeheartedly with Mao that the FLN would be victorious only if it could succeed in uniting the Algerian people behind its cause. Similarly, Brahim

63. Si Azzedine, On nous appelait fellaghas, 310-312.
64. Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA.
65. Transcript of Mao Zedong’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 30 April 1959, 107-00191-04, CFMA.
Ghafa viewed China as a country whose people had achieved the political goals for which Algerians continued to fight. He praised the Chinese for sharing their “knowledge, experience, [and] talent” in order to help others follow their path.\(^66\) Ghafa was particularly concerned about the political immaturity of Algerian society, where French rule had stunted the development of a vigorous political system, and he looked to Mao and Zhou for an example of how Algeria might begin to construct a strong political identity.\(^67\) Although Ghafa described the Chinese political system as a “democracy,” he co-opted the Chinese model to promote an explicitly authoritarian culture whose principal goal was to unite the Algerian people behind one mission.

Azzedine was perhaps the most exuberant admirer of the CCP’s success at rousing fervent domestic support. He wrote glowingly of the huge numbers of Chinese people who turned out to welcome his delegation, including what he described as “a thousand Chinese officers and military attachés” who lined up at the airport as the visiting Algerians descended from their airplane. Azzedine was enthralled by the “millions” of workers who marched with perfect precision in the May Day celebrations in Tian’anmen Square, and he declared that he and the other Algerians were “amazed by the size of the spectacle” they witnessed in Beijing.\(^68\) Azzedine described the “impeccable” order he revered in China with an anecdote about a reception in southern China on his last night in the country. When he noted that the hall was in such an immaculate state that his eye was drawn to the presence of a single fly, a group of senior Chinese military officers reflexively lunged after the insect in an effort to make sure their guest’s experience was completely perfect.\(^69\) The enthusiasm of prominent


\(^{67} \) Ibid., 13-16.

\(^{68} \) Si Azzedine, *On nous appelait fellaghas*, 308-310.

\(^{69} \) Ibid., 311-313.
Algerians such as Azzedine helped to spread the myth that China commanded the unshakable commitment of its people to the nationalist cause. Even after Algerian independence, the FLN daily *El Moudjahid* still heralded China as a country that had achieved complete “national unity” (*al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya*). China thus came to represent the ideal of order and unity to which Algerian society sought to aspire.

In general, Algerian visitors to China valued the same qualities that had appealed to journalists from other Arab countries a few years before. Above all else, it was the precision with which the CCP mobilized its citizens that left observers from Arab countries in awe. ‘Abd al-Salam al-Adhami’s laudatory description of marching workers at the 1953 National Day celebrations did not differ markedly in style or substance from Azzedine’s description of the Tian’anmen Square festivities on May Day in 1959. Perhaps frustrated with the disunity they perceived within their own societies, these commentators were swept away by the idea that China embodied a nation-wide commitment to advance a common cause. In both Egypt and Algeria, as in other Arab countries, celebrating China gave voice to a deep-seated longing for an efficient, orderly, and self-consciously “modern” society. In the 1950s, the most compelling argument the Chinese government could present in its overtures to other Third World countries was that the CCP had achieved complete popular mobilization. The similarities between the judgments that Egyptian and Algerian writers rendered after their visits to China demonstrate how deeply this idea resonated, at least in the Arab world. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the subtle differences in how Egyptians and Algerians interpreted their experiences in China. Egyptians were much more interested in political aspects of the new China, especially with regard to religious freedom, the existence of multiple political parties, and the government’s policy toward minorities. In their surveys

of Chinese society, they tended to deny that China was a fully communist country, focusing instead on the meaning of China’s ongoing “revolution.” This preoccupation with making fine political distinctions made sense for Egyptians who were concerned with defining a detailed political ideology for their own established country. Algerians, by contrast, tended not to show as much interest in the specifics of Chinese politics, preferring to emphasize China’s stature as an opponent of imperialism and to discuss only in very vague terms its potential to serve as a model for military, political, and social development in Algeria. In contrast to Egyptian writers, Algerians also tended to avoid invoking the idea of a “revolution.” Ironically, despite the expectations of both the Chinese government and worried Western observers, it was the Egyptians who were more willing to engage on an ideological level with the Chinese. The Algerians, embroiled in the midst of an all-consum ing conflict, were intrigued by China, but they were much less concerned with using the Chinese experience to articulate any sort of concrete political ideology.

What made China important to the FLN was that it was the only country that could plausibly symbolize the order the FLN wished to emulate. The Algerians found inspiration from all the countries of the communist bloc, but each country embodied different qualities. While Azzedine was fascinated with the military precision of Chinese society, he admired the opposite characteristics in North Vietnam. The atmosphere in Hanoi, Azzedine reported, was entirely different from what he had encountered in Beijing:

Chinese courtesy does not preclude intensity, but emotion is kept within strictly determined limits. In North Vietnam, we rediscovered enthusiasm and exuberance. Our delegation was welcomed into a state of spirited disorder (*fougueux désordre*).71

Azzedine’s animated description of his trip to Hanoi mirrored the impressions of other Algerians who visited North Vietnam, who tended to depict the country in the midst of a chaotic war. For example, Yacine used farcical situations in The Man with the Rubber Sandals to represent a nation struggling to overcome a continuing period of turmoil. For Algerians, North Vietnam symbolized the sacrifice that was necessary to triumph in a military campaign; Algerians, recognizing that their own homeland was also a war zone, found it easy to empathize with the Vietnamese. By contrast, China represented the possibilities that could be achieved once that struggle was finally complete. Beijing and Hanoi, the two most reliable communist allies of the FLN, were thus separate metaphors that formed complementary parts of the same discourse. Together, China and North Vietnam were useful symbols for the FLN because they could be invoked to assert its ability to unite and lead the Algerian people both during and after the war for liberation.

For the Chinese as well as the Algerians, the focus on unity superseded any interest in ideology. The governments of each of the two revolutionary countries were more concerned about the other’s ability to promote nationalist solidarity than its political orientation. It was this emphasis on national unity that made the Chinese government’s endorsement of the FLN so valuable politically for an organization grappling to establish itself as the sole representative of its people’s aspirations. Initially, this shared appreciation for nationalism had actually prevented leaders of the CCP and the early Algerian liberation movements from embracing one another as allies. In 1949, when Mao formally established the People’s Republic of China, Benkhedda refused to celebrate the CCP’s victory. As a member of the central committee of the MTLD, he declined to publish an article congratulating Mao in the party’s newspaper on the grounds that supporters of the nationalist movement in Algeria

72. Kateb Yacine, L’homme aux sandales de caoutchouc.
ought not to cheer the demise of the Chinese “Nationalists.” Similarly, when the Algerian communist Abdelkader Babou visited China as part of a joint PCA-PCF delegation in 1954, a few months prior to the outbreak of open warfare, Mao lectured his guest on the importance of maintaining a united front. Mao pointedly asked Babou which revolutionary organization in Algeria was the most popular. When Babou responded that Messali’s MTLD was the largest anti-French party, Mao instructed him to cooperate with that faction: “Comrade, then it is your duty to enter this party, to work within it, and to guide it toward a progressive path.” By 1958, however, this joint insistence on nationalist solidarity helped strengthen the bond between the CCP and the FLN as the paramount representatives of their respective nations. When Oussedik asked Peng Dehuai in 1959 to help convince the PCF to support Algerian independence, Peng inquired whether the FLN was concerned that the CCP would not be trustworthy in its dealings with a fellow communist party. Oussedik replied that he believed wholeheartedly in the CCP, since it shared with the FLN a common experience of fighting against imperialism. Oussedik’s confidence that China’s leaders would put nationalism before communism reflected the general attitude of the FLN, which viewed China as the apotheosis of national unity.

For members of the FLN who demanded that all Algerians (including communists) subordinate their political ideologies to the struggle for national liberation, the Chinese...

73. Mohammed Harbi, Une vie debout, 102.
74. Si Azzedine, On nous appelait fellaghas, 260-262. When the PCA subsequently dissolved itself to join with the FLN in accordance with Mao’s advice to form a united front, Babou became a military commander for the ALN under the nom de guerre Si Youcef.
75. Transcript of Peng Dehuai’s conversation with the Algerian military delegation, 6 April 1959, 107-00191-03, CFMA. Azzedine, a member of the Algerian delegation that Oussedik led, embellished this conversation in his memoirs. He attributed to Oussedik a passionate statement in flowery language that is not present in the somewhat more mundane official transcript of the conversation as preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives. According to Azzedine’s version, Oussedik declared: “No, you did the Long March. We do ours. You fought for the liberation of China, and the scope of your revolution has largely spilled beyond your borders to encompass the entirety of Asia. Behind the struggle of the Algerian people, all of Africa is marching. The triumph of our revolutions can shake the foundations of global imperialism.” See Si Azzedine, On nous appelait fellaghas, 310-313.
example was particularly potent. The FLN’s leaders were adamant that they needed to retain complete control over the Algerian independence movement. Not only were they engaged in a bloody armed conflict against their rivals in the MNA, but they were leery of dissent within their own organization, which brought together the proponents of diverse ideological perspectives. In the early 1960s, as the war for independence concluded and bitter rivalries divided the multitude of Algerian factions that had united temporarily under the auspices of the FLN, China symbolized what many Algerians hoped their country might someday become: a supremely organized society in which every citizen dutifully served the common national cause. Every FLN member who traveled to Beijing and received a formal audience with China’s elite leaders reinforced this vision. Although the disorganized propaganda apparatus of the FLN rarely referred explicitly to China, the parade of FLN delegates who passed through Beijing, including all of the top ministers of the GPRA, made certain that the impact of the FLN’s burgeoning relationship with China was widely felt.

The End of an Era

Throughout the period from the formation of the GPRA until the establishment of an independent Algerian state at the end of the war with France, China was an ideal ally for the FLN. Mao’s government was consistent and outspoken in its support for the Algerian cause. From time to time, China’s leaders were also willing to commit a modest amount of military aid to the FLN. Most important, however, the Chinese government was eager to present itself as the patron of the FLN at a moment when that organization most needed the ideological validation that China could offer. By listening to long-winded speeches about Maoism and then publicly praising the CCP, the FLN’s leaders earned the right to portray themselves as students of Mao. They reaped the rewards of this association – the presumption of military competence and the appearance of political legitimacy – without
conceding to China any actual power over the direction of the Algerian independence movement. Such a relationship, which perfectly served the needs of both the radicalized Chinese government during the Great Leap Forward and the embattled FLN, was, by nature, temporary. When the FLN emerged from eight years of war with its political reputation intact and the Algerian economy in a shambles, the leaders of the new Algerian state had no choice but to rethink their bargain with China. Having outlasted the French army, they no longer felt compelled to proclaim fealty to Mao’s theories of guerrilla warfare. With both Algeria’s sovereignty and their own authority confirmed by the Evian Accords, they also no longer needed to rely on China to endorse their leadership. Sino-Algerian relations reached the stage in 1962 that Sino-Egyptian relations had passed through in 1958: it had become clear that the political situation inside independent Algeria no longer required its leaders to maintain their intimate relationship with Beijing.

When Zhou Enlai arrived in Cairo on 14 December 1963 for the initial leg of his first official tour of Africa, he was received with carefully orchestrated pomp. His Egyptian hosts, led by Prime Minister ‘Ali Sabri, arranged an honor guard at the airport as well as a twenty-one-gun salute, an accolade usually reserved for visiting heads of state. All along the route from the airport to Zhou’s temporary residence at al-Quba Palace, curious Egyptians gathered to catch a glimpse of the enigmatic Chinese leader.\(^1\) On 21 December in Algiers, the second stop on the “safari” that eventually took Zhou to ten African countries, the popular reaction was even more celebratory, as thousands turned out to welcome the Chinese premier.\(^2\) China’s ambassador, Zeng Tao, later estimated that as many as 30,000 Algerians assembled to chant “China!” and “welcome!” as Zhou’s motorcade drove from the airport into the capital.\(^3\) It had been eight and a half years since the Bandung Conference, when Zhou had first proclaimed China’s interest in pursuing closer relations with Egypt, and five years since China had become the first non-Arab country to recognize the GPRA. Now, Zhou, along with Chen Yi, had arrived on the African continent to cash in on the credit of goodwill that nearly a decade of anti-imperialist solidarity was supposed to have banked. Whatever Zhou’s

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1. Sources disagree as to how enthusiastic and how numerous the crowd assembled to greet Zhou actually was. The propagandist Chinese press reported that “tens of thousands of people” lined the streets of Cairo. Similarly, the Egyptian media claimed that Egyptians lined balconies throughout Cairo to catch a glimpse of Zhou as his motorcade drove past. On the other hand, the equally nationalist, if technically independent, American press averred that Zhou was in fact unwelcome in Cairo, as when Time asserted that his welcome was “somewhat restrained.” See “‘Alian de pengyou zhou enlai, huanying ni’ [‘The UAR’s friend Zhou Enlai, welcome’].” Renmin Ribao, 16 December 1963, 1; “Al-Sha‘b yastaqbil al-za‘im bi-l-hutaf wa-daqq al-tubul [The people welcome the Chinese leader with cheering and the beating of drums],” Al-Ahram, 15 December 1963, 1; “The Yellow Man’s Burden,” Time, 20 December 1963, 22.


expectations, it quickly became evident that, by 1963, the tone of Sino-Arab relations had lost the idealism of the 1950s. Nasser, whom Zhou had not seen in person since the two men became friends in Bandung, was conspicuously absent from the ceremonies marking Zhou’s arrival in Cairo. Hurrying back from a public appearance with Ben Bella and Habib Bourguiba in the Tunisian town of Bizerte, Nasser received Zhou quietly at a reception later in the evening. In a private conversation between the two men, Zhou lamented how fast the world had changed since they had last met and commented in jest that Nasser nevertheless appeared younger than he had in Bandung. Laughing, Nasser retorted that his hair was graying at an alarming rate and that he slept very little. This frank discussion of stress and aging between two former revolutionaries, which demonstrated that their energetic optimism had been tempered by the realities of a decade in power, offered a compelling metaphor for the challenges facing their countries in the 1960s.

While Zhou’s conversations with Nasser in Cairo and with Ben Bella in Algiers were amicable, they were not as productive as the Chinese government had hoped. Zhou’s foremost goal during his tour of Africa was to secure foreign support for a second Asian-African Conference. He believed that such a conference would allow him to promote China’s leadership role among the postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa and reinforce the principles of international solidarity that he had championed in Bandung. The Chinese government was particularly adamant that Soviet delegates should not be included in the proposed conference, thereby allowing the Chinese to demonstrate that their own commitment to opposing imperialism was more genuine than that of Moscow. To Zhou’s disappointment, however, neither Nasser nor Ben Bella enthusiastically supported China’s plans for a second Bandung Conference. Nasser insisted that he was entirely indifferent to

4. Transcript of Zhou Enlai’s first private conversation with Gamal Abdel Nasser, 14 December 1963, 203-00612-05, CFMA.
the question of whether this conference should be held. At the same time, he eagerly
promoted a reprise of the 1961 Belgrade Conference of countries that were not overtly allied
with either superpower. Ben Bella expressed tepid approval of Zhou’s plans to host a second
Bandung Conference, but he intimated that he did not see eye to eye with the Chinese
Premier regarding the topics to be discussed at such an event.

Despite the warm public receptions that Zhou was given in both Cairo and Algiers, his
private conversations with Nasser and Ben Bella revealed subtle yet significant cracks in the
foundations of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations. A close analysis of the rhetoric
that these three men employed in their conversations demonstrates that they emphasized
different issues and disagreed about what challenges facing their respective countries
deserved the most immediate attention. Zhou focused especially on the threat of continued
meddling by imperialist countries, which, he contended, still had the power to exert nefarious
influence throughout the Third World. In official Chinese parlance, the menace of “old and
new colonialism” (lao xin zhiminzhuyi) was the most pressing issue facing the Non-Western
world. By contrast, neither Nasser nor Ben Bella was willing to use the term
“neocolonialism” or to concur that imperialist pressure remained a dire threat. Instead,
Nasser spoke of imperialism as a problem of the past, something that his revolution had
vanquished and consigned to history, while Ben Bella also denied that neocolonialism was a
priority. Zhou wanted to discuss the shared experience of all Asian and African peoples, but
Nasser and Ben Bella were much more interested in regional politics, whether in the Arab
Middle East or in Africa. Moreover, it was Nasser – not Zhou – who was most eager to label
other Asian and African countries as progressive or reactionary and even to extol the virtues
of socialist development. In short, whereas Zhou preached unity of all Asian and African
countries in opposition to a palpable outside threat, Nasser and Ben Bella no longer
interpreted the international landscape in these terms. The result was that these leaders talked
past each other, with each highlighting different themes and promulgating divergent worldviews.

The most charistmatic delegates at the Bandung Conference, including Zhou and Nasser as well as India’s Nehru and Indonesia’s Sukarno, had been united by their similar predicaments as the leaders of newly formed states. These men were devoted nationalists who hoped to use the concept of Asian-African solidarity to craft a sense of national identity and legitimize the authority of their young regimes. Throughout their war against the French, the leaders of the FLN implicitly accepted this same logic, relying on alliances with foreign countries, including China, as a way of defining the Algerian nation and validating the ideology of the FLN. By 1963, however, the international situation had changed dramatically. Conflicts between independent Asian and African states – including Egypt and Iraq, China and India, Algeria and Morocco, Indonesia and Malaysia, and India and Pakistan – belied any notion of unity throughout the postcolonial world. Moreover, regimes that had once struggled to consolidate control were now firmly entrenched. The quickening pace of decolonization, especially in Africa, instilled confidence that the tide had turned against imperialism and sapped the sense of urgency that had underscored anti-imperialist rhetoric in Bandung. Equally important, many countries in Asia and Africa faced mounting challenges, particularly economic stagnation, that could no longer be so conveniently dismissed as the legacy of imperialism; to promote development, many of these countries openly sought assistance either from former colonial powers or from one or even both of the superpowers. As a result of these changes, Asian and African leaders were compelled to re-evaluate the consensus that had motivated the Bandung Conference and to reconsider whether emphasizing Asian-African solidarity against imperialism was still the most effective strategy by which to promote and enhance their authority.
When Zhou traveled to Cairo and Algiers in December 1963, he found that the
Bandung consensus had all but evaporated. For China, at least, open hostility with the Soviet
Union created many of the conditions under which the “Bandung spirit” had flourished in the
1950s. The feud with Moscow left China more isolated than it had been at any point since
1955. It also made Mao and other leaders bristle at perceived threats to China’s sovereignty
by a stronger foreign power. Most significant, the Sino-Soviet split forced the CCP yet again
to re-imagine and refocus the ideology with which it legitimized its own authority. China’s
leaders needed to explain how their brand of communism differed from that of the Soviet
Union, which Chinese propaganda had until recently branded an unimpeachable exemplar of
the coming global revolution. Zhou’s goal was to use the approval of postcolonial African
countries, especially Egypt and Algeria, to highlight the anti-imperialist heritage of Chinese
communism. By resurrecting his conciliatory policies of the mid-1950s, he hoped to win
support throughout Africa, thereby ensuring continued legitimacy for the CCP as the
vanguard of a global struggle against imperialism. The problem with this plan was that
neither Nasser nor Ben Bella – nor, for that matter, any other African leader of sufficient
prestige – was fully willing to help Zhou put it into action. As a result of the fundamentally
different circumstances in which these three leaders found themselves in the 1960s,
meaningful cooperation between China and its former Arab allies became impossible.

The Revival of the Bandung Spirit in China’s Foreign Policy

China’s return to the politics of the Bandung era began in 1962. During that year, the
Chinese government, along with Indonesian president Sukarno and the ruling junta of
Pakistani president Ayub Khan, sought the support of other countries for a second Bandung
Conference. In November, this proposal lost any chance of immediate success when the PLA’s assault on disputed territory in the Himalayas sparked the Sino-Indian War. Remarkably, open military conflict between two of the most prominent attendees of the original Bandung Conference did not deter the Beijing regime from promoting another conference. Instead, Zhou insisted to representatives from Egypt and other Asian and African countries that China had conducted the war according to the Bandung principles of peaceful co-existence, which is why the PLA had voluntarily withdrawn from conquered Indian territory after occupying the land it believed to be rightfully Chinese. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War, the Chinese government continued to invoke the legacy of the Bandung Conference as it tried to placate critics of its aggression against India. By December 1963, Beijing was ready to send Zhou on a full-scale charm offensive to win over the newly independent countries of Africa. Originally, Zhou planned to visit eleven African countries plus Albania, but unrest forced him to cancel his trips to Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika. Instead, he accepted last-minute invitations to visit Tunisia, where Bourguiba formally recognized Communist China, as well as Ethiopia, with which China did not establish diplomatic relations. Zhou’s trips to Tunisia and Ethiopia demonstrated his willingness to engage with all countries in Asia or Africa regardless of their political orientation, an approach that had been the hallmark of his strategy in Bandung eight years before.

By going out of his way to placate the most conservative leaders he met during his 1963-1964 tour of Africa, Zhou hoped to revive the idea that China aspired to be a friend to

5. G.H. Jansen, Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment, Ch. 17.
6. When the Chinese government announced a unilateral cease fire in November 1962, it declared that its war against India had not violated the Bandung spirit or the five principles of peaceful co-existence celebrated in Bandung. In fact, Zhou insisted that these principles should be employed when resolving all boundary disputes in Asia and Africa, including the war between China and India. See “Zhou enlai zongli jiu zhongyin bianjie wenti zhi yafei guoji lingdaoren de xin [Premier Zhou Enlai’s letter to the leaders of Asian and African countries about the Sino-Indian boundary dispute],” Renmin Ribao, 20 November 1962, 1.
all. In Bandung, he had demonstrated the sincerity of this promise by signing an agreement about the hajj with Saudi Prince Faisal, whose religious and political beliefs were the antithesis of the CCP’s. Now, he used meetings with conservative leaders such as Bourguiba and Ethiopia’s Haile Selassie to try to alleviate any skepticism about China’s commitment to peace. In Addis Ababa in late January and early February 1964, Haile Selassie publicly criticized the Sino-Indian War and chastised Zhou for China’s refusal to accept an international treaty outlawing further nuclear tests. Rather than defend China’s record, Zhou simply accepted these criticisms and responded soberly that he would do everything possible to “seek common grounds” despite the differences in “systems” between China and Ethiopia.7 In Tunis in December 1963, Bourguiba had been even more confrontational, seizing the opportunity presented by his private meeting with Zhou to berate the Chinese Premier for his leftist beliefs.8 In response, Zhou calmly insisted that both the Chinese and Tunisian political systems were valid and that the countries could – and should – be allies despite their differences:

Every country has its own situation. Each country’s leaders determine their own system based on the practical domestic needs of their country and the demands of the people. A certain system may be applicable in one country but not applicable in another. Nevertheless, everybody has the same objective. We can become closer and strive to understand, and we can introduce each other to the systems we have chosen for ourselves. We can also learn from each other’s experiences. We can respect different systems, and we can also influence each other.9

8. Ibid., 186.
Zhou was willing to embrace the prospect of alliances with non-communist countries that did not trust or respect his government because he was desperate to achieve the appearance of unity at any cost. Locked in a bitter quarrel with the Soviet Union, the Chinese had to create the perception that the most significant dichotomy in global politics was not between capitalism and communism, but between the imperialist powers and their non-Western victims. If Zhou had to bite his tongue in order to promote this worldview, then he was prepared to do so.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite Zhou’s moderate tone, he was also adamant that the revolution in Africa was incomplete. On his last full day before leaving Africa in February 1964, Zhou summarized his conclusions about the state of the continent in a long speech in Mogadishu. He began by praising the many African countries that had won independence, but he also warned that every person across the continent had to remain vigilant in order to win a complete victory over imperialism. Zhou pledged that every African country could rely on Chinese support in achieving this goal. He went on to declare that no revolutionary movement operated in isolation, since all the revolutionary peoples of the world should assist one another.

According to Zhou, as long as the formerly oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America worked together as a single bloc, then they could defeat the future obstacles that would be posed by the retreating forces of “imperialism and old and new colonialism.”\textsuperscript{11} Zhou’s emphasis on the continued challenges facing the non-Western world served his goal of promoting unity. His choice to refer to “revolutionary struggles” (\textit{geming douzheng}) rather than “struggles for national liberation” (\textit{minzu jiefang douzheng}) suggested that

\textsuperscript{10} Zhou’s conciliatory approach to foreign policy was endorsed by \textit{Renmin Ribao}, which in December 1963 editorialized that “China has always advocated that all countries big or small, and irrespective of their different social systems, should live together on an equal footing and in friendship.” See “Zengjin youyi, jiaqiang tuanjie, gonggu heping de fangwen [A visit for promoting friendship, strengthening unity, and consolidating peace],” \textit{Renmin Ribao}, 14 December 1963, 1.

\textsuperscript{11} “Zhou enlai zongli changtan feizhou de dahao geming xingshi [Premier Zhou Enlai speaks about prospects for the great revolution in Africa],” \textit{Renmin Ribao}, 6 February 1964, 1.
achieving formal independence was not sufficient for former victims of imperialism to be truly free. Instead, Zhou implied that “revolution” was an ongoing process hindered both by foreign intervention and by native “reactionaries” (fandong pai). This blatant use of Marxist terminology seems out of place in a speech intended to promote unity among countries of vastly different political systems. One contemporary commentator who drew attention to Zhou’s Mogadishu speech was quick to point out that Zhou’s stated support for “revolution” in Africa actually referred to “revolutions of national-liberation, rather than any social revolution which could be labeled a ‘Communist takeover.’”\(^{12}\) Although it is true that Zhou was studiously avoiding any implication that he hoped to establish communism throughout Africa, it is nevertheless also true that he was hinting at a more complicated notion of revolution than merely the fight for national independence.

While Zhou was promoting a moderate image of China during his Africa tour, the Chinese government continued to present itself in domestic propaganda as a leader of violent leftist revolution around the world. Two popular dramas, *On the Docks* [Haigang] and *War Drums on the Equator* [Chidao zhangu], make clear the radical image of Africa that government-approved Chinese authors presented to the masses. At a time when official Chinese foreign policy steadfastly supported the rights of sovereign states in Africa, both of these plays eschewed that framework and celebrated non-state actors. The premiere of *On the Docks* at the Spoken Drama Experimental Performing Festival of Eastern China in December 1963 and January 1964 coincided with Zhou’s visit to Africa. In that play, set in 1949 Shanghai, the newly liberated workers strive to complete a shipment of desperately needed rice seed for the people of Africa despite the sabotage efforts of a “class enemy” in league with the evicted imperialists.\(^{13}\) The play’s female protagonist, Fang Haizhen,

\(^{12}\) W.A.C. Adie, “Chou En-lai on Safari,” 175.

\(^{13}\) An English translation of a revised text of *On the Docks* was published by China’s Foreign Language Press in *Chinese Literature* 5 (1972), shortly after the revised Chinese version was published in *Hongqi.*
explicitly links her own experiences as a victimized and exploited laborer in Shanghai with the continuing plight of the people of Africa, claiming that the oppressed Africans “very much want the support of the revolutionary people of the world.” According to Fang, the anonymous Africans languishing under colonial rule rely on Chinese patronage and aspire to recreate the Chinese model of socialism in their own society. *War Drums on the Equator*, which premiered in 1965, was even more militant in its support of socialist revolution in Africa.¹⁴ That play, a dramatization of Patrice Lumumba’s guerrilla war against pro-Western forces in the Congo, proclaimed the importance of developing a people’s army, without which revolution could not be sustained. Both *On the Docks* and *War Drums on the Equator* were performed frequently in China throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, since both were adopted into the small canon of state-sanctioned communist dramas promoted during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵ *On the Docks* was even adapted into an opera, in which form it became one of the eight “model operas” championed by Jiang Qing.¹⁶ Neither *On the Docks* nor *War Drums on the Equator* paid any attention to African nationalism or to the nationalist regimes sprouting up across that continent; instead, both plays depicted Africans as a homogeneous group that could escape imperialist persecution only through a bloody, Marxist conflict.

This active commitment to foster global revolution was not the only legacy of the Great Leap Forward that survived into the 1960s. Although Zhou preached a return to the

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¹⁵ Both *On the Docks* and *War Drums on the Equator* were analyzed in much greater detail in Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Jiang Qing, Mao’s third wife, assumed responsibility for promoting proper culture during the Cultural Revolution as one of the leaders of the Gang of Four. A former actress herself, Jiang took a special interest in Beijing opera. She endeavored to remake Chinese art and culture to glorify peasants, workers, and soldiers and to adhere to the principles of Mao’s artistic theories as outlined in his 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art.” For an analysis of the operas that Jiang promoted, including *On the Docks*, see Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact of Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 114-119.
politics of the Bandung era, he did not give the same prominence to Chinese Muslims as he had from 1955 to 1957. After the CCP inaugurated its policy of persecution against adherents of all religions during the Great Leap Forward, it was not eased until after Mao’s death in 1976. The absence of Islamic rhetoric in Sino-Arab relations during the 1960s was most evident at the mass meetings organized for visiting Algerian officials. In general, these rallies differed little from those attended by representatives of the FLN during the Great Leap Forward. For example, the events planned in October 1963 to greet Amar Ouzegane, then serving as Algeria’s minister of state, followed the usual script almost exactly. The main purpose of Ouzegane’s trip to Beijing was to participate in the 1963 National Day celebrations, where he was one of dozens of honored foreign guests trotted out to pledge their countries’ support for the CCP before a massive crowd. In addition to this rally, the municipal government of Beijing drafted smaller groups of between 500 and 1,000 members of the “masses” (qunzhong) to attend several different mass meetings in support of Ouzegane and the Algerian people. It is important to note that the Chinese government did not intend these rallies to appeal to its Algerian guests; instead, the rally organizers were confident that the Algerians already fully supported China and that Ben Bella had dispatched Ouzegane to Beijing to reaffirm that the Algerian government was grateful for China’s “past, present, and future” commitment to its alliance with Algiers. Although Ouzegane was a devoted Muslim who tried to synthesize Islam with nationalism and socialism, the rallies he attended in Beijing did not highlight Islamic themes. As always, Ouzegane was welcomed by Bao’erhan, the Muslim leader who had spearheaded China’s Arab diplomacy since 1955, but Bao’erhan did not mention Islam at all in his welcome speech. Instead, he followed the party

17. “Guanyu aerjiliya zhengfu daibiaotuan fanghua jiedai jihua de qingshi [Request for instructions regarding the plan for receiving the Algerian government delegation on its visit to China],” 27 September 1963, 102-001-00299, BMA.
line by lavishing praise on the FLN and railing against alleged American neocolonialism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.\(^\text{19}\) By avoiding the topic of Islam entirely, Bao’erhan signaled that the Chinese government would not return to the religious diplomacy by which it had wooed Egypt and other Islamic countries prior to the Great Leap Forward.

The belligerent attitude expressed in popular dramas and the government’s hostility toward Islam were both manifestations of a militant strain in Chinese communist ideology that was steadily gaining power during the 1960s. This radicalism was also reflected in the increasing importance that some Chinese leaders, especially Mao, placed on the military as an instrument of social and political change. In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, which left the CCP apparatus fragmented and discredited, Mao turned to the PLA as the institution most capable of directing social reform in China. Under the leadership of Lin Biao, the PLA began to present itself more overtly as an instrument for the Marxist education of the masses.\(^\text{20}\) While Zhou was still in Africa, *Renmin Ribao* demanded that the Chinese public “learn from the PLA,” inaugurating a new campaign to promote militant Marxist fervor in Chinese society.\(^\text{21}\) Continuing themes from the Great Leap Forward era, the Chinese press used the examples of foreign revolutions – particularly in North Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba – to advance this campaign. *Renmin Ribao* began to mention those three countries specifically in the same contexts in which it had previously invoked the more general examples of “Asian, African, and Latin American peoples.” The Chinese press chose North Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba to represent their respective continents because their revolutions were violent and leftist. Whereas the Chinese media had celebrated Nasser’s

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19. “Zai huanying aerjiliya minzhu renmin gongheguo zhengfu daibiaotuan dahui shang bao’erhan fu huizhang de jianghua [The speech of committee vice chairman Bao’erhan at the mass meeting to welcome the government delegation of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria],” *Renmin Ribao*, 1 October 1963, 4.
Free Officers Revolution in the mid-1950s, by the following decade Chinese propaganda focused solely on revolutions deemed to be in the spirit of the CCP’s own rise to power. *Renmin Ribao* often cited North Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba in order to justify violence against colonial regimes, as when it declared China’s support for Cameroon’s resistance movement in March 1964. This emphasis on the importance of militant combat blatantly contradicted the spirit of Zhou’s diplomacy in Africa and may have reflected the fact that Zhou’s approach to foreign policy was increasingly at odds with a strengthening new coalition in Chinese politics that rejected the notion of solidarity with non-communist countries altogether. If so, one might conclude that Zhou had only a limited time in which to make his policy of Asian-African solidarity pay dividends before Mao would direct him to abandon the diplomatic principles of the Bandung era. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these *Renmin Ribao* articles in favor of militant revolution never explicitly contradicted anything Zhou said in Africa; while Zhou pledged his support to independent non-communist regimes, Chinese propaganda at home celebrated leftist insurrection only against the imperialist West.

Zhou’s fastidiously scripted comments about cooperation and co-existence masked an agenda that was actually quite radical. His goal was to challenge the status of the United States and the Soviet Union as the world’s two superpowers by piecing together a coalition of non-Western countries that condemned foreign influence in the Third World. This Chinese approach differed from that of the Non-Aligned Movement, which was a mostly successful attempt by leaders such as Nasser, Nehru, and Tito to establish their independence from the Cold War blocs while simultaneously benefiting from their relationships with both sides. Zhou insisted that Western imperialism was still a menace to the peoples of Asia and Africa,

now compounded by the new threat of “neocolonialism.” The term neocolonialism had been in currency throughout the 1950s. Delegates to the Bandung Conference had even debated whether to condemn neocolonialism in the Conference’s final communiqué, but this language was omitted when the attendees could not reach a consensus.  

Originally, Chinese propaganda employed the rhetoric of neocolonialism to defend revolutionary forces (such as those in the Congo, Algeria, Cuba, and Laos) against intervention by the United States and other Western powers. After the Sino-Soviet split, however, the Chinese government adapted this rhetoric to attack the Soviet Union as well. By 1963, Chinese publications were openly accusing Moscow of pursuing a neocolonialist foreign policy. A characteristic October 1963 editorial prepared by the staffs of Renmin Ribao and Hongqi, which proclaimed that “the national liberation movement has entered a new stage,” blasted both the United States and the Soviet Union for their policies of “old and new colonialism,” particularly in the Congo.  

Zhou’s goal for his African tour was to gain foreign support for the idea that the superpowers were perpetuating imperialism by taking advantage of Third World countries. If he could promote this ideology, Zhou reasoned, he could simultaneously enhance China’s prestige and undermine a global order in which China was severely handicapped.  

Accordingly, Chinese diplomats and the Chinese media both inserted condemnations of “old and new colonialism” into every public statement about Zhou’s trip to Africa. For example, Renmin Ribao hailed Zhou’s Africa trip as an opportunity to strengthen “feelings of brotherhood and kinship between the Chinese and African peoples” that were “continuously

23. Proposed resolutions at the Bandung Conference, April 1955, 207-00047-01, CFMA.  
strengthened by their common cause of fighting old and new colonialism.”

Zhou, never one to stray off message, greeted Nasser in Cairo by proclaiming him a supporter of “other Arab and African peoples in their struggle against old and new colonialism” and told Ben Bella in Algiers that “the Chinese and Algerian peoples now face the common task of opposing imperialism and old and new colonialism.”

In private, Zhou also invoked neocolonialism persistently, as when he stressed to Nasser the importance of “the question of opposing imperialism (diguozhuyi) and neocolonialism (xin zhiminzhuyi)” in the Arab world. This focus on neocolonialism was a somewhat desperate attempt to convince leaders of sovereign Asian and African countries that imperialism still posed a threat to their regimes and thus that Asian-African solidarity against the West was still relevant, even in the 1960s. It was also a means to distinguish China from the Soviet Union, whose economic and military presence in Africa and the Middle East the Chinese government hoped to contest.

The most concrete anti-imperialist initiative that Zhou pursued during his Africa trip was his attempt to drum up support for a second Bandung Conference, a policy intended to discredit the Soviet Union and reinvigorate China’s claim to leadership status in the Third World. In 1963, as the Western press recognized, Asian and African leaders were jockeying to see which of two potential conferences – a second Bandung Conference of Asian and African countries or a second Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned countries, including Yugoslavia and some Latin American countries – would be held. For China, this issue acquired special significance. As Zhou admitted publicly during his Cairo press conference,

27. “Premier Chou En-lai’s Speech at the Reception Given by President Gamal Abdel Nasser” and “Premier Chou En-lai’s Speech at Algiers Airport,” in Afro-Asian Solidarity Against Imperialism (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1964), 5-10, 63-64.
29. The most accurate contemporary explanation in English of this competition was “The Mandarin Meets the Sphinx,” The Economist, 21 December 1963, 1257-1258.
his government could not participate in a second Belgrade Conference because, as a communist country, China was “aligned,” even if it was temporarily engaged in a dispute with Moscow.  

Officially, the Chinese position in December 1963 was that worldwide conditions were conducive to holding a second Bandung Conference and that such a conference should be held even if a second Non-Aligned summit was also scheduled, since there were no “contradictions” (maodun) between the views that would be advanced at each gathering.  

The decision to declare support for a Non-Aligned conference, even one in which China could not participate, was probably a pragmatic choice, since Beijing recognized that there was nothing it could do to prevent it. Zhou and his entourage somberly reported back to the Chinese Foreign Ministry that Nasser was lukewarm to the idea of a second Bandung Conference, instead deeming the Non-Aligned meeting “easier.” Still, China’s leaders continued (along with Ayub Khan and Sukarno) to be among the most vocal supporters of another gathering of Asian-African countries. For the Chinese government, the opportunity to present China to the world as a leader of all victims of imperialism and neocolonialism at a conference from which the Soviet Union would be excluded was a tantalizing proposition.

Zhou Enlai’s Ambivalent Reception in Cairo

Throughout the week that Zhou spent in Egypt in December 1963, he maintained a full schedule as a tourist. In Giza, he watched an Egyptian athlete climb to the top of the Great Pyramid, then marveled that the man maintained a low pulse rate. Zhou shared the stage

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30. See “Shu in lay yujib fi al-qahira ‘an as’ilat 120 sahifan [Zhou Enlai answers in Cairo the questions of 120 reporters],” Al-Ahram, 21 December 1963, 7.
32. Report on Zhou Enlai’s trip to Cairo, 19 December 1963, 203-00395-08, CFMA.
33. Many of the photographs from Zhou’s visit to the Pyramids in Giza are available online in the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Arab Republic of Egypt’s “Photo Album of China-Egypt Relations.”
with Nasser at an event to mark Egypt’s “Celebrate Education Day,” where the Chinese Premier gave a short speech to an audience of Egyptian schoolchildren. He was even whisked away to Aswan for a day to admire the progress on constructing the High Dam. Since most of the funding for the dam had come from Moscow, this itinerary had the potential to stir up controversy, but Zhou handled his obligation with characteristic grace. Because Zhou’s Egyptian hosts kept him busy playing tourist, he spent surprisingly little time in private negotiations with Nasser. The two leaders did meet officially on five separate days, but their conversations were brief.\textsuperscript{34} The Western media, eager to embarrass Zhou and the CCP, speculated that the Chinese Premier was angry to be given so little time with Nasser;\textsuperscript{35} however, no available Chinese archival evidence suggests that Zhou was actually peeved by the schedule the Egyptian government made for him. To the contrary, Zhou’s official reports on the meetings state that Nasser was friendly and happy to welcome him to Cairo.\textsuperscript{36} Even so, the Egyptian reaction to his visit was deeply ambivalent. It is not difficult to understand why a leader who tried to maintain a delicate balance in his relations with the United States and the Soviet Union might be reluctant to embrace a delegation from a country that openly antagonized both superpowers. Although Egyptian public opinion toward China remained extremely positive, and despite the public fanfare with which Zhou was welcomed, it is likely that Nasser’s government found China to be an inconvenient ally. In private, Nasser studiously avoided engaging with Zhou on any matter that would undermine Egypt’s emerging status within the international community.

One of the factors complicating Nasser’s response to Zhou’s visit was the fact that Egypt’s most prominent leftist intellectuals tended to be quite sympathetic toward China and

\textsuperscript{34} Zhou’s daily schedule for his trip can be found in ZNP, vol. 2, 600-603.
\textsuperscript{35} Such a charge appears, for example, in “The Mandarin Meets the Sphinx,” The Economist, 21 December 1963.
\textsuperscript{36} Report on Zhou Enlai’s trip to Cairo, 19 December 1963, 203-00395-08, CFMA.
the CCP. Ever since the Bandung Conference, when Egyptian journalists began in earnest to investigate Communist China and its government, some influential Egyptians were enamored with the idea of pursuing closer relations with China. Even in October 1959, the single most contentious month in Sino-Egyptian relations, the leftist Egyptian media held out hope for reconciliation. Writing in *Ruz al-yusuf*, Ihsan ʿAbd al-Quddus condemned the Chinese government’s belligerence toward Taiwan, Tibet, and India, but he nevertheless insisted that China had the potential to be a valuable ally and defended Nasser’s decision to recognize China two years previously. ʿAbd al-Quddus declared that countries should be judged by their “actions” (*tašarrufāt*); while China’s recent behavior had been threatening, he hoped that the Chinese government would pursue more responsible policies in the future.37 By the early 1960s, as China began to return to its more moderate positions, members of the Egyptian left openly admired Chinese communism once again. Some commentators have even claimed that Nasser designed the Arab Socialist Union, his pet project intended to mobilize the Egyptian population in support of progressive causes, with the organizational structure of the post-1949 CCP in mind.38 Moreover, Egyptian Marxists such as Anouar Abdel-Malek, who singled out China and Egypt as the historical centers of Asian and African civilization, consistently promoted China as an ideal partner.39 China’s proponents in Egypt were undeterred even by the Cultural Revolution, as Egyptian publishers continued to churn out new books praising the CCP throughout the 1960s and 1970s.40 Whatever the actions of

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40. Perhaps the most interesting such book was Muhyi al-Din Fawzi and Ibrahim ʿArif Kirah’s *Shu yin lay waqafat al-sin li-l-amam [Zhou Enlai and China’s leap forward]* (Cairo: al-Dar al-qawniyya li-l-tabāʿa wa-l-nashr, 1967), whose authors went out of their way to establish a historical connection between China and Egypt. They particularly emphasized that China suffered because of Japanese imperialism, which they likened to British imperialism in Egypt on the grounds that Japan and the United Kingdom were allies at the time. They also identified a connection between Saad Zaghloul’s revolution in Egypt in 1919 and the May Fourth protests in China that same year.
the Chinese government, full reconciliation between China and Egypt continued to intrigue many Egyptians.

This reservoir of goodwill was an important factor moderating the Egyptian government’s attitude toward China during the early 1960s. Although one might have expected Nasser and other top Egyptian officials to denounce the Chinese for their aggression during the Sino-Indian War, the Egyptian government actually took a much more measured stance. Nasser and Nehru had been close allies as leaders of the new Non-Aligned Movement, but they disagreed on many international issues. In particular, Nehru’s preoccupation with the Cold War and his refusal to back the anticolonial movements in Algeria and the Congo as resolutely as Nasser would have liked estranged India from Egypt and other Third World countries in the early 1960s.41 Faced with a fierce conflict between two occasional allies whose foreign policies he often opposed, Nasser declared his intention to remain neutral. When sustained fighting between Chinese and Indian forces broke out in October 1962, Nasser offered his services as an impartial mediator. Although both Zhou and Nehru scrambled to try to secure international support for their respective positions, the only Asian or African countries to support India explicitly in the conflict were Cyprus and Malaya. Egyptian newspapers were generally critical of China for launching an unprovoked military attack, but restricted themselves to calling for an immediate end to the fighting. The most important goal for the Egyptian press was to portray Egypt as a responsible mediator that could exert moral pressure to prevent war during both the Sino-Indian War and the concurrent Cuban Missile Crisis.42 On the whole, the Egyptian media was more eager to

41. The process by which Nasser and Nehru became disenchanted with each other’s foreign policies is outlined in great detail in Chotirat Komaratad’s “Friends Fall Apart: The Wax and Wane of the Indo-Egyptian Relations, 1947-1970,” Ch. 4.

42. See “Anzar al-ṭalim tuwaji’ dawr al-qahira fi inha’ al-sira’ bayna al-sin wa-l-hind [The eyes of the world look to the role of Cairo in ending the conflict between China and India],” Al-Akhbar, 29 November 1962, 1; “Al-ra’is yaqtařah tawassut al-dawal ghayr al-munhaza fi al-niza’ bayna al-sin wa-l-hind [The President suggests the mediatiion of the non-aligned countries in the conflict between China and India],” Al Gomhuria, 24 October 1962, 4; and “Al-tahdid bi-l-harb [The threat of war],” Al Gomhuria, 24 October 1962, 5.
castigate both China and India for threatening world peace than to assign blame specifically to either party. Two days after the outbreak of the war, a caricature in the official Egyptian daily *Al Gomhuria* succinctly captured this attitude; that cartoon depicted Mao and Nehru standing on either side of a mountain angrily punching the personification of peace, who called out in vain, “may God protect me from my friends.” The Egyptians who participated in the negotiations in Ceylon to resolve the Sino-Indian War also tended to be sympathetic toward China. Egyptian journalist ʿAli Hamdi al-Jamal, who had published a laudatory book about China in 1956, again portrayed Zhou positively and asserted that Egyptian mediation and the commitment of all sides to the Bandung principles would quickly resolve any tensions. This enduring friendliness toward China, even at a time when the PLA was invading Egypt’s ostensible ally, demonstrated that many Egyptians still valued China and held out hope for Sino-Egyptian relations in the future.

Although Egyptian commentators generally promoted this positive attitude toward China, they were nevertheless bewildered by the Sino-Soviet split. China’s deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union had great potential to impact Egypt because Nasser took such care to maintain friendly relations with Moscow. Broadly speaking, most Egyptian commentators interpreted the Sino-Soviet conflict in one of two ways: some emphasized the significance of Marxist ideology, while others asserted that Chinese nationalism trumped communism. Writers in the former category tended to downplay the significance of the feud, since they assumed the communist bloc would ultimately remain unified. By contrast, Egyptian intellectuals who looked beyond ideology were generally more sympathetic toward China, since they recognized that the Chinese government was trying to secure autonomy from Moscow. Regardless which of these two interpretations Egyptian observers adopted,

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43. See *Al Gomhuria*, 22 October 1962, 2.
their analyses tended to be based on an incomplete understanding of the political situation in
China and were mostly devoid of any real insight into the causes or consequences of the
Sino-Soviet rift. As a result, it is difficult to characterize the attitude of Egyptian intellectuals
toward Chinese foreign policy in the early 1960s.

One prominent Egyptian commentator who was perplexed by China’s behavior was
ʿAbd al-Quddus. Writing in Ṣawāqī ṣawawf in October 1959 at the height of hostility between
China and Egypt less than a week after Khalid Bakdash’s inflammatory speech in Beijing,
ʿAbd al-Quddus outlined his interpretation of Chinese and Soviet foreign policy. 45 He
observed that the Chinese government had once pursued a policy of peaceful coexistence
with all countries, but that now China’s leaders overtly challenged foreign governments; at
the same time, Khrushchev had reversed Stalin’s inward-looking policies and now promoted
closer relations with non-communist regimes in the Third World. 46 Accordingly, ʿAbd al-
Quddus concluded that China had entered a “Stalinist” stage of development. He asserted
that China’s attitude toward the non-communist world had hardened because the Chinese
revolution was still continuing, whereas the situation in the Soviet Union had stabilized. He
also portrayed China’s leaders as immature and said that they did not take their decisions to
bombard islands in the Taiwan Strait any more seriously than “going to the cinema.” By
portraying China’s leaders as children and averring that they were developmentally behind
the Soviet Union, however, ʿAbd al-Quddus was also hinting that Egyptians could look
forward to the time when China would grow out of this behavior and rejoin the community of
responsible countries. This interpretation of the tension between Beijing and Moscow

45. Ihsan ʿAbd al-Quddus, “Ayna taqif al-sin?”
46. ʿAbd al-Quddus was consistently incorrect in his understanding of the chronology of Chinese and Soviet
history. Stalin died in 1953, two years before China began to court international acceptance from non-
communist Asian and African countries at the Bandung Conference. ʿAbd al-Quddus suggested that the
Chinese government’s willingness to listen to different points of view in Bandung reflected Mao’s policy of
“letting a hundred flowers bloom,” a short-lived movement encouraging popular expression within Mao’s
policy “switched” roles is thus oversimplified and easy to refute.
foreshadowed later Egyptian commentaries on the Sino-Soviet split, many of which also suggested that the feud was only temporary. For example, in the midst of the Sino-Indian War, Al-Akhbar accepted at face value a comment by a Soviet official that the “eternal relationship” (‘alāqa abadiyya) between China and the Soviet Union remained fully intact.47 The notion that this feud might not be genuine was intriguing because it coincided with the conventional wisdom of the Cold War, which did not recognize dissension within the communist camp. This assumption also made it all but impossible to know how to react to China’s increasingly antagonistic attitude toward its supposed ally.

The opposite approach to interpreting the Sino-Soviet split was promoted by the Egyptian economic planner and Marxist theorist Rashid al-Barrawi, who asserted that China’s animosity toward the Soviet Union reflected a deeper rift between the two countries. Al-Barrawi was one of the chief architects of Nasser’s command economy and an admirer of the Soviet Union’s success at building an industrial infrastructure via central planning. He was also known for writing several Arabic translations of Marxist classics such as Marx’s Capital and Lenin’s Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.48 Al-Barrawi recognized that the root of the Sino-Soviet split was the desire of China’s leaders to free themselves from Soviet control and make their own foreign policy decisions. In a 1964 book on the conflict between Beijing and Moscow, al-Barrawi contended that the ideological debate between the CCP and the CPSU and the personal antipathy between Mao and Khrushchev were only part of the story behind the Sino-Soviet clash.49 Al-Barrawi claimed that the conflict reflected the tendency of all communist countries to seek “autonomy” (al-istiqlāl al-dhāti) from Moscow,

a phenomenon that he also identified as a priority of the Romanian government. Ultimately, al-Barrawi maintained, each of these countries could only develop its economy if it could make full use of its own resources, something that was not possible if all economic decisions were dictated by Moscow. The fact that al-Barrawi could be so sympathetic toward the Chinese position while continuing to advocate Soviet-style economic policies epitomized the conundrum facing Egypt’s leaders in the 1960s. Although many influential leftist thinkers, including al-Barrawi, felt an affinity for the CCP and the Chinese revolution, they also recognized that the Soviet Union was a much wealthier country with a much more developed economy. Al-Barrawi may have been an anti-imperialist who admired China’s independence, but he was also an economist who recognized the importance of Soviet patronage to the building of Egypt’s infrastructure. It was perhaps for this reason that he did not attempt to reinforce his sympathetic attitude toward China with any overt criticism of the Soviet Union.

Ultimately, the need not to antagonize Moscow hamstrung the ability of the Egyptian government to engage with China during the 1960s. Egyptian economic planners, like those of other Arab countries, championed large-scale development projects, such as the Aswan High Dam and the Helwan steelworks, which could only be achieved with significant Soviet economic and technological assistance. Indeed, only the Soviet Union could provide Egypt with the trained specialists necessary to implement the Soviet-style development schemes that Nasser’s government envisioned. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, Egyptian planners identified more and more with the Soviet Union’s authoritarian “production culture,” which emphasized central planning, ambitious production targets, and military-style

50. Ibid., 262-263.
precision. Soviet aid was a significant boon to the Egyptian economy, which increasingly relied on Moscow for support. As a result, it is not surprising that influential Egyptian intellectuals placed a great deal of faith in the Soviet Union’s economic power. For example, Mohamed Hasanayn Heikal, who made several visits to China and generally supported the Chinese government, was convinced that China was doomed in its confrontation with Moscow. Heikal fully accepted an argument that Khrushchev advanced in Cairo in 1964, which was that China would eventually “return to the age of the famines” without Soviet economic assistance. When Khrushchev went on to assert that the end of Soviet support would force China back to the feudal society that Pearl Buck had described in *The Good Earth*, Heikal and other associates of Nasser agreed with this grim prognosis. For an Egyptian government that was economically dependent on the Soviet Union, the assumption that the Chinese economy could not survive the Sino-Soviet split made it all the more important not to alienate the Soviet regime. Consequently, when Zhou arrived in Cairo in 1963, Nasser could not risk upsetting his patrons in Moscow.

Nasser had to be particularly wary in his meetings with Zhou about giving too much support to the Chinese plan to exclude the Soviet Union from a second Bandung Conference. Nasser told Zhou that he had only come around to the decision not to support such a conference in 1961, which was, not coincidentally, both the year that the UAR fell apart and the year that the Chinese government openly denounced the Soviet Union. When Zhou broached the topic in his second private meeting with Nasser in December 1963, Nasser politely reminded him that he had fully supported Indonesian President Sukarno’s call in 1960 to begin preparations for a second Bandung Conference. At the time, Nasser told

52. Elizabeth Bishop, “Talking Shop: Egyptian Engineers and Soviet Specialists at the Aswan High Dam” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997), Ch. 4.
54. Transcript of the second discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 17 December 1963, 107-01027-06, CFMA.
Zhou, he believed that any international conference would help bring about greater cooperation among Asian and African countries. It was only the subsequent outbreak of conflicts among those countries – and particularly among Arab countries – Nasser explained, that made him doubt the efficacy of a second gathering of Asian and African leaders. In contrast to Zhou, who believed that a second Bandung Conference would demonstrate the unity of non-Western peoples, Nasser did not place any importance on this notion of race-based solidarity. Instead, he was more interested in political alliances, including those with countries outside of Asia and Africa (such as Yugoslavia and Cuba) that could attend a second Belgrade Conference instead. Particularly after the collapse of the UAR, Nasser engaged in a decade-long, remarkably blunt confrontation with the Saudi monarchy, which he deemed the paramount example of a reactionary Arab regime and which he blamed for the failure to unite the Arab world.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, it was not surprising that Nasser clarified for Zhou that the problem with the first Bandung Conference was the presence of countries that were too closely tied to the West, especially Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq (before the 1958 revolution). If a second conference of Asian and African countries included delegates from pro-capitalist countries, Nasser cautioned, it would be far more difficult to reach a meaningful consensus than if the conference consisted only of Non-Aligned countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as Yugoslavia, all of which enjoyed “closer” relations with each other.\textsuperscript{56}

Whereas in 1955 Nasser’s priority had been finding common ground from which to declare a collective commitment to individual sovereignty and to condemn imperialist intervention in Asia and Africa, by 1963 he hoped to use a new international summit as a forum to legitimize his position in the so-called “Arab Cold War” and to speak out against his Arab rivals.

\textsuperscript{55} Nasser’s struggle against the “reactionary” countries of the Middle East in the early 1960s was analyzed in Malcolm Kerr’s \textit{The Arab Cold War: Gamal Ṭab al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970} (London: Oxford University Press, [1965] 1971).

\textsuperscript{56} Transcript of the second discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 17 December 1963, 107-01027-06, CFMA.
Nasser was unwilling to cooperate with Zhou because he was more interested in regional politics at a time when the Chinese government was trying to challenge the worldwide power structures of the Cold War.

Nasser demonstrated most clearly that he had come to accept the balance of power on a global level by consistently refusing to agree with Zhou’s characterization of imperialism as a pressing problem in Asia and Africa. Instead, Nasser described imperialism as a burden of the past. While Zhou worked his condemnation of “old and new colonialism” into every speech he gave in Cairo, Nasser spoke of imperialism as a force whose deathblow had already been dealt. When he welcomed Zhou to Cairo at a public reception, for example, Nasser lauded the Bandung Conference as “the outstanding turning point in the Afro-Asian struggle,” then summarized for Zhou the defeats that imperialism had suffered in the Middle East since 1955. The Suez Crisis, the Egyptianization of Egypt’s banks in 1957, the formation of the UAR, the Iraqi revolution of 1958, and the independence of Algeria, Nasser asserted, were decisive victories in the fight against imperialism. Zhou’s argument that neocolonialism continued to threaten Asian and African nations and thus required their solidarity and their constant vigilance, therefore, was at odds with Nasser’s optimistic celebration of imperialism’s defeat. Indeed, Nasser invoked the term “neocolonialism” only once during his private negotiations with Zhou, when he defended his government against charges that its administration of Syria after 1958 was representative of a “new colonial rule” (xin de zhiminzhuyi tongzhi), an allegation that Nasser said left him astonished. Given Egypt’s increasingly active role throughout the Middle East, particularly in Syria during the period of unification and in Yemen, Nasser was sensitive to accusations that his government

58. Transcript of the first discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 15 December 1963, 107-01027-05, CFMA.
interfered in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. Nasser condemned the maintenance of French and American military bases in Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya, but he studiously avoided labeling this practice as an example of neocolonialism in his conversation with Zhou. 59 Instead, by refusing to portray neocolonialism as a current threat to the postcolonial world, Nasser undermined the basis for the global international solidarity Zhou endeavored to establish.

Nasser also demonstrated how he had retreated from his previous emphasis on anti-imperialism when he refused to invoke that concept while analyzing the current state of the Middle East for Zhou. One of Zhou’s many talents as a diplomat was his ability to listen, and he began his first private meeting with Nasser in Cairo by asking the Egyptian president to teach him about the political situation in the Middle East. Nasser, never one to pass up an opportunity to talk, obliged with a candid and lengthy monologue on Middle Eastern regional politics from 1955 to 1963 that – preserved in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives – offers great insight into how Nasser understood regional politics and how he presented his own role in the region to a sympathetic foreign ally. What is most remarkable is the extent to which Nasser avoided referring to imperialism when justifying Egypt’s rivalry with Iraq and explaining the collapse of the UAR. Nasser mentioned imperialism only to criticize the historical role of the United Kingdom, in particular to disparage the Baghdad Pact as an instrument of British imperialism. He was careful, however, to avoid labeling the Eisenhower Doctrine as an example of American imperialism. He justified his opposition to the Eisenhower Doctrine to Zhou by saying that it was flawed because it was intended to prevent communist invasion, when in fact “most Arab countries are clear that invasion comes from Britain and France.” 60

60. Transcript of the first discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 15 December 1963,
asserted American complicity in the sins of all European imperialists, Nasser’s attempts to spare the United States the “imperialist” label must have been difficult to swallow. Having dismissed imperialism as an archaic concern, Nasser instead defined the most important conflict in the Middle East as one between progressive leaders such as himself and conservative regimes. Thus, when Nasser explained the politics of the Arab world to Zhou, he criticized his rivals not for being in league with foreign imperialists, but for being reactionary.⁶¹

Nasser’s interest in developing a legitimizing ideology that was not based on anti-imperialism demonstrated that he and other Egyptians no longer considered imperialism to be an urgent threat. One article that Lutfi al-Khuli wrote for al-Ahram clarified how far Egypt had drifted away from the Bandung spirit. As al-Khuli recognized, the Bandung Conference had succeeded because the attendees were unanimous in recognizing “shared general dangers that threaten[ed] Egypt and the existence of every country regardless of its political or social orientation.” According to al-Khuli, the tripartite invasion of Egypt in 1956 demonstrated the severity of this peril, which forced all Asian and African countries to support one another. The main purpose of his article was to link the ongoing Arab League summit in Cairo in January 1964 to previous international conferences in which Egypt had participated, especially the Bandung Conference and the May 1963 Addis Ababa Conference. Al-Khuli argued that the threat of Zionism should unite Arab countries regardless of their political systems, just as imperialism had united Asian and African countries in 1955.⁶² Yet this

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107-01027-05, CFMA. Nasser’s refusal to label the Eisenhower Doctrine as an imperialist instrument in 1963 marked a return to his initial response to the program in 1957, when he neither accepted nor opposed it openly. It was only after the American intervention in Lebanon in 1958 that Nasser criticized the Eisenhower administration by invoking anti-imperialist rhetoric. See Salim Yaqub, Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 121, 230.

61. Transcript of the second discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 17 December 1963, 107-01027-06, CFMA.

62. Lutfi al-Khuli, “Min wahdat bandunji...ila wahdat adis ababa...ila wahdat al-qahira [From the unity of Bandung...to the unity of Addis Ababa...to the unity of Cairo],” al-Ahram, 23 January 1964, 9.
contrived comparison between the Bandung spirit and 1960s Arab politics suggested how much had changed in the intervening decade. The focus of Egypt’s foreign policy had narrowed considerably, from global affairs to regional politics, and the Asian-African consensus was something that commentators like al-Khuli could only discuss wistfully in the past tense. Al-Khuli may not have been willing to concede in the pages of *Al-Ahram* that the Bandung spirit no longer had any direct relevance to Egypt, but he openly admitted that the circumstances that had made the Bandung Conference a triumph were no longer in place.

Al-Khuli’s theoretical arguments about the Chinese revolution further indicated that Egyptian politics had evolved beyond the simplistic ideological propaganda that had characterized the mid-1950s. In the 1950s, Egyptian journalists had celebrated Communist China in order to validate the idea of a national revolution. By drawing parallels between the Chinese revolution and the coup that brought the Free Officers to power in Egypt, they endorsed Nasser’s government. In 1963, al-Khuli reformulated this old strategy; now, he legitimized Nasserism by pointing out the *differences* between China’s and Egypt’s revolutions. Al-Khuli outlined his understanding of the Chinese revolution in *Al-Ahram*. He asserted that the CCP’s rise to power was much less bloody than the Russian revolution had been because the CCP enjoyed the backing of a broad coalition of social classes. This extensive support, al-Khuli claimed, allowed the CCP to complete its transition period and implement socialism more quickly than had been the case in the Soviet Union. The problem with this revolution, in al-Khuli’s opinion, was that the social structure necessary to support true democracy never took root because the intermediate phase of revolution – the stage of cooperation among all classes outlined in Mao’s *On New Democracy* – gave way to the dictatorship of the CCP. In contrast to the failure of the Chinese revolution, al-Khuli held up the Egyptian revolution as an example of a fully “democratic” revolution. By more effectively concentrating power in the hands of the people, al-Khuli claimed, Nasser had not
only led a bloodless revolution, but had also gone further than either China or the Soviet Union toward implementing a revolutionary society.\textsuperscript{63} In stating this claim, al-Khuli essentially appropriated the ideological foundations of the Chinese Communist state by suggesting that Nasser’s Egypt was a more complete realization of Mao’s “new democracy” than was China. When Zhou arrived in Cairo eleven months later, al-Khuli reviewed the Chinese revolution again, this time more diplomatically. Yet while he welcomed Zhou as the representative of a great revolution that had happened “in the same historical period” as that of Egypt, he was careful to make clear that the Chinese and Egyptian revolutions were fully distinct. Al-Khuli presented the Bandung Conference as an important step in Egypt’s political development because it was “the first meeting between the revolution of China represented by Zhou Enlai and the revolution of Egypt represented by Gamal Abdel Nasser.”

Al-Khuli then explained that Nasser’s government continued to evolve after 1955, and he highlighted Egypt’s attendance at two conferences from which China was excluded (the 1961 Belgrade Conference and the 1963 Addis Ababa Conference) and Egypt’s commitment to a foreign policy of “positive neutralism” that distinguished it from China.\textsuperscript{64} Although al-Khuli presented China as an equal with shared goals and a similar history, he was thinking and writing more critically about what makes a revolution succeed or fail than were the authors who had discussed China in the mid-1950s.

Al-Khuli’s attempts to construct a more sophisticated theoretical model to sanction the Egyptian revolution reflected the increasing significance of socialism in Nasser’s Egypt. Nasser’s turn toward socialism was the culmination of a long search for a legitimizing ideology to support the Egyptian government. In 1952, when the Free Officers came to power, they were technocrats with a military background who, for the most part, had little


interest or training in ideological matters. Nasser used his *Philosophy of the Revolution*, published in 1955, as the first step in a process of defining retroactively the philosophical goals behind his military takeover. Nasser approached this quest for theoretical legitimacy self-consciously, portraying himself as a reluctant leader who took power in the wake of the Free Officers’ coup only because nobody more qualified was willing to lead. The gradual evolution of Nasser’s understanding of his own government’s principles has long been a source of interest for historians, one of whom even labeled this process an “uncertain revolution.” Although Nasser placed particular emphasis on pan-Arabism throughout the 1950s, beginning in 1961 he gave much more prominence to socialism in his official statements. To a large degree, this transformation reflected Nasser’s changing priorities in the wake of the collapse of the UAR. Perhaps most important, he had to explain why, despite his insistence that Arab unity was inviolable, Syria had dropped out of the union with Egypt. By distinguishing between “progressive” and “reactionary” forces within the Arab world, Nasser could save face by blaming the demise of the UAR on class enemies who were trying to hinder the Arab revolution. Marxism also gave Nasser a vocabulary with which to denounce his Arab rivals, some of whom (such as Qasim) had unimpeachable anti-imperialist credentials themselves. Embracing socialism allowed Nasser to make more refined political distinctions. Now, rather than pan-Arab unity, he could call for the unity of progressive forces in the Arab world, and instead of celebrating “revolution” in the abstract, he could begin to define more carefully the characteristics that made a revolution truly successful.

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67. Qasim died in a February 1963 coup that brought the pan-Arabist military officer ʿAbd al-Salam ʿArif to power. Because Nasser and ʿArif maintained friendly relations in 1963, Nasser criticized only the Iraqi government’s past actions while speaking with Zhou.
68. Nasser’s transition to socialism was part of a larger global phenomenon, which David Priestland, *The Red Flag: Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 471 has identified as the gradual transition in many Asian and African countries from the emphasis placed on nationalism and anti-imperialism at the Bandung Conference in the 1950s to an increasing interest in Marxism in the 1960s.
Nasser’s increasing interest in socialism was evident in his conversations with Zhou in Cairo, during which he invoked Marxist principles in part to avoid agreeing with Zhou about the continued importance of imperialism. Instead of imperialists, Nasser identified his chief antagonists in the Middle East as those reactionaries who opposed “progress” in the region.\footnote{Transcript of the first discussion between Zhou Enlai and Gamal Abdel Nasser, 15 December 1963, 107-01027-05, CFMA.} Nasser tried to present a contrast between himself as socialist and a progressive and his Arab rivals as conservative and reactionary. What was most remarkable about Nasser’s attempts to appropriate Marxist legitimacy for his own actions during his conversations with Zhou was that the Chinese Premier showed no interest in Nasser’s Marxist rhetoric. Zhou did not even respond when Nasser tried to explain his regime’s persecution of communists. Nasser, presumably accustomed to explaining his government’s repression of leftist parties in Egypt (and in Syria between 1958 and 1961) to wary Soviet representatives, brought up the topic of Arab communists without prompting from Zhou, who given the circumstances would probably have been content to overlook the matter entirely. So long as Arab communists remained focused primarily on opposing imperialism, Nasser told Zhou, there was no conflict whatsoever between his ideology and theirs. Most of the time, Nasser lied, his regime granted total political freedom to Arab communists, including Syrian communists after the formation of the UAR.\footnote{In reality, Nasser had arrested a large group of Egyptian communist leaders as recently as 1959. See Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifa‘at El-Sa‘id, The Communist Movement in Egypt, 120-121.} The problem, he proclaimed, began two months after the Iraqi Revolution, when Iraqi communist newspapers began to criticize the UAR’s rule over Syria. Nasser employed Marxist rhetoric to assert that, to his surprise, the communists had effectively teamed up with the “feudal” class and the “reactionaries” who opposed his attempts to implement land reform in Syria. The Iraqi communists, Nasser continued, had been manipulated by Qasim as well as by the British in their attempts to thwart the Arab
unity project. Only because the Arab communist parties were duped into opposing Arab unification did Nasser finally issue an order in 1960 to arrest Syrian communist leaders, although he promised Zhou that communist parties in the UAR continued to enjoy political freedom even after these arrests. Whatever Zhou may have thought about this distortion of the truth, he did not challenge the Egyptian president’s explanation. Nasser’s commentary was most interesting for his tortuous use of Marxist principles to justify his government’s anticommunism. Perhaps Nasser thought that, as a communist himself, Zhou might be sympathetic to the idea that those who undermined the revolution by associating with “feudalists” and “reactionaries” needed to be stopped, even if they purported to be communists. The most important benefit of Marxist theory, however, was that it provided Nasser with the vocabulary he needed to denounce his Arab rivals. Because he was now challenged by foreign leaders (especially from Iraq) who also championed anti-imperialism, Nasser appropriated socialist rhetoric to bolster his ideological position at a time when anti-imperialism no longer resonated.

Nasser’s conversation with Zhou thus involved an ironic role reversal that would have been unfathomable at the time to any Western observer. Zhou, hoping to distinguish Communist China from its Soviet rival, downplayed Marxism and highlighted his government’s anti-imperialist credentials; Nasser, eschewing a radical approach that might threaten the international balance of power, responded with socialist rhetoric that de-emphasized any interest in anti-imperialism. This exchange encapsulated the divergent approaches to international relations that China and Egypt had adopted by the time Zhou traveled to Cairo in 1963. At the most fundamental level, the foreign policies of the two countries differed because Egypt, but not China, had been fully incorporated into the

international community. With his government’s sovereignty secure, Nasser derived considerable benefit from his relationships with both the United States and the Soviet Union. He manipulated the global politics of the Cold War for his own gain, but in the 1960s he never sought to undermine the foundations of the international system. Instead, he focused on regional politics within the Arab world. The Chinese government’s position was the reverse. With their stature in the international community anything but secure, China’s leaders attempted to gloss over any differences between countries in Asia and Africa in order to form a united front against the global status quo. Nasser’s unwillingness to countenance such a strategy meant that, no matter how jubilant the crowds that welcomed Zhou to Cairo and no matter how relentlessly the Chinese media insisted that the Sino-Egyptian relationship remained as strong as ever, Zhou’s visit to Cairo was doomed.

The Tempering of Algerian Anti-Imperialism

However disheartening Zhou may have found his conversations with Nasser in December 1963, he remained optimistic as he continued his tour of Africa. Most Western commentators predicted that he would find a warmer reception in Algiers than Nasser had given him in Cairo. Time magazine, for example, identified Algeria, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali as the only African countries that would prove sympathetic toward China. Analysts in Western governments, such as the political officers in the British consulate in Beijing, were convinced that the Chinese were counting on a hearty reception in Algiers to give them a foothold on the African continent. Since the Chinese government had been so outspoken in its support for the FLN during the latter’s struggle against the French, most observers – not

73. British consulate in Beijing to the Foreign Office, 3 January 1964 and T.E. Evans, British ambassador in Algiers, to R.A. Butler, 4 January 1964, FO 371/175919, UKNA.
least the Chinese themselves – assumed that Ben Bella’s newly installed administration would owe China a debt of gratitude. Moreover, journalists around the world believed that the Algerian government’s interest in people’s revolution and agrarian socialism would be compatible with China’s Communist ideology. There is no question but that many of these assumptions were warranted: the CCP certainly enjoyed great popularity among many Algerians, both within and outside of Ben Bella’s government. Yet despite the praise that the Algerian regime lavished upon Zhou during his visit, it is clear in retrospect that Ben Bella tried many of the same tactics to distance himself from Zhou that Nasser had employed in Cairo. Ben Bella may have admired China, but he no longer fully accepted the Bandung consensus that Zhou was attempting to promote. As Ben Bella confronted the challenges of independence, particularly a moribund economy, he found that declaring international solidarity against imperialism could no longer be his first priority either.

By 1963, Algeria’s dire economic situation overshadowed the development of Sino-Algerian relations. Nearly eight years of war had ravaged the Algerian countryside, ripped apart traditional social structures, and displaced huge numbers of people in rural areas. The French had never attempted to develop native industry on a significant scale in Algeria, but instead had left the country highly dependent on trade with France. The majority of Algeria’s white settler population – known in popular parlance as pied-noirs – immigrated to France, taking with them most of the country’s private capital. This exodus included almost all of Algeria’s skilled workforce. Many pied-noirs compounded the challenges facing independent Algeria by destroying hospitals, schools, and infrastructure as they fled. Between 1960 and 1963, Algeria’s gross national product dropped by as much as 35%, particularly in the manufacturing sector. As displaced peasants abandoned the war-ravaged

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countryside for Algeria’s swelling cities, they found an economy in turmoil with an unemployment rate as high as 70%. Upon taking office as independent Algeria’s first premier, Ben Bella faced the impossible task of salvaging this situation. He and other leaders of the FLN, all of whom were more experienced at running an insurgency than a national government, had to adapt and improvise in order to address the economic crisis they faced. Under these circumstances, the economy became the Algerian government’s paramount concern. Because China and Algeria had never had a significant economic partnership, this focus on building the economy relegated the goal of improving Algeria’s ties to China to secondary importance.

Ben Bella’s preoccupation with the economic crisis in Algeria detracted from Zhou’s message of anti-imperialist cooperation during the latter’s first visit to Algiers in December 1963. In a formal speech welcoming the Chinese delegation to Algeria, Ben Bella shifted the focus of Asian-African relations in the postcolonial period from political to economic connections. Following the Bandung Conference, he proclaimed, “the nations were quick to realize that political independence and economic independence were inextricably linked and that the latter was the pole to the equilibrium of the world.” In fact, the delegates at the Bandung Conference paid very little attention to economic development, a theme that was also mostly ignored in subsequent Asian-African gatherings, goodwill tours, and proclamations of solidarity. Prior to Zhou’s visit to Algiers, economic issues had never been a major component of Sino-Arab relations. When he arrived in Algiers, however, the

75. John Ruedy, Modern Algeria, 195.
76. “Speech by Algerian President Ahamed [sic] Ben Bella on the Arrival of Premier Chou En-lai at Algiers Airport,” in Afro-Asian Solidarity Against Imperialism, 81-84.
77. The economic reasons for the failure of developing countries to form strong trade relationships in the wake of the Bandung Conference are analyzed in Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.
78. On the few previous occasions when Chinese and Arab officials had discussed economics, such as the negotiations in Beijing that led to the signing of the first Sino-Egyptian trade agreement in August 1955, these discussions were merely a tactic to facilitate the development of closer political relations.
Algerian media portrayed economic development as one of the main focuses of Sino-Algerian relations by declaring that China should be admired primarily for its supposed economic successes, particularly in industry and agriculture. When Ben Bella first introduced the current state of Algerian society to Zhou in their private conversations, he began by describing at length the devastating effects of the war on Algeria’s economic and social infrastructure. In order to address these problems, Ben Bella explained to Zhou, the Algerian people had chosen the socialist path. According to Ben Bella, land reform, the development of manufacturing, and the nationalization of industry were the first steps toward reviving the economy. Such frank comments about socialism – or, indeed, about economic issues at all – would have been out of place in any discussion between elite Chinese and Arab leaders prior to the 1960s. Zhou did give a cursory explanation of China’s industrialization in response to Ben Bella’s comments, but in general he preferred to stick to his usual topics: foreign policy and the global struggle against imperialism. The fact that Ben Bella, but not Zhou, was eager to discuss the former’s efforts to implement a socialist economy in Algeria was a telling indication that the two leaders harbored vastly different agendas.

With the Algerian government so intently focused on reinvigorating the country’s economy, the biggest hurdle facing the Chinese government was that it simply could not afford to commit significant financial aid to Algeria or other foreign countries. Throughout the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet rivalry manifested itself as a competition to provide more economic and military aid to Africa. With the Algerian government desperate to secure as much foreign financial support as possible, this was a competition that China could not possibly hope to win. One recent scholar has identified Algeria – along with Egypt, India,

80. Transcript of the second conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 23 December 1963, 203-00614-08, CFMA.
81. Transcript of the fourth conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 26 December 1963, 203-00614-06, CFMA.
and Indonesia – as one of four principal targets for Soviet foreign assistance as Moscow sought to buy a superior position in the Sino-Soviet confrontation in Asia and Africa.\textsuperscript{82} If American intelligence reports were accurate, the Soviet government offered Algeria a generous three-year credit of $100 million in 1963, a deal that Beijing could only counter with an offer of a $50 million credit at no interest. Later that same year, the Soviet Union offered Algeria a sizeable military aid package, complete with 12 MTB tanks and several MiG fighters.\textsuperscript{83} By 1967, the American government estimated that the Soviet Union had outspent China $900 million to $350 million in economic aid to Africa as a whole since 1954, with much of that total going to Algeria.\textsuperscript{84} Because the Soviet Union had such great capacity to deliver financial aid, and as long as the flagging economy remained a priority for the Algerian government, China was simply unable to afford to position itself as the main patron of an independent Algeria.

When Zhou arrived in Algiers, he faced a sustained pro-Soviet media campaign designed to preserve the balance between China and the Soviet Union. So as not to anger any side, neither Zhou nor Ben Bella broached the topic of the Sino-Soviet split in their private conversations, which were consistently cordial and diplomatic.\textsuperscript{85} In addition, no major Algerian newspaper so much as hinted at any tension between Beijing and Moscow. Nevertheless, the Algerian national media did make clear that Algeria’s interests lay

\textsuperscript{82} Jeremy Friedman, “Reviving Revolution,” 189. Friedman cited Chinese government statistics, which may or may not be reliable, to claim that the Soviet Union sent over $800 million in aid to Egypt and $225 million in aid to Algeria between 1954 and 1964. According to these estimates, Egypt and Algeria together received more than two thirds of all Soviet economic aid to African countries.

\textsuperscript{83} Robert W. Komter to McGeorge Bundy, files of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, National Security Files, 14 October 1963, reprinted in \textit{FRUS}, vol. 18, 128-129.

\textsuperscript{84} Files of the Lyndon Johnson administration, 1393/67, “Intelligence Memorandum,” 19 October 1967, reprinted in \textit{FRUS}, vol. 24, 382-383. These figures explicitly excluded economic aid to Egypt, which was far and away the largest recipient of Soviet aid in Africa.

\textsuperscript{85} Zhou came the closest to mentioning the Sino-Soviet split when he cited Khrushchev’s decision in July 1960 to withdraw the Soviet Union’s technical experts from China as an example of a challenge the Chinese people faced in catching up to the West. See transcript of the fourth conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 26 December 1963, 203-00614-06, CFMA.
primarily with the Soviet Union. *Le Peuple*, Ben Bella’s socialist mouthpiece, editorialized two days before Zhou’s arrival that the development of relations with Moscow should be Algeria’s primary foreign policy goal.\(^86\) Similarly, a brief article about Zhou in the 20 December 1963 issue of *Alger Républicain* (a newspaper closely linked to the Algerian left) was overshadowed by a full-page interview with Khrushchev, who proclaimed his commitment to developing the Algerian economy and argued that economic independence was part of national liberation.\(^87\) Ben Bella, with fortuitous timing, had dispatched a high-level Algerian delegation to Moscow immediately before Zhou’s arrival, ensuring that articles praising China and the Soviet Union would run side-by-side in the Algerian press. After Zhou left, Ben Bella finally acknowledged the Sino-Soviet rift in an interview, stating that it would be important to “balance” Algerian foreign policy between the two countries.\(^88\) The significance that Ben Bella attached to Soviet-Algerian relations, however, made any “balance” tenuous because, whatever ideological affinity he might have shared with the anti-imperialist Chinese, he was in no position to risk damaging his relationship with the richer of the two communist powers.\(^89\)

The relative wealth of the Soviet Union was not the only obstacle to the development of a special relationship between Beijing and Algiers. After Algeria formally gained independence, Ben Bella courted support from both France and the United States, thereby establishing new ties that further relegated China to insignificance in the eyes of the Algerian government. Given the rancor with which Ben Bella had denounced France during the

\(^{86}\) “Développer et élargir les relations amicales algéro-soviétiques [Develop and enlarge the friendly Algerian-Soviet relations],” *Le Peuple*, 19 December 1963, 3.

\(^{87}\) “L’interview de Nikita Khrouchtchev [Interview of Nikita Khrushchev],” *Alger Républicain*, 20 December 1963, 2.

\(^{88}\) Ben Bella’s interview in *Jeune Afrique* was discussed in W.A.C. Adie, “Chou En-lai on Safari.”

\(^{89}\) Ben Bella was cautious in part because he was acutely aware of the Soviet government’s skeptical attitude toward his government. After he formally banned the PCA in November 1962, he felt that Moscow regarded him with “coldness.” Accordingly, he told a French-Algerian interviewer, he had to go to great lengths to flatter Soviet leaders in the press. See Robert Merle, *Ahmed Ben Bella*, 166.
Algerian War, it was perhaps surprising that he would try so quickly to construct a working relationship with Algeria’s former colonial master. After all, Ben Bella had spent several years in a French prison. It is important to remember, however, that the Algerian colonial economy had been closely integrated with that of France. Moreover, a significant number of Algerians lived and worked in France, where Ben Bella and most other top leaders of the FLN had themselves been educated. Ben Bella also hoped to stem the tide of emigration by white settlers back to France, thereby preserving what little industry remained in Algeria. Simply put, the Algerian economy could not have survived if Ben Bella’s government had severed all ties to France after winning independence. Setting his animosity toward the French government and military aside, he refused to criticize France publicly and instead adopted a pragmatic foreign policy that emphasized the need for cooperation.\(^90\) Ben Bella took a similarly positive tone in his relations with the United States, which he visited in 1962. He was careful, however, to maintain a perception of balance by stopping in Havana on his return from Washington. By positioning independent Algeria between the Soviet and American blocs, Ben Bella was able to develop contacts in both Moscow and Washington and secure funding from both sides. Like Nasser, Ben Bella manipulated the Cold War to his advantage to gain foreign support. Ben Bella’s success in this endeavor reflected the integration of Algeria into the international community. By 1963, Algeria enjoyed several distinct advantages that China still lacked: universal recognition of its sovereignty, a seat in the United Nations, and productive relations with both superpowers. It is little wonder, then, that Algeria’s leaders proved less sympathetic to Zhou’s attempts to subvert global power hierarchies than they had been just a few years before.

\(^90\) David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway, *Algeria*, 148. For his part, French President Charles de Gaulle was sympathetic to the Algerian initiative. He tried to present a policy of “coopération” between France and its former colonies as the defining characteristic of a revived French foreign policy.
Ben Bella’s need to secure Western support, particularly from France but also from the United States, prevented him from accepting Zhou’s argument that neocolonialism was an immediate threat to the postcolonial world. Instead, Ben Bella repeatedly told Zhou that eliminating traditional imperialism ought to take precedence over the fight against neocolonialism until every African colony had won independence. Ben Bella certainly did agree that neocolonialism was a concerning phenomenon. He allowed Zhou to insert a condemnation of neocolonialism into their joint communiqué, which called that practice “a menace to the newly liberated countries” and reaffirmed both Algeria’s and China’s support for the “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.”

Ben Bella also agreed with Zhou that neocolonialism was becoming a major problem in Africa and the Middle East, where he cited Israel as an instrument of neocolonialism. Ben Bella drew a distinction, however, between idealism and pragmatism, arguing that it was only possible for Algeria to focus on opposing traditional forms of imperialism in Africa and that he could not fight neocolonialism at the same time. When Zhou pointedly asked whether France harbored neocolonial designs in Algeria, Ben Bella equivocated. He quickly shifted the topic of conversation from “neocolonial” countries to “capitalist” countries, thereby avoiding the implication that his pro-French foreign policy was a betrayal of the Algerian struggle for independence. In so doing, he justified his relationships with both France and the United States as an expedient tactic that would ultimately serve the wider national liberation struggle in Africa, declaring that “right now we are not giving prominence to the struggle against neocolonialism, and we are not going to fight right away on two separate fronts.”

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92. Chinese ambassador to Algeria to the Foreign Ministry, 5 February 1964, 203-00328-02, CFMA. Ben Bella’s comment was somewhat out of the ordinary, since most Arab leaders, including Nasser, continued to refer to Israel as an instrument of imperialism, not neocolonialism.

days later, in another private conversation with Zhou, Ben Bella reiterated this policy. In a discussion about the Addis Ababa Conference, he insisted that, “at the moment, the most important task in Africa is opposing imperialism and colonialism. This is the first stage. Later, under better conditions, we can oppose neocolonialism.”

The Chinese Foreign Ministry paid particular attention to Ben Bella’s insistence that Algeria could not join the Chinese in their staunch opposition to neo-colonialism, since this disagreement reflected a significant difference between how the Chinese and Algerian governments interpreted the international situation in the early 1960s. As Algeria began to derive material benefit from its relationships with France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, its leaders became increasingly reluctant to embrace an ideology that condemned Western involvement in postcolonial countries.

Although Ben Bella rejected Zhou’s conception of neocolonialism, he nonetheless did base independent Algeria’s foreign policy on resolute opposition to traditional forms of imperialism. He received Zhou enthusiastically in Algiers because he genuinely did believe in the importance of unity among countries that had been historical victims of Western imperialism. As was the case with the CCP in China, the FLN derived much of its legitimacy from having led a military struggle for national independence, a fact that both parties enthusiastically emphasized long after their respective wars had ended. Ben Bella also invoked anti-imperialist symbolism to defend his regime against certain internal challenges, including the insurrection of Hocine Aït Ahmed in September 1963. By linking Aït

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94. Transcript of the fourth conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 26 December 1963, 203-00614-08, CFMA.


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Ahmed’s rebellion to the concurrent border war against Morocco, Ben Bella was able to portray himself as the defender of Algerian sovereignty against an enduring foreign threat.\textsuperscript{97} Such propaganda emulated a model perfected by the CCP, which fostered the popular perception that the imperialist challenge to China was ever present. Ben Bella also sought legitimacy by portraying himself as a champion of the global anti-imperialist cause beyond Algeria. He was particularly eager to pledge Algerian assistance to other national independence struggles throughout Africa. Many scholars have viewed Ben Bella’s commitment to Third World solidarity, particularly within Africa, as the defining feature of his administration’s foreign policy, although they have almost universally recognized that this ideology was tempered by his pragmatic approach to governing.\textsuperscript{98} This focus on international unity was an enduring aspect of Algeria’s foreign policy that continued more or less unchanged even after Boumedienne replaced Ben Bella.\textsuperscript{99} It is important, however, to identify more explicit limitations than most previous scholars have admitted on Ben Bella’s willingness to pursue a foreign policy based on Third World solidarity. His reliance on the West and the Soviet Union prevented him from adopting the radical attitude toward neocolonialism that Zhou pressured him to support.

\textsuperscript{97} It is also worth noting that some of Ben Bella’s other domestic rivals, including Benkhedda, invoked the rhetoric of African anti-imperialism to accuse Ben Bella of trying to destabilize Algeria. For example, Benkhedda accused Ben Bella of promoting the “conglisation” of Algeria during their brief showdown in 1962. Because the FLN as a whole had placed so much importance on internationalizing the Algerian war for independence, in the years after independence it was easy for any faction to attack domestic rivals with the same internationalist rhetoric. See Benyoucef Benkhedda, L’Algérie à l’indépendance: la crise de 1962 [Algeria at independence: the crisis of 1962] (Algiers: Dahlab, 1997), 30-32.


It was clear from the discussions between Zhou and Ben Bella that the latter staked his legitimacy on a foreign policy of encouraging national independence throughout Africa. Ben Bella’s most significant triumph in promoting himself as a champion of decolonization in Africa was his participation in the Addis Ababa Conference. That summit featured delegations from 32 independent African countries, which combined to form the Organization of African Unity (the forerunner to the current African Union). The participants in the Addis Ababa Conference agreed that their priority should be to promote decolonization in the African countries that remained under white rule, including Southern Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, and apartheid South Africa. In order to accomplish this goal, the Conference delegates pledged to finance liberation movements and deny their airspace to colonial powers. Ben Bella was fiercely protective of the legacy of the Addis Ababa Conference. He explained to Zhou that he was skeptical of plans to hold a second summit of Non-Aligned countries because such an initiative might distract from the emphasis placed on decolonization in Addis Ababa. “We support the Non-Aligned conference,” Ben Bella told Zhou, “but we believe that it cannot be convened immediately because first we must settle what we believe to be some more important problems.”

Zhou, who completely opposed the Non-Aligned Movement and was an unwavering supporter of the decolonization of sub-Saharan Africa, must have been heartened by Ben Bella’s words. He had, after all, found a fellow leader who was unwilling to let any international issue divert attention from the global struggle against imperialism, which, Ben Bella agreed, was still being waged.

Ultimately, Ben Bella agreed with Zhou that a second Bandung Conference should take place. Since this conference would take place in Algiers, it would offer the new Algerian government the opportunity to celebrate its independence and demonstrate the widespread

100. Transcript of the fourth conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 26 December 1963, 203-00614-06, CFMA.
support that the FLN enjoyed from other Asian and African leaders. Nevertheless, the Chinese Foreign Ministry could not consider this development to be an unqualified success. It was obvious that Ben Bella was more interested in a second Addis Ababa Conference than a second Bandung Conference and that he cared more about fighting for decolonization in Africa than about anything happening in Asia. Another Addis Ababa Conference, Ben Bella explained, would be beneficial for enhancing and encouraging the “revolutionary current” (geming chaoliu) then running through Africa.  

The final Sino-Algerian communiqué, signed at the end of Zhou’s visit to Algiers, pledged the two countries to “develop the spirit of Bandung,” but remained silent on the question of whether a second Asian-African Conference would actually be desirable. In private, Ben Bella told Zhou that he wanted a second Bandung Conference, but that he and Zhou would have to work hard to restrict the topics of discussion to supporting national liberation and opposing imperialism, lest other issues distract from this message once Asian and African leaders came together. Ben Bella’s clear preference to concentrate on Africa undermined Zhou’s agenda and detracted from the message he was trying to promote. In Cairo, Zhou had been frustrated by Nasser’s inclination to put his priorities within the Arab world ahead of Asian-African solidarity; in Algiers, he faced a leader who wished to focus solely on Africa rather than Asia and Africa together. Such an emphasis demoted China to the status of an outsider and blocked Zhou’s plans to reclaim a leadership role for the CCP.

The Algerian government’s muted response to Zhou’s visit in December 1963 reflected the reality that, after independence, foreign policy could no longer be connected quite so directly with the process of articulating Algeria’s identity as an independent nation. It is

101. Chinese embassy in Algiers to the Foreign Ministry, 5 February 1964, 203-00328-02, CFMA.
103. Transcript of the fourth conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ahmed Ben Bella, 26 December 1963, 203-00614-06, CFMA.
particularly important in analyzing postcolonial Algeria to maintain a clear distinction between the processes of nation-building and state-building. Throughout the war against France, the internationalization of the conflict served the former goal. As Matthew Connelly has argued, one of the key objectives of the FLN was to win foreign endorsement for its discourse of Algerian nationalism, thereby presenting Algeria as a unified and sovereign nation and establishing an Algerian identity independent from the French position that Algeria was inherently a part of France.\(^\text{104}\) This strategy had much in common with the foreign policies of other anti-imperialist countries in the 1950s, not least in China, where Mao and Zhou hoped to find other newly independent states willing to affirm the CCP’s vision of Chinese nationalism in order to solidify their position in a hostile environment.

After 1962, Ben Bella did occasionally manipulate international relations to confer ideological legitimacy upon himself – most notably during his ongoing feud with Morocco – but the focus of the Algerian government increasingly turned away from this kind of foreign policy. Instead, Ben Bella’s administration (like that of Boumedienne after him) became preoccupied with the task of building the power of the Algerian state and strengthening the economic and political institutions necessary to expand and sustain it, rather than with ideological development. Jeffrey Byrne has identified the inspirations for this enterprise in socialist economic policies, American modernization theory, and even French counterinsurgency tactics. As Byrne has asserted, the FLN staked its prestige on its ability to modernize Algeria.\(^\text{105}\) Once Ben Bella and other top Algerian leaders established this priority, it was inevitable that the unity politics of the Bandung era would quickly become a relic of the past.

\(^{104}\) Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution.*

Competing Visions for the Second Bandung Conference

Neither Nasser nor Ben Bella greeted Zhou as enthusiastically as the Chinese government might have hoped, but Zhou nevertheless must have considered his African “safari” to have been a partial success. He reminded the world of China’s interest in Africa and established contact for the first time with two other African countries, Tunisia and Ethiopia. He also accomplished his most important mission by securing the acquiescence of at least some African countries to the Chinese plan to hold a second Bandung Conference in Algiers. Nasser had declared himself to be indifferent to such a conference and had expressed a strong preference that a second Belgrade Conference take precedence, but he had indicated that he would not refuse to attend a second Bandung Conference if other countries organized it. Ben Bella, who had been more positive than Nasser, was certainly in favor of hosting such a conference, even if he had disagreed with Zhou over some of the topics that should be discussed during it. It is only in retrospect that one can discern how Zhou’s conversations with Nasser and Ben Bella in 1963 set the tone for the two years of futile negotiations by obstinate politicians that ultimately doomed the Conference. For the Chinese, it was not enough simply for the independent countries of Asia and Africa to gather for a second Bandung Conference. Instead, Beijing needed such a conference to serve its interests by providing it with a forum free from the interference of the Soviet Union in which to proclaim that it was leading the united countries of the non-Western world against the ever-present reality of neocolonialism. Other leaders, including Nasser and Ben Bella, had their own visions for the worldview that the second Bandung Conference should promote – and these visions were fundamentally incompatible with China’s foreign policy objectives.

The first significant setback for China’s Asian-African policy after the conclusion of Zhou’s trip did not directly involve China at all. The meeting of delegates from 57 countries
at Cairo University in October 1964 for the second summit of Non-Aligned countries demonstrated how little prestige China enjoyed, since Beijing had been unable to halt the plans to hold that conference before organizing the second Bandung Conference.\textsuperscript{106} As it turned out, many of the official positions adopted in Cairo in 1964 would have been acceptable to the Chinese government, especially the decision by the delegates to denounce imperialism using much harsher language than the attendees of the Belgrade Conference had employed.\textsuperscript{107} Because China, like all communist countries, could not participate in a conference of Non-Aligned countries, however, this focus on imperialism actually usurped China’s role as one of the chief defenders of oppressed peoples of the non-Western world. The Cairo Conference revealed a remarkable lack of unity among its attendees, a phenomenon best encapsulated by the bitter and public argument between Sukarno on one side and Tito and Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on the other over whether “peaceful coexistence” with both superpowers was a viable policy in a world still threatened by imperialism. Ultimately, many of the attendees in Cairo registered reservations when adopting the final communiqué, an outcome that weakened the results of the summit and indicated just how difficult it had become for non-Western countries to agree on any policy.

In the aftermath of the Cairo Conference, as preparations to hold a second Bandung Conference in Algiers began in earnest, it quickly became evident that Asian-African disunity had the potential to derail these plans entirely. The two most significant conflicts undermining international solidarity in 1965 were the ongoing Congo Crisis and the

\textsuperscript{106} Most of the attendees at the Cairo Conference were from Asian or African countries. Of the 47 official delegations, only those from Yugoslavia and Cuba came from outside Asia and Africa. The conference also included ten delegations with “observer” status, including representatives of nine countries from Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Finland.

\textsuperscript{107} One reason for the enhanced focus on imperialism was the greater number of sub-Saharan African countries in attendance. Another reason, put forth by G.H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, Ch. 28, was that the relative détente between the superpowers in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis minimized the significance of the Non-Aligned countries as a moral force against the threat of nuclear war and thus brought the discussion back around to the question of imperialism.
continuing fallout from the Sino-Indian War. Ben Bella’s decision to provide weapons to the leftist insurrection of Antoine Gizenga against the Congolese government – a cause that Nasser also backed – alienated many of the conservative Francophone rulers of postcolonial Central Africa. The idea that one independent country would invoke the rhetoric of anti-imperialism to oppose an independent African regime was deeply threatening to African rulers who still maintained close ties to France. Consequently, many African rulers boycotted a preparatory meeting of foreign ministers in Algiers in June 1965.\textsuperscript{108} Earlier that same month, the prime ministers of twelve other Commonwealth countries had joined India in an appeal to postpone the second Bandung Conference indefinitely. This disagreement set the stage for a showdown in Algiers, where the foreign ministers in attendance took a vote on whether or not to postpone the Conference.\textsuperscript{109} Sardar Swaran Singh, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, tried desperately to court enough votes to forestall a conference that would offer a political victory to China. Singh’s campaign probably would have failed but for an explosion in the main meeting hall, which prevented the foreign ministers’ meeting from convening at all. The bomb was placed by supporters of the recently deposed Ben Bella in an attempt to ensure that Boumediene’s new government could not gain status by hosting an international conference. In the chaotic days and months after the bombing, the question of whether to hold the Conference was debated at length by an endlessly shifting series of factions, whose inability to agree on anything sealed the demise of Asian-African solidarity.

In the end, it was China that inflicted the coup de grâce on the conference Zhou had worked so tirelessly to promote. The Chinese government became concerned about the

\textsuperscript{108} Ten of the fifteen Francophone members of the newly formed Organisation Commune Africaine et Malagache decided to boycott the planning sessions for the conference. See Guy J. Pauker, “The Rise and Fall of Afro-Asian Solidarity,” \textit{Asian Survey} 5 (1965), 428.

\textsuperscript{109} The plans to hold the second Bandung Conference were supported by thirteen Arab countries (voting as a bloc in support of Algeria) along with China, Indonesia, North Korea, and North Vietnam. They were opposed by India, Ceylon, Thailand, Japan, and Laos, all of which wished to postpone the conference indefinitely. The best summary of the arguments about the preparations for the conference remains G.H. Jansen’s \textit{Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment}, Ch. 29, which Jansen finished writing just as the conference plans were falling apart.
preparations for another planning session in Algiers in October 1965 when the Soviet Union declared its intention to participate. The Soviet Union had vocally supported the first Bandung Conference, though it had not been invited to participate. Because it occupied so much territory in Asia, however, it had sporadically joined Asian-African cultural initiatives in the years following the first Bandung Conference, even going so far as to host a gathering of Asian and African writers in Tashkent in October 1958. In 1965, the Chinese government perceived the Soviet Union’s interest in attending the second Bandung Conference as an initiative designed solely to discredit China and prevent it from taking its rightful leadership role among the Asian and African countries. In memoranda exchanged with the Chinese embassy in Moscow, Foreign Ministry officials labeled the Soviet Union’s attempts to be admitted to the Conference a “conspiracy” (yinmou). Chinese officials were particularly indignant about what they saw as self-serving Soviet efforts to court Boumedienne’s favor in order to participate in the Conference. \(110\) Fearful that the Soviet Union would succeed, the Chinese government finally announced that it would boycott the Conference. The Foreign Ministry was aware that many foreigners, especially in Algeria, did not understand or agree with the Chinese decision to pull out.\(111\) Such a decision, however, was the only realistic course of action once it became clear that the Conference would not fulfill the Chinese government’s principal goal of providing a forum in which to establish China’s superiority over the Soviet Union as a non-Western power that steadfastly opposed a continuing imperialist threat. For the Chinese, convincing other countries to hold a second Bandung

\(110\) Chinese embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 3 November 1965, 107-00939-05, CFMA.

\(111\) Chinese embassy in Algiers to the Foreign Ministry, 11 November 1965, 107-01079-11, CFMA. The negotiations throughout 1964 and 1965 regarding the plans for the conference are outlined in staggering detail from the perspective of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Li Qianyu, “Shilun zhongguo dui di’erci yafei huiyi zhengce de yanbian.” In addition to the feud over Soviet participation, Li described China’s increasing militancy toward the United States (partly the result of escalation in Vietnam). The Chinese government suggested that the conference should condemn the United States and exclude South Vietnam. With so many potential conference attendees dependent on American foreign aid, this proposal never had any chance of success.
Conference was not enough; Beijing would only have been satisfied if other Asian and
African countries had adopted the Chinese vision for the type of international solidarity the
Conference was supposed to champion. Given the lack of unity among Asian and African
countries in the mid-1960s, this latter condition proved unattainable. With the chief
supporter now sidelined and the political situation in Algiers still uncertain, plans for the
Conference were quietly abandoned once and for all.

In the years since 1965, many commentators have mourned the demise of Asian-
African solidarity. The fiftieth anniversary of the Bandung Conference in 2005 inspired a
particularly potent groundswell of nostalgia from commentators, mostly from Asia or Africa
themselves, who looked back fondly on a time when Third World countries were supposedly
united behind a common purpose. A flurry of publications – including official proclamations
from some national governments – lamented the demise of the “Bandung spirit,” that sense of
optimism and unity that pervaded the postcolonial world in the 1950s. A close analysis of
Zhou’s conversations with Nasser and Ben Bella in 1963 is a particularly revealing way to
explore how the Bandung spirit evaporated. The first Bandung Conference was a success
because, for the most part, the delegates who attended it shared the same essential worldview:
they were all outsiders who were struggling to make their voices heard in a world dominated
by the West. By 1963, however, Zhou, Nasser, and Ben Bella all viewed international
politics through distinctly different prisms. Each had a conflicting interpretation of the
current danger posed by imperialism, and each had a conflicting vision of the values and
priorities that an international summit should affirm. The negotiations for the second
Bandung Conference in 1965 demonstrated how far many Asian and African countries had
wandered from the Bandung consensus in the decade since the first Conference. For ten

112. A representative example is Roselan Abdulgani’s “From Bandung with a Sense of Solidarity,” in Asia,
Africa: Africa, Asia: Bandung, Towards the First Century (Jakarta: Department of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Indonesia, 2005), 29-33.
years, Sino-Arab relations had blossomed on the basis of this consensus. When China pulled out of the second Bandung Conference, the Conference’s failure sounded the death knell not only for the Bandung spirit as a whole, but also for many of the individual relationships it had helped to foster.
CONCLUSION

Ten years passed between Zhou’s first encounter with Nasser in Bandung and the collapse of the plans to hold a second Asian-African Conference. In that decade, the Chinese government built close working relationships first with Egypt and then with the Algerian FLN, only to see those relationships ultimately lose their potency. The optimism of the Bandung Conference, where leaders from Asia and Africa had proclaimed their intentions to work together toward a common purpose, eroded after only a few years. Contemporary observers and subsequent historians seized on the recrimination of the mid-1960s as evidence that neither Asian-African solidarity generally nor Sino-Arab relations in particular had ever represented a meaningful force in world affairs. For example, officials within the British Foreign Office were convinced that both Arab governments and the Arab public were extremely skeptical of Communist China; they described Nasser as “embarrassed and apprehensive” about his relationship with Beijing and insisted that the Algerian people were unenthusiastic about the prospect of building a closer connection to China.¹ Yitzhak Shichor’s 1979 study of the Chinese attitude toward the Middle East took an even more dismissive tone, asserting that “China’s mid-1960s’ policy in the Middle East, as well as in Asia and Africa, ended in total collapse and bitter disappointment.”² In 1966, G.H. Jansen denied that Asian-African unity on the whole had ever truly been a compelling phenomenon and invoked Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” as a questionable metaphor to liken Asian and African leaders to “ignorant armies” clashing on a “darkling plain.”³ These and other unfavorable evaluations of China’s initiatives in Asia and Africa reflected a general

¹. T.E. Evans, British ambassador in Algiers, to R.A. Butler, 4 January 1964, and Harold Beeley, British ambassador in Cairo, to R.A. Butler, 7 January 1964, FO 371/175919, UKNA.
consensus that a decade of intense interest in the Third World had produced no tangible result.

Yet despite the bitterness and frustration that characterized Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations by 1965, it would be inaccurate to assert that the preceding decade of international engagement had been futile or counterproductive. Instead of focusing solely on the rocky relationships between Beijing and Cairo and between Beijing and Algiers, historians must also evaluate the effects of Sino-Arab relations on the domestic politics of each of the countries involved. The Chinese and Egyptian governments and the Algerian provisional government relied on Sino-Arab relations to help articulate the national identities that each regime strove to foster. For example, China’s support for Egypt in the mid-1950s helped establish an image of China – both at home and abroad – as a unified, multi-ethnic nation. Many Egyptians who supported China at this time did so in order to appropriate the CCP’s ideological legitimacy and endorse the idea that Nasser’s regime was also the beneficiary of a national revolution. When the Chinese government began in 1959 to adopt a much more militant attitude toward Egypt, it did so because the ideological demands of the Great Leap Forward compelled it to revise the image of China it had previously sought to promote. In addition, establishing close ties to the FLN allowed Beijing to portray China as a model for leftist revolution. For many members of the FLN, securing Chinese support was a way to legitimize the Algerian revolution by comparison with the CCP’s own violent rise to power. Finally, for the Chinese government in the 1960s, pursuing positive relations with Arab and African countries such as Egypt and Algeria was a tactic intended to differentiate Chinese communism from that of the Soviet Union by emphasizing China’s connection to other non-Western revolutionary countries. These manifestations of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations had in common that they were all part of sustained attempts by intellectuals and policymakers to present their own countries to domestic and foreign
audiences from a fresh perspective. Because the Chinese, Egyptian, and Algerian regimes all manipulated their relations to serve these evolving goals, historians who focus solely on the weakness of these relationships discount the logic behind their development. The actual material benefits of Sino-Arab relations, if any, were incidental to the ideological advantages associated with articulating a strong national identity.

The evolution of Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations in the decade following the Bandung Conference demonstrated the importance of nationalism and nation-building in postcolonial countries. As Robert Good observed, Third World leaders often crafted their foreign policies to reinforce their own visions of national unity at home.\(^4\) Even the Bandung Conference itself, which has often been lauded as a triumph of transnational cooperation, was at its heart a ratification of nationalist principles, as reflected in the final communiqué’s pledge that each country in attendance would respect “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.” The delegates even invoked Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination, both in the conference discussions and in the final communiqué, to reiterate that their own nations ought to be inviolable. The idea that countries would gather together to propose international solidarity in order to reaffirm their individual rights as nations was nothing new; in fact, nationalist principles underlay most of the first European attempts at internationalism in the nineteenth century.\(^5\) Recently, some revisionist historians have begun to question the notion that the Bandung Conference represented a triumph of international cooperation, instead proposing that the conference was merely a forum in which different leaders could each pursue their own nationalist agendas. One such historian, Robert Vitalis, has tried to minimize the significance of the Bandung Conference as a whole by asserting that much of its

\(^4\) Robert C. Good, “State-Building as a Determinant of Foreign Policy in the New States.”

\(^5\) Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), Ch. 2. Mazower paid particular attention to Giuseppe Mazzini, who was simultaneously a devout Italian nationalist and a champion of pan-European cooperation.
supposed legacy was merely the result of ex post facto efforts to mythologize the conference by intellectuals who were not particularly concerned with what actually transpired in Bandung. Vitalis was correct that the Conference was not a genuine attempt to achieve international unity, but the emphasis on nationalism he identified deserves to be examined in its own right. The “Bandung spirit” cannot be fully understood from a global perspective; it was an important manifestation of nationalist politics in the early Cold War era that historians must analyze by paying careful attention to the domestic affairs of each of the countries that combined to produce it.

Indeed, nationalist development was so fundamental to postcolonial societies during the mid-twentieth century that it often took precedence over other seemingly contradictory ideologies. Both Nasser and the leaders of the FLN won the adherence of their countries’ respective communist movements by adopting strong nationalist positions, particularly in foreign policy. During the mid-1950s, the Chinese government was also remarkably successful at tightening its control over its own Muslim population by subordinating pan-Islamic identities to its own conception of the Chinese national identity. For all three countries, pledging solidarity with one another was often a strategy intended to circumscribe ideological opposition by redefining what it meant to be part of the Chinese, Egyptian, or Algerian nations. The governments of each of these countries were willing to promise to band together – at least most of the time – because they all accepted the nationalist logic of the era, which asserted that national unity should take priority over all other concerns. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, it may seem odd that the CCP was complicit in the debilitation of communist parties in Egypt and Algeria or that Nasser gave his seal of

7. Such a claim is in line with the conclusions of Peter Lyon, Neutralism, Ch. 7 regarding Third World politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Lyon dismissed the idea that “neutralism” was a meaningful ideology that could easily be defined and identified, insisting instead that historians should understand Third World politics as a whole by analyzing each country on a case-by-case basis.
approval to the Chinese government’s often questionable treatment of its own Muslim population, but these decisions would not have seemed out of the ordinary to the leaders who made them. In the uncertain world of the postcolonial age, the bond of nationhood proved stronger than any transnational commitment.

As newly independent governments consolidated power, they gradually became less dependent on foreign policy to articulate their visions for the national identities of their respective countries. Established regimes no longer needed to seek legitimacy with the same urgency as the attendees of the Bandung Conference had done. Instead, those governments were free to focus on more conventional international goals, such as attracting foreign aid, securing advantageous trade relationships, or expanding their political clout on the regional or global level. The incorporation of postcolonial Asian and African countries into the international community of nation-states undermined the need for these countries to collaborate as they had done in Bandung. The rapid pace of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s meant that, more and more, Asian and African leaders no longer viewed imperialism as a pressing threat to their countries. At the same time, the critical need to modernize economies, particularly through large-scale building projects, compelled them to develop positive relationships with one or both of the superpowers. As grand dreams of global unity yielded to narrower ambitions, it became clear that the internationalist logic of the Bandung decade was a fleeting phenomenon contingent on the particular circumstances of the era of decolonization. The changing power dynamics in the international community augured poorly for Sino-Arab relations, which had developed on the basis of this logic; after 1965, China’s once-fruitful ties to Egypt and Algeria quickly declined in significance.
As China descended into the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the country’s leaders turned their backs on the relationships they had built with Arab countries over the previous ten years. China’s disengagement from the Middle East occurred in part because the power struggles of the Cultural Revolution ravaged the Foreign Ministry bureaucracy, purged many leaders responsible for crafting Chinese foreign policy, and distracted the entire country from international affairs. Beginning in September 1966, Zhou and Chen Yi (at Mao’s insistence) recalled embassy staff posted abroad so they could return to China and join the Cultural Revolution. In early 1967, Zhou began ordering China’s ambassadors to return home as well, leaving China unrepresented in many foreign capitals. Despite China’s inward turn, it is nevertheless important not to overstate the extent to which the Chinese government reduced its ties with the rest of the world. Zhou specifically instructed Huang Hua, the new Chinese ambassador to Egypt, to remain in Cairo in 1967 because it was crucial for China to maintain some presence in the Middle East. China actually strengthened its relationships during the Cultural Revolution with particular countries (such as Tanzania) whose governments it deemed sufficiently socialist. In general, Chinese policymakers during the Cultural Revolution eschewed the pragmatic approach to international relations that Zhou had championed during the preceding years. Instead, they distributed huge amounts of Maoist propaganda, including millions of copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, and targeted


10. Martin Bailey, “Tanzania and China.” China began sending military aid in large quantities to Tanzania in 1964. China also provided the funding for Julius Nyere’s most ambitious project, the Tan-Zam Railway, which connected mineral-rich, landlocked Zambia with Tanzanian ports. Bailey noted that China’s leaders were willing to invest heavily in this project because its completion allowed them to proclaim that they had helped reduce Zambia’s dependence on the white governments of Zimbabwe and South Africa.
their diplomacy at a few key communist allies.\textsuperscript{11} To some extent, Chinese foreign policy during the first part of the Cultural Revolution was a much more extreme version of its international relations during the Great Leap Forward, when it had criticized nationalist rulers such as Nasser and engaged only with foreign groups (including the FLN) that accepted its interest in socialist revolution.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government increasingly patronized militant Arab organizations that actively engaged in violent struggles against entrenched governments. The Chinese government had preferred during the most radical stage of the Great Leap Forward to support the ongoing revolution of the FLN in Algeria rather than continue to support the post-revolutionary UAR. Similarly, after 1965, Chinese policymakers were eager to find new Arab allies that needed Chinese support to achieve power, recognition, or independence. One cause that particularly attracted the Chinese government was the Palestinian struggle against Israel, which had turned much more militant after the founding of the PLO in 1964. Beginning in 1965, China supplied weapons and training to several constituent organizations within the PLO, including Yasser Arafat’s Fatah and George Habash’s PFLP. China was a much more consistent supporter of both these organizations prior to 1968 than was the Soviet Union, prompting Habash to assert in 1970 that “our best friend is China.”\textsuperscript{12} The first chairman of the PLO, Ahmad Shuqayri, was greeted in China as if he were a foreign head of state during an official visit to Beijing in 1965; five years later, both Arafat and Habash received similar treatment during separate tours of China.\textsuperscript{13} The Chinese government always insisted that leftist constituents of the PLO, including the PFLP, be included alongside members of Fatah in the delegations that

\textsuperscript{11} China’s foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution is described in much greater detail in Jeremy Friedman, “Reviving Revolution,” Ch. 4.

\textsuperscript{12} Lillian Craig Harris, “China’s Relations with the PLO,” \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies} 7 (1977): 123.

visited China, demonstrating Beijing’s continuing support for foreign communist
movements.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, it is important to note that Fatah received much more attention
and military aid from China than did the PFLP, even though Arafat held conservative
political beliefs and Habash was an unabashed Marxist.\textsuperscript{15} The fact that both organizations
were leading a violent struggle against a pro-Western country was more important to the
Chinese than the internal politics of either faction.

In the late 1960s, in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government
began for the first time to intervene directly in the internal affairs of an Arab country when it
backed a separatist movement in the Dhofar region of Oman. By supporting the Dhofar
Liberation Front and its successor organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the
Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), the Chinese were joining an armed struggle against the
Omani sultanate, which was fully independent despite its strong relationship with the United
Kingdom.\textsuperscript{16} Occurring at the apex of Chinese radicalism, the alliance between Beijing and
the PFLOAG was thus an aberration in China’s relations with the Middle East. In other
respects, however, China’s interest in Oman was consistent with its ambitions elsewhere.
Although the PFLOAG was a leftist organization with ties to communist South Yemen, its
leaders were not particularly interested in a Maoist approach to Marxist ideology at the time
Beijing first agreed to send them arms. As was the case with China’s simultaneous support
for both Fatah and communist organizations within the PLO, the Chinese government was
more concerned with the fact that the Omani rebels were leading an armed struggle than with
the fact that they might have an ideological affinity for the Chinese. Only after China had
become the most prominent backer of the PFLOAG did many of its members start to take a

\begin{itemize}
  \item[] 14. Yezid Sayigh, \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for a State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993}
  \item[] 15. Lillian Craig Harris, “China’s Relations with the PLO,” 124-125.
  \item[] 16. The most extensive research into Chinese support for Omani leftist groups remains Hashim S.H.
  Behbehani’s \textit{China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World}. 
\end{itemize}
definite interest in Maoism. This progression fit nicely into Mao’s idea that the Chinese experience should be a model for other non-Western leftist groups to study and emulate. The greater the interest that Omani rebels evinced in following the Chinese path, the more assertively the Chinese government could present itself as the most ardent champion of worldwide revolution. China’s backing for the PFLOAG represented, at least to some degree, the natural next step after its support for the FLN during the latter’s war against the French; as the political situation within China became progressively more extreme, Chinese foreign policy mirrored this change by patronizing revolutionary groups that were more overtly committed to Chinese-style communism.

In 1971, one year before Richard Nixon met Mao in Beijing and inaugurated a new phase in China’s relations with the non-communist world, the Chinese government suddenly curtailed its support for the PFLOAG and began the gradual process of seeking reconciliation with the countries of the Middle East. In that year, China’s leaders established diplomatic relations with the conservative monarchies of Kuwait and Iran and attempted to lay the foundation necessary to build formal ties with Saudi Arabia. In the last years of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government became willing to support non-communist regimes that were opposed by insurgencies with links to the Soviet Union. In some cases, including in Oman, this new policy meant that Beijing became complicit in suppressing radical groups it had funded only a few years before. This complete reversal of priorities reflected not only the continued rivalry between China and the Soviet Union, but also the renewal of the Chinese government’s aspirations to be taken seriously as a responsible and reliable ally of

17. Abdel Razzaq Takriti, “Revolution and Absolutism: Oman, 1965-1976” (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), 74, 85-86, 91. According to Takriti, in the 1960s, the Omani left was interested generally in all Third World communist movements, including those in China, Vietnam, and Cuba. Because China was the only country willing to provide significant aid, the rebels increasingly began to pay attention to China. This “turn to China,” according to Takriti, “initially lacked an ideological foundation.”
established Middle Eastern countries. Thereafter, China’s standing in the region improved gradually until it enjoyed permanent, cordial diplomatic relations with every country in the Middle East. The establishment of formal relations with Israel in 1992 – fully 42 years after Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett became the first Middle Eastern leader to recognize Mao’s regime as the de jure government of China – marked the conclusion of this long process of rapprochement.¹⁹ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as China began to liberalize and develop its economy, the two most important themes in Sino-Arab relations were the dramatic expansion of Chinese economic investment in the Third World and the Chinese government’s developing role as a purveyor of arms to Arab countries and Iran.²⁰ By the end of the twentieth century, China had established itself as a key partner of many Middle Eastern regimes.

At present, the Chinese government’s Middle East policy is determined in large part by the interests of the rapidly growing number of Chinese companies that have invested in the region. The need to secure access to oil to meet increasing demand within China has been perhaps the most significant force driving recent Chinese initiatives in the Middle East, but it is also important to note that Chinese companies have made substantial investments in other industries as well as in major infrastructure projects throughout the region. In addition, in recent years, the Middle East has also become a significant market for goods produced by Chinese manufacturers.²¹ The economic dimensions of Sino-Arab relations in the twenty-first century make it difficult to compare China’s current Middle East policy with that of the

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21. Of the dozens of reports about Chinese investment in the Middle East that have been produced in the past several years, Jon B. Alterman and John W. Garver, The Vital Triangle, Ch. 2 is worth mentioning because its authors exhaustively documented Chinese deals in Arab countries while simultaneously keeping Sino-Arab economic relations in perspective. In 2004, Alterman and Garver noted, the Middle East accounted for only 1% of Chinese foreign investment.
1950s and 1960s. After all, when the Chinese government signed its first Arab trade deal with the Egyptian delegation of Muhammad Abu Nusayr in August 1955, it agreed to unfavorable economic terms in order to advance its political agenda. By contrast, current Chinese policy often gives priority to economic considerations. Nevertheless, this dramatic shift masks important continuities in China’s Middle East policy that have endured since the Bandung Conference. By looking beyond the new role of trade and investment in Sino-Arab relations, it is possible to observe two broad similarities between China’s attitude toward the Middle East sixty years ago and its present approach: Beijing’s abiding respect for national sovereignty and the renewed importance of religious and cultural linkages.

China’s steadfast refusal to intervene in the internal affairs of Arab countries has been a prominent and consistent feature of its Middle East policy since the Bandung era. With the sole exception of its machinations in Oman during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government abided by its promise not to challenge independent regimes. In the 1960s, this policy meant that China gave foreign aid without preconditions, a stance intended to contrast with the machiavellian attitudes of the United States and the Soviet Union. Today, much to the chagrin of pro-human rights protestors in the West, Beijing continues to support established governments regardless of their domestic policies. Prior to the upheavals of 2011, this policy created the most controversy in Sudan, where the Chinese government protected investments by Chinese companies despite the international indictment of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on charges of war crimes. In the past two years, with the Middle East in disarray, China’s leaders have attempted to maintain their non-judgmental approach to the region. They continued to recognize the Libyan regime of Muammar Qaddafi long after most other powers had endorsed the rebel government. They have also continued to support the embattled government of Bashar al-Asad in Syria, even going so far as to use China’s veto in the United Nations Security Council to shield him from international
condemnation. The Chinese attitude toward turmoil in the Middle East is embodied in the photo display at the Chinese embassy in Cairo, which celebrated China’s disinclination to intervene. The idea that China should engage only with established governments harkens back to the debates at the Bandung Conference, where Zhou went to great effort to convince the other delegates that China wanted to be part of the international system of nation-states rather than to undermine it. For Chinese leaders who still bristle at international criticism and who are adamantly committed to a nationalist ideology, this state-based approach to foreign policy remains as fundamental today as it was in the 1950s.

In the past two decades, another important theme from the mid-1950s has once more become relevant to Sino-Arab relations as Chinese officials have again decided to make Islam a centerpiece of their diplomacy. During the Bandung Conference and for several years immediately afterwards, Beijing’s propaganda efforts – directed at both Chinese and Arab audiences – emphasized the longstanding religious connection between Chinese Muslims and the Middle East. Once the Great Leap Forward radicalized Chinese politics and proscribed any discussion of religion in mainstream Chinese discourse, this approach was quickly abandoned. By the 1990s, however, a combination of the liberalization of Chinese society and the growing importance of transnational Islamic movements around the world compelled the Chinese government to be proactive in reasserting the significance of Chinese Islam. One French journalist has labeled this revived strategy “hajj diplomacy” in reference to the fact that China relies on religious linkages with the Arab world, especially participation in the hajj, to demonstrate its respect for Islam.22 Maintaining positive relations with Middle

22. Alain Gresh, “China’s Hajj Diplomacy,” http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=43364, 31 December 2010 (accessed 31 January 2013). When the CCP’s attitude toward religion soured in 1965 in the run-up to the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government stopped allowing Chinese Muslims to undertake the hajj. In 1979, Chinese participation in the hajj resumed with an official group of 19 pilgrims. In the 1990s, the number of Chinese Muslims traveling to Mecca each year reached into the thousands, with most pilgrims paying their own expenses. See Dru C. Gladney, “Sino-Middle Eastern Perspectives and Relations since the Gulf War: Views from Below,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 26 (1994): 679. With China’s economy booming, an unprecedented number of Chinese Muslims have been able to afford the journey. In November
Eastern countries helps the Chinese government minimize dissent among an increasingly restive Uyghur population in Xinjiang because endorsements from Arab regimes add credibility to Beijing’s claims about its restrained treatment of Chinese Muslims. In recent years, this policy has been remarkably successful. In 2009, when Chinese security forces suppressed riots in Urumqi and other cities in Xinjiang, a spokesman for the Saudi Foreign Ministry helped the Chinese government by refusing to grant Islamic legitimacy to anti-Chinese protestors. “A good Muslim should be a good citizen,” he insisted, “whether in China or any other country. We do not interfere in the internal affairs of others, and we don’t want them to interfere in ours. It is a principle we share with Beijing.”

The Chinese government and government-affiliated institutions such as the China Islamic Association have also arranged for Chinese Muslims to study in the Middle East, including in multi-year Islamic studies programs at al-Azhar in Cairo (the main destination for Chinese Muslim students prior to World War II, though not in the 1950s, when the Chinese government preferred the secular Cairo University). Much evidence suggests, however, that the China Islamic Association is meticulous in selecting loyal, pro-regime Muslim students to study in the Middle East rather than more religious youths who might be more easily radicalized. In other words, while the government wants some Chinese Muslims to gain prestige from studying Islam in the Middle East, it seeks to restrict this opportunity to students who will reinforce the authority of the state. As in the 1950s, therefore, Beijing is attempting to manipulate religious associations between Chinese Muslims and their coreligionists in the Middle East in order to reaffirm the allegiance of the former to China.

2012, for example, the Chinese media proudly declared that more than 13,800 Chinese Muslims had performed the hajj as part of a program organized by the government. See “Chinese Muslims Head for Mecca,” China Daily, 10 November 2012.

23. Alain Gresh, “China’s Hajj Diplomacy.”
24. Ibid.
The similarities between the Chinese government’s attitudes toward the Middle East in the mid-twentieth century and the early twenty-first century reflect a hitherto unappreciated continuity in Sino-Arab relations. For nearly six decades, the meanings of the relationships between China and Egypt and between China and Algeria have been continually redefined to fit the changing priorities of their respective leaders. Now, as in the 1950s, the legacies of revolution in each of these countries are open to interpretation and debate. As China moves beyond the communist model, its citizens are forced to come to terms with the impact of Mao’s policies and ideology. In Egypt, where the successor to Nasser’s military regime was toppled by yet another revolution – one which many Egyptians consider unfinished – protestors, activists, and a new generation of politicians are forced to grapple with the question of what “revolution” really means. The leaders of the FLN intended the struggle for Algerian independence to usher in a utopian era of unity and progress, but instead it led to a divisive civil war and a conservative dictatorship. It is little wonder, then, that China, Arab countries, and Sino-Arab relations have been such compelling symbols in contemporary political discourse. A Chinese embassy official who designs a photograph display to emphasize the order of Chinese citizens in the midst of chaos, an Egyptian protestor who labors to translate his anti-Mubarak poster into Chinese, a representative of the Muslim Brotherhood who proclaims his interest in learning from the Chinese experience, and a Chinese youth who uses coded language to subvert government censorship and discuss the Egyptian revolution in online chatrooms are all participating in a tradition that goes back to the 1950s. By investing Sino-Arab relations with symbolism that transcends any concrete connection between China and the Middle East, they are promulgating visions for the identities and ideologies of their own nations.
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