

## A MISSION FOR ALL YOUTH

# Reviving the Spirit of Bandung Today

by Ashley Tran

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Schiller Institute

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Good morning everyone! Today I want to talk about a significant historical moment during the Cold War that many people in the West may not know about. I have only recently been made aware of this story—thanks to the Schiller Institute—and its relevance in the context of the second Cold War that we are facing today. And that event is the 1955 Bandung Asia-Africa Conference.

It was the first international conference of independent nations with the goal of initiating cooperation between Asian and African nations to build a new global paradigm based on self-determination and national sovereignty. It had no participation from any Western colonial power. This conference and its goals would ultimately be the foundation for the development of the Non-Aligned Movement. The West’s ignorance and ahistorical understanding of this alliance’s significance to Cold War history, only illuminates the callousness in which we have been maneuvered for the past decades to arrive at the disaster that we now face.

The current global geopolitical situation mirrors the volatility of tensions between the West and the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. There is no doubt that if we do not commit ourselves to weathering the seas of history with the wisdom of the past as our guide, we are bound to crash into the waves of senseless conflict and war that will only bring us to our final demise.

It is no exaggeration to say that we are at the brink of a thermonuclear world war with the rising tensions between the West, and Russia and China. Four days ago, in an address to government advisors representing private business interests during a legislative meeting, Chinese President Xi Jinping explicitly announced in an unprecedented manner that “Western countries, led by the United States, have contained and suppressed us in an all-around way, which has brought unprecedented severe challenges to our development.”

Like the Cold War, each day we are witnessing unparalleled escalation and provocation from the West. However, we are also witnessing a growing new tendency among Asian, African, and South American countries, to not only push back against the Western hegemonic powers, but also increasingly align with each other in defiance of their oligarchical rule. This new tendency is best exemplified with the expansion of the BRICS-Plus nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the growth of the Chinese economy over the past decade.

### No to Oligarchical Rule

In the past year, we have seen BRICS [potential] membership explode with many nations formally applying to join BRICS, such as Iran, Argentina, Algeria, and recently Mexico. Other countries are expressing interest in joining, like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. It is clear that we are in the midst of a global economic transformation. The rise of China since the 1960s has been a beacon of inspiration for all under-developed nations to quickly rise out of poverty without bending a knee to Western hegemonic forces. China has completely elevated not only its own domestic economic capabilities and manufacturing infrastructure, agriculture, and other

industries, but it has also been a leader in global economic growth and development through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.

The Belt and Road Initiative has especially played a key role in China-Africa cooperation. Since the BRI was proposed in 2013, China has supported modern infrastructure projects such as railways, roads, ports, dams, industries, and digital connectivity. China has injected vitality into Kenya's growth: Developed in less than a decade, Kenya now has a brand new 670-km modern, standard-gauge railway connecting the port of Mombasa and the inland port of Naivasha. This was celebrated in the 2021 report by the Africa Policy Institute, "Shared Prosperity: Tracking the Belt and Road Initiative in Kenya." China has assisted Africa in building the African Union Commission Conference Center in Addis Ababa, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, the Mombasa-Nairobi railway, and other large-scale infrastructure projects, while also closely working with African nations in the fields of science, education, culture, health, and more.

These cooperative efforts are the legacy of the Spirit of Bandung that began at the 1955 conference. As we can see, the Spirit of Bandung has written the continuation of the countries in the East and the Global South into the future of history. With the waning Western NATO influence on the continent, the U.S. does not intend to go out without a fight. Will we have a peaceful transition into the multi-polar landscape with the cooperation of America and its NATO allies? Or, will the West resist all progression forward in the name of "preserving unipolarity"? This decision can be answered with the wisdom the Bandung Conference.

The meeting of the Colombo powers—Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon), India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Myanmar (formerly known as Burma)—convened in April and December 1954 in the wake of these nations becoming newly independent, forming the foundation from which the Bandung Conference was born. Despite their different interests, ideologies, and historical trajectories, at the precipice of the Cold War, all were united in preserving their own sovereignty and self-determination without being subject to any dominion again, whether it was the Soviet or Western bloc.

At the Colombo conference, the participants decided to build an alliance with other Asian and African nations that had faced similar imperial rule. Through the preparations, the 1955 Bandung Conference was born.

The Bandung Conference spanned six days, from April 18 to 24, 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. It was attended by state leaders and other high officials from 29 different nations, representing around 1.5 billion people of that region, nearly two-thirds of the world's population at the time. Countries in attendance included Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Liberia, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and many others.

### **Principles for Peace**

It is obvious that the Bandung Conference set the precedent for the new paradigm that is being born today. Despite their common status as former colonies, the participating countries came from diverse ideological, economic, and cultural circumstances, ranging from absolute monarchies to popular democratic and communist governments, ranging from nationalist movements to communist movements. The conference's unity and success cannot be attributed to their common history of being former colonies, but their ability to reach a consensus on mutual interests and goals, which culminated in their [final communiqué](#).

After two days of plenary sessions and five days of closed-door deliberations within their respective political, economic, and cultural committees, the final communiqué was adopted. The contents of the final communiqué included economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, human rights, and self-determination, as well as the adoption of a Declaration on Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation, listing ten principles in handling international relations.

It is no coincidence that the Schiller Institute has adopted our own Ten Principles for peace in remembrance of this historical conception of a new global paradigm, recognizing that each country has a right to equal participation in the prosperity and peace on Earth. The spirit of unity among Asian and African people, and now the growing support among South American people, opposing imperialism and colonialism, struggling for the defense of national independence, world peace, and the promotion of friendship among the peoples as demonstrated at the conference, is known as the Bandung Spirit.

The Bandung Spirit caused a ripple effect across all countries in those regions. In May 1956, the Indonesian government revoked the agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands, which—among other things—had ensured the domination of foreign companies after

Indonesia's independence. Right after the law was revoked, an agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands was passed, and Sukarno, the President at the time, started nationalizing Dutch assets in Indonesia. A few months later, [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in Egypt. Both actions evoked reactions from the former colonial powers, but did not stop the national governments from taking further steps.

In the early 1960s, a wave of nationalizations swept the two continents, which turned the colonial economy on its head. The Asian-African conference gave the leaders of the newly-independent states the confidence and support to take on the Western hegemonic powers, and drastically restructure the colonial economy.

Today, the Spirit of Bandung is largely lost in the Western hemisphere, which is still dominated by the NATO imperial nations. Their superficial sectarian political groups have been a point of division that has driven us further away from each other domestically and globally. The West is completely separate from the mutual win-win cooperation that is flourishing among the Asian-African region and the growing relationship with the South American countries as well.

However, it is not too late. The Chinese still remember the Bandung Spirit, as well as African nations through their partnership in the Belt and Road Initiative with China. In order to transition into this new paradigm, which will determine the fate of the world, we must also join in partnership with these countries to build this new paradigm. Will we choose to resist and fight this individually, or move forward together? The Spirit of Bandung says that we must move together in cooperation.

### Opening Speech to Bandung Conference

I want to also share President Sukarno's opening [speech](#), "Let a New Asia and New Africa Be Born," at the first Asian-African conference. Here are some sections of his speech:

"I am proud that my country is your host....

"It is a new departure in the history of the world that leaders of Asian and African peoples can meet together in their own countries to discuss and deliberate upon matters of common concern....

"In spite of the diversity that exists among its participants—let this Conference be a great success!

"Yes, there is diversity among us. Who denies it? Small and great nations are represented here, with people professing almost every religion under the sun—Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, and others. Almost every political faith we encounter here—democracy, monarchism, theocracy, with innumerable variants. And practically every economic doctrine has its representative in this hall—marhaenism, socialism, capitalism, communism, in all their manifold variations and combinations.

"But what harm is in diversity, when there is unity in desire? This Conference is not to oppose each other; it is a conference of brotherhood."

I wanted to share these memories of this conference, and also to bring back the Spirit of Bandung to the West so that more people can realize that we have this infrastructure, and we have this capability to work with all these different nations and to cooperate in a way that brings prosperity across the globe. We each have an equal opportunity to participate in that.

Thank you.



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