



**Taomo Zhou.** *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. 318 pp. \$43.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-3993-4.

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What scholars know about mass violence in the twentieth century is compromised by a simple but brutal fact: the victims can no longer speak for themselves, and perpetrators often impugn the dead and displace responsibility, generating popular myths and tainted archival trails. Such is the case in Indonesia when, in 1965-66, the massacre of half a million alleged communists, including attacks on ethnic Chinese, accompanied the fall of President Sukarno and the rise of General Suharto. The political and communal bloodbath came on the heels of the abduction and killing of six anticommunist generals by leftist military officers on October 1, 1965. Known as the “September 30th Movement,” the military crisis became an opportunity seized by Suharto—head of the army’s strategic reserve—to counterattack, regain control, and, eventually, usurp the presidency from Sukarno. Suharto and the army quickly blamed the movement on the home-grown Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and on the People’s Republic of China (PRC), accusing the latter of backing the PKI in a plot to spark a national uprising and turn Indonesia communist. Thus did the general come to command both the armed forces and an ideological narrative, helping him sideline Sukarno, butcher the political opposition, scapegoat Chinese at home and abroad, and win American support. Although Suharto would go on

to rule Indonesia for decades, the myths around his rise, especially on the question of Chinese complicity, have proven remarkably durable, outlasting his own fall in 1998 and persisting into an era of democracy for Indonesia and renewed scholarly inquiry into a pivotal episode in the Cold War. [1]

Among the book’s many strengths, Taomo Zhou’s excellent *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War* goes a long way toward dispelling the myths foundational to Suharto’s long rule. By answering the key question of Chinese culpability, her timely book contributes significantly to recent and robust scholarship that aims to provide a more accurate, empirically based account of the alleged coup and its relation to the mass killings.[2] Probing the ties between Sukarno, PKI leader D. N. Aidit, and Mao Zedong, Zhou argues convincingly that “Beijing was not as influential over the turn of events in 1965 as the Suharto regime had charged” (p. 153), concluding that the regime “and some Western observers have exaggerated Beijing’s ability to project its power in Indonesia” (p. 154). This important finding adds to a long, scholarly rebuttal of the Suharto regime’s propaganda charging the PKI with masterminding the September 30th movement in an attempted coup d’etat.[3] Rather, the author strengthens a scholarly consensus that the

PKI's rank and file—all members of a legal political party at the time—were in no way culpable for the events that the Suharto regime used as pretext for their mass murder.

Zhou's book does much more than just demystify propaganda germane to Suharto's self-proclaimed "New Order." Based on outstanding archival research and pioneering interviews, *Migration in the Time of Revolution* is a diplomatic, social, and political history of Indonesian-Chinese relations and the relationship's interactions with Indonesia's Chinese diaspora from 1945 to the late 1960s. Covering a volatile period and controversial topic, the book's solid evidentiary basis, creative methodology, and accessible prose exemplify what transnational history can do when done well.

Zhou approaches relations between China and Indonesia with three innovations—evidentiary, contextual, and humane—that flesh out a complex relationship and tell a gripping story. First, she draws on a rich array of archival and human sources, including Chinese-language documents collected during a rare respite of openness. For two years, between 2006 and 2008, the Chinese Foreign Ministry declassified thousands of documents dating from 1949 to 1965, including minutes of a discussion between Mao and Aidit just weeks before September 30, 1965, only to reclassify them all again in 2013. To these fortunate finds, Zhou adds copious evidence from PRC provincial archives, Indonesia's national archives, and collections in Taiwan, including the Chinese Nationalist Party. Incorporating oral history, too, Zhou tracked down and interviewed historical actors, especially the Chinese Indonesians who migrated to southern China in the early 1960s.

Second, the author wisely situates a bilateral relationship in the national contexts under study and the population movements between them, what she aptly calls "the entanglement of diplomacy and migration" (p. 4). Highlighting the Indonesian side, she explains how large, diverse

communities of ethnic Chinese came to be governed as an "alien minority" under Dutch colonialism and then faced "divisions within and discrimination from without" during the postcolonial era (p. 9). Large in number, dispersed across the archipelago, and often born and raised in Indonesia, ethnic Chinese suffered a renewal of suspicion, marginalization, and violence after independence. Yet even for the 164,000 economic migrants and political refugees who moved from Indonesia to China between the early 1950s and 1967, life did not necessarily improve during the lean years of collectivization and cultural revolution under Mao. Third, Zhou populates her narrative with historical actors, brings their experiences down to earth, and analyzes how they interacted with national projects, like citizenship, and transnational forces, such as anticolonial solidarity early in the Cold War. For example, Zhou bookends her account with the remarkable biography of Ba Ren, an activist and playwright whose story starts in revolutionary Sumatra in 1945 and ends with his destitution and death in Zhejiang in 1972. In so doing, Zhou both weaves wide-ranging narrative threads together and humanizes impersonal forces and political movements.

*Migration in a Time of Revolution's* chronological narrative is divided into ten substantive chapters. Opening with Indonesia's revolution against the Dutch, chapters 1 and 2 compare and contrast how Chinese Communists and Nationalists jostled for influence among Indonesia's ethnic Chinese population, estimated at the time at 2.5 million people, or 2 percent of Indonesia's total. Moving into the 1950s and 1960s, chapters 3 and 4 discuss how the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) maneuvered diplomatically and mobilized popularly against one another to generate support for rival regimes. Notwithstanding this sometimes fierce "Red-versus-Blue" struggle and the splits it produced among ethnic Chinese, indigenous Indonesians tended to treat them categorically and suspiciously. Chapters 5 and 6 trace the reemergence of anti-Chinese sentiment through 1959,

when Sukarno's government revoked the trading licenses of noncitizen ethnic Chinese and authorized the military to remove them from rural areas. In spite of the resulting anti-Chinese crisis, the PRC adopted a moderate stance towards its noncommunist ally, choosing instead to prioritize stable state-to-state relations with Sukarno's Indonesia. Focused on the early 1960s, chapters 7 and 8 discuss the evolution of this bilateral relationship, beginning when the PRC and Indonesia teamed up to challenge the bipolar Cold War order and ending with an in-depth analysis of China's (non) role in the September 30<sup>th</sup> movement. Chapter 9 analyzes how Suharto reversed his predecessor's foreign policy toward the two Chinas, first suspending relations with its erstwhile ally and then welcoming the ROC into an anticommunist alliance. Chapter 10 tells the story of the ethnic Chinese who migrated to coastal southern China during the two decades covered in the book. In one of many ironies noted by the author, some of the same Chinese who had been persecuted as communist in Indonesia earned reputations as spoiled capitalists in the PRC. Further, noting their entrepreneurial skills and overseas connections, Zhou argues that this same group of migrants helped drive southern China's trade liberalization and market reforms beginning in the late 1970s.

In conclusion, Taomo Zhou's fascinating book about Sino-Indonesian relations has wide relevance for historians, historical social scientists, and anyone interested in the countries and peoples under study. In its two-decade sweep from the 1940s to 1960s, *Migration in the Time of Revolution* disentangles a knotty diplomatic relationship and analyzes its connections to Cold War strategies, tense domestic politics, and population movements. As a result, the book will appeal to scholars interested broadly in Asia, regional foreign relations, and Cold War hot spots as well as to specialists in mid-twentieth-century Southeast Asia, political violence in Indonesia, and the Chinese diaspora.

## Notes

[1]. See, for example, Howard French, "Mao's Shadow," *New York Review of Books*, March 12, 2020, 12.

[2]. Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Murders, 1965-66* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

[3]. Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 "Coup" in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971); Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, no. 21 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, 1990); Siddarth Chandra, "New Findings on the Indonesian Killings of 1965-66," *Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 4 (November 2017).

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