

Global reporting from the Third World: the Afro-Asian Journalists' Association, 1963–1974

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First things First

The **AAJA** is the **Afro-Asian Journalist Movement**, and as the most important **global alliance of journalists** in the formerly colonized world, the AAJA was a multilingual, multicultural and multifaceted organization.

The Movement was built on an inclusive foundation of peaceful co-existence and aspired to help lay the foundations for anti-colonial, anti-imperialist associations unbounded by sovereign statehood.

During the Cold War, the Afro-Asian Journalists Association (AAJA) fostered solidarity among journalists from formerly colonized nations



Bandung and cosmopolitan approach to reporting

- The Third World made its debut on the international stage at the 1955 Bandung Conference and the term, coined in order to refer to formerly colonized societies that remained outside the division between the First World – the capitalist bloc led by the United States – and the Second World – the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union.
- In addition to its political significance, Bandung is one of the very few international diplomatic conferences that has entered the realm of popular culture across continents.
- The ethos of the AAJA was an extension of the Bandung Conference's emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in journalism.
- To combat the capitalist presses, the AAJA believed that journalists in the Third World had to assume the role of “doctors of the mind” by imparting the truth and exposing lies. For AAJA members, “the truth” meant information and comments that were in accordance with “the legitimate aspirations of peoples for national independence, social progress, democracy, freedom, and peace.” In contrast, “lies” referred to reports in the interests of colonial powers or the indigenous exploiting classes.
- A key feature of the Afro-Asian Journalist was its extensive use of images, including photos and political caricatures.

Participants of Bandung Conference





Global Reporting from the Indonesian Archipelago

- In 1966, **Djawoto - an Indonesian Diplomat who also served as the Indonesian Ambassador to China and the AAJA's first secretary general**, announced its relocation to the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.). From its new headquarters, first at the Peking Hotel and then inside a traditional Beijing courtyard, the AAJA continued its activities, including frequent international exchanges and regular publishing, until its informal dissolution in 1974.
- The liberal democratic era was “a period of confusion” for Indonesian journalism because excessive freedom had led to conflicts among different newspapers that oftentimes involved the use of what the author claimed was “abusive language.”
- Afro-Asian journalist situated itself at the centre of a worldwide network of leftist media.
- The AAJA held that the task for Asians and Africans in the postcolonial era was to restructure local politics and economies in a manner suited to their historical and cultural heritage.
- In 1974, the year of the AAJA's demise, **Mao Zedong - President of the Chinese Communist Party from 1943- announced his theory of three worlds.**





Beijing Revolutionary Message

- The mid-1960s was a turning point in Indonesian history and in the Afro-Asian movement. During the first part of its Beijing period (1966–1971), the AAJA became the P.R.C.'s international mouthpiece, featuring a rigid reporting format and Cultural Revolution propaganda that accentuated the image of Mao as a world revolutionary leader.
- During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party abandoned the principles of peaceful co-existence promoted by Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference. P.R.C. representatives abroad were either expelled for violations of diplomatic protocol or called back for domestic political campaigns.
- China's links to the Third World became few, although the CCP continued to imagine itself to be the center of international affairs.
- In December 1965, the Indonesian Army searched AAJA headquarters in Jakarta, confiscated documents, cut off its communications with the outside world, arrested three staff members, and harassed many others.



A New Third World

- In its last two years of existence, due to the reorientation of Chinese foreign policy following the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, the AAJA shifted its emphasis from militant anti-imperialism to economic development.
- In the early 1970s, this ideological fervor began abating and Chinese diplomacy took a more moderate tone, including engagement with governments and international organizations that the P.R.C. had previously considered reactionaries or lackeys of imperialists.
- With the P.R.C.'s decision to join the international community, the term "Afro-Asian", given its longstanding association with armed struggle for national liberation, was replaced by "Third World" in Chinese public discourse.
- Vice-Premier Deng announced: "China is a socialist country, and a developing country, as well. China belongs to the Third World. China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to be one."
- Ironically, following the political shifts in China in the early 1970s, the transnational networks previously forged by the AAJA in the name of anti-imperialism became platforms that facilitated the migration of Indonesian left-wing journalists exiled in the P.R.C. to the capitalist West.





In conclusion

- “The Third World was not a place. It was a project”
- As the nexus of print culture in the Third World, it briefly created a transnational public space for disparate and diverse peoples and nations to explore their own approach to journalism free from imperialist intervention.
- The September Thirtieth Movement changed the historical trajectory of modern Indonesia as well as the fate of the AAJA.
- The AAJA, although created for the purpose of preventing the spillover of the Cold War into the Third World, nevertheless became embroiled in geopolitical competition, internal ideological disputes, and interpersonal rivalries among Third World leaders.

Personal Opinion and Comments