Exploring Asia-Africa Consensus on Human Rights in the Context of the Cold War: A Historical Perspective of the Bandung Conference

HUA Guoyu[*] *& LIU Xiaolan*[**]

Abstract: *The Bandung Conference was held against the international background of intensified confrontation during the Cold War, and the human rights issues discussed at the conference exhibited a complex dual character. On the one hand, some human rights issues were politicized as a means of international struggle, hindering the awakening of human rights subjectivity of the participating countries. On the other hand, by endorsing the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to demand equal rights and the right to discourse, the conference emphasized propositions such as people's self-determination, anti-colonialism and anti-racism, promoting the integration of Asia-Africa human rights demands into the international human rights agenda. The principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences proposed by China played a positive role in promoting conference solidarity and resolving differences. The conference provided impetus for the early efforts of Asian and African countries to promote human rights and laid a promising foundation for regional human rights consensus.*

Keywords: Bandung Conference ♦ Asia-Africa ♦ human rights consensus ♦ people's self-determination

The formation and evolution of Asia-Africa Consensus on Human Rights is indeed a complex and intricate process. Academic discussions on the origins of the Asia-Africa Consensus on Human Rights have largely focused on the landmark conferences from the late 20th to the early 21st century, often overlooking the pivotal role of the Bandung Conference. The Bandung Conference stands as a significant milestone in the rise of Third World nations. Previous research on the conference has predominantly centered on international relations and diplomacy, with few scholars analyzing its impact from a human rights perspective. The Ten Principles enshrined in the *Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference* are a profound spiritual legacy bequeathed to posterity by the conference, with its first principle explicitly stating, "The Asian-African Conference declared its full support of the fundamental principles of Human Rights as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations."[1] Although human rights were not a dedicated agenda item, placing respect for fundamental human rights at the forefront of these principles holds extraordinary historical significance. "After experiencing the turmoil of World War II, Asian countries showed a positive willingness to cooperate in forming a human rights consensus, but as the Cold War between the superpowers escalated, Asian countries were either drawn in or divided, making it difficult to implement sincere and in-depth cooperation in the field of human rights."[2] A review of the Bandung Conference's background and

[*] HUA Guoyu (化国宇), Associate Professor and Doctoral Supervisor, School of Law, People's Public Security University of China.

[**] LIU Xiaolan (刘晓澜), Doctoral Candidate (Class of 2023) in Jurisprudence at the People's Public Security University of China, and Lecturer in the Department of Basic Courses, Fujian Police College. This article is a phased research outcome of the 2022 Ministerial-Level Research Project on Rule of Law Development and Legal Theory of the Ministry of Justice, "Legislative Research on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of 'Digitally Disadvantaged Groups' from the Perspective of Digital Inclusion" (Project Number 22SFB5001), and the 2025 General Graduate Research Innovation Project of the People's Public Security University of China, "Paradigm Transformation in the Construction of the Fundamental Rights System and the Chinese Approach" (Project Number 2025YJSKY010).

[1] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955), available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed October 15, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/200504/t20050415_284634 .shtml.

[2] Chang Jian, "Opportunities, Challenges and Paths for Enhancing Human Rights Consensus in the Asian Region," *Chinese Journal of Human Rights* 1 (2023).

the process of reaching a human rights consensus reveals that the conference precisely fell within this historical period of "positive willingness" but "difficulty in conducting in-depth cooperation." During the conference, the participating Asian-African nations indeed demonstrated a political will to forge a human rights consensus. However, the great power rivalry during the Cold War increasingly highlighted macroscopic political divergences among nations, making the achievement of a human rights consensus even more challenging. Yet, another crucial aspect is that the Bandung Conference skillfully leveraged the fissures of the Cold War, providing a historical opportunity for these nations to assert their voice in international human rights discourse and playing an indispensable role in promoting regional human rights consensus. Following this line of thought, this paper aims to analyze the obstacles encountered by the Bandung Conference in fostering an Asia-Africa Consensus on Human Rights within the Cold War framework, its achievements despite these constraints, and the constructive role played by the Chinese delegation during the conference proceedings.

General Secretary Xi Jinping, in his speech at the Asian-African Summit on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, put forward a clear initiative to deepen Asian-African cooperation. He pointed out, "There are more than 100 countries in Asia and Africa. Though diverse in social system, history, culture and values, they present a colorful tapestry of civilizations. We should seek common ground while shelving differences, and be open and inclusive. By drawing on each other's strengths through exchanges and mutual learning, we may see all civilizations progress and thrive together. What is more, Asian-African cooperation is not a closed and exclusive pursuit, but an open and win-win endeavor. We therefore welcome active participation and constructive contribution by countries from other regions."[3] In this context, we should study and draw lessons from the consensus achieved at the Bandung Conference in the field of human rights, as well as its limitations and achievements, and explore the historical role of China's advocated principle of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" in bridging human rights differences among various parties. All of these will help to forge a new human rights consensus that aligns with the historical traditions and practical needs of the Asian-African region in a multicultural context, and achieve common progress in Asian-African human rights endeavors, thus providing support for building a more just and equitable international human rights order.

I. Bandung Context: Origins of the Conference

The Bandung Conference, held in 1955, took place during the expanding phase of the Cold War.[4] Its origins can be traced back to the struggle of newly independent nations against colonial rule after World War II and their dissatisfaction with the global bipolar structure. In the decade following the war, although Asian-African countries successively gained independence, they remained on the periphery of the international stage, unable to influence great power rivalries or safeguard their interests independently. By the mid-1950s, with the Korean War's aftermath still lingering and the Taiwan Strait situation becoming tense, East Asia became a frontline of Cold War confrontation.[5]

[3] Xi Jinping, "Remarks by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Asian-African Summit (Full Text)," published on the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China Website, accessed July 7, 2024, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-04/22/content_2851460. htm.

[4] Liu Jinzhi divides the history of the Cold War into five stages: the beginning of the Cold War (1945-1949), the expansion of the Cold War (1950-1962), the détente period (1963-1979), the resurgence of the Cold War (1980-1984), and the end of the Cold War (1985-1991). The Bandung Conference took place during the expansion phase of the Cold War. In 1950, the United States National Security Council issued National Security Council Report No. 68 (NSC-68), which laid down the strategic blueprint for the Cold War. The report called for the establishment and strengthening of the Western strategic alliance system, the expansion of military capabilities, and a comprehensive policy of containing the Soviet Union and communism. See Liu Jinzhi, *History of the Cold War*, vol. I (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2002), 24 and 214-215.

5 Zhao Xuegong, "The United States, the United Kingdom, and the Cold War in East Asia in the 1950s," in *Lessons from the Cold War: Special Reports on the History of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War*, Shen Zhihua, et al. eds. (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2019), 281.

Facing a common historical destiny and severe security challenges,[6] nations gradually realized that only through sincere unity could they effectively resist the dominance of great powers.[7] In April 1954, Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo first proposed an Asian-African Conference at the Colombo Conference. Later that year, at the Bogor Conference, the prime ministers of Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) formally decided to convene the Bandung Conference, clearly defining its core objectives: to promote friendly cooperation among Asian-African nations, explore common interests, strive for peaceful coexistence, and focus on issues vital to the well-being of Asian-African peoples, such as national sovereignty, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism.[8]

China was not a founding nation of the Bandung Conference, but attached great importance to it, viewing it as a historical opportunity to promote unity and cooperation among Asian-African nations and jointly resist colonial oppression.[9] Before the conference, the Chinese government strategically planned its diplomacy, engaging in a series of high-level interactions.[10] Premier Zhou Enlai visited India, Burma, and other countries, exchanging in-depth views with political leaders to consolidate common positions. Concurrently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs meticulously analyzed the situation and formulated a comprehensive strategy, explicitly adopting "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" as its approach for participation, striving to resolve potential differences appropriately while maintaining Asian-African unity and ensuring the conference's success.[11]

II. Exploring Asia-Africa Consensus on Human Rights: Common Positions at the Bandung Conference

A. Order recognition

The first consensus reached at the Bandung Conference on human rights issues was the recognition and support for the fundamental principles of the *Charter of the United Nations* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The final communiqué of the conference explicitly expressed full support for the basic human rights norms established by the Charter and "noted" the Declaration, viewing it as a universal standard that all nations should strive to achieve.[12]

The conference agenda was advanced by the Political Committee, Economic Committee, and

---

[6] An Gang, "The 'Bandung Era' Has Not Ended," *Journal of International Relations* 2 (2015).

[7] Chen Changwei and Niu Dayong, "An Exemplar Model for China's Diplomacy towards the Asian-African World: Re-examining the Bandung Conference," *Social Sciences in Chinese Higher Education Institutions* 4 (2018).

[8] Sir John Kotelawala, *An Asian Prime Minister's Story* (London Toronto Wellinton Sydney: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1956), 174-176.

[9] Zhu Yi, *The Bandung Symphony: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Bandung Conference* (Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 2005), 1-3.

[10] To make full use of the Bandung Conference as an important international forum for expanding China's diplomatic influence, it was necessary to establish and strengthen friendly and good-neighborly relations with Southeast Asian countries before the conference. As early as the summer and autumn of 1954, the Chinese government actively sought negotiations with the Indonesian government to address one of the major historical issues inherited from the past — the overseas Chinese question. After several rounds of talks in November 1954, the two countries drafted a treaty aimed at resolving the issue of dual nationality. This provided an important basis for the smooth signing of a formal agreement at the Bandung Conference and contributed to the creation of a cordial and cooperative atmosphere. See Zhu Yi, *The Bandung Symphony*, 4-5.

[11] Premier Zhou repeatedly invoked and implemented the principle of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" before, during, and after the Bandung Conference. See Tang Hao Publishing House ed., *Zhou Enlai's Journey to the Bandung Conference*, (Beijing: China Workers Publishing House, 2003), 250, 256, 270, 315, 328, 342 and 344.

[12] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

Cultural Committee, respectively. The first item on the Political Committee's agenda was "Human Rights and Self-Determination." At the outset of the discussion, Lebanese representative Charles Malik proposed formally recognizing and supporting the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which was immediately echoed by Sri Lanka, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, Thailand, and South Vietnam. India, China, Indonesia, and North Vietnam, however, expressed differing opinions.[13] The Indian representative stated that while acknowledging the human rights principles established by the Charter, there was no need to specifically mention particular UN documents.[14] The Chinese delegation held a similar stance, advocating for broader wording and exercising caution regarding direct invocation of the Declaration. As the agenda progressed, Malik and Philippine representative Carlos Romulo played significant roles. As one of the Declaration's core drafters, Malik elaborated on its content in detail and actively lobbied all parties for its recognition. He later recalled, "The whole of Wednesday we were discussing whether we should support the Declaration, and I had to take a stand in favor of supporting it; time and again delegates asked me to explain the articles of the Declaration in detail."[15] To facilitate an early consensus, all parties ultimately decided to establish a subcommittee to adjust the text's wording. After extensive consultations, the Chinese delegation agreed to explicitly support the Charter in the resolution, while for the Declaration, the phrase "noted" was adopted, which both maintained conference unity and allowed greater room for nations to understand and apply the Declaration.[16]

The Bandung Conference's endorsement of the fundamental principles of the Charter and the Declaration reflected the Asian-African nations' acceptance of and integration into the existing international order. This "order recognition" signaled the Asian-African nations' intention to participate in international norm-setting within the UN framework and adhere to recognized human rights standards. Furthermore, Asian-African nations hoped to leverage the recognition of international norms to assert their voice and participation within the existing order, thereby demonstrating their equal status as sovereign states under international law.[17] The *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference proposed that Asian-African nations should gain broader representation within the UN system, especially occupying seats in the Security Council to play a greater role in matters of international peace and security[18] — this corroborates the deeper motivations behind the aforementioned "order recognition." In the same year the conference concluded, Ceylon, Cambodia, Jordan, Laos, Libya, and Nepal successfully joined the United Nations, followed by Japan and Sudan the following year.[19] The process by which Asian-African nations gradually enhanced their

---

[13] David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement: Ideology and Foreign Policy of the Third World* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973), 68.

[14] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China , *Selected Diplomatic Archives of the People's Republic of China, Series II: The Chinese Delegation's Participation in the 1955 Bandung Conference* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2007), 88.

[15] Roland Burke, "The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom: Human Rights at the Bandung Conference," 28 *Human Rights Quarterly* 4 (2006): 954.

[16] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China , *Selected Diplomatic Archives of the People's Republic of China, Series II*, 88.

[17] Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of Modern International Order," *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2019): 468.

[18] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[19] The *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference urged the United Nations Security Council to facilitate the admission of all states that met the membership qualifications set forth in the United Nations Charter. The Communiqué identified eight such states — Cambodia, Ceylon, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Libya, Nepal, and a unified Vietnam. Except for Vietnam, all were admitted to the United

representation in the international system through the Bandung Conference can be seen as a vivid portrayal of Asian-African countries working together to seek changes in the international order, demonstrating their growing voice and influence on the global political stage.

The Bandung Conference's recognition of the fundamental principles of the Charter and the Declaration marked the first collective voice of Third World nations on human rights issues. This historic pronouncement broke the long-standing Western dichotomy of "civilization" and "barbarism," proclaiming that human rights are not the exclusive domain of Western powers but a universal principle to be discussed by all. The conference's reaffirmation of the Charter and the Declaration also served as a normative action paradigm for disadvantaged nations, demonstrating how to overcome marginalization in global rule-making. This "support" and "confirmation" of universal international norms implicitly contained an element of "resistance," serving as a strong protest against the Western powers' hypocrisy regarding colonialism and racial discrimination.[20] For a long time, the Western powers' disregard of and trampling over national self-determination and human rights protection had accumulated resentment in Asian-African nations. The Bandung Conference came at an opportune moment, providing a crucial platform for the oppressed Asian-African nations to unite and voice their moral stance in international affairs through "order recognition." Relying on the United Nations as a core international mechanism, the participating countries solidified a strong, legitimate foundation for national independence and autonomous development, and opened new avenues for gaining broader international discourse power and expanding their spheres of interest. This "order recognition" also constituted a prelude to the subsequent "order reshaping," representing a critical step for Asian-African nations to gain moral legitimacy through normative alignment, thereby gradually engaging in the global order and influencing the international human rights agenda.

B. Order reshaping

1. The legal evolution and political cohesion of the right to self-determination of peoples

The realization of self-determination has always been regarded as the core of the anti-colonial struggle, and its historical process has been complex and protracted. Beginning with the 1940 Atlantic Charter and the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, the United Kingdom, the anti-colonial camp continuously challenged the "gradualist approach to colonial liberation" advocated by colonial empires, attempting to reshape self-determination from a vague political principle into a prerequisite for all fundamental human rights. When the Human Rights Commission drafted the human rights covenants in 1950, self-determination was not included. Subsequently, post-colonial states passed a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly, demanding research into feasible ways to guarantee self-determination and explicitly defining it as a prerequisite for the realization of human rights.[21] Facing the triple challenges posed by colonial empires,[22] the anti-colonial camp, based on the framework of the Charter, directly confronted the core contradictions of colonial rule and proposed a new interpretation: foreign rule fundamentally deprived the colonized of their basic dignity and civil rights, and collective self-determination should be a necessary prerequisite for the realization of individual human rights. This argumentation clarified the intrinsic link between the two,

---

Nations in 1955 or 1956. Sudan, although not listed in the Communiqué, was likewise admitted during the same period. See *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[20] Amitav Acharya, "Who Are the Norm Makers-The Asian-African Conference in Bandung and the Evolution of Norms," *Global Governance* 20 (2014): 414.

[21] *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1952* (New York: United Nations Organization, 1952), 441.

[22] These three lines of criticism respectively denied the status of peoples as collective rights-holders, conflated the boundaries between law and politics, and maintained that the right of self-determination constituted no more than a subsidiary principle. The response of the colonial empires was, in essence, an effort to curb the emergence of the anti-colonial concept of self-determination by invoking the original meaning and framework of the United Nations Charter. See ibid.

laying a crucial foundation for the legal advancement of self-determination. In 1954, the UN Human Rights Commission completed two draft human rights covenants, prominently placing self-determination as the first article, hoping to incorporate it into the international human rights covenant system in written form.

The Bandung Conference in 1955 was held against this backdrop, bringing together the self-determination principle of the Charter and the anti-colonial camp's decade-long refined advocacy for self-determination into a common political program for Asian-African nations. The conference's *Final Communiqué*, in the form of a collective political declaration, reaffirmed and strengthened this core claim, explicitly declaring that self-determination "is a pre-requisite of the full enjoyment of all fundamental Human Rights."[23] The communiqué emphasized that the right to self-determination belongs to all peoples, that dependent peoples should gain freedom and independence as soon as possible, and that each nation has the right to choose its political system independently. It also condemned foreign conquest and domination, considering them a violation of fundamental human rights and the Charter, and explicitly supported the struggle of the peoples in North African dependent territories for self-determination. The consensus forged at the Bandung Conference was subsequently brought into subsequent UN debates, providing crucial political momentum and a solid voting basis for the eventual adoption of Resolution 1514 (the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*) in 1960.[24] Jack Mellish further argued that the Bandung Final Communiqué and UN Resolution 1514 together subverted the traditional logic of human rights centered on individual rights.[25] The Bandung Declaration emphasized that self-determination is a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of all fundamental human rights. Similarly, Resolution 1514 declared, "All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."[26] In this understanding, self-determination was established as a primary right, and its subjects were not individuals but peoples as a collective. Only through this collective right could peoples establish independent states free from external interference, and other human rights benefits could then achieve substantive development within their own socio-political contexts. This interpretation marked a shift from the universal individual human rights paradigm established by the Declaration to a more pluralistic collective rights paradigm.[27]

Historian Mark Mazower once argued that at its inception, the United Nations' designers were not truly committed to building a global order based on the universal dissemination of self-determination; instead, they held a deeply entrenched hierarchical worldview with strong racial biases,

[23] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[24] As Edward McWhinney observed, "A breakthrough in United Nations membership did not occur until 1955, when sixteen new states were admitted, bringing the total membership to seventy-six. In 1960, the admission of nineteen additional members marked the emergence of what Cold War terminology described as a neutral majority voting coalition. This coalition was known by various names, including the Non-Aligned Group, the Group of 77, the Bandung Group, the developing world, or the Third World. It was precisely this informal electoral coalition that generated a concentration of collective wisdom and developed the political skills necessary to ensure the adoption of Resolution 1514 (XV) by the General Assembly without any formal dissent." Edward McWhinney: *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, 1960, page 1.

[25] Jack Robert Mellish, "UN Resolution 1514: The Creation of a New Postcolonial Sovereignty," 44 *Third World Quarterly* 6 (2023): 1319.

[26] *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, December 14, 1960, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), accessed January 5, 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/zh/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples.

[27] Jack Robert Mellish, "UN Resolution 1514: The Creation of a New Postcolonial Sovereignty," 1319.

intending to maintain the dominance of European empires in the international landscape.[28] Mazower's assertion provides a profound perspective for understanding why the Charter only rhetorically mentioned self-determination,[29] and why the Declaration did not address this concept at all. This assertion also inversely highlights the historical value of the Bandung Conference, revealing why Asian-African nations needed to speak out collectively at that critical historical juncture, jointly advocating and consolidating the right to self-determination, so that it could be established in the edifice of international law.

2. Emphasizing anti-colonialism and anti-racism to integrate Asian-African human rights into the international human rights agenda

The word "rights" permeated the discourse of the Bandung Conference representatives, and their expressions were largely based on "anti-colonialism" and "anti-racism." The news statement issued by the representatives of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress at the Bandung Conference clearly illustrates the profound connection between colonialism, racism, and human rights. "The non-white groups of South Africa are being totally deprived of their fundamental rights. They have no right to vote, no right to have a say in the government that rules them, and no say in the affairs and administration of the country. They lack representation, yet are taxed by force... Economically, they are oppressed and exploited, unable to freely engage in trade, have no right of residence, and may not buy or own land. According to the *Group Areas Act*, they will lose their property, businesses, institutions, and even religious places. They are not eligible for civil service positions, nor are they eligible for professional positions in industry, technical fields, or commerce. In access to education and social services, they face severe discrimination, and their daily dignity is repeatedly trampled upon."[30] For the colonized nations at that time, the struggle against colonialism and racism was both a political struggle for national independence and the creation of prerequisites for the realization of fundamental human rights.

The anti-colonial consensus established at the Bandung Conference was rooted in the shared colonial history of Asian-African nations. Most of the participating countries had become colonies of imperialist powers during the wave of Western imperialism that began in the 16th century. The painful memories of being colonized and the common desire for national independence and self-determination prompted the Bandung Conference to take a historic step towards completely burying colonialism.[31] One conference representative stated that since the time of colonial expansion, the colonial rule of foreign powers has been the cause of many wars.[32] At the time of the Bandung Conference, colonial powers were still attempting to maintain control over former colonies in various disguised forms. The conference provided an important platform for newly independent Asian and African nations to unite and collectively express their opposition to colonialism and imperialism. Many representatives at the conference shared their bitter experiences under colonial rule and their arduous journeys to independence. Indonesian President Sukarno stated in his speech, "For us, colonialism is not something far and distant. We have known it in all its ruthlessness. We have seen

---

[28] Mazower, M, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 30.

[29] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, Wang Shaoqing and Tao Lixing, trans. (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2017), 90.

[30] World Opinion Statements by Visitors to the Conference: Press Statement by Representatives of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 7-2, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 11.

[31] World Opinion Statements by Visitors to the Conference: Extracts from Statements Made by Archbishop Makarios on the Cyprus, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 8-2, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 10.

[32] Opening Speech of Lt. Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 4-5.

the immense human wastage it causes, the poverty it causes, and the heritage it leaves behind when, eventually and reluctantly, it is driven out by the inevitable march of history. My people, and the peoples of many nations of Asia and Africa know these things, for we have experienced them."[33] The participating representatives clearly recognized that colonialism had not completely disappeared and that vigilance and continued struggle were necessary because "vast areas of Asia and Africa are still unfree."[34] "When we look at the map of Asia and Africa, we find many regions, and even entire countries, still deeply entangled in the shackles of colonialism. In some of us, the sting of colonial rule still remains, whether large or small."[35] At that time, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco in North Africa were still under French colonial rule, and there was an urgent need to accelerate the recognition of these countries' independence.[36] The Ethiopian representative, when discussing the issue of trust territories, also stated directly that colonialism applies equally to those territories which are under the Trusteeship System… We support the early liberation of Trust Territories from colonial or trusteeship bonds.[37] The conference further pointed out that colonial policies are tantamount to "a denial of fundamental rights of man" and not only "impede the cultural advancement in this region and also hamper cultural co-operation on the wider international plane."[38] The *Final Communiqué* of the conference declared that "colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end."[39]

The Bandung Conference's clear opposition to colonialism prompted the international community to give sustained attention to colonial legacies, gradually matured the decolonization process at the level of international law, and had a profound impact on the formulation of subsequent international legal instruments. As a significant milestone in the decolonization process, UN Resolution 1514, adopted in 1960, inherited the anti-colonial tone established by the Bandung Conference. During the deliberation of this draft resolution, representatives from numerous Asian-African nations explicitly pointed out that the fundamental principles established at the 1955 Bandung Conference were the policy cornerstones for Asian-African countries in promoting the decolonization process. These principles were subsequently reaffirmed and reiterated at the 1958 Accra Conference, the 1959 Monrovia Conference, and the 1960 Conference of African States in Addis Ababa.[40] The draft of Resolution 1514 was precisely the crystallization of these anti-colonial claims centered on the Bandung spirit, and was ultimately jointly submitted and promoted for adoption by 43 Asian-African nations.[41] The core phrasing of the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* attached to the resolution — "The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the

[33] Speech of President Sukarno at the opening of the Asian-African Conference 18th April 1955, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 3-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 4.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Richard Wright, *The Colour Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, 1956), 121-122.

[36] Speech of Dr. Mohammed Fadhil El-Jamali, Iraq, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 6.

[37] Speech of Ato Aklilou Habtewold, Ethiopia, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 6.

[38] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[39] Ibid.

[40] *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1960* (New York: UN Dept. of Public Information, 1960), 46.

[41] Ibid.

Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation"[42] — is almost a direct quotation from paragraph (b) of the Bandung *Final Communiqué* concerning the problems of dependent peoples.[43]

At the Bandung Conference, human rights issues were not only closely linked to anti-colonialism but also intricately intertwined with the issue of anti-racism. The conference attracted many international observers, including the African-American writer Richard Wright, who later wrote in *The Colour Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, "Racism is a part of colonialism, and the maintenance of the colonial system depends entirely on the ruling class's self-proclaimed superiority. Discrimination based on color is a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights… If we observe the progress of modern society, is not the system of racial segregation a relic of the barbaric old world? "[44] Indonesian President Sukarno called the conference a "new starting point" and even hailed it as the first intercontinental conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind.[45] The conference chairman, Indonesian Prime Minister Sastroamidjojo, lamented in his opening remarks that the world "still has a long way to go" in terms of racial and gender equality.[46] Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Nasser stated bluntly that racial discrimination, in whatever form it manifests, is contrary to the fundamental responsibilities of national governance and harms friendly relations between nations.[47] Carlos Romulo also emphasized in his speech that, besides the issues of colonialism and political freedom, the issue of racial equality is equally highlighted and concerned… Although this issue has different manifestations depending on the historical context, looking at history from ancient times to the present, Western colonial regimes, without exception, have to a greater or lesser degree imposed the theory of racial inferiority upon the peoples they ruled. People know the pain of being belittled on their own land, the taste of being forced into political, economic, and military subordination — including racial subordination. This is a great shame… To maintain their rule and justify their power, Western white regimes claimed superiority based on genes and skin color. The extreme of this absurd logic was that the lowliest person in a colonial society could lord it over the most outstanding among the colonized people.[48] Following Romulo's speech, representatives from Liberia, Libya, Turkey, Pakistan, Syria, and other countries responded one after another, competing to denounce the evils of racial discrimination, making this issue deeply rooted in people's minds with overwhelming force.[49] The *Final Communiqué* of the conference declared, "The Asian-African Conference deplored the policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination which form the basis of government and human relations in large regions of Africa and in other parts of the world. Such conduct is not only a gross violation of human rights, but also a denial of the fundamental values of civilization and the dignity of man."[50] Among the Ten Principles listed in the communiqué,

---

[42] *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, December 14, 1960, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV).

[43] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[44] Richard Wright, *The Colour Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, 122.

[45] John Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations, Dobbs Ferry* (N.Y.: Transnational Publishers, 1984), 2.

[46] Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 18.

[47] Opening Speech of Lt. Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 4.

[48] Richard Wright, *The Colour Curtain*, 131.

[49] Ibid., 132.

[50] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

"recognition of the equality of all races and of the equality of all nations large and small"[51] was explicitly proposed.

The Bandung Conference elevated anti-racial discrimination from a regional issue to a global one, prompting the international community to engage in a broad and profound dialogue on racial equality and pointing the way forward for the development of international human rights law. In 1963, the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, whereby the anti-racism concepts advocated by the Bandung Conference were continued and deepened within the framework of international law, prompting countries to take effective measures to eliminate racial discrimination and strengthening international cooperation mechanisms.[52] The Bandung Conference also facilitated the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961, which in turn led to the birth of the Group of 77 in 1964. These two multilateral organizations enabled Third World countries to actively voice their shared positions on political, economic, and other issues in the United Nations and other international venues, and gradually achieve unity and cooperation in the process of striving for equal rights. Under the continuous impetus of the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN General Assembly adopted the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* in 1965. Some commentators have pointed out that the ideals of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement were concretely reflected in this convention, whose purpose was to construct a post-colonial order and explore forms of political community beyond the nation-state.[53] After the Bandung Conference, the UN General Assembly also successively passed a series of resolutions calling for an end to the apartheid system in South Africa and for measures such as economic sanctions to force South Africa to change its racial discrimination policies.[54]

A common hatred of colonialism and racism served as an important emotional bond for Asian-African nations and was the focus of human rights issues at the Bandung Conference. The connection between people's self-determination, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and human rights protection discussed at the conference not only reflects the complex and intertwined aspects of these issues but also shows that they support each other and form an integrated whole in the demands of Asian-African nations. Together, these issues constituted the primary demands of Asian-African nations on the international stage at that time and had a profound impact on the development of international human rights law. On this basis, the journey towards an Asian-African human rights consensus began.

3. Advocating simultaneous economic and cultural progress to foster the soil for a new order and the right to development

Some Western human rights scholars have pointed out that the Bandung Conference had not yet presented the "developmentalism" and "cultural relativism" that were later regarded as the two pillars of non-Western human rights concepts.[55] This view is somewhat biased. In fact, the advocacy for

---

[51] Ibid.

[52] Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963-11-20), UN General Assembly Resolution 1904 (XVIII), accessed May 2, 2025, https://www.un.org/zh/documents/treaty/A-RES-1904%28XVIII%29.

[53] Crystal Parikh, *Writing Human Rights: The Political Imaginaries of Writers of Color* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 45.

[54] United Nations General Assembly Resolution, Treatment of people of Indian origin in the Union of South Africa, A/RES/1179 (XII) of 26 November 1957; Treatment of people of Indian origin in the Union of South Africa, A/RES/1302(XIII)of 10 December 1958; Question of race conflict in South Africa resulting from the policies of apartheid of the Government of the Union of South Africa, A/RES/1375 (XIV) of 17 November 1959; Treatment of people of Indian origin in the Union of South Africa, A/RES/1460 (XIV), of 10 December 1959; The policies of apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa, A/RES/1761 (XVII) of 6 November 1962.

[55] Roland Burke, "The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom," 950.

economic and cultural cooperation in the Bandung *Final Communiqué* already laid the ideological groundwork for the subsequent brewing of the New International Economic Order and the proposal of the right to development. All participating countries at Bandung were plagued by the problem of underdevelopment and had a deep understanding of the practical significance and urgent need for economic and cultural development. The Economic and Cultural Committees were two of the three committees established at the conference, and representatives frequently expressed their demands for economic and cultural development. The *Final Communiqué* reached an important consensus at the economic level. It emphasized promoting economic cooperation among Asian-African countries, especially in technical assistance, trade stability, and common development, advocating for regional economic prosperity through multilateral and bilateral cooperation; at the cultural level, it strongly opposed cultural suppression as a denial of fundamental rights to education and culture, advocated for equal cultural exchange and cooperation, restored and developed traditional cultural links between Asian and African countries, and encouraged nations to advance together based on respect for diversity to promote common development.[56] After the Bandung Conference, a large number of newly independent nations joined the United Nations, bringing the economic, social, and cultural development demands from the Bandung Conference into the UN agenda, making the United Nations no longer merely a venue for Cold War rivalry but gradually turning its focus to the widening development gap between the North and the South. In 1974, the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries called for the reform of unequal international economic relations and the establishment of a "New International Economic Order" (NIEO). In the same year, at the request of developing countries, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order*, proposing 20 core principles, where terms such as "self-determination," "international cooperation," "assistance," and "raw material prices" can all be traced back to the economic cooperation consensus reached at the Bandung Conference.[57] The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights traces the concept of the right to development back to the *United Nations Charter*, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and the two international human rights covenants, and regards UN General Assembly Resolution 1161 (XII) of 1957 as the beginning of the recognition of the right to development. This resolution stated, "a balanced and integrated economic and social development would contribute towards the promotion and maintenance of peace and security, social progress and better standards of living, and the observance of, and respect for, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all."[58] Similar views had already appeared as early as the 1955 Bandung Conference. Pakistani representative Mohammed Ali stated in his speech, "Peace is not a purely political phenomenon, but is more influenced by economic, social and moral factors. As political difficulties become more acute, we should pay more attention to economic, social and moral values. Poverty, disease, ignorance and prejudice are the real enemies of peace and progress, corroding society and breeding instability and hatred. Economic improvement will effectively combat poverty and disease; education will dispel the mists of ignorance and prejudice. In these times of political unrest, we must redouble our efforts to work for the comprehensive economic, social and intellectual progress of our people."[59] Indonesian Prime Minister Sastroamidjojo also stated at the conference, "…almost all Asian and African countries are generally faced with the predicament of low living standards. For centuries, our wealth has

[56] *Final Communiqué* of the Bandung Conference (April 24, 1955).

[57] *Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order*, A/RES/3201 (S-VI), General Assembly Sixth Special Session, 1974.

[58] Balanced and integrated economic and social progress, A/RES/1161 (XII), General Assembly-Twelfth Session, 1957.

[59] Speech of Mohammed Ali, Pakistan, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 5-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 7.

continuously flowed to the suzerain states, while we ourselves have remained in poverty. After the end of World War II, although we gained political independence, this political freedom did not bring true economic independence, nor did it eradicate the poverty and backwardness that our people had long suffered. We strive for the most basic guarantee of survival, but we are far from being a true welfare state. Although development plans have begun to be formulated, the lack of resources and capacity often becomes an insurmountable obstacle."[60]

III. Divergence and Convergence: Negative Cold War Impacts and China's "Seeking Common Ground While Setting Aside Differences" Policy

A. Divergence: cold war constraints

Human rights issues always hovered between divergence and deadlock at the Bandung Conference. At that time, human rights appeared more in an instrumental guise: in the eyes of some participants, it was "a final and best line of defense against the threat of communism,"[61] and "an excellent way to pursue anti-colonialism in a more specific and normative field."[62] Representatives of the pro-U.S. camp frequently used concepts such as "colonialism," "freedom," and "democracy" to target socialist countries, attempting to transform human rights issues into anti-communist political weapons. In the conference's Political Committee, Ceylon Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala, who held a pro-U.S. stance, unreservedly condemned the Soviet Union's control over Eastern Europe, labeling it as a "new form of colonialism" and advocating for its strong condemnation along with Western colonialism.[63] This position triggered a heated debate about the nature of freedom and the relationship between national self-determination and individual freedom. Lebanese representative Malik[64] pointed out that the greatest divergence at the Bandung Conference lay in different understandings of the connotation of freedom: the pro-U.S. camp believed that freedom meant not only national liberation but should also include the freedom of individual will and thought; while the socialist camp argued that getting rid of colonial oppression and achieving national liberation was the prerequisite for freedom to exist.[65] The divergence on the nature of freedom thus became the core contradiction of human rights issues at the Bandung Conference, directly reflecting the profound influence of ideology on human rights issues under the Cold War framework.

In fact, before Kotelawala delivered his dramatic speech, Romulo had already taken the lead in guiding participants to reflect on the relationship between freedom, individual rights, and anti-colonialism. Romulo's attack on communism[66] put the Chinese delegation in a difficult position, disrupted the harmonious atmosphere of the conference, and made the conference proceedings

---

[60] Address by Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo of Indonesia President of the Asian-African Conference, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 3-2, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 11.

[61] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 72.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, 32.

[64] On the one hand, Charles Malik and Carlos P. Romulo presented themselves as a champion of human rights and a guardian of the Third World, respectively, and emerged as leading proponents of the Declaration. On the other hand, both maintained close ties with the United States. Malik served as Lebanon's envoy to Washington, while Romulo was the Philippine President's personal representative in the United States. In the lead-up to the Bandung Conference, the U.S. Secretary of State reportedly pressured the Lebanese and Philippine governments to appoint Malik and Romulo as delegates. They were expected to advance the discourse of human rights at Bandung while simultaneously ensuring that the conference would not culminate in overtly anti-Western or anti-white resolutions. See M. D. Walhout, *Arab Intellectuals and American Power: Edward Said, Charles Malik, and the U.S. in the Middle East* (Bloomsbury: I. B. TAURIS, 2021), 54.

[65] Roland Burke, "The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom," 959.

[66] Ibid.

increasingly tense, even pushing the conference to the brink of failure at one point. Immediately following this, the "Nine-Nation Proposal" suggested "condemning colonialism in all its forms," harboring a hidden critique of the Soviet Union. The argument intensified, and the conference was forced to decide to temporarily set up a special group to handle the issue of colonialism. Until the conference was nearing its close, the dispute remained unresolved, and the issue had to be transferred to the "World Peace and Cooperation" group for further consultation. The deadlock was broken in the last five minutes of the conference, as all parties reached an agreement on the issue of colonialism, declaring, "Colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end…"[67]

From the complex controversies mentioned above, it is not difficult to see that human rights issues at the Bandung Conference exhibited clear instrumental characteristics. This instrumentality was the main source of divergence and deadlock at the conference, and its formation was influenced by multiple factors, among which the influence of the Cold War was particularly significant.

1. Camp confrontation shaking the foundation of human rights consensus

There were certainly many commonalities among the participating countries at Bandung: most of them had suffered from colonial rule, faced similar economic predicaments, and generally cherished fundamental values such as peace and national independence. At the same time, the participating countries presented a "kaleidoscopic" diversity — each possessed unique cultural traditions, historical contexts, and social structures, and their chosen development paths and international positions were also different. Under the Cold War framework, these inherent differences were further amplified. While defending their own interests and independence, countries had to seek their positioning in the rivalry between the U.S. and Soviet camps. "…every force had to clarify its position," "either support" or "oppose."[68] This reality intensified the complex tensions among participating countries and cast the Bandung Conference into more uncertainty and confrontation.

From a political standpoint, the participating countries at the Bandung Conference could be roughly divided into three camps: the pro-U.S. anti-communist camp, the communist camp, and the non-aligned camp.[69] By the time the Bandung Conference was held in 1955, several pro-U.S. or pro-Western treaties and organizations had already appeared in the Asian-African region, the most notable being the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). These organizations aimed to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and its allies, with the primary task of containing communist expansion in the Cold War context. SEATO was established in 1954 to prevent communism from spreading to Southeast Asia, with participating countries the Philippines[70] and Thailand[71] as members. CENTO was established in 1955, mainly to restrict the Soviet Union's influence in the Middle East, with participating countries Pakistan[72] and Iran[73] as members. In addition, Turkey,[74],as a member of NATO, also participated in the Bandung

[67] Li Shenzhi, Zhang Yan, *Bandung Conference Diary* (Beijing: China News Publishing House, 1986), 26-35.

[68] George F. Kennan: *The Kennan Diaries*, edited by Frank Costigliola, translated by Cao Mingyu (Beijing: CITIC Publishing Group, 2016), 247.

[69] In his address to the Political Committee of the Bandung Conference, Jawaharlal Nehru noted the existence of three major groupings among the participating countries. He unequivocally affirmed India's commitment to the policy of non-alignment and argued that non-alignment offered a viable means of preventing the dangerous consequences associated with bloc politics and ideological confrontation. See G. M. Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), 64-72.

[70] The Philippines, as an important ally of the United States, was a founding member of SEATO.

[71] Thailand was likewise one of the founding members of SEATO and maintained close cooperative relations with the United States.

[72] Pakistan was a founding member of CENTO and sought American support as a means of balancing India's influence.

[73] Iran was an important member of CENTO and maintained close relations with the United States.

Conference. These organizations reflected the geopolitical choices of some Asian-African countries under the Cold War framework — as the confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet camps became increasingly severe, these countries tended to maintain close ties with the United States (U.S.) and its Western allies. For pro-Western countries, participation was not only to defend national interests but also intended to respond to the increasingly spreading communist forces and stabilize the Western-led global strategic pattern. As Romulo said, besides explicitly pro-Western countries, there were also countries at the conference that held a "more or less friendly attitude" towards the West, including Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, and Ceylon, and even Japan, Sudan, South Vietnam, and others maintained some degree of contact with the West. Opposing them was the communist camp represented by China and North Vietnam. As for the third camp, the non-aligned countries, they pursued the principle of "independence and autonomy," striving to remain neutral in the confrontation between Cold War powers and avoid being embroiled in the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. India, Indonesia, Burma, and many Arab countries were in this category.[75] Although non-aligned countries tried their best to stay out of it, the Cold War framework still hung over them like a dark cloud, making it difficult for them to completely disengage. The division and confrontation among the three camps made it difficult for all parties to reach a consensus on political positions, especially on human rights issues, making the road to consensus arduous. Taking the condemnation of colonialism as an example, the Nine-Nation Proposal mentioned earlier, which suggested "condemning colonialism in all its forms," became the focus of controversy. The pro-U.S. camp took the opportunity to launch a fierce attack on the Soviet Union's control in Eastern Europe, with all parties engaging in a war of words and intense confrontation. Finally, after repeated mediation and compromise, a vague consensus was reached. This process reflects the complexity of great power rivalry during the Cold War and highlights how great power politics affects the direction of regional cooperation and issue decision-making.

2. U.S. "remote intervention" instrumentalizing human rights

The U.S. was deeply wary of the convening of the Bandung Conference, with its anxiety mainly stemming from three levels of "potential risks":[76] first, given the long-standing racial problems and colonial history within the U.S., combined with its tacit approval of European colonialism, the U.S. worried that the Bandung Conference might turn into a "court" to denounce U.S. and Western hegemony; second, the U.S. was concerned that the conference might provide a favorable political stage for communist countries, especially China, thereby weakening its own influence in the Asian-African region; third, the rise of the neutral camp led by India and Indonesia also made the U.S. feel uneasy. To prevent these concerns from becoming reality, the U.S. orchestrated a series of "psychological wars,"[77] before and after the Bandung Conference, attempting to influence the positions of representatives, the setting of conference agendas, and even the overall direction of the conference. Before the conference, the U.S. tried its best to obstruct it, attempting to make it fail or at least deviate from its original intention. When this failed, the U.S. turned to pressure pro-U.S. countries to send representatives to participate, including Malik of Lebanon and Romulo of the

[74] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established in 1949, is an international organization created by European and North American states to promote collective defense and security cooperation. Turkey joined the organization in 1952.

[75] David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*, 64-65.

[76] G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment* (London: FABER AND FABER, 1966), 184.

[77] The United States' strategy of psychological warfare was dedicated to winning "the minds and hearts" of people. It sought to contain communism on a global scale while promoting Western political and social models. In the narrower sense of political warfare, psychological warfare referred to external propaganda and activities aimed at undermining adversaries, with ideological struggle constituting its core component. See Yu Qun and Bai Yuping, "American Psychological Warfare and Propaganda during the Cold War," in Shen Zhihua, et al., *Lessons from the Cold War* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2019), 90-114.

Philippines. At the same time, with U.S. support, Britain provided "guidance" documents to pro-Western participating countries (such as Turkey, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines) and some countries with wavering positions (such as Ceylon). These documents covered issues such as "communist colonialism," nuclear disarmament, and religious freedom in communist countries, aiming to "embarrass Communist China as much as possible,"[78] and prevent Asian-African countries from forming a closer political alliance. During the conference, the U.S. maintained close contact with the invited pro-U.S. delegations and used the Jakarta embassy as a hub to coordinate all parties' actions, promoting the formation and operation of an anti-communist alliance.[79] The U.S. was thus able to substantially influence the conference agenda and the direction of discussions without being physically present, ensuring that the pro-U.S. camp dominated the conference and thereby leading to the instrumentalization of human rights issues in the Political Committee. Most of the conference time was spent on groundless attacks on communism, which to some extent hindered Asian-African countries from reaching a clearer consensus on human rights issues.

The divergence surrounding human rights issues at the conference also reflected, to a considerable extent, that the subjective consciousness of human rights among Asian-African countries had not yet fully awakened. The conference observer Richard Wright once said, "What do these nations have in common? In my opinion, they have almost nothing in common except the resonance brought by their historical entanglements with the Western world. This group of the excluded meeting together is, in fact, a judgment upon the Western world."[80] Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out on the eve of the conference that the Bandung Conference "will show the awakening of Asia and Africa after two hundred years of Western rule and exploitation." Reflecting on the discussion process of human rights issues at the conference, the so-called "judgment" and "awakening" were ultimately limited. This limitation stemmed both from the constraints of the Cold War framework and from the deep-seated, hard-to-cure maladies left by "two hundred years of rule and exploitation." First, under the Cold War context, many countries faced complex diplomatic pressures. This diplomatic predicament weakened their autonomy on the international stage, especially on human rights issues, where these countries often needed to find a balance between great powers, making it difficult to form strong collective action. Second, long-term colonial rule deeply influenced the thoughts of Asian-African countries through their suzerain states. Many newly independent nations still could not completely escape the colonial imprint in their cultural identity and values; colonial-era ideologies and governance styles continued to affect their social structures and political decisions. As some scholars have noted, these countries had long been held in shackles,[81] and nations that had just gained independence would still need the accumulation and cleansing of time to completely break free from spiritual bondage and rebuild cultural confidence. Third, long-term economic plunder made most Asian-African countries dependent on Western aid, which often came with stringent conditions and became "policy tools for the West to promote its own interests."[82] Therefore, although many countries at the Bandung Conference were critical of Western oppression, they found it difficult to escape the constraints of Cold War maneuvering and foreign aid on specific human rights issues, and efforts to promote a human rights consensus were thus largely limited. This

[78] Amitav Acharya, "Lessons of Bandung, Then and Now," *Financial Times,* 21 April 2005, 18.

[79] Cary Fraser, "An American Dilemma Race and Realpolitik in the American Response to the Bandung Conference," in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 129.

[80] Richard Wright, *The Colour Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, 10.

[81] Ibid., 175.

[82] Kausikan, "Human Rights: Asia's Different Standard," Xu Yi trans., *Modern Foreign Philosophy and Social Sciences Abstracts* 6 (1994).

also explains the contradictory mentality displayed by Asian-African nations when facing the Western-led international order — having both a partial recognition of the established order and a desire to reshape it and strive for fairness and autonomy. This complex and entangled psychology is a true portrayal of Asian-African nations' hesitant progress between external pressure and internal development challenges in the post-colonial era.

B. Convergence: seeking common ground while setting aside differences

During the conference proceedings, the policy of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" advocated by the Chinese delegation became one of the key factors in promoting the smooth convening of the conference, fostering unity and cooperation among Asian-African countries, and consolidating consensus on human rights issues. At that time, the world was divided by the confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet camps, and most Asian-African nations had just escaped colonial rule, making the maintenance of national sovereignty and independence an urgent priority. The PRC's economic foundation was still weak, its international status was not yet stable, and it faced blockades and isolation from Western countries. Facing the diversity and complexity of positions among nations at the Bandung Conference, China deeply understood that overemphasizing ideological convergence while ignoring practical interests would inevitably exacerbate divisions, which would not only be detrimental to the realization of its own diplomatic interests but also damage the overall unity of Asian-African nations. Premier Zhou Enlai thus proposed "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" at the conference, advocating that Asian-African countries focus on common interests and goals, temporarily setting aside differences that were difficult to resolve for the time being, to form a synergy to deal with common external challenges.

The differing opinions of the Chinese delegation on the issue of the Declaration mentioned in the second part of this paper might superficially be seen as an "obstacle" to reaching a human rights consensus, but in fact, it was not. China's dissent and subsequent strategic compromise were the first practice of the principle of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" and played a constructive role in the process of forging consensus. From a historical perspective, the discussion surrounding this issue at the Bandung Conference actually continued the debate that the United Nations had launched on the Declaration in the late 1940s. Although the Declaration was formally adopted on December 10, 1948, as the foundational text of the global human rights framework, it had not gained universal recognition worldwide by the time the Bandung Conference was held. When the Declaration was adopted, the United Nations had only 58 member states; by the time of the Bandung Conference, more than one-third of the participating countries had not yet joined the United Nations. These countries had neither participated in the drafting of the Declaration nor exerted influence in its formation process, and some were even still in the process of striving for national independence.[83] The dissent raised by the Chinese delegation reflected a cautious reflection on the universality of the Declaration and objectively reflected the common concerns of many newly independent Asian-African nations,[84] namely that the Declaration should be recognized on the basis of a broader international consensus. Regarding the compromise in the final wording, some scholars believe that Malik persuaded Zhou Enlai to make concessions, thereby prompting China to accept the recognition of the Declaration in the final communiqué.[85] This interpretation fails to accurately capture the true position of the Chinese delegation. The adjustment made by the Chinese side was both a practice of

[83] At the time of the Bandung Conference, the Gold Coast (later Ghana), Sudan, and Yemen had not yet attained independence.

[84] Many delegates encountered the text of the Declaration for the first time at the conference itself. As a result, they repeatedly requested that Malik provide detailed explanations of its provisions, thereby underscoring the necessity of a cautious and prudent approach. See Roland Burke, "The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom," 954.

[85] See M. D. Walhout, *Arab Intellectuals and American Power: Edward Said, Charles Malik, and the U.S. in the Middle East*, Bloomsbury: I. B. Tauris, 2021, 54.

the principle of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" and a reaffirmation of respect for fundamental human rights and the purposes of the UN Charter.[86] This position demonstrated China's diplomatic wisdom in balancing the interests of all parties and safeguarding national interests on the international stage, and also highlighted China's respect for international consensus and its attention to the human rights demands of Asian-African nations.

The policy of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" continued to play an effective role in bridging differences and deadlocks on subsequent human rights issues. The frequent "Voice of America" at the conference, while undermining the friendly atmosphere of unity at Bandung, caused human rights issues to fall into unnecessary polemical attrition, diverting the attention of Asian-African nations from the main contradictions and their own vital human rights interests. As Sastroamidjojo stated in his memoirs, "The success or failure of the conference depended largely on Zhou Enlai's response, a sentiment we all shared."[87] Contrary to the intense confrontation expected by the outside world, Premier Zhou, with the strategy of "seeking common ground while setting aside differences," defused conference crises many times and guided the agenda towards consultation and unity. During the conference, Iraqi representative Fadhil al-Jamali, Philippine representative Romulo, and Ceylon Prime Minister Kotelawala, among others, publicly made strong anti-communist remarks, even describing communism as "new colonialism" and advocating for measures to contain it. Facing fierce ideological opposition, Premier Zhou did not directly refute them but skillfully used the "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" strategy to respond. He emphasized that the purpose of the Chinese delegation's visit was to promote unity rather than create opposition, and explicitly pointed out that the conference should not become a place for countries to promote their own political systems or ideologies, but should focus on jointly opposing colonialism and promoting peaceful coexistence. By guiding participating countries to seek consensus on the common goal of opposing colonial rule, Premier Zhou successfully avoided direct ideological conflict and maintained the overall atmosphere of cooperation at the conference. He further clarified that even if Asian-African countries had differences in social systems and ideologies, they could still forge a consensus on the basis of mutual respect and jointly promote regional development.[88] "Seeking common ground while setting aside differences" played an important role in strengthening unity and cooperation among Asian-African countries and also became an important methodology for balancing different human rights positions. Although Asian-African countries differed in the specific ways of realizing human rights, they had highly consistent demands in maintaining national independence, promoting economic development, and eliminating colonial legacies. At the Bandung Conference, Premier Zhou stated the following position, "Nations, large or small, strong or weak, should enjoy equal rights in international relations. Their sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected and not violated" and "Opposition to racial discrimination and demand for fundamental human rights, opposition to colonialism and demand for national independence, and the firm safeguarding of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one's own country have already become the common demands of the awakened Asian and African countries and peoples."[89] "We are against outside interference; how could we want to interfere in the internal

[86] David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*, 113.

[87] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Milestones on My Journey*, Zhou Gaota and Song Kangyuan trans. (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1983), 266.

[88] John Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations, Dobbs Ferry*, 11-26.

[89] Premier Zhou Enlai's Address at the Plenary Session of the Bandung Conference (1955-4-19), accessed March 5, 2024, http: //www.71.cn/2011/0930/632293.shtml.

affairs of others?"[90] Premier Zhou also emphasized that Asian-African countries each have unique characteristics in history, culture, and social systems, and nations should uphold an attitude of mutual respect rather than measuring other countries' human rights situations by a single standard. This position fully reflects China's consistent advocacy on human rights issues, namely insisting on the combination of the universality of human rights with the development realities of various countries, advocating for respect for each country's right to independently choose its human rights development path, opposing the politicization of human rights issues, and promoting the establishment of a just and reasonable international human rights governance system.

The "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" policy defused the tension at the Bandung Conference and became a bridge connecting the interests of all countries and eliminating differences, enabling the conference to proceed steadily and receive widespread praise.[91] It was no accident that this concept won widespread recognition; it met the themes of the times faced by Asian-African countries then. First, many Asian-African nations had just shaken off colonial rule and immediately faced the arduous task of maintaining national independence and resisting external interference. Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism became the most urgent common demands of these new nations, and China's "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" was based on this greatest common denominator, allowing countries to find resonance in a complex and volatile international environment. Second, the participating countries at the Bandung Conference came from different regions, with different social systems and political demands, and faced vastly different internal and external challenges. "Seeking common ground while setting aside differences" provided a realistic solution that balanced unity and autonomy, forging consensus without harming their respective core interests, thereby winning broad recognition. Finally, the inclusiveness of the "seeking common ground while setting aside differences" concept respected each country's sovereignty and development path, thus preventing the conference falling into the quagmire of ideological debate, and meeting the practical needs of Asian-African countries for pragmatic cooperation. Under the guidance of this policy, countries were able to set aside unnecessary disputes and focus their attention on win-win cooperation, thereby promoting the success of the conference.

IV. Reassessing Bandung Human Rights: Achievements Under Constraints

In the opening remarks of the conference, several representatives of participating countries successively mentioned keywords such as "war," "hydrogen bomb," "atomic energy," "great powers," and "weapons of mass destruction."[92] Sastroamidjojo stated bluntly in his speech, "The fundamental cause that brought about this Conference is the disturbing tension in the world today." "Today we are gathered here not only to witness a critical turning point in the history of Asia and Africa, but also to stand at an important juncture affecting the fate of all mankind... The whole world is hovering on the

[90] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee, *Selected Diplomatic Works of Zhou Enlai* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1990), 123.

[91] Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, spoke highly of Premier Zhou's remarks, describing them as "an excellent speech." U Nu, Prime Minister of Burma, likewise observed that the statement constituted "the most appropriate response" to external doubts and criticisms directed at China. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Prime Minister of Egypt, also expressed his approval of Premier Zhou's reply, considering it a clear demonstration of China's sincerity and pragmatic spirit at the conference. Even Romulo, who had previously voiced strong anti-communist views during the proceedings, praised Premier Zhou's remarks as "outstanding and conciliatory in spirit." Ibid., 18.

[92] In their speeches, Sukarno, President of Indonesia; Ali Sastroamidjojo, Prime Minister of Indonesia; Norodom Sihanouk, Prince of Cambodia; John Kotelawala, Prime Minister of Ceylon; Gamal Abdel Nasser, Prime Minister of Egypt; and Tatsunosuke Takasaki, Head of the Japanese Delegation, all referred to such terms as "war," "the hydrogen bomb," "atomic energy," "great powers," and "weapons of mass destruction." Their remarks reflected the grave security situation brought about by the Cold War at the time the Bandung Conference was convened. See Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4, The Ministry of Foreign affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2-7.

brink of turmoil. A slight slip, and mankind might fall into an irrecoverable abyss. In the past decades, those great powers that dominated global affairs have not only created crises on their own development paths but have also dragged all countries of the world onto this disaster-filled track."[93] When the Bandung Conference was held, the global situation was tense, the shadow of war lingered, and the future of human civilization seemed to hang under the sword of Damocles. Avoiding conflict and safeguarding peace became an urgent mission; only in a relatively stable environment could Asian-African nations achieve their respective historical tasks.[94] "If peace itself is in jeopardy, or even cast aside as worthless, then no other specific issues can be discussed. Our primary responsibility is to maintain peace."[95] In this context, the priority of human rights issues in the conference agenda was temporarily placed in a secondary position, and the core objectives of the conference were focused on defusing the Cold War crisis, defending national independence, and advancing the decolonization process. Only after breakthroughs were made in these fundamental issues could human rights issues be fully developed. The special significance of the Bandung Conference lies in its clear expression of the urgent demands of Asian-African nations for sovereign independence and the acceleration of the decolonization process. But when it comes to the modern social transformation based on Asian-African civilizational traditions and cultural foundations, the direction shown by the conference was still blurred, and the future development path was not yet clear.[96] Historian David Kimche once pointed out that from a purely political point of view, the Bandung Conference did not fully demonstrate the "spirit of Asian-African solidarity."[97] He believed that in the Cold War context, the influence of political alliances shaped by ideological confrontation far exceeded the identity ties within Asian-African nations. The strategic involvement formed by the Cold War was so strong that the core issue of colonialism, which was closely related to the fate of Asian-African nations, was weakened to some extent in the conference discussions.[98] This view of completely erasing the spirit of Bandung solidarity is too extreme and one-sided, but the international environment under the Cold War did weaken the spirit of Bandung solidarity to some extent, constrained the human rights positions and claims of participating countries, and thus weakened the depth of the Bandung Conference in obtaining a human rights consensus. Shimazu Naoko described the Bandung Conference as a theatre,[99] and the process of the Bandung Conference obtaining a human rights consensus was like a scene in a play. Regrettably, at the Bandung Conference, human rights seemed to jump to the front of the stage but actually remained hidden behind the scenes.

Undeniably, the Cold War added many hardships and obstacles to the achievement of a human rights consensus at the Bandung Conference. But on the other hand, the Bandung Conference marked the shift of Asian-African countries from passive acceptance to active construction in the international

---

[93] Opening Speech of Sir John Kotelawala, Ceylon, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 4, The Ministry of Foreign affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2.

[94] "Statements by National Delegations at the Closing Session (Abstracts)," in *Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference* (World Knowledge Press, 1955), 62.

[95] Closing Speech of Jawaharlal Nehru, Asian-African Conference Bulletin No. 10-1, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 7.

[96] David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*, 2.

[97] Ibid., 73.

[98] David Kimche substantiated this view by noting that conference delegates referred to Eastern European regions — such as Latvia and Estonia, which were often characterized as Soviet "satellite states" — more frequently than they addressed African territories that remained under colonial rule. Ibid.

[99] Naoko Shimazu, "'Diplomacy as Theatre': Recasting the Bandung Conference of 1955 as Cultural History," ARI Working Paper No. 164, 2011, page 3.

human rights field, becoming a key starting point for Third World identity and laying a solid foundation for their subsequent influence in the UN human rights agenda and the process of formulating international human rights covenants. Before the Bandung Conference, Western countries had predicted that the conference would inevitably become a gladiatorial arena for ideological confrontation due to the irreconcilable positions of all parties, ultimately ending in failure. However, the direction of the conference far exceeded outside expectations—not only did it not collapse due to differences but instead it gave birth to historic results. As an important watershed in international diplomacy in the post-colonial era of the 20th century, the significance of the Bandung Conference lies not only in the collective appearance of Asian-African nations but also in its reshaping of the basic narrative of the global political landscape. The widely recognized concept of the "Third World" generated by the conference symbolizes the unity and rise of emerging nations.[100] As Malik said after the meeting, "The core issue of today's world is no longer just how communism and the West 'coexist,' but whether and how they can 'coexist' with Asia and Africa."[101] The Bandung Conference built a new geopolitical landscape and also became a turning point in the history of international human rights development. It was not confined to the abstract human rights framework set by the West but clearly established people's self-determination, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism as indispensable components of obtaining human rights, emphasizing that human rights can only be truly realized on the basis of these prerequisites being guaranteed. This position laid the foundation for an Asian-African human rights discourse system centered on national independence, opposition to colonial oppression, and racial discrimination, providing a basic consensus and direction for action for subsequent Third World countries to expand the global human rights agenda in the United Nations. The *Proclamation of Teheran* (1968), based on the Bandung human rights consensus, deepened the focus on anti-colonialism and anti-racial discrimination, clarifying that "Since human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible, the full realization of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is impossible. The achievement of lasting progress in the implementation of human rights is dependent upon sound and effective national and international policies of economic and social development."[102] The *Bangkok Declaration* (1993), as a natural continuation of this inheritance, further emphasized the fundamental role of economic, social, and cultural development in the realization of human rights.[103] Thus, the Bandung *Final Communiqué*, the *Proclamation of Teheran*, and the *Bangkok Declaration* followed one another and progressed step by step, jointly building a continuously deepening framework of human rights consensus. The voices of Third World countries have thus gradually gained momentum on the international human rights stage, marking the direction towards a more just and equitable international human rights order.

As a hazy beginning of the formation of a human rights consensus in the Asian-African region, the Bandung Conference revealed the complexity of achieving a regional consensus on human rights issues. But it marked the rise of the Asian-African region on the international stage and heralded the beginning of a long-term, multi-dimensional evolution of human rights consensus.

(Translated by *LI Donglin*)

---

[100] Christopher Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Second Edition) (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019).

[101] Charles Habib Malik, *The Problems of Coexistence* (Evanston, III: Northwestern Univ., 1955), 17.

[102] Proclamation of Teheran, Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights, A/CONF. 32/41 (1968), 4.

[103] The Bangkok Declaration, Report of the Regional Meeting for Asia of the World Conference on Human Rights, A/CONF. 157/ASRM/8, A/CONF. 157/PC/59 (1993), 3.