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1917-1937**

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5.1 The Asian Relations Conference in the post-war world

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the only remaining certainty was that everything would change.¹ With some Asian nations on the brink of independence and others nursing their war wounds, locked in civil war, or occupied by a foreign power, the post-war map of Asia was not at all self-evident. And as India's trajectory towards independence became clearer towards the latter half of 1945, the view that the era of colonialism was drawing to a close was widely if not universally shared in Asia. Nehru voiced the thoughts of many in a long article in the *New York Times Magazine* in early 1946, with the unambiguous title 'Colonialism Must Go'.

It is evident that the dependent peoples of the colonial empires are in a rebellious mood and cannot be suppressed for long, and every attempt to suppress them is a drain on the ruling country which weakens it. It is even more evident that the old-style empires are decadent as empires and show signs of cracking up. In some instances, indeed, they have cracked up and the attempts that are being made to pin together the broken pieces show a lack of wisdom and statesmanship which is amazing. One decadent empire tries to help another still more ramshackle empire and speeds up the process of its own dissolution.²

Viewing colonialism as the source of conflict and war, Nehru contended that the matter of Asia's future was both complicated and simple; complicated, because 'it is not an easy matter to refashion the destiny of hundreds of millions of people'—but simple, for the obvious start was 'a clear renunciation of colonialism and imperialism, and recognition of the national independence of the dependent countries within the larger framework of the emerging world order'.³ The latter remark referred to the San Francisco Conference at which the United Nations was established, and to which India had been invited to send a delegation, led by Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit.⁴ The 'emerging world order' also referred to the

¹ C. A. Bayly and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), introduction.

² J. Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, edited by M. Chalapathi Rau, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, B. R. Nanda, and Sarvepalli Gopal, 15 vols. (New Delhi: Orient Longman 1982), 15:509.

³ Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:510.

⁴ The other Asian countries at San Francisco were China, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Philippines, Syria, and Turkey.

increasing distrust between the two superpowers. And thus, to the American press, Nehru explained that an independent Asia would always side with world peace. The new Asian nations had to focus on their progress, on making up for lost time, and war would be disastrous. However, he warned, 'if freedom is delayed ... they will side with this or that power as suits their convenience and advantage. They will add to the confusion and chaos of a distracted world'.⁵

However, Nehru had words of comfort as well. He stressed that decolonization would not create a patchwork of new states each intent on their isolated independence. Instead, he invoked the decolonized future that had been the ideal of many interwar internationalists, from C. R. Das to Mahendra Pratap: Asia as a group of states that would be part of a future world federation, 'that one world of which wise statesmen have dreamed and which seems to be the inevitable and only outcome of our present troubles, if we survive disaster'.⁶ Nehru's first step towards the achievement of that goal was also a continuation of interwar discourse: the organization of a conference of Asian representatives. But in spite of claims to the contrary by Nehru's biographers, the initial idea for the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 was not his.⁷

The Indian press, which had kept abreast of international Asianist movements throughout the interwar years, saw the San Francisco conference as a chance for Asia to influence the making of the post-war world.⁸ And as soon as Vijayalakshmi Pandit had arrived in the US, she appeared on national radio to say: 'Asia will be the testing ground of all the theories advanced by the United Nations but the continuation of colonial empires will be a constant danger to world peace and the progress of humanity'.⁹ Within a week, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* continued: 'India belongs naturally to other Asiatic countries rather than western [ones]. Her ties with Britain are more artificial than her ties with China. The domination of the white man over the rest of the world since the sixteenth century is coming to an end. It will not go any more. Asia is awake. ... The era of white domination won't last and cannot be revived'.¹⁰ But by far the most telling message again arrived from the United States:

The voice of some six hundred million enslaved people of Asia may not be officially heard at this Conference and those who have usurped their birthright of freedom may cynically claim to speak for them, but there will be no real peace in this earth so long as they are denied justice. These words, instinct with truth and representing the verdict of all the enslaved peoples of the world, should be inscribed on the gates of the Conference.¹¹

⁵ Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:513.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Among others M. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); J. Brown, *Nehru: A Biography* (London: Longman, 1999); S. Tharoor, *Nehru: The Invention of India* (New York: Arcade, 2003).

⁸ 'Send Indian Leaders to San Francisco Conference', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 March 1945, 5.

⁹ 'Are Colonial Empires a Threat to World Peace?' *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 March 1945, 4.

¹⁰ 'Independence by Definite Date', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 March 1945, 4.

¹¹ 'India's Ambassador', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 May 1945, 4.

The message was clear: Asia was no longer content to be a bystander in international affairs that concerned them. As reports of the conference started to come in, statements in the Indian press grew increasingly aggressive, stating that recent years should have taught France to respect the freedom of others; that India's ties with Britain were more artificial than those with China; and that India now had more claim to great power status than France did.¹² The events of the Second World War had temporarily revived Asianism in other respects as well: it had not taken long for Japan to regain its pre-Manchuria status as an integral part of any Asianist project, at least in the eyes of the Indian press. This is evidenced from publications that claimed Japan's people had never wanted the war and placed the blame instead on the machinations of the Black Dragon Society.¹³

It was to the background of these aspirations that the Asian delegations met at San Francisco. And according to B. Shiva Rao, the idea for an Asian Relations Conference was first raised by the Asian delegates present there, and then pitched to Vijayalakshmi Pandit.¹⁴ Most of the delegates were well aware of the failings of the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations. They had also been eyewitnesses to Asia's longstanding frustrations with the League as a western-dominated institution. Would the UN 'trusteeship' system turn out to be the same as the mandate system? Would the vetoes held by the Security Council prove to be the same weakness that had paralyzed the League? Reports stated that the San Francisco conference 'over-represented' the West, and that the East suffered neglect.¹⁵ It is not surprising that when the Asian Relations Conference was convened, Nehru emphasized that 'the idea of such a conference arose simultaneously in many minds and in many countries of Asia'.¹⁶

B. Shiva Rao returned to India, and he and Nehru started discussing the idea of an Asian conference in December. Nehru advocated a Federation of Asian States if the UN should prove ineffective. The Asian Relations Conference was to be the prelude to such a form of Asian cooperation. Less than four weeks after this conversation, the conference is mentioned concretely in a message from Nehru to the Central News Agency of China: 'A time is coming when representatives should meet together to draw up common policies. ... I trust that a fully representative Asian conference will be able to meet before very long. Probably India will be the best place for such a conference to meet'.¹⁷ And in his March *New York Times Magazine* article, Nehru was confident enough to note that although a conference was not immediately feasible due to travel restrictions, it would be held 'as soon as conditions permit'.¹⁸ In May, Nehru wrote to Aung San of Burma that the conference was intended to be fully representative of Asia and that it intended to lay the foundations of 'some kind of an Asian organization'.¹⁹ By July, having received favourable reactions from Syria, Indonesia,

¹² *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 April 1945, 4; 6 April 1945, 4; 22 April 1945, 4.

¹³ 'Japan's Black Dragon Society', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 April 1945, 10.

¹⁴ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 41. B. Shiva Rao was a member of the Indian delegation at San Francisco, and he was to become a member of the organizing committee of the Asian Relations Conference.

¹⁵ ARC, *Proceedings*, 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ J. Nehru, 'Common Policies for Asia', in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 14:470-1.

¹⁸ Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:513.

¹⁹ Nehru to Aung San, 25 May 1946, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 15:539.

Burma, and Ceylon, Nehru was sending around letters to raise funds to host the conference in Delhi.²⁰ The actual preparations did not start until the end of August, due to the chaos erupting in India over the Cabinet Mission Plan,²¹ but the official invitations were sent in September.

As the responses started coming in and the conference appeared to be drawing between twenty and thirty different Asian delegations, the world outside Asia started to get nervous, fearing ‘an attempt to organize an Asian bloc’.²² In response, Nehru strongly and publicly affirmed that the conference would not ‘be opposed in any way to America or the Soviet Union or any other power or group of powers’.²³ The juxtaposition of the US and the USSR is significant here, for it demonstrates an intent to remain aloof from this rivalry early on—long before Bandung or the non-aligned conference at Belgrade were ever thought of.

This feeds into a series of trends in the historiography of the Cold War. The old notion of an Asian vacuum waiting to be filled by one of the superpowers has been thoroughly challenged in recent years. New scholarship of the Cold War in Asia has highlighted a number of characteristics that set it apart from events elsewhere.²⁴ Two historiographical developments in particular are relevant to the present argument. The first is that the global ideological struggle interacted with (rather than impacted) the rise of Asian nationalisms. Tuong Vu in a recent publication puts this even more strongly: ‘Indigenous processes in Asia ... had critical *reverse* impact on the Cold War’.²⁵ The second argument is that the Cold War should not be viewed as divorced from the larger global processes of the twentieth century.²⁶ And indeed, a contextualization of the proceedings of the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) will prove any such separation untenable: ‘Asia’ at the ARC had an internal dynamic all its own.

This internal dynamic had everything to do with the antecedents of the conference. If indeed, as Michael Szonyi and Hong Liu argue, we view the events in Asia less as the playground of the two superpowers and more as a set of on-going processes that played their own part in the shaping of those constellations, it should be recognized that those processes did not start at the end of the Second World War. Much is to be gained from a longer perspective that includes the internationalist momentum of the interwar years and the commitment to a world of greater justice and equality that informed many of the earlier conferences and federalist projects. This was evident, among other things, from the fact

²⁰ Nehru, Request for Financial Support for Inter-Asian Relations Conference. To several people, all sent 30 July 1946, in *Selected Works*, 15:522.

²¹ The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 had envisaged a united India, but consensus could not be reached over ‘balancing’ Hindu and Muslim majority provinces at the central legislature.

²² Nehru mentions having received inquiries from ‘several governments’ to that effect. Nehru to V.K. Krishna Menon, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 15:586.

²³ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment*, 43.

²⁴ Among others, C. E. Goscha and C. Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia (1945–1962)* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2009); O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁵ T. Vu, ‘Cold War Studies and the Cultural Cold War in Asia’, in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, edited by T. Vu and W. Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 3.

²⁶ M. Szonyi and H. Liu, ‘New Approaches to the Study of the Cold War in Asia’, in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Z. Yangwen, H. Liu, and H. Szonyi (Leiden & Boston: Brill 2010), 6.

that the ideological boundaries that determined later conferences, even Bandung, had not yet been drawn. Invitations to the ARC were issued to the republics of Soviet Central Asia, which were taken as models of development that might be emulated, as will be shown below. Much as in the interwar period, Asia was presented here as a continent with common present problems and future trajectories. Suggesting that the delegates that assembled in Delhi were faced with a choice between one of two ready-made sets of ideas would be rather reductive: the appropriation and adaptation of ideas to fit the 'Asian' context was felt to be fully justified, and the ARC's proceedings reflect this.

Convening the ARC

The conference had been called to review the position of Asia in the post-war world; to exchange ideas on the problems shared by all Asian countries; and to study ways and means of promoting closer contacts between them.²⁷ The organizing body was not the Provisional Government of India, which was in place by September 1946, but the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), a body established only three years earlier as a non-political, non-official institute for the study of international affairs. This meant that the Asian Relations Conference would be a non-official gathering, composed of delegates from academic, cultural, and other organizations, and many of the papers and speeches presented reflect this. The conference was emphatically presented as a non-political gathering to the outside world, to allay any fears that an attempt was being made to organize a political bloc.

However, two things detracted from the ARC's credibility as a non-political conference. Firstly, it was largely the brainchild of soon-to-be Prime Minister Nehru, and partly the fruit of his and other Indian anti-imperialists' longstanding efforts towards Asian cooperation. Indeed, Nehru linked his attendance at the 1927 League Against Imperialism conference to the ARC in an article:

Twenty years ago, I attended a conference in Brussels, at which many Asian and European countries were represented. Then those who came from Asia met together, and we talked about developing some kind of contacts so that we could meet occasionally, somewhere in Asia, and develop political, economic and other relations, and, at any rate, get to know each other better. But though everybody agreed ... an odd fact emerged: that this conference or meeting that we might have, of representatives of Asia, could not meet anywhere in Asia! It was easier to meet in Paris, Berlin, or Brussels or London than anywhere in Asia, partly because of political restrictions and partly because of travel difficulties. ... It might interest you to know that some of the friends I made twenty years ago at the conference are running the Indonesian Republic today.²⁸

The conference participation was a reflection of the interwar networks examined in the previous chapters, which included activists and anti-imperialists from all corners of Asia

²⁷ Indian Council of World Affairs, *Asia: A Souvenir Book issued by the Indian Council of World Affairs on the occasion of the Asian Relations Conference New Delhi March 23 – 2 April 1947* (New Delhi: ICWA 1947), 78.

²⁸ J. Nehru, 'Inter-Asian Relations', *India Quarterly* 11 (1946): 323–6; 323.

(more on which below). At Nehru's instigation, the ICWA had left the door open for political participation despite its non-political nature; every delegation was free to include 'government observers'—and the list of participants included thirty-nine people with this status.²⁹ The invitations went to organizations similar to the ICWA (Burma, for instance, had a BCWA), and in the absence of such an organization, to cultural and academic institutions. But Nehru told the ICWA to be flexible and keep its definitions broad: 'It may even be that Governments might be unofficially represented'.³⁰

The second—related—issue undermining the conference's claim to being non-political was that with several Asian nations on the brink of independence and the widespread sense that decolonization was just around the corner, the conference committed itself to a strong anti-imperialist stance. Despite incessant affirmations of the ancient bonds between Asian lands that had existed in pre-colonial times and positive definitions of Asia, the real common denominator at the ARC was the experience of European domination and corresponding struggle for independence, and anti-colonialism became a major part of the conference proceedings. This was reinforced by uncertainty about the way the newly established United Nations would develop, and the role non-Western powers were to play therein; uncertainty over the constellation of the post-war world; and the first apprehensions of new forms of domination, made poignant by the US and Soviet occupation of the Korean Peninsula.

Having decided which organizations were to be invited, it had to be decided which countries were to be considered as 'Asian'. In the end, the ARC defined Asia in its broadest possible sense, including both the Middle East and the Soviet Republics of Central Asia.³¹ Egypt was welcome as a Middle Eastern country, for being so close in 'culture and general economic and political development'.³² US-occupied Japan was also invited, but General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan, had banned overseas travel for the Japanese. This resulted in a strong press offensive in India geared towards pressuring the United States to allow a Japanese delegation to travel to New Delhi. This proved so strong in fact, that an American observer at the conference was reported to have cabled both President Truman and General MacArthur to fly a Japanese delegation to New Delhi 'because the absence of Japanese is badly affecting Asian-United States Relations'.³³ The problems of whom to invite were exacerbated by the various Ongoing struggles in Asia. In the case of China, for instance, it was decided to welcome delegations from both the Kuomintang and the Communists, while invitations were issued to both a Jewish and an Arab delegation from Palestine. Finally, Tibet was invited separately, which was to be Tibet's last international event.³⁴

After the invitations had been sent, it was a feat of Herculean proportions to actually get the delegates together. First of all, responses were slow to arrive, leaving the organizers in Delhi somewhat at a loss as to how many people they would be hosting. It reaffirmed Nehru's

²⁹ ARC, *Proceedings*, 8.

³⁰ Nehru, 'Inter-Asian Relations', 325.

³¹ ARC communications in this period do speak of the Middle East rather than West Asia.

³² D. Gopal, ed., *Asian Relations* [reprint of the original proceedings] (New Delhi: Authorspress 2003), 5.

³³ 'Fly Jap Delegation to Delhi!' *Bombay Chronicle*, 27 March 1947, 1.

³⁴ S. Saran, *50 years after the Asian Relations Conference* (New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre 1997), 17.

view that it was easier to communicate with Europe than with neighbouring Asian countries.³⁵ But if that was true for the postal services—the invitations to Tibet and Bhutan were delivered by ponies—it was arguably even harder for the actual delegates. Some travelled for over three weeks to reach New Delhi, using every means of transport known to man. A few did not make it in time; delegates from Korea and Mongolia arrived several days into the proceedings, whereas the delegates from Kirghizia and Turkmenistan did not arrive until a day after the conference ended.

In the end, however, there were 244 delegates representing 28 countries of Asia.³⁶ In terms of the final participants, there were some notable continuities from the interwar years, echoing a variety of networks that far transcended those forged by Nehru personally. The international contacts of the All-India Women's Congress (AIWC), whose All Asia Women's Conference (AAWC) of 1931 has been treated in chapter 1, were represented by a fair number of former Asia Committee members on the delegation rolls. Among them were formidable names: long-time AIWC president Lakshmi Bai Rajwade; Lady Ram Rao, who had represented the Asian Women's Conference at Geneva; Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, who would go on to contribute to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a year later; and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.³⁷ The large number of female delegates from other countries, too, notably Indonesia and Ceylon, was remarkable.³⁸ Women's organizations represented were, among others, the All Ceylon Women's Conference Association, the Egyptian Feminist Union, the All-Indonesian Women's Congress, the Korea Women's Bureau, and the Women's Association of Iran. This was no coincidence: one of the five subject groups was exclusively devoted to the problems facing Asian women, and Nehru's invitation stated explicitly: 'I hope it will be possible to send at least one woman delegate from your country who will be able to assist the Conference by presenting the women's point of view on the various matters before the conference and, in particular, in the discussing of the status of women and women's movements in Asia which is one of the main topics suggested for the agenda'.³⁹ Other familiar Asianist veterans, apart from Nehru himself, included the likes of N. M. Joshi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, as well as a strong representation of the Santiniketan network: Tai Chi-Tao was present as an official delegate; Tan Yun-Shan,

³⁵ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 8.

³⁶ Reports on the exact number of countries represented at the ARC differ, because several of the delegations represented states that were not yet independent. There is also confusion as to the number of attendees—Indian scholars who had prepared discussion papers, for instance, were not included in the delegations but did take part in the proceedings. The same holds true for other Asian scholars already present in India. Finally, the numbers given by Saran differ from those in the proceedings because Saran does not include the Tajik delegation. See Saran, *50 Years After the Asian Relations Conference*, 10–1; Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 8–9.

³⁷ Delegation list in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, Appendix C, 307–309; cross-checked against the archives of the All Asia Women's Conference. NMML, All-Asia Women's Conference, microfilm 2278: Minutes of the meeting of the Permanent Committee of the All Asia Women's Conference, Karachi 2 January 1935. Sarojini Naidu could not attend because she was in prison for civil disobedience at the time, but was elected conference president because of it.

³⁸ The second All Asia Women's Conference was to take place on Java, but the logistical challenges proved too great. The invitation was taken over by Japan, but the Sino-Japanese war broke out before it could be held.

³⁹ NAI External Affairs Department File no. 14(19)-cc/46 1:1. Invitation to the Inter-Asian relations conference, 7 September 1946.

resident in India, attended the conference; and Kalidas Nag reported extensively on the ARC.⁴⁰

Performing Asia in Delhi

On 23 March 1947, five short months before India's independence, over ten thousand people streamed into the Purana Qila (Old Fort) of New Delhi. Open to the public for a small fee the opening and closing sessions drew massive crowds. All had come to stand, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period in history'.⁴¹ Given the chaos of communal violence that had already erupted in several places around India, the overwhelming attention the ARC received from the public and in the national press would seem extraordinary. In the aftermath of Partition only months later, the very site of the conference, one of the most imposing historical Mughal forts of Delhi, had to be converted into a refugee camp. Even the day before the conference was to begin, a riot broke out in Delhi and the police had to implement a curfew without warning. This made it harder for people to get to the Purana Qila, but it did not deter them from coming.⁴²

Perhaps it was precisely the hope of a new period in history that drew people into the Purana Qila. If we regard the ten days of the conference less as a gathering of leaders discussing the post-war future, and more as an attempt to present India from its most attractive side to a decolonizing Asia, a different picture emerges. To the theatrical backdrop of the Indo-Persian Purana Qila, the participants performed their own interpretation of Asia, and of India within it.⁴³ And the welcoming of Asia into India was a very public effort indeed. New Delhi was still ill-equipped to house such distinguished guests for lack of passable hotels, and the wives of the members of the organizing committee stepped in to house the majority of the delegates in their own homes. It was such details, perhaps, that led journalist G. H. Jansen to characterize the atmosphere at the conference as one of 'innocent enthusiasm'.⁴⁴

The performance aspect of the conference stretched to other areas as well. The unity of an Asian culture and history was articulated in exhibitions of, respectively, art and archaeology. The art exhibition in particular, a joint venture of the ICWA and the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, was a massive undertaking. The committee had three months to organize it and transport through Asia was still very difficult. However, art from Iran, Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Nepal, China, Bali, and India was exhibited. At the official opening of the 'Inter-Asian' exhibition for the delegates on the second day of the conference, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad declared that this display would indeed reveal a layer of Asian identity that the conference itself could not: 'This exhibition of arts is as significant as the conference itself, for whereas at the Conference the voice of the Asian nations is heard, here the very embodiment, the innermost experiences and the deepest sensibilities are put on record through

⁴⁰ K. Nag, *New Asia* (Calcutta: Prajna Bharati, 1947).

⁴¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, Inaugural Address. Asian Relations Organization, *Proceedings*, 21.

⁴² NMML, B. Shiva Rao Papers, Correspondence: to Tej Bahadur Sapru (nos. 384–406): 24 March 1947.

⁴³ For a further theorization of the performance aspect of international conferences, see N. Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Recasting the Bandung Conference of 1955 as Cultural History', *ARI Working Paper Series* No.164 (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2011), 1–19.

⁴⁴ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment*, 53.

their artists'.⁴⁵ Indian reviews of the art exhibition, however, were somewhat carping and oftentimes explicitly orientalist. The Balinese paintings were declared to have 'a delightful feeling for form' but 'a complete lack of sophistication'. Iran 'seemed content to follow the traditional decorative style', while Burma and Ceylon worked in 'Western' technique.⁴⁶

The aim of the archaeological exhibition, fittingly organized at the Central Asian Antiquities Museum, was to demonstrate the historical ties that had bound India to the Asian continent for millennia, and to show the reciprocal influences between Asian countries and cultures.⁴⁷ This exhibition received less attention in the press, but is interesting because it staged a light-hearted version of the Greater India idea in which other Asian museums seem to have happily implicated themselves. The Kabul Museum, for instance, brought along carved Indian ivories from Bagram, a statue of Surya from the excavated solar temple at Khair Khaneh, and painted copies of the Buddha statues of the Bamian valley. The review of the museum's Afghanistan room celebrated Afghanistan, in true Greater India style, as 'for many centuries a cultural province of India'.⁴⁸ However, it was also noted that Afghanistan itself had played a role in the development of Buddhist art, through which it regained some agency as a cultural actor in its own right. Room 3 was devoted to Southeast Asia, which was declared to have been for several centuries within 'the orbit of India's cultural empire'. Any thought of reciprocity was abandoned here. Instead, it was considered 'a suitable monument to the glory ... of the early Indian navigators'.⁴⁹

If the exhibitions were organized mainly with the help of the countries represented, India itself was lavishly performed by performances by various regional dance troupes at the Regal Theatre. Chitrangada (written by Tagore) was staged, South Indian Kathakali and Bharatanatyam were performed, and Nehru entertained all delegates to a reception with a Chhau performance. The most controversial, however, was the decision by Mrs Shiva Rao, wife of B. Shiva Rao, to stage a ballet of Nehru's massive tome *Discovery of India*. This sparked a series of angry letters both in support of and against this venture. A distraught S. Venkatraman wrote:

They have set about trying to make a travesty out of Pandit Nehru's monumental contribution to Indian thought. ... The reported attempt to translate this great work into visual virtuosic form is foredoomed to failure. The reasons are obvious. Assuming that this abstract work of imagination of a first-class mind contains elements that lend themselves for representation ... the amateurish dilettantes whom Mrs Shiva Rao is looking for are scarcely the sort of artists who have in them the power and gift to interpret a truly Olympian theme like Nehru's.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 335.

⁴⁶ Review by Anil Roy Chaudhury, published in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 335. The exhibition further received interest in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 March 1947, 2; and 25 March 1947, 5.

⁴⁷ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 339.

⁴⁸ V. S. Agrawala, in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 346.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵⁰ Letter to the editor, S. Venkatraman, *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 March 1947, 4.

One reader who replied to this criticism that the ballet was a wonderful idea and that all the delegates should see it was eventually proven right: not only was the ballet staged, it was performed on the closing night of the conference.⁵¹ Further participation by Indian civil society organizations included a reception at Lady Irwin College for all the female delegates, hosted by the All-India Women's Congress, a reception by the Archaeological Survey of India, and most important, a massive effort by research institutions across India to prepare memoranda with available statistics and other information about Asian countries. Ninety-four such memoranda were submitted, often numbering in the hundreds of pages. While cultural and historical issues were popular, the memoranda dealt extensively with the Asian lag in development, labour issues, and social services, and how this was best to be remedied.⁵² Others dealt with Asian racial issues, demonstrating the historical intermingling of Asian peoples through anything from craniology to migration patterns to cultural anthropology to deliver further proof of Asia's unity.⁵³ These were intended to facilitate the programming of the conference—many were eventually made into papers for the conference itself and presented at the group discussions.

However, other issues detracted from the demonstrable desire to showcase the unity of Asia and underplay its divisions. One of these was the problem of language. Interpreters had to be engaged for Arabic, Russian, French, Persian, and Chinese. Those who commanded none of those languages had to solve the problem within their delegation with those who did, which led to considerable difficulties. For many issues, no more than a short summary was conveyed to those in need of translation. And when Piug Peang Youk Anthon, a Cambodian princess, addressed the gathering in rapid French, the interpreter failed to convey the gist of her words.⁵⁴ The princess, who spoke some English, noticed her words were being twisted and refused to continue. Fortunately Nehru, a perennial Francophile, saved the situation by stepping in and interpreting personally. This impediment to in-depth conversation was lamented at various stages of the conference and addressed in the session on cultural problems with a discussion on the desirability of choosing an Asian language for communication rather than imperialist tongues such as English and French. This too harked back to visions of Asia from the interwar period, for this same issue had been addressed by Asianists ranging from Tagore to Pratap. The next sections will therefore explore three Asianist themes from the group discussion that demonstrated particular continuity from the Asianist momentum in the interwar years described in the parts of this dissertation: Asian development and social issues; Asian culture and education; and Asian federation and cooperation.

5.2 Asian development

Asian development and 'social issues', which according to the memoranda included a spectrum varying from public health issues to labour rights, figured prominently in the proceedings. Of the five roundtable groups, the third dealt exclusively with agricultural reconstruction, industrial development, labour problems, and the 'transition from colonial to

⁵¹ Asian Relations Conference Supplementary Programme. in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 360.

⁵² NMML, Asian Relations Memoranda, Typescript. Agricultural Reconstruction and Industrial Development.

⁵³ NMML, Asian Relations Memoranda, Typescript. Racial Problems in Asia.

⁵⁴ Nag, *New Asia*, 45–6.

national economy', issues of concern for all the nations represented. Moreover, the participants believed themselves to be on shared trajectories of modernization. These issues were also a direct continuation of an activism that had started in the interwar period. The lag in development due to imperialist exploitation, the western bias of the world economic system, and the peculiarity vis-à-vis Asian issues of labour and trade unionism had all figured prominently in Asian activism at the International Labour Organization, the Asiatic Labour Congress as well as the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and have been described in chapter 2. The search for models of development to emulate, from the industrial and economic advances of pre-war fascist Italy to the accelerated industrialization of the Soviet republics, has been noted in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The next two sections will therefore be concerned with the continuation of these two themes at the Asian Relations Conference. The similarities to the internationalist rhetoric of the interwar years will be treated, but also the ways in which these same subjects resounded differently in a post-war context.

Asian issues of labour

By far the most continuity was evident in the discussion on labour problems, if only because trade union veteran N. M. Joshi was one of the chairs. The issues on the table, too, harked back to the agendas of both the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Asiatic Labour Congress in the 1920s and 1930s. Employment conditions, trade unionism, and industrial relations, and the gap between Asia and the West were all listed. The first of the topics, which was the transition from a colonial to a national economy, echoed familiar anti-imperialist rhetoric. First, it was lamented that Asian countries had no knowledge whatsoever of worker's conditions in neighbouring lands. They had been cut off from their Asian fellow workers by imperial borders. This was a fairly close paraphrasing of the Asian resolution at the League Against Imperialism Congress at Brussels. Second, the imperialist countries had exploited Asia's resources and its workers, leaving the continent far less developed than the West, an issue that figured prominently in the Asiatic Labour Congress session at Colombo. This was declared to be the case even in fully independent areas, for 'they may share in some respects the characteristics of a colonial economy because of their inability to shape independent economic policies in regard to tariffs, foreign investments and of the large part played by foreigners in important sectors of the country's economic life'.⁵⁵ In view of that, it was observed that it would be a 'waste of economic incentive' if each country in Asia tried to achieve self-sufficiency. Rather, 'it would be conducive to greater confidence and security in Asia if a regional economic balance could be evolved'.⁵⁶ The very fact that most Asian countries were borrowing from the metropolitan countries made intra-Asian collaboration all the more necessary.

N. M. Joshi gave these observations new direction when he stated in the third session that without international cooperation, the improvement of labour conditions would always be limited.⁵⁷ This took the discussion into a realm with which he was familiar. Joshi still

⁵⁵ ARC, *Proceedings*, 121.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

considered the ILO as the principal body in which the Asian voice should be heard, but to make it effective, more Asian nations should be allowed into the ILO. The end of the Second World War had brought the inclusion of the Philippines, but Japan had not yet re-joined and Asian representation as it stood was still unbalanced. At the ARC, Joshi received an eager hearing for what he had so vocally advocated at the ILO in Geneva since the early 1920s: That the ILO should expand to included countries such as Malaya, Ceylon, and Vietnam. Joshi hoped that all these countries would make use of the existing ILO to address labour problems, rather than create another body. The fact that the long-desired ILO Asian Regional Conferences was finally scheduled in October 1947 in New Delhi was considered a good sign.⁵⁸

There were objections to Joshi's message. The first were raised by the Malayan delegation, who—as long as the conference was addressing labour in a regional context—begged India to halt labour migration to Malaya, as the circumstances of Indian workers there were dismal, and their low wages undercut others, cancelling out any advances made to the living standards of workers.⁵⁹ It was also noted that local hostilities against Indian labourers, a familiar occurrence in interwar Asia from Burma to Ceylon and Malaya, had not ceased.⁶⁰ Second, the problem was raised once more with regard to the agricultural base of most Asian economies. Given that about 85 per cent of the economy was generally based on agriculture, or, as the Mongolian delegate hastened to add, nomadic cattle breeding and grazing, was the ILO the way forward?⁶¹ How much could realistically be gained from discussing labour legislation in an industrial context? Joshi argued that the difference was limited, especially in the case of plantation workers, if not of petty landholders, and that in any case, the two problems were interconnected.⁶² However, the majority of the delegates did not accept this, and the final session report recognized the need for action in the field of agricultural workers' rights which had no place in the ILO. However, there was consensus in another respect: post-war Asia had to find a place in the world economic system from a starting point of great disparity. On this everyone agreed.

With a few honourable exceptions, the economic conditions of workers in most Asian countries are greatly backward compared to those in Great Britain and other industrial countries of the West. The disparity is not only indefensible from the point of view of human dignity, but also constitutes a danger to the peace of the world, as there can be no peace without social justice within and between countries. In the case of Asian countries, this means that the pace of progress must be more rapid than in the more advanced countries. ... It will of course take time for Asian countries to attain equality with the more advanced countries, but the two facts ... demand greater efforts on the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶⁰ On anti-Indian riots in Southeast Asia, see S. R. Sudhamani, 'Indians in Southeast Asia: an approach paper,' in *Indians in Southeast Asia*, edited by I. J. Bahadur Singh, 8–22 (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1982); M. M. Kaul, 'Indians in Southeast Asia: the colonial period and its impact,' *Idem*, 23–33.

⁶¹ ARC, *Proceedings*, 167.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 160.

part of the Asian people. ... Regional and international efforts are necessary for the solution of the problem.⁶³

Among others, these solutions were to take the form of the organization of training centres for trade union officers; the formulation of a charter of human rights embodying minimum standards; and the collection and exchange of statistics and information on labour matters in different Asian countries. Joshi was pleased that the group had considered labour problems in their regional setting, and referred to the 'Asian Trade Union Conferences' in Colombo and Tokyo in the interwar years, stating that these had first promoted contact between trade unionists of different Asian countries.⁶⁴ The proceedings had thus come full circle: the struggle for the achievement of workers' rights in the interwar years, which had mainly been an indictment of imperial arrangements, could now be applied to a successful implementation of these discussions in an Asia that consisted of independent countries.

The Central Asian Soviet Republics as a developmental model

As noted in chapter 4, admiration for the Soviet model as a potential avenue for accelerated development had a pedigree which dated back to the early 1920s. Nehru himself had made his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 and was 'profoundly impressed' with what he saw there.⁶⁵ In the run-up to the ARC, the wider public, too, was exposed to the achievements of especially the Central Asian parts of the Soviet Union through publicized travel reports and newspaper articles. Although the place of the Soviet Central Asian republics in most cartographies of Asia was tenuous, they were held up by the Indian media as examples of 'backward' regions of Asia that had made great progress thanks to the great reforms of socialism: 'In Soviet Central Asia, peoples, backward, oppressed, nomadic a bare thirty years ago, are forging ahead to new miracles of Socialist reconstruction'.⁶⁶

It is important to note that the dichotomy of communism versus other systems was rarely if ever raised. Just as in the interwar years, the concern was mainly with examples of fast modernization, which, if properly adapted to Asian circumstances, might assist in closing the developmental gap between Asia and the West faster than would otherwise be the case. The contributions from the Central Asian Republics reflect this: in an attempt to demonstrate that they had succeeded in maintaining their identity even as they underwent industrialization and modernization, they presented themselves as Asian above all. By and large, their audience accepted their statements, particularly the Indian delegation. Socialism—if the definition was left vague enough—could mean many things to many different people. And it did. There was a mixing of liberal, illiberal, and socialist idioms in thinking about 'development' in India—

⁶³ Session report, in *Proceedings*, 169–71.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁵ As remembered by his daughter Indira Gandhi in, 'Foreword', *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: NMML, 1984), i.

⁶⁶ 'For Unity in the Battle for Asia's Freedom and Against Imperialism', *Peoples' Age*, 23 March 1947, 3; 'Soviet Asia Speeds Forward Under New Five Year Plan', *Peoples' Age*, 14 July 1946, 11.

aspects of which were later to be rationalized and dignified as ‘non-alignment’ and the ‘third path’—under the umbrella term of ‘socialism’.⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, the roundtables on development were the sessions in which the Soviet delegations—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—were most outspoken. All emphasized their national independence and culture, while praising their advances, which included universities, women’s rights, and literacy. The opening message from Azerbaijan is quite revealing: ‘Before the Socialist Revolution [Azerbaijan] was one of the most backward corners of Asia. ... The people of Azerbaijan have now received all those opportunities for the further development and enrichment of culture which progressive humanity has ever created. More than sixty scientific research institutions ... using their own national language are now functioning in Azerbaijan, where before Soviet power there existed not a single [one]’.⁶⁸

The ARC was a unique propaganda opportunity and the delegates made sure that not a moment was wasted. That this was more obvious to some observers than others is evident from different reports from attendees. The two observers from the Institute of Pacific Relations in the United States, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, reported after the conference that they had noted the Soviet propaganda but did not think it had been very effective: ‘[They] assumed no aggressive part in any of the discussion groups. Upon request they gladly told of the achievements of their respective governments but their complacency precluded any admission of even the existence of such problems as were plaguing other countries of Asia. ... General disappointment over the Soviet’s aloofness and patterned, generalized answers to all questions under discussion was apparent’.⁶⁹ Gerald Packer, one of the conference’s two Australian observers, simply remarked: ‘The members of the various Soviet Republics obviously marked time on the Moscow line’.⁷⁰ G. H. Jansen, finally, described the delegates from the Asian Soviet Republics as plain annoying and remarked wryly: ‘The Soviet Central Asians [had their say] with such well-drilled unanimity that it is not surprising that they were never again invited’.⁷¹ But he did think that they succeeded in leaving their mark on the proceedings: ‘This axiom is even more obvious in the discussions on “Labour Problems and Social Services”. At this point the imaginary gap between the Asian republics and the rest of Asia proved wide: the delegates of the former gave a wholly laudatory picture of their conditions, while the latter, more honestly, were concerned as to how the prevailing unsatisfactory state of affairs could be improved. In consequence, the report is full of flattering references to the Soviet republics’.⁷²

It is important to note that the group discussions on Asian trajectories of development do reflect an admiration of the achievements of the Asian Soviet Republics whenever they were voiced, but that both the need for Western loans and the possible gains from the Soviet model

⁶⁷ B. Zachariah, *Developing India: an Intellectual and Social History, c.1930–1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2005), 299.

⁶⁸ ARC, *Proceedings*, 35.

⁶⁹ V. Thompson and R. Adloff, ‘Asian Unity: Force or Façade?’ *Far Eastern Survey* 16:9 (May 1947): 97–9: 98.

⁷⁰ G. Packer, ‘The Asian Relations Conference: The Group Discussions’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 1:2 (1947): 4.

⁷¹ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 69.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 64.

of planned development—and the balance they hoped to strike between the two—were overshadowed by the conference’s anti-imperialist stance. First, there was a general determination not to let foreign loans serve as an opening wedge for a revival of economic imperialism under a new guise. The need for American financial aid was acknowledged but its policies in Asia condemned. Packer also noted an undercurrent of anti-Russian feeling, but interestingly, he reports that ‘any public expression of this sentiment was adroitly sidetracked by the Indian delegates’.⁷³ However, the explicit remark in the proceedings that cultivation and ownership of land should be in the same hands speaks volumes of the discussion on agricultural reconstruction: The Soviet Central Asians spoke at length about the need for land reform.⁷⁴ But when one (unidentified) speaker replied that the Asian peasants wanted land for themselves and not state tenancy or collective farms, the delegate of Soviet Azerbaijan, beating a hasty retreat, agreed.⁷⁵

5.3 Asian cultural unity

In order for the Asian Relations Conference to be successful in establishing more permanent contacts among the various Asian nations, it had to be established that ‘Asia’ indeed existed as a space with shared characteristics. As noted in chapter 3, the debate as to what those characteristics were, what united Asians, and what set them apart collectively from other parts of the world, was the oldest Asianist debate in existence. It had started in the late nineteenth century with notions of a spirituality that all Asians shared—regardless of their respective religious backgrounds—vis-à-vis a more materialist West. This debate had intensified in the interwar years, promoted especially by the Tagore salon, and found a more cultural-imperialist incarnation in the Greater India circle. At the ARC, both themes co-existed and permeated the proceedings, especially in the plenary sessions. Even Gandhi, who otherwise considered the conference a waste of energy that should have been devoted to nation-building, made a speech in which he viewed Asia as a space with a shared culture of spirituality and nonviolence:

What I want you to understand is the message of Asia. It is not to be learnt through the Western spectacles or by imitating the atom bomb ... In this age of democracy, in this age of awakening of the poorest of the poor, you can redeliver this message with the greatest emphasis. ... If all of you put your hearts together—not merely heads—to understand the secret of the message these wise men of the East have left to us, and if we really become worthy of that great message, the conquest of the West will be completed. This conquest will be loved by the West itself.⁷⁶

In many ways, the quest for Asian cultural identity at the ARC was a safe one. It was hard for delegates indeed to object to the positive traits ascribed to the ‘Asia’ to which they all belonged. Unlike the discussions on development and industrialization, in which Asia was

⁷³ Packer, ‘The Asian Relations Conference’, 3.

⁷⁴ ARC, *Proceedings*, 150.

⁷⁵ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 64.

⁷⁶ As published by *Harijan*, 20 April 1947, 117.

perceived to share the negative characteristic of being behind the West, the thousands of years of Asian cultural and religious history was something all delegates partook in and could be proud of. It was to be the cement of the ARC—provided the disproportionate Indian presence at the conference did not tip the scales towards Greater India and other jingoistic rhetoric.

This balance was preserved with great care during the plenary sessions. While Sri Ram, head of the reception committee, referred to the Pandyas' and Cholas' contacts with Southeast Asia in the very first speech of the conference, it was to wish that the renewal of such networks would 'enable us to learn from the experience and knowledge of each other, and to appreciate and enjoy each other's literature, arts and so forth'.⁷⁷ Nehru, too, who officially inaugurated the conference, emphasized the reciprocity of historical influences, considering these the very basis of what Asians shared together: 'We all changed in the process and in India today all of us are mixed products of these various influences. An Indian, wherever he may go in Asia, feels a sense of kinship with the land he visits and the people he meets'.⁷⁸ It was this precisely this kinship that needed to be revived:

There is a new vitality and powerful creative impulse in all the peoples of Asia. The masses are awake and demand their heritage. Strong winds are blowing all over Asia. Let us not be afraid of them but rather welcome them for only with their help we can build the new Asia of our dreams. ... Let us have faith in the human spirit which Asia has symbolized for all these long ages past.⁷⁹

Sarojini Naidu, who had been elected conference president and spoke in that capacity, lived up to her fame both as an Edwardian poet and as a veteran of interwar internationalist projects.⁸⁰ She asked: 'And what will Asia do with her renaissance? Will she arm herself for battles to conquer, to annex and exploit, or rather, will she forge new weapons and re-fashion her armoury in accordance with ancient ideals, as soldiers of peace and missionaries of love?'⁸¹ However, though reactions to her particular speech have gone largely unreported, the latter half of her speech may have raised some eyebrows for its unabashed references to Greater India:

Today if India, my India, has issued an invitation and summoned the people of the east and west of Asia to come to this great gathering, has she—who has been the custodian of our own culture as well as yours ... not the right to do so? Did we not in our own turn send to southeast Asia the great treasure of ours in India, Gautama Buddha—the teaching of peace? Did we not send to China, to Japan, to Ceylon, to Burma, the influence, philosophy, and wisdom of India?⁸²

⁷⁷ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁰ See, respectively, M. R. Paranjape, *Sarojini Naidu: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New Delhi: Indus, 1993); S. R. Bakshi, *Sarojini Naidu: Struggle for Swaraj* (New Delhi: Anmol 1991).

⁸¹ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 32.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 34.

The proceedings from the roundtables on cultural issues do reflect uneasiness on the part of many delegates from Southeast Asia.⁸³ One reason for this may have been the strong presence of former Greater India Society scholars such as Kalidas Nag, R. C. Majumdar and their academic legacy: their depiction of India as ‘bringer of civilization’ to the rest of Asia, and as a country that had once had ‘cultural colonies’ in Southeast Asia, was cause for concern. As one Burmese delegate said, voicing his apprehensions rather explicitly: ‘It was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it would be even more so to be ruled by an Asian power’.⁸⁴ Though full of brotherly affirmations of Asian cultural and civilizational unity, the roundtable section on cultural problems was one of the best attended but least successful parts of the conference: intra-Asian hegemonies were feared at least as much as outside ones.

The fourth of the five roundtable groups dealt with ‘Asian education’ and ‘Asian culture,’ and what collaboration along those lines could contribute to a unified Asia. The following discussion considers these topics in the context of an imagined Asian future consisting of regionally collaborating independent nations.

Asian education

Much like the discussion on development, the question of education in Asia was intimately tied to the issue of closing the gap between Asia and the West. In the opening discussion, a delegate from India remarked that Asia should relinquish the idea that a man did not become competent until he had studied in Europe or America.⁸⁵ The expense was colossal, and the benefit not always clear. It is a testament to the general atmosphere prevailing at the ARC that he hastened to add that though he stood by his comments, he was still ‘no less an internationalist than any other’.⁸⁶ Another delegate remarked that Asia’s first order of business was the application of science to social and economic problems. No matter how important fundamental research was, raising the standard of living had to be tackled first.

Second, the global domination of Western models of education was discussed. Delegates from Egypt and Afghanistan, among others, remarked that Asia needed to reorient its educational models to fit a more Asian mould. Asia was the source of religious philosophies and spiritualism, culture and religion were everywhere inextricably entwined.⁸⁷ Education in Asia should reflect this. As noted in chapter 3, this had been the foremost ground on which *Viśva Bharati* had been established in 1921. The university was referred to several times over the course of the proceeding by delegates from various countries, as was the educational contribution of Rabindranath Tagore.⁸⁸ And much like Tagore, who had sought to establish in the heart of Asia a centre that would blend the best of both East and West, a delegate from Georgia emphasized that the best potential model would be a combination of

⁸³ On Southeast Asian apprehensions to Indian hegemony, see also T. A. Keenleyside, ‘Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia: A Troublesome Legacy for Post-Independence Indian Foreign Policy’, *Pacific Affairs* 55:2 (1982): 210–30.

⁸⁴ Quoted in W. Henderson, ‘The Development of Regionalism in Southeast Asia’, *International Organization* 9: 4 (1955): 463–76: 466.

⁸⁵ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 212.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 218–9.

⁸⁸ Nag, *New Asia*, 21.

the two. It would be wrong to reject the advances of the West in the field of science, but the 'great material and spiritual wealth of Asia' should be harnessed to create a model more suited to advance Asia as a continent.⁸⁹ Perhaps it was for this reason that in his report Kalidas Nag congratulated Nehru for laying 'the foundation of a superb shrine of creative unity which immortal Tagore wished to see realized years ago'.⁹⁰

Third, the internationalist atmosphere of the conference caused narrow nationalism to be condemned as harmful in the field of education too. A delegate from Nepal remarked that 'exultation of its own greatness by a country in the teaching of history' could only be harmful and cause disunity among nations.⁹¹ Instead, a cooperative effort was needed to change school curricula so that they would emphasize the unity of cultures rather than what set them apart. As one paper circulated in the roundtable posed: students should 'realize the unreality of frontiers'.⁹²

How was this all to be accomplished? Several solutions were offered, some of which carried. Several of the smaller countries, especially Burma, emphasized that given their size, it would be hard for them to take great leaps unassisted.⁹³ There was both a lack of qualified teachers and of equipment. A delegate from Palestine proposed that at the very least, an inter-Asian exchange for books and journals should be set up, which would also translate journals into the various languages of the exchanging countries.⁹⁴ Preferably, the larger countries should send professors to the smaller ones, with the expenses born in part by the sending countries. A second proposal was for a uniform standard for the recognition of degrees among Asian universities, to increase mobility.⁹⁵ A third proposal entailed the establishment of scholarships for students to be trained elsewhere in Asia. This would also serve to intensify bonds between the various Asian nations and promote mutual understanding. On the spot, the National Council of Education in Bengal offered a scholarship for a student from each of the participating countries in the ARC to study at the Jamalpur College of engineering.⁹⁶

Finally, the proposal was made to organize inter-Asian student conferences, for students to meet and exchange ideas. This too, was not a new idea. Student participation in the interwar conferences noted in chapters 1 to 4 had always been high, from the League Against Imperialism Conference at Brussels in 1927 to the Pan-Asiatic Conference in Rome in 1933. The Pan-Asiatic Conference at Nagasaki (1926) had even had a separate student conference attached to it, held after the official conference. At the ARC too, this suggestion was received favourably. It carried to the list of resolutions, and was realized, among others, in 1955, when the Bandung conference was accompanied by a student conference after the official state-

⁸⁹ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 217.

⁹⁰ Nag, *New Asia*, 19.

⁹¹ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 219.

⁹² LoC, Asian Relations Conference, South Asian Ephemera Collection, I-CLR-765: Joel de Croze, 'Implications of the Cultural Position of India'.

⁹³ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 213.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

oriented proceedings.⁹⁷ But while these proposals were all hard to disagree with, the discussion also generated more far-reaching proposals that did not find favour with all delegates at the ARC.

Cementing Asian educational cooperation—federative solutions

The two proposals that called for true Pan-Asian cooperation in the field of education and science were the establishment of one Asian language, in which all Asian nations might publish and exchange ideas, and the establishment of a Pan-Asian university. Many of the papers presented at the roundtable reflected on the language question in some way. The failings as well as the merits of the Esperanto movement in Europe were discussed in detail. But perhaps the most striking contributions were delivered by linguists Baburam Saxena and J. F. Bulsara. Saxena advocated an ‘Inter-Asian [sic] language’, because ‘the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babal [sic] imparts one important lesson: that the diversity of speech is a great factor of disintegration of peoples and that unity of language is a great cementing force’.⁹⁸ His rejection of English—incidentally the primary medium of communication at the ARC—was strongly reminiscent of Tagore’s educational vision that English was detrimental to the formation of Asian minds. In an elegant plea for the rejection of English as an imposed language, which ‘both sentiment and reason would induce us to discard,’⁹⁹ he managed, through a series of logical fallacies, to arrive at Hindi as the best option. At this point, the Soviet delegations naturally pressed the Conference to look at how Russia tackled the problem, for ‘after the Revolution, the Government made it compulsory for people to learn their own language and Russian’.¹⁰⁰ This had worked for all the Asian Soviet Republics and was suggested as worthy of emulation. At this, the discussion stalled.

Bulsara had framed his paper in the context of concrete proposals for the ARC.¹⁰¹ Mindful of the fact that most Asian nations would not accept the language of one Asian country to become the language in all others, a notion which carried with it connotations of the imperialism the conference sought to discard, he suggested an Asian ‘auxiliary’ language which might be used for external communication. He assumed that the ARC was merely the start of close contacts in the fields of politics, economics, science, and education, and European languages simply did not ‘express the idiom of the mother tongues of these representatives or their peoples’.¹⁰² Rather than chose Arabic, Chinese, or Hindustani, the international auxiliary language should be artificially constructed. Of course, a world language was preferable—but failing that, the movement could restart in Asia first. His paper closed with the remark that even if the West had failed to construct such a language successfully, the rest of the world would soon have to decide what sort of inter-language they would use at their gatherings. The ARC should appoint a committee of experts of the various

⁹⁷ Arguably a much more Asianist conference than Bandung’s intergovernmental meeting. See P. Sabharwal, *Little Bandung: A Report on Asian-African Students Conference (May-June 1956)* (New Delhi: University Press 1956).

⁹⁸ LoC, *Asian Relations Conference*; B. Saxena, ‘Inter-Asian Language’, fiche 10, 1.

⁹⁹ Saxena, ‘Inter-Asian Language’, 5.

¹⁰⁰ ARC, *Proceedings*, 195.

¹⁰¹ NMML typescript, J.F. Bulsara, ‘International Auxiliary Language’, Group D/VII.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24.

existing languages, and fashion out of them a new language. This ‘need not take longer than two years’, even if his requirements were stiff—the language should have minimal grammar; it should be easy to pronounce; its vocabulary should be precise and analytical; and it should possess a ‘rational alphabet’ with a limited number of vowels and consonants. And also, even the busiest man should be able to master it within three to six months on half an hour of study a day.¹⁰³

Bulsara’s proposal, though discussed at length, was rejected primarily on the grounds of language not counting as one of the ‘immediate or urgent’ problems of Asia—the very point his paper had tried to make. Furthermore, there ‘was no reason to allow considerations of continental prestige to preclude the use of an available and practical medium’.¹⁰⁴ In a surprising turn of events, the use of English—lamented throughout the conference as an imperial relic—was suddenly re-appreciated as a language in which Asians could communicate with each other *and* with the West. The final session report mentions the subsequent compromise that there was a ‘need’ for a neutral language (aimed directly at the suggestions for Russian and Hindi, both of which were vocally opposed by Malaya); and that ‘for the moment’ English would be the best choice.¹⁰⁵ And rather than try to modify existing languages, Asian nations should devote more effort to learn the languages of their neighbours. The discussion had turned full circle to the earlier exchange proposals: Asian nations should send language teachers abroad for that purpose.

Most of the conference papers on education also proposed Asian institutions of learning in various forms. To some, these would serve as instruments for the revival of pre-colonial historical, intellectual, and cultural contacts between Asian nations. The emphasis put on the reinstating such contacts had long been a powerful rhetorical tool in Asianist discourse, especially among the Calcutta circle of intellectuals. Though other delegates also speculated upon these pre-existing ties, the same group of people who had reinvented this discourse in the interwar years were primarily responsible for framing the discussion in this way. Kalidas Nag had prepared a detailed piece on the historical literary, artistic, and cultural collaboration of the Asian nations for the conference.¹⁰⁶ Tan Yun-Shan, in 1947 still director of Viśva Bharati’s Cheena Bhavana (China House) likewise wrote on ‘Inter-Asian Cultural Cooperation’.¹⁰⁷ Tan Yun-Shan proposed in his paper to found ‘All Asia Institutions for Asian Studies’ [sic] in each Asian country, and to found All-Asia Libraries and Museums.¹⁰⁸ The other papers prepared by this group reflect a similar desire to bring out Asia’s cultural interconnectedness with titles such as ‘Aesthetic Traditions of the East’ and ‘Chinese and Indian Culture: a Plea for Understanding’, while R. C. Majumdar, formerly active in the Greater India Society, wrote ‘Cultural Problems of India and Indonesia’. Almost every paper advocated the establishment of one or more Asian Studies Institutes, Asian UNESCOs, or Asian cultural exhibitions.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁴ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 231.

¹⁰⁵ ARC, *Proceedings*, 204–205.

¹⁰⁶ See also Kalidas Nag’s own report of the ARC: *New Asia* (Calcutta: Prajna Bharati 1947).

¹⁰⁷ LoC, *Asian Relations Conference*, Tan Yun-Shan, ‘Inter-Asian Cultural Co-operation,’ fiche 10, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., fiche 10, 3.

What the delegations could not agree on, however, was the form such Pan-Asian institutions should take. Was it to be based in one location? That would benefit one country more than others. But if it were to be rotated between Asian nations on a yearly basis, this would be costly and render it ineffective. One group of delegates, from India, Ceylon, China, Palestine, Egypt, Siam, and Afghanistan, finally suggested a set of regional inter-university organizations and a 'central university of the federative type'.¹⁰⁹ This proposal found favour also with the more practically-minded delegates: existing institutions such as the Academy in China and the Royal Institute of Siam could serve as 'inter-university' organizations with a regional function. Both the Arab representative and the Georgian delegation made it known that they, too, would cooperate with such an initiative.

But one question remained unanswered: Where was the central institution to be located? After much discussion, it was announced that the ARC's steering committee had appointed a subcommittee for the establishment of a central institute, and that it would be useless at this stage to discuss it further. The delegates were also reminded that the ARC was an exploratory conference rather than an attempt at Asian federation, and a delegate from Afghanistan put the discussion into perspective by adding that, while it was all very interesting, his country at present found it difficult enough to import paper and stationary, let alone anything else.¹¹⁰

Surprisingly enough, it turned out that the question of Asian cooperation in the sphere of politics was almost easier than culture or education. As noted above, the overriding unifier at the ARC was a universal condemnation of imperialism in any shape or form. India was still some months shy of attaining independence; Korea was occupied; Indonesia and Vietnam were fighting the Dutch and French, respectively; China was locked in civil war; and Malaysia's independence was not yet in sight. The post-war world was slowly taking shape, but international institutions did not yet reflect that world. It was in the discussion on what Asia as a whole could do to influence the global political environment that the most powerful continental solidarities emerged.

5.4 Towards an Asian Federation?

One Asia, One World

The idea of Asia speaking with one voice, possibly through an intergovernmental institution or even an Asian federation had also found its origins in the interwar years. As discussed in the introduction, the possible foundation of such a federation had been raised at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress as early as 1921.¹¹¹ Congress President Chittaranjan Das was convinced that 'such a bond of friendship and love, of sympathy and cooperation, between India and the rest of Asia ... is destined to bring about world peace'.¹¹² Federationalist ideas would resurface with great frequency throughout the interwar years, often with an Asian federation as a precursor to a world federation. Sarat Bose had even

¹⁰⁹ Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 216.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹¹ M. Krása, 'The Idea of Pan-Asianism and the Nationalist Movement in India', *Archiv Orientální* 40 (1972): 246.

¹¹² N. C. Banerji, *Asianism and Other Essays* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House 1930).

claimed that any world federation *had* to be preceded by an Asian one as Asia was, among other things, the most populous continent on earth.¹¹³ And Gandhi, who otherwise did not consider himself an internationalist, had accused militarist Japan in the Second World War of destroying the world's chances at federation by dismembering Asia.¹¹⁴ The third Aga Khan, imagining a different cartography of the Asian continent, had proposed the creation of a South- and West-Asian Union.¹¹⁵

This continued at the ARC, where Sutan Shariar called the conference 'a mutual endeavour on the part of all Asians for a better world in which the granting of political, social and economic justice to all will lead to a "One Asia" which will in time expand into a "One World"'.¹¹⁶ Another, unnamed, delegate, likewise noted that the peace of Asia could not be separated from world peace.¹¹⁷

One of Nehru's intentions in convening the ARC had certainly been to take the first step towards an Asian federation. His inaugural address to the conference revealed a sense of mission. He referred directly to Asia's political future in the post-war international constellation, albeit framed in the familiar rhetoric of the interwar years:

In this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour. ... In this atomic age Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part. ... The whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful, and the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace.¹¹⁸

The proceedings show that the conference's participants were themselves aware of the internationalist environment of the early decades of the twentieth century. The first roundtable report refers to the inspiration that nationalist movements across Asia took from the Japanese victory over the Russians in 1905 as well as the cry of 'Asia for the Asiatics'—although raised by Japan 'for its own motives'.¹¹⁹ It was also noted that since Japan's militarist exploits leading up to and during the Second World War, the concept of an Asian bloc had been condemned.¹²⁰ However, the concept should be revived and melded into a just and peaceful form. The conference proceedings reveal two possible forms that such Asian cooperation might take: an Asian Relations Organization as a permanent body to convene conferences that would allow Asia to speak with one voice in the international theatre; or a neutrality bloc, that through force of sheer numbers would allow Asia to stay out of superpower conflicts.

¹¹³ Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 204.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹¹⁵ Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia', 217. As Cemil Aydin has recently demonstrated, this was one of several attempts in this period to combine Pan-Islamism and Pan-Asianism. Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*. See also S. Esenbel, 'Japan's Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945', *American Historical Review* 109:4 (2004): 1140–70.

¹¹⁶ ARC, *Proceedings*, 241.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹⁸ J. Nehru, Inaugural Address, in ARC, *Proceedings*, 23–5.

¹¹⁹ ARC, *Proceedings*, 80.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

Asian Relations Organization

The first, an Asian Relations Organization (ARO), raised sharp differences of opinion. India, Ceylon, Burma, and Iran were in favour; China, Afghanistan, and the Philippines were opposed. Here, the ARC was impeded by its status as an academic and cultural conference. The point was raised that most of the delegates were not political leaders, or in some cases—such as China’s Kuomintang delegates—not fully representative of their country as a whole. With the discussion in deadlock, Nehru made sure that Gandhi, who addressed the conference on its closing day, referred to the plan.¹²¹ Gandhi’s words carried much weight, and an uneasy compromise was reached: an Asian Relations Organization was indeed established with Delhi as its temporary headquarters. It is indicative of the rising Indo-Chinese competition for the leadership of Asia that China hastened to invite the conference to convene in China next time anyway, and this invitation was accepted. This new body was to be non-governmental, but far less academic than its Indian counterpart, the ICWA; it had as its objectives ‘to foster friendly relations and co-operation’ and look after the well-being of the countries of Asia.¹²²

The Asian Relations Organization, much coveted in the interwar period, was set up in New Delhi and provided with a provisional general council before the conference had ended. At the suggestion of Wen Yuan-ning from China, the council had thirty members from all over Asia and consisted of politicians, academics, and public figures alike.¹²³ The organization soon saw the establishment of six national units: Burma, Ceylon, India, Israel, Malaya, and Nepal. But it led a halting existence. The invitation to hold the next conference in China was moot, as it had been issued by Kuomintang representatives who were ousted from China before any conference could be organized. The Chinese Communist Party had not attended the ARC, and did not take the KMT’s place. After the Communist takeover, the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs in Peking did suggest closer affiliations to the ARO, but this was limited to the exchange of publications.¹²⁴ As the India branch dwindled to an office with three rooms and as many full-time staff, the only further conference it organized was on the position of women in South Asia.¹²⁵ Finally, the Asian Relations Organization was completely eclipsed by the Bandung Conference, which was not held under its auspices. Its end was ignominious: it was quietly disbanded by the very person who had dreamt it into being. Nehru wrote to the Organization’s secretary:

I think it is better to wind up the organization because in the present political climate nothing much can be done. As you know, almost from the start of this organization, there have been conflicts among member-states and in such a situation I don’t think

¹²¹ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 70. Original voice recording LoC, Audio-visual department, EMI 7EPE.3005.

¹²² ARC, *Proceedings*, 255.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹²⁴ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 72–3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

any work can be done. ... You have my authority to put a note in the file to say that the Organization is to be wound up with immediate effect.¹²⁶

Neutrality bloc

Perhaps the most lasting achievement of the Asian Relations Conference was to sow the seeds of neutrality and non-alignment, even if both ideas were somewhat ridiculed at the ARC itself. While an Asian bloc was alluded to early in the Conference in the opening addresses of various delegations, it was brought up in earnest by a Malay delegate of Indian origin, John Thivy.¹²⁷ According to him, it was to take the form of refusal of assistance of raw materials, arms, or dockyards in the event of war. If Asia would 'demobilize', world wars could be prevented. Moreover, this would protect the smaller countries of Asia such as Malaya itself, which had no air force, army, or navy. Finally, other Asian countries could thus support independence movements by not lending their facilities to imperialist forces.¹²⁸ This suggestion, though applauded by some of the smaller countries of Southeast Asia, found little support. So little, in fact, that Thivy's lengthy speech on the possible gains from a demobilized Asia received no more than a single sentence in the final report.

Criticism varied—the idea was perceived by some to be insufficient; others considered it too wild. Indonesia suggested a more tangible contribution to the fights going on there and in Vietnam. A Burmese delegate put it simply: 'if we are attacked, we will fight'.¹²⁹ The objection was raised that with the establishment of the United Nations, neutrality would be impossible due to countries' obligations to that body. K. Santhanam, for India, said that they could not be spectators in such an event. Thivy replied that it was not only up to the UN to declare war; countries should always be free to choose peace.¹³⁰ At this, it was claimed that a neutrality bloc would not be enough to reach the goal of independence for all of Asia.¹³¹ And, finally, Vijayalakshmi Pandit proclaimed the idea 'rather vague'.¹³²

The last pronouncement is possibly why the concept of non-alignment would become the subject of much confusion later, even after Belgrade.¹³³ As is reflected in the verbatim reports of the conference, Thivy's idea encompassed a set of concepts that each delegation interpreted differently. The bones of contention were 'neutrality' and 'neutralism'; the conflation of both concepts with nonviolence; and the concept of 'demobilization'. Thivy had claimed his neutrality bloc as a 'dynamic force:' the active and conscious refusal of ports, airfields, and supplies to alien powers. He opposed any interpretation that equated this kind of neutralism with inertia. However, Pandit relegated the concept to precisely that when she

¹²⁶ A. Appadorai, 'The Asian Relations Conference in Perspective', *International Studies* 18:3 (1979): 275–85: 283.

¹²⁷ John Thivy was an Indian lawyer who had settled in Singapore.

¹²⁸ The full quotation is published in Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 58.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 58–9.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³¹ In the opinion of the Vietnamese delegation.

¹³² Interestingly, Sarojini Naidu was among the latter group.

¹³³ See, among others, M. B. Alam, 'The Concept of Non-Alignment: A Critical Analysis,' *World Affairs* 140:2 (1977): 166–85.

called it ‘a nice gesture’, but not one that would ever stop a war. Burmese delegate Mr Rachid went further, stating simply that ‘some of us here’ do not believe in nonviolence.¹³⁴

This confusion of terms is reminiscent of Gandhi’s long struggle with explaining to the world *satyagraha* as an active rather than a passive form of resistance, and his frustrations with people consistently interpreting it as the latter.¹³⁵ In that light, it is somewhat surprising that the idea was misunderstood to this degree, especially by the Indian delegates. Nevertheless, while the proposal did not carry in the ARC, the discussion was not without the desired effect: a year later, several of the ARC countries denied transit rights to Dutch ships and airplanes during the Indonesian crisis.¹³⁶

What the delegations did agree on, was a notion much more similar to neutralism than was perhaps realized at the time: that it was not in the interest of Asia, or its individual countries, to become embroiled in the power struggles of others. Nehru had already framed this in an Asian context when he said:

We stand on the edge of a precipice and there are various forces which pull us on one side in favour of cooperation and peace, and on the other, push us towards the precipice of war and disintegration. I am not enough of a prophet to know what will happen, but I do know that those who desire peace must deprecate separate blocs which necessarily become hostile to other blocs. Therefore, India, in so far as it has a foreign policy, has declared that it wants to remain independent and free of all of these blocs and that it wants to cooperate on equal terms with all countries.¹³⁷

At the ARC, this non-involvement was framed at first in the context of the colonial experience. Domination by another power would just be imperialism in a new guise, as the delegation from Korea was experiencing first-hand. The roundtable report included the unanimous wish that the occupation of Korea would end shortly and that Korea would receive full independence. It is here, rather than at Bandung, that the first glimpses of the non-aligned movement must be located. As the concept of ‘dynamic neutrality’ moved to ‘positive neutralism’, it came to hold the connotation that an uncommitted course signified the freedom to judge each situation on its own merit, which finally became non-alignment.

Much has been said about the successes and failures of non-alignment, which needs not be reiterated here.¹³⁸ It is important to recognize, however, that the movement grew out of a drive for Asian cooperation on the one hand, and an unequivocal rejection of imperialism on the other, and that both had played a significant part in the public imagination since the end of the First World War. The concept of non-alignment did not start at Belgrade—it did not even start at Bandung. In 1963, Michael Brecher wrote that at Bandung, the primacy of anti-

¹³⁴ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 60.

¹³⁵ M. K. Gandhi, letter to unknown addressee, 25 January 1920, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 19:350.

¹³⁶ Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Ceylon, India, and Burma. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 84.

¹³⁷ J. Nehru, ‘We wish for Peace,’ in *India’s Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), 11.

¹³⁸ N. Miskovic and H. Fischer-Tine, eds., *The Cold War and the Postcolonial Moment: Prehistory, Aims and Achievements of the Non-Alignment Movement 50 Years after Belgrade* (forthcoming London: Routledge, 2014).

colonialism and regional autonomy had been declared, and therefore Asia's non-involvement in the bipolar struggle for power between the Soviet Union and United States.¹³⁹ It is argued here that anti-colonialism and regional autonomy were already strongly present in the proceedings of the ARC. As a concept posited, contested, and debated in an Asian setting, the Asian Relations Conference was its first venue.

But if the ARC was the start of something, it was the end of something else. Amitav Acharya has rightly noted that the Asian multilateral conferences of the 1940s and 1950s contributed to Asian regionalism by embedding the Westphalian norms of independence, reciprocity, equality, and non-interference within regional diplomatic and security practice.¹⁴⁰ What they had in common with their European counterparts is that they were consequently instrumental in preserving the status quo rather than creating a brave new world of interregional cooperation. The very fact that after the ARC these conferences were convened by independent Asian states that had lost the common denominator of desiring to oust European imperialism from their continent meant that the desire for Asian unity was ebbing fast. In its unanimous exaltations of Asian brotherhood and unity, and in its attempt to convene 'Asia' in the widest definition possible, the ARC was very much the last of the interwar conferences rather than the first of the post-war ones.

The ARC plucked the fruit of more than two decades of Asian cooperation, both in terms of the pre-existing networks that determined its participants, and in terms of the Asianist rhetoric that permeated the proceedings. As such, it was an outcome of the Asianist enthusiasm of the interwar period much more than a product of the emerging Cold War. Convening the conference had been made more urgent by the prospect of decolonization and the establishment of the United Nations. The presence of several Central Asian Soviet Republics was a telling feature. This too was a continuation of earlier nationalist contacts, and though the conference did not lean significantly to the left, there was little criticism of the policies of the Soviet Union, or of the role played by Communists in the internal politics of any of the countries represented. This overture—on both sides—was never to be repeated. The ARC marked a crucial transitional period and should not be too lightly discarded for its lack of long-term tangible results.

5.5 The road to Bandung

Asia unites for Indonesia: January 1949

Though organized and dominated by India, the ARC had been a product of the cooperation of several Asian nations and had been conceived in that context. The first explicitly *inter-governmental* Asian conference after the war, however, was an Indian initiative.¹⁴¹ After frustration over the inaction of the Security Council in the Dutch offensive on Indonesia, Indian planes had started night flights to break the air and sea blockade imposed upon the

¹³⁹ M. Brecher, 'International Relations and Asian Studies: The Subordinate State System of Southern Asia', *World Politics* 15:2 (1963): 224.

¹⁴⁰ A. Acharya, 'Will Asia's Past be its Future?' *International Security* 28:3 (2003): 159.

¹⁴¹ Though reportedly suggested to Nehru by Prime Minister Thakin Nu of Burma. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 88.

republic with material and financial support, Nehru called for a second Asian conference in Delhi.

The list of invitations was different from that for the ARC, and demonstrates that the Cold War had made its mark on Asia. Neither the Soviet Republics nor Communist Vietnam were invited. Turkey, which had been courted in every Asianist initiative since the early nineteenth century, was invited but refused to attend because ‘it was a European nation’.¹⁴² These absences changed the cartography of what constituted ‘Asia’ at this conference, and created a new demarcation along the political lines of the Cold War. This was a geography of Asia hitherto unknown: the ‘communist north’ had been excluded, and the invitation to China had again been extended to the KMT. But this was an exclusion on both sides: as noted in chapter 4, during Stalin’s time in power, Asian communism was not well-disposed to what it perceived as Asian nationalism. The Middle East, however, was almost fully represented, in opposition to the ARC, where it had been represented by a single observer on behalf of the Arab states. A possible explanation is that their hopes of international cooperation had been directed eastwards because of Palestine; Jansen has suggested that the issue of Indonesia, as the most populous Muslim country in the world, also held special significance to the Arab states.¹⁴³ Finally, the map of Asia had, for the first and only time, come to incorporate Australia and New Zealand. However, this had more to do with the location of Indonesia and recognition of the Australian contribution to the Indonesian struggle rather than with Australia’s position vis-à-vis Asia. However, the fact that Australia decided to attend with a full delegation—in spite of opposition both at home and in the United Kingdom—is an indicator that the Australian government was acutely aware of its physical location in a rapidly decolonizing world.

It is not just for the peculiarities of its Asian cartographies, however, that this conference deserves more attention than it has previously received. First of all, it was a daring feat to organize an international political conference critiquing the United Nations in 1949. It was perceived as such, too, both by the Western press—which viewed it with apprehension—and by the Indian press—which viewed it with pride. But most important, the Delhi conference on Indonesia marks a moment when a concrete political expression of Asian unity was still the most favoured outcome in the Indian public sphere and the main focus of the press. And although the venue for the conference was less public than the grounds of the Purana Qila had been, the public was no less present: All India Radio made special arrangements to report on the proceedings and published the time and frequencies in all major newspapers.¹⁴⁴ On the opening day of the conference, the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote in an editorial:

Today is another historic day in the history of Asia. For the Asian Conference, meeting in New Delhi, represents a notice to the Western World that Asia is determined to be mistress of her own fate and destiny, freed, every inch of her, from the imperialist domination of any European country. ... The West has got to

¹⁴² Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 200.

¹⁴³ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 84.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Asian Conference Proceedings on AIR’, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 19 January 1949, 9.

understand that it cannot—the time is past—argue in respect of any Asian country as if that country was in any sense any part of it.¹⁴⁵

As the conference opened and the customary welcome messages were read, all participants hastened to emphasize that the conference did not intend to form a hostile bloc; nor was it meant to impose sanctions on any other regime. Rather, the conference wanted to create the political momentum for the cessation of hostilities in Indonesia and the restoration of authority to the Indonesian republic. Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, the representative for Pakistan, restored the conference to the sphere of the UN when he remarked, that it had convened seventeen full members of the UN and one soon to be admitted, which meant that thirty per cent of the UN was represented at Delhi.¹⁴⁶

After the first day, it turned out that the various proposals for ending the hostilities in Indonesia largely overlapped. These included a ceasefire, the immediate release of jailed Indonesian leaders, an end to the blockade, and the interim government's control over the armed forces. The only dissent was as to the order in which these four steps should take place. This unanimity was not lost on the Indian press. The *Bombay Chronicle* reported the proceedings on its front page, sure that the solidarity of this conference would lead to something bigger:

Never before a conference with such potentialities for good opened in the whole of Asia as it was in New Delhi this morning. If the sentiments expressed by the delegates were really implemented, the conference will become Parliament of Asian people, hostile to none, yet a bulwark of their power, safeguarding their interest particularly at the international organization.¹⁴⁷

This was fully endorsed by another journalist, who even saw the place such an 'Asian Parliament' was to occupy in the international theatre:

Is it not natural that the free countries of Asia should begin to think of some more permanent arrangement than this conference for effective mutual consultation and concerted effort in the pursuit of common aims, not in a spirit of selfishness or hostility to any other nation or group of nations, but in order to strengthen and bring nearer fulfilment the aims and ideals of the Charter of the United Nations?¹⁴⁸

The conference was indeed both efficient and effective. Two days later, a drafting committee had already formulated a resolution on the Indonesian situation, which was cabled to the UN Security Council that very night. The most bellicose proposals, such as immediate cessation of all Marshall Aid to the Netherlands, had disappeared, but all demands for a fast transfer of power to the Indonesian Republic had been kept. The Security Council was also pressed to take action 'under the wide powers conferred upon it by the Charter' in case of non-

¹⁴⁵ Editorial, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 20 January 1949, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ 'Nehru Leads Asia Against Foreign Aggression,' *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 January 1949, 1.

¹⁴⁸ 'Asia for the Asians', *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 January 1949, 9.

compliance with the Council's final resolution, which, it was noted, the UN member states gathered at Delhi supported fully.

At the ARC, Nehru as well as many of the delegates had been determined to create a permanent institution, that would further cement Asian unity. The history of the Asian Relations Organization's failure was already clear by the time the Indonesia Conference was held in 1949. Nevertheless, the success of the Indonesia conference reawakened a dormant parliamentary Pan-Asianism in both the delegates and the public that harked back to the early interwar years. After the drafting committee had commenced its work on the Indonesian resolution, the conference moved to the question of further cooperation. The Philippines advocated a 'permanent organization of Asian states functioning as a regional body' and Yemen envisioned 'a Union of Asiatic States to make a machinery for consultation'.¹⁴⁹ Both were careful not to call it a 'bloc'. But Nehru was hesitant this time; there was already one half-defunct Asian organization in Delhi; why have another? But his counter-proposal for a consultative committee drawn from Asia's ambassadors in Delhi was considered insufficient. It is ironic that at the ARC, several delegates declared at the first roundtable that they would not have come if they had known it would be a political conference. Now delegates said their governments would not have sent them 'if they had thought it was not going to lead to future cooperation on all matters'.¹⁵⁰

The Indian press, for one, was sure that things would not end with this conference, and saw the gathering as a promise: 'The Asian Conference is a promise that both political domination and economic exploitation will no more be tolerated and that the forces of Asian Nationalism will unite to throw off all aggression'.¹⁵¹ Besides, now that there was agreement on Indonesia, the public could hardly expect their governments to let the matter rest with the sending of a telegram to the Security Council: 'Since the conference was convened to discuss a specific issue, namely, Indonesia, the setting up of a body like a "Standing Committee" of the participating countries to continue dealing with the problem till it is successfully solved is taken for granted'.¹⁵² For good measure, the *Bombay Chronicle* decided to drive home the point that the political clout for closer cooperation existed by publishing all messages the conference had received since it had opened. These ranged from Emir Abdul Karim in Cairo ('It is my prayer and belief that the conference will reach unanimous positive decision on this grave matter which the Arabs and people of Asia can no longer tolerate') to the National Student Conference of the Philippines, who 'urge[d] the formation of an Asian Federation to support Indonesian Independence and safeguard freedom, and promote the welfare of the Asiatic people as a step towards the maintenance of world peace'.¹⁵³

Like its predecessors, this conference would fail to achieve a federated Asia, but viewed from New Delhi, the conference had achieved what it had set out to do: six days later, the Security Council resolved its deadlock over the Indonesian crisis. A United Nations

¹⁴⁹ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 93.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Editorial, *Bombay Chronicle*, 21 January 1949, 6.

¹⁵² 'Rapid Progress of Asian Conference—General Agreement on Draft Resolution on Indonesia', *Bombay Chronicle*, 22 January 1949, 1.

¹⁵³ 'Rapid Progress of Asian Conference,' 1.

Mediation Commission was set up and the release of political prisoners was demanded.¹⁵⁴ They remained in prison three months later, when a majority of the participating countries reconvened in Delhi and this time decided to ask the Security Council for economic sanctions against the Dutch, as well as a denial of all land, sea, and air facilities. They also they decided to start delivering aid to Indonesia themselves.¹⁵⁵ When the resolution from this meeting was released on April 13, negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia resumed. Although the conference may have played only a small role in helping Indonesia achieve independence, the Indian public held it up as a demonstration of what a united Asia could achieve.

Increasing competition: 1950–4

In the intervening years between the Delhi conference on Indonesia in 1949 and the Bandung Conference in 1955, Asia would come to be more sharply divided along the lines of the Cold War. As will be shown below, bloc formation on the continent would play a large role in the failures of the latter conference, despite the enduring legend of the ‘Bandung spirit’. Under varying degrees of political pressure, Iran, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines ‘chose’ alignment to the United States. China, North Korea, and North Vietnam aligned with the Soviet Union. Due to the American forces present in Japan and South Korea, neither could be considered unaligned. Turkey became a member of NATO and moved further away from Asia. Iraq conferred with India in 1954 prior to joining the Baghdad Pact. Hesitant about aligning itself to either bloc, it first sought a defensive alliance with India and wanted a guarantee of military assistance in the event of an invasion. When this did not result in a bilateral agreement, the Baghdad Pact was concluded.¹⁵⁶ In the case of Pakistan, too, its inclusion in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization or SEATO, was a direct result of failed negotiations with India, in this case of a different nature: it joined SEATO primarily for fear of further deterioration of its relations with that country. From mid-1954 to mid-1955, intra-Asian competition increased sharply.

Other than India, several countries were explicitly unaligned in this period, albeit for very different reasons. Laos and Cambodia had their non-alignment codified through the Geneva agreement on Indo-China of 1954. For Ceylon, non-alignment was a matter of economics, as its two main export products, tea and rubber, were exported almost exclusively to each respective bloc: tea to the West, and rubber to the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷ Indonesia reported that its primary consideration for choosing non-alignment was internal reconstruction.¹⁵⁸ A survey of these underlying motives for non-alignment reveals that the concept was far from doctrinaire for many, and that it might prove a shaky foundation for further regional cooperation.

It was under these circumstances that two smaller conferences were convened in 1954, first at Colombo and then at Bogor, south of Jakarta. Burma, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Pakistan (as the only aligned power) used these meetings to discuss closer cooperation. The proposal to organize another Asian conference was on the table, with Indonesia eager to host.

¹⁵⁴ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 92.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

The conference was decided upon in Colombo; the Bogor meeting was intended to hammer out the details. The decisions about whom to invite signal the death of Asianism at the inter-governmental level. Not because Bandung was to become an Afro-Asian conference, with a second continent entering the equation, but because Asianist geographical imaginings were abandoned in favour of a very different cartography: that of the Cold War.

First of all, inviting the Soviet Union's Asian republics was no longer a consideration. In fact, by 1954 Soviet Central Asia had lost its Asian identity altogether in the eyes of the Colombo powers. U Nu said that 'it is time the Asians told them to stop interfering in our affairs'.¹⁵⁹ The Colombo powers were 'us'; Central Asia had become 'them'. This was an interesting decision insofar as the same did not apply to China, which was said to be Asian first, and communist second.¹⁶⁰ Mongolia, on the other hand, was firmly within the Soviet orbit and therefore not invited. The continental principle of Bandung would be partly salvaged by the presence of several non-self-governing territories. However, the emphasis on the aligned and non-aligned would spell the end of Asianism.

Enthusiasm for Asian federation was waning among Asia's governments, and it became increasingly clear that the configurations of the Cold War had rendered the concept of continental solidarity vis-à-vis the West moot. The forces that had driven it—the pooling of efforts to realize a leap in development, education, and science that had marked the ARC, and the support for the fight against colonialism that had spurred the Indonesia conference—were now largely sought in other areas. However, Asianism was well and truly alive among both the political opposition and the general public, who still considered both development and imperialism vital concerns that should be addressed in an Asian context.

The 1940s and early 1950s saw a variety of Asian conferences in this context, among which were an Asian Writer's Conference, an Asian History Conference, and not least the Asian regional conference of the ILO (see chapter 2). Out of the last, a new initiative had arisen that would come to the fore during the very time that Asia's governments were becoming increasingly divided: an Asian socialist movement. The ILO conference at Delhi had once more thrown into sharp relief the Asian lag in development and its impact on both industrial and agricultural workers. A group of representatives from Asia's socialist parties—at first consisting of India, Burma, and Indonesia, felt that this lag was best addressed by social-democratic means. This time, Burma took the initiative, and preliminary meetings were held in Rangoon in March 1952. It was here, rather than at the intergovernmental meetings of Colombo and Bogor, that the internationalist spirit of the interwar years was kept alive. The group's main concerns were 'to strengthen relations between the Asian socialist parties' to 'champion the cause of all colonial and oppressed peoples and guide the freedom movements towards the establishment of democratic national independence', and to cooperate 'for the maintenance of world peace'.¹⁶¹ When they looked back on the incipient stages of the movement in 1956, they saw themselves as the real torch bearers of international socialism in the context of the imperial exploitation of Asia:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 158.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 207.

¹⁶¹ NMML, *Three Years of Asian Socialist Conference*—Preparatory committee Second Congress of the Asian Socialist Conference, Bombay, November 1956, i.

The rise of Asian nationalism was one of the most significant features of the post-war world situation. But what was still more significant was the emergence of strong and well organized Socialist parties, firmly rooted in the patriotic upheavals of their respective lands, following the guidance from the teachings of Marx and Engels, holding a fervent belief in the innate importance of the individual as a man, and consequently, in the human values of the Socialist revolution, wedded to social change and democracy. Conscious of their strength and historic role, devoting full attention and study to the peculiar problems and needs of the over-populated and underdeveloped countries of Asia, with confidence and self-assurance, they refused to become slaves to either totalitarian communism or capitalist democracies of the West.¹⁶²

In January 1953, 177 delegates and observers convened in Rangoon. The invited political parties were all moderate socialist parties whose views were roughly in line with the Socialist International. They also fitted with the geography of Asia as it had been constructed by the ILO regional conference. Professed communist states had been left out. Represented were Indonesia, India, Burma, Malaya, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, and Japan. The conference had a choice of parties to invite from the last two. For Israel, the centrist Mapai party attended, rather than the more leftist Mapam. In the case of Japan, both the right and left wings had indicated their interest, and both had been involved in the preparatory process, so they were both invited. Syrian and Iraqi delegations had been invited, but declined to attend. An Egyptian delegation attended, but staged a walkout early in the conference over a disagreement with the Israeli delegation, and Lebanon followed suit.¹⁶³

The conferences were strongly committed to combatting imperialism, and the resulting partner organizations and their projects reflected this. A permanent bureau was set up with Burma, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaya, Pakistan, and Vietnam. The administrative headquarters was Rangoon. This time, there was a marked move to lessen Indian influence on the movement; only one Indian was invited to take up a position in the permanent bureau: Praja Socialist Party member Madhav Gokhale. Over the course of the first conference and the subsequent meetings of the bureau in Hyderabad (August 1953), Kalaw (Burma, May 1954), and Tokyo (August 1954) a set of initiatives emerged. These echoed the internationalist spirit of the interwar years in three different ways. First, they sought to unite the socialist parties of Asia in order to cooperate with larger international bodies including the International Union of Socialist Youth, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Socialist Alliance of Yugoslavia, and the Popular Socialist Movements in Latin America.¹⁶⁴ Second, they were committed to world peace as a phenomenon that would emerge if their initiatives were successful:

World peace and the possibilities of democratic socialist development of Asia are inseparably tied up and mutually conditioned. World peace is threatened by three main

¹⁶² Ibid., 2.

¹⁶³ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 265.

¹⁶⁴ NMML, *Three years of Asian Socialist Conference*, 6.

factors, namely colonialism, economic disequilibrium and the politics of spheres of influence. The association of Asian Socialists with the freedom struggle in the world constitutes an important element in the role which Asia can and should play in the maintenance of world peace.¹⁶⁵

Finally, they sought to engage their alliance to obtain freedom for areas still under colonial rule, with an emphasis on a free Asia supporting an un-free Africa.

The latter was not limited to wordy resolutions professing Asian-African solidarity, although these occurred too. On the initiative of the Asian Socialist Conference, its member parties and partner leagues observed a yearly ‘Dependent Peoples Freedom Day’ on 30 October. This was meant to ‘encourage dependent peoples in their fight for independence and against poverty. It should strengthen the fraternal bonds between the fighters for freedom throughout the world, in the countries behind the Iron Curtain as well as those under imperialist rule’.¹⁶⁶ The question that would come to plague Bandung—whether Soviet domination could be equated with imperialism, and whether it was an imperialism equal to or perhaps worse than ‘European’ imperialism—was not seen as an issue here. From the outset, the conference rejected both the capitalist and communist routes in favour of a social-democratic path of development. Two more tangible initiatives emerged as well: the conference arranged for a scholarship programme for African students to learn about cooperative movements, farming, and political organization.¹⁶⁷ It also set up an Anti-Colonial Bureau in Rangoon, which gathered information on colonial struggles and distributed them through a monthly newsletter. One of their further tasks was pressing the international theatre for universal membership of the United Nations.

In the run-up to the second Asian Socialist Conference held in Bombay, the question of non-alignment, which was well on its way to becoming Asia’s most pressing political issue, could not be evaded. But whereas at Bandung non-alignment would replace the idea of ‘Asia’ with the divisions of the Cold War, the Asian Socialist Conference utilized the concept of non-alignment for an explicitly Asianist agenda, stating that ‘the independent position of the Asian countries and their freedom of movement with regard to the problems of world peace do not mean ideological neutralism or the policy of sacrificing the liberty of other peoples or nations to one’s own selfish interests’.¹⁶⁸ Instead, they should commit themselves to democratic government and concentrate specifically on Asian problems such as bettering the lot of agricultural workers along the line of the ILO convention on minimum standards (1952).¹⁶⁹ Equating foreign imperialism with domestic feudalism, the two should be combated in tandem: ‘the Asian upheaval ... is inseparably tied up with Asia’s rejection of the yoke of imperialism and feudalism, and with her search for those forms of social organization which will ensure a higher level of production’.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁶ NMML, *Three years of Asian Socialist Conference*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

The Asian Socialist Conference, which would fade into the background towards the late 1950s, gradually breaking into smaller-scale initiatives, kept Asianist internationalism alive beyond the Bandung years. It would also be instrumental in influencing a new set of initiatives in the later 1950s, which will be examined in the next section. One of very few authors to write on the Asian Socialist Conference, G. H. Jansen concluded that ‘the apologetic mumblings of the Socialists produced no more practical results than had meetings of the Afro-Asian governments’.¹⁷¹ He termed the Asian Socialist Conference no more than an ‘echo’ of the ‘real’ Afro-Asian movement.¹⁷² Given the short lifespan of the conference, and seen from the perspective of inter-governmental Afro-Asianism, this is a fair assessment. However, the movement is evaluated differently here for two reasons. First, if one is to take Asianism not as an exclusively political instrument, but as a vision of a fair and just world order that penetrated much deeper layers of society, the Asian Socialist Conference convened an Asia that sought to carve out a place for itself on that basis. Second, it did so not as a marginal movement, but as an alliance of parties whose delegates to the conference were well-known figures such as Sutan Shahrir and Ram Manohar Lohia.¹⁷³

The Bandung myth

It was in this context of waxing post-war Asianist solidarity at the non-governmental level, and waning Asianism at the governmental level, that the Bandung Conference was finally convened. Held in April 1955, the Bandung Conference is still widely recognized as the most successful Asian-African conference as well as *the* conference that created a sense of Asian-African solidarity and condemned colonialism in all its manifestations. In fact, it was neither. The famous resolution on colonialism was in fact the result of the biggest struggle at the conference, which divided the participants between those who considered the resolution to include Soviet imperialism, and those who did not. The careful wording of the resolution was a compromise that left it open to be interpreted either way. The press too, had its doubts even before the conference began. On April 12, the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote:

There was a time when the region covering the Middle and Near East and the Indian Subcontinent had a noticeable and welcome unity in the midst of diversities. It all began to change not so long ago. ... The area is no longer compact in the one important sense which counts today. There are conflicts between Turkey and the Arab countries, between Pakistan and most of the Arab countries, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to say nothing of the post-partition issues still bedevilling Indo-Pakistani relations. ... No other region is suffering such unfortunate dissensions, and therefore if for no other reason there is an urgent need to restore some common understanding and friendliness. The prospects are not exactly promising.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 267.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Sutan Shahrir was Prime Minister of Indonesia from 1945 to 1947 and founder of the social democratic PSI in 1948. This party participated in the Asian Socialist Conference but was banned by Sukarno in 1960. Ram Manohar Lohia had helped to found the Congress Socialist Party in India in 1934 and served as an MP after Independence.

¹⁷⁴ Editorial, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 12 April 1955, 4.

G. H. Jansen has dubbed the ‘Bandung Spirit’ the ‘Bandung Myth’, for the region never put in practice the solidarity the conference is said to have created. It was a myth indeed—but not necessarily for the reasons Jansen proposes. The abandonment of Asianism in favour of Afro-Asianism was not the issue. Quite the contrary; the Indian press, still eager to promote Asian unity, largely ignored the African presence at Bandung and framed it as an Asian conference. However, despite Bandung’s precursors and the rousing speeches of Nehru and Sukarno, who tried to keep the Asian internationalist moment alive, neither Asianism nor Afro-Asianism were the driving force of the gathering. The decline of older Asianist principles had set in with the Indonesia conference of 1949, and deteriorated further with the compromises of the Colombo and Bogor meetings. The fate of Asianism was sealed by the fact that even the rallying point of anti-imperialism, which had driven the internationalist moment for decades, could no longer produce agreement. The most definitive outcome of Bandung was the demonstration that Asianism, or indeed Afro-Asianism, did not work on an intergovernmental level. To find continuity in the internationalist moment, we should look not towards intergovernmental cooperation, but towards the non-state level, for it was here that Asianism had flourished throughout the interwar years, and it was here that it continued.

5.6 Conclusion

The Asian Relations Conference was the first in a series of Asian comparable gatherings in the post-war period. It was convened on the wings of Asianism and visions of Asian unity that had held various elements of Indian civil society in its grip since the early 1920s. The ARC at Delhi was unique in several ways. It was a gathering of academic and cultural organizations representing the nations of Asia and all issues pertaining to Asia, were discussed in a non-political manner, from the emerging Cold War to decolonization and Asian representation at the UN. It was the only conference to invite all of Asia, including not only Soviet Russia and the Central Asian Soviet Republics, but also US-occupied Japan. This inclusive Asianist atmosphere spoke strongly to the internationalist moment of the interwar years, much more so than to the emerging constellations of decolonized nations in the Cold War. This was due in no small part to the strong continuity of individuals and groups represented at the ARC. Nevertheless, the emerging shape of the post-war constellation was not without impact on the proceedings.

The ARC was not successful in building a lasting Asian organization. At the governmental gatherings of Bogor and Colombo, which were precursors to the Bandung Conference, it became clear that the internationalist moment could not be continued successfully at the inter-governmental level. However, it has been argued here that the internationalist moment was not buried at Bandung. Rather, Asianism continued where it had always been strongest: at the non-state level. The Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Movement (AAPSM) was one venue where anti-imperialist solidarities in a regionalist inflection continued.

Much like the Asian Socialist Conference, the AAPSM was strongly wedded to the ideal of world peace. It originated at the Stockholm meeting of the World Peace Council in June 1954, where ‘Asia’ was represented by India, China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Syria,

Lebanon, and the Soviet Union, who was in this case included once more as 'Asia'. The separate gathering of Asian delegates there had been an Indian initiative. Rameshwari Nehru reported of that meeting, that 'a spirit of kinship tied the Asian delegates with one another. A general desire for a get-together was felt'.¹⁷⁵ Together, they decided to start a popular movement, unencumbered by the considerations of the *Realpolitik* that seemed to plague the Colombo powers during the same months. As such, the cornerstone of the movement had little to do with prospects of actual federation, and everything to do with the ideals of Afro-Asian brotherhood and solidarity. The organization of their first manifestation was put in the hands of an Indian committee headed by Rameshwari Nehru,¹⁷⁶ and was to be held in Delhi. To the dismay of both Nehru and Sukarno, it was to be held only eleven days prior to the Bandung Conference. Nehru explicitly distanced himself from the initiative in order not to offend Sukarno.¹⁷⁷ And there were other reasons for doing so: for one, the Soviet Union, which was explicitly not invited to Bandung, sent a delegation to the Delhi meeting. Moreover, the AAPSM never distanced itself from either communism in general or the Soviet bloc in particular.

On April 11, a hundred and eighty-eight delegates from a further thirteen Asian countries convened in Delhi. The Indian government, which was not supportive of the initiative, underestimated the popular appeal that Asianism still possessed in the mid-1950s, both in India and across Asia. Unlike Bandung, a conference that could be followed only through journalistic reports, the AAPSM was held in the open air and was attended by several thousands of people. In this sense, the manifestation of Asian brotherhood and solidarity was perhaps more like the ARC than any other conference held since. It has often been remarked, not least by Jansen, that the ARC was marked by a sense of innocence, perhaps even naiveté, towards the shaping of post-war Asia. If that was indeed the case, then the AAPSM was an explicit attempt to recapture that innocence. In a large field, banners had been erected in Hindi and English with cries such as 'Long live friendship of the Asian countries and the peace of the world'.¹⁷⁸

The delegates and participants rallied around anti-colonialism and nuclear non-proliferation, all in the cause of world peace. By the closing session, the audience was estimated to have grown to a staggering twenty-five thousand participants. As Rameshwari Nehru later reported: 'All sat in pin-drop silence giving cheers of welcome to the delegates'. Three Chinese girls sang a song in Hindi to the words *Hindi Cheeni bhai bhai*—Indians and Chinese are brothers'.¹⁷⁹ Significantly, while the Bandung Conference would wither away as a strongly divided voting bloc in the United Nations, it was the AAPSM that would continue to celebrate the Bandung Spirit. Claiming Bandung's production of international solidarity as its own, the AAPSM's next meeting would, in the words of its convener, Egypt's Anwar Sadat,¹⁸⁰ 'meet partly in honour of the spirit of Bandung and as a reminder of the principles

¹⁷⁵ NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Circular.

¹⁷⁶ NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Preparatory Committee, Conference of Asian Countries.

¹⁷⁷ NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Jawaharlal Nehru to Rameshwari Nehru, 11 March 1955.

¹⁷⁸ NMML, RNPP, File 29: Afro-Asian Solidarity, 1955-8. Speech, 7 April 1955.

¹⁷⁹ *Asians Resolve to End Colonial Rule*, *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 April 1955, 1.

¹⁸⁰ A close collaborator of Nasser, who would become one of the three pivotal figures in the organization of the Belgrade conference and the later non-aligned Movement.

and ideals it stands for, and partly to push it a step forward'.¹⁸¹ By this time, the AAPSM had become an Afro-Asianist initiative, and with it, the committee had moved to Cairo in 1956. This decision had been taken at the Asian Writer's Conference at New Delhi. This is indicative of the nature of the AAPSM: like the Asianist initiatives described in the previous chapters, it was driven by intellectuals and (self-proclaimed) revolutionaries. The AAPSM became a project of journalists and writers. The initiative for the second manifestation came from Anup Singh, an Indian left-wing socialist; Yang Shou, a Chinese novelist; Anatoly Sofranov, a Russian author; and Masaharu Hatanaka, a Japanese journalist.

The Cairo gathering, held in December 1957, was perhaps the largest Afro-Asian conference ever held, with five hundred delegates representing forty-five countries and colonial territories. Over the next four years, it would evolve into a left-wing international nucleus that drew together the Afro-Asian Youth Movement (1959, Cairo), the Afro-Asian Writers' Movement (Tashkent, 1958), and the Afro-Asian Women's Movement (Cairo, 1961). Together with these organizations, manifestations of international solidarity continued to be held on issues such as Laos, Vietnam, and Mongolia. Jansen complains that the movement never gained 'respectability'.¹⁸² However, the AAPSM never sought any 'official' status on the international stage. It sought an international voice—and this the AAPSM accomplished by becoming the famed Bandung Spirit that Bandung itself had never had. However, if it did not seek to affect international politics directly, international politics directly affected it—the collapse of the movement was augured in by war between the two biggest countries of the movement, representing almost a third of the world's population: the AAPSM would not survive the Sino-Indian Border War.

¹⁸¹ NMML, RNPP, File 28 File 28 Afro-Asian Solidarity Correspondence relating to 1954-64: Cairo Conference December 1957–January 1958.

¹⁸² Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 263.

