

“Sukarno’s students” in Czechoslovakia A brief contribution to Czechoslovak-Indonesian relations in the 1950s and the 1960s

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Abstract

In the mid-1950s, communist Czechoslovakia established diplomatic relations with several of the newly emerging states in the decolonising world and with states that were leaning towards socialism themselves. In building bilateral relations, Czechoslovak diplomacy often benefited from earlier, interwar cooperation and from traditional interests in the local knowledge of these “exotic” regions acquired during previous trade relations. Whilst the region of Southeast Asia lay largely on the periphery of these interests, the situation radically changed from the middle of the twentieth century. The ideology of “proletarian internationalism” played a key role here, and after 1956 it gave a new impetus to engagement with developing countries, signalling a shift in Soviet (and thus Czechoslovak) foreign policy. Although the Vietnamese are one of the largest national minorities in the Czech Republic today, in the late 1950s high expectations were placed on another state in the region: Indonesia. This study provides a brief reconstruction of the mutual relations between the two countries and the student communities that were formed in Czechoslovakia within this foreign policy context.¹

Keywords

foreign students, third world, Sukarno, Indonesia, international relations,
communist Czechoslovakia, diaspora

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Between Prague and Jakarta

First, it is necessary to briefly recall some of the key moments in relations between the two countries, which I consider crucial for the subject examined in the study and that are essentially unknown in the general historical consciousness of the former Czechoslovakia. In addition to the secondary and other open sources, I base the article primarily on the — incomplete and uncatalogued — archive collection of the University of 17th November, which is housed in the National Archives of the Czech Republic Prague (Národní archiv České republiky, NA), and on the collection of the Indonesian territorial department stored in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí České republiky, AMZV ČR). I also draw on the valuable information provided by published interviews with former students and their descendants.² I have spoken on many occasions with Soegeng Soejono,³ the informal chronicler of the Indonesian diaspora in the Czech Republic. The Indonesian artist Vincent Rumahloine, who through his art captured the issues faced by the Indonesian community during his artistic residency at Prague's MeetFactory in the spring of 2019, also provided me with invaluable observations. The present study is based on my preliminary observations and is my first publication on the topic in a scholarly journal. My research is still ongoing.

Perhaps the most pertinent image of the Indonesian archipelago in Czech literature and social consciousness was that drawn by Karel Čapek (1890–1938)'s novel *Krakatit*, first published in 1924. The inspiration for the destructive force in the novel that “in everyday life grows amongst the people”⁴ was probably the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano in the Sunda Strait in August 1883. It is, however, questionable to what degree readers may be aware of the volcano's connection to today's Indonesia. Another example does not inspire such doubts. The artistic reflections of the poet Konstantin Biebl (1898–1951), who travelled to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon, a colony of the British crown) and to Java and Sumatra (then part of the Dutch East Indies) between 1926 and 1927, are still remembered and the publications are re-issued to this day.⁵ The motifs of exoticism, the desire for the Orient,

2 Zpěvák a judista Rony Marton (Singer and judoka Rony Marton) on the Czech television programme *Babylon*, 26. 8. 2008 – see www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

3 Author's interview with Soegeng Soejono, 17. 10. 2017, and 30. 4. 2019.

4 LEHÁR, Jan – STICH, Alexandr – JANÁČKOVÁ, Jaroslava – HOLÝ, Jiří: *Česká literatura od počátků k dnešku* (Czech literature from the beginning to today). Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Praha 1998, p. 590.

5 BIEBL, Konstantin: *S lodí, jež dováží čaj a kávu. Poesie 1926–1927* (With the boat that imports tea and coffee. Poetry 1926–1927). Odeon, Praha 1928. For a more recent publication, see BIEBL, Konstantin: *Cesta na Jávě* (Travels to Java). Labyrint, Praha 2001.

its colours and scents were common in the works of many Czech poets,⁶ but it was only Biebl who actually visited these places.

Czechoslovakia’s footprints in Southeast Asia were also represented by the Baťa shoe company, established in 1931 in Batavia (present day Jakarta). The retail network rapidly expanded to other locations. At the end of the 1930s, a factory opened in the Dutch East Indies and production and sales gradually increased in the region.⁷

In 1942, during the Second World War, Japan occupied the territory of present-day Indonesia. Japan was perceived both as an occupier and an ally, the motto of its propaganda being: *Asia to the Asians!* The Japanese offered the possibility of independence from the Netherlands and an opportunity for Indonesian nationalists, who had long been imprisoned or interned. Paradoxically, the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies contributed to the linguistic unification of the territory. Two days after the end of the Japanese occupation, on 17 August 1945, Sukarno,⁸ the charismatic leader of the Indonesian nationalists, proclaimed the new, unified state of Indonesia on the territory of the former Dutch East Indies. The new state also adopted a new state language: Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), which at the time was lexically and grammatically identical to Malaysian.⁹ The borders of the newly formed Indonesia corresponded to the borders of the former Dutch colony, with the exception of the western section; Western New Guinea, referred to as West Irian, only became part of Indonesia in the 1960s. In the subsequent four years after the proclamation of independence, the new state struggled for its existence and for international recognition. At the time of the Indonesians’ fiercest struggle for independence, the 1st World Festival of Youths and Students took place in Prague in 1947 and Indonesian’s fight became the leitmotif of the festival,

6 The avant-garde literary movement developed in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. It had its roots in proletarian poetry that is mainly associated with the literary group Devětsil. In addition to Konstantin Biebl, its prominent members included Vítězslav Nezval, František Halas, Vladimír Holan, Jaroslav Seifert, Karel Teige, Vladislav Vančura, Vilém Závada and Jaroslav Jan Paulík. See LEHÁR, Jan – STICH, Alexandr – JANÁČKOVÁ, Jaroslava – HOLÝ, Jiří: *Česká literatura od počátků k dnešku*, p. 575.

7 See svet.tomasbata.org/asia/indonesie (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

8 Sukarno (1901–1970), sometimes mistakenly referred to as Ahmed (Achmed) Sukarno in the Czech sources, studied at the Bandung Institute of Technology. He refused to cooperate with the Dutch and in 1928 established the Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI). In his speeches he linked ancient Javan mythology and legends to modern nationalism. Sukarno was convicted of agitating against Dutch rule and imprisoned between 1930 and 1934 (his defence is available in Czech, see SUKARNO: *Indonésie žaluje /Indonesia presses charges/*. Orbis, Praha 1959, translated by Miroslav Oplít). Following his release, he was arrested again and interned on the island of Flores. He was only released at the beginning of the Japanese occupation, in early 1942. Sukarno dismissed Marxism as an ideology that would lead to liberation and instead created his own socialist political ideology, Marhaenism, which was a national movement based on the ordinary, “little” people and without the presence of the national bourgeoisie in the country. His ideas were mainly derived from Karl Kautský and his comrades in the II. International.

9 PETRŮ, Tomáš: *Indonéština jako politický nástroj. Od jazyka revoluce k byrokratické „papaláštině“ (Indonesian as a political tool. From the language of the revolution to the bureaucratic officialese)*. *Nový Orient*, 2012, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp. 49–54.

which adopted the Indonesian word *merdeka*, meaning freedom, as its motto. Around 17,000 delegates from all over the world participated in the festival.¹⁰

The intellectual interest in Czechoslovakia for this region of Southeast Asia is evident. For example, in the academic year 1953/1954 it was possible to study the Indonesian language as an individual degree programme at the Faculty of Philology, Charles University in Prague.¹¹ Most of the subjects were taught by Miroslav Opl, a translator and member of staff at the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Československá akademie věd, ČSAV).¹² It is worth noting that, for obvious reasons, the study plan included learning Dutch as well. Dutch was taught by Olga Krijtová, the wife of the Dutch national Hans Krijt.¹³ An Indonesian lecturer, whose name is unfortunately not mentioned in the sources, also taught at the faculty.¹⁴ The first graduate of the programme was Zorica Dubovská (born 1926)¹⁵, who was later employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but who was also a language teacher and author of several scholarly and linguistic publications. The establishment of the field demonstrates the interdependence of political interests with the academic sphere as well as the promotion and favouring of certain scholarly subjects according to contemporary political interests. There are several further examples, the most well-known is the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology in Prague, which was established in 1958 (or 1959)¹⁶, not long after the Suez Crisis,

10 DUBOVSKÁ, Zorica – PETRŮ, Tomáš – ZBOŘIL, Zdeněk: *Dějiny Indonésie* (The history of Indonesia). Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Praha 2005, p. 437.

11 For political reasons, the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague was divided into a Faculty of Philosophy and History and a Faculty of Philology from 1951 to 1959. BEČVÁŘ, Jindřich – HAVRÁNEK, Jan – POUŠTA, Zdeněk: *Dějiny Univerzity Karlovy IV, 1918–1990* (The History of Charles University IV, 1918–1990). Univerzita Karlova, Praha 1998, p. 446.

12 *Archiv Univerzity Karlovy* (Archive of Charles University), f. (Fund) Filozofická fakulta UK/FF UK (Faculty of Arts), Seznam přednášek (List of lectures, so-called Karolinka) 1953–1954.

13 Hans Krijt (1927–2011) fled to Czechoslovakia from the Netherlands in 1947, as did many of his peers. He had deserted the army in protest at the deployment against the struggle to liberate Indonesia and faced seven and a half years in prison in his homeland, while in Czechoslovakia his safety was guaranteed. Czechoslovak state officials publicly condemned the Dutch action. Krijt graduated from the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Filmová akademie múzických umění, FAMU) in 1955. Until the mid-1960s he worked as a director and documentary filmmaker for Czechoslovak Television, after which he worked as a translator and lecturer of Dutch. De BRUIN HÜBLOVÁ, Magda: Review of the memoir KRIJIT, Hans: *Enkele reis Zaandam-Praag* (Zaandam-Prague, no return ticket). De Prom, Baarn 2001 – see <http://www.iliteratura.cz/Clanek/9715/krijt-hans-enkele-reis-zaandam-praag> (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

14 I argue that such engagement could have been perceived as a sort of cultural mission. For example, in the late 1950s Bakri Siregar (1922–1994), an Indonesian translator and literary scholar, taught at the University of Warsaw. In 1957, during his stay in Warsaw he also visited Charles University, Prague. At the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s he taught in Beijing – see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakri_Siregar (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

15 See <http://database.obecprekladatelu.cz/database/D/DubovskaZoricaMarta.htm> (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

16 JŮNOVÁ-MACKOVÁ, Adéla: Vznik Československého egyptologického ústavu. Střet mezi ČSAV a FF UK (The Foundation of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology. Conflicts between the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of Arts, Charles University). In: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis*, 2017, Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 123–134.

in which Czechoslovak arms exports played an important role.¹⁷ The opportunity to study Indonesian at university level ended in 1974 and it was no longer possible to learn the language at university until the programme was renewed in 1992, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989.¹⁸

Until 1955, Soviet and by extension Czechoslovak foreign policy kept colonial and other dependent regions outside its area of interest. Soviet foreign policy embraced the doctrine of the antagonistic dualism between the socialist and the capitalist systems and in its sphere of influence promoted only Communist elites. They were not able to discern the political potential of the emancipatory movements in the colonies. After Stalin's death, and due to developments on the international political stage, Soviet foreign policy interest gradually shifted towards developing countries. In April 1955, the Afro-Asian Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, attended by representatives of twenty-three Asian and six African countries. The newly established, decolonised countries found themselves outside of the divided bipolar world, a strategic position that Soviet politicians began to notice. The new Soviet approach towards developing countries was confirmed at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956. From the perspective of Indonesia and its politics, the Bandung Conference was a turning point as, figuratively speaking, it put the country and its leaders on the world map.¹⁹

The ideology of "proletariat internationalism" underpinned the attention paid by the Soviet bloc to these emerging states, which at around this time had received a new impetus and a new and more concrete form. In the general understanding of this ideology at the time, based on the simplified teachings of Karl Marx, it signified the solidarity of all workers, in contrast with "bourgeois nationalism". At the heart of "proletariat internationalism" was the cooperation between workers and the communist movement, transcending the borders of individual nations and thus strengthening the cooperation between socialist states. The worldwide revolutionary movement was led by the Soviet Communists and it was thus subject to their interests. The term itself is more propagandistic than ideological, and at the highest political level it overshadowed the apparent pragmatism that is always present in international politics.

If we look through this lens at the states that were now being prioritised for Czechoslovak foreign policy, we can observe obstacles that resulted from the vastly different forms of social, cultural and political organisation. Sukarno was not a member of the Communist party, but of the Indonesian National Party. His

17 ZÍDEK, Petr – SIEBER, Karel: *Československo a Blízký východ v letech 1948–1989* (Czechoslovakia and the Near East, 1948–1989). Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, Praha 2009.

18 See uas.ff.cuni.cz/ustav/oddeleni/indonesistika (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

19 PETRŮ, Tomáš: *Jago a preman – kontroverzní hrdinové indonéské historie* (Jago and preman. Controversial heroes of Indonesian history). PhD thesis. Ústav etnologie Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy (Institute of Ethnology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University), Praha 2008, p. 114 – see <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/16334> (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

post-1959 government, after the introduction of the so-called “guided democracy”, exhibited clear authoritarian features and broadly relied on a fusion of nationalism, Communism and Islam. However, as this study shows, despite this conceptual disharmony, there was no doubt a solidarity between these states that took on concrete forms and the values of which were not diminished in any way by the ambiguous ideological background.

Indonesian footprints in Czechoslovakia

In the 1950s alongside Nehru, Nkrumah and Nasser, the first Indonesian president, Sukarno, became a popular Third World leader, declaring Indonesia’s move towards the socialist camp. His “policy of active neutrality” was based on a strategic manoeuvring between West and East. It was during this period that Czechoslovak diplomacy started to build mutual relations with Indonesia. On 22 September 1956, Sukarno visited Prague. The programme of his visit included a tour of the sites of Prague, a visit to an engineering exhibition in Brno and a trip to Kladno, a city known for its coal mining and steel production, where the President gave a speech. The Faculty of Law of Charles University awarded Sukarno an honorary doctorate and he also received the Order of the White Lion (Řád Bílého lva) Class I from the state.²⁰ Less than a year later, in August 1957, a cultural delegation from Central Java and Sumatra consisting of about forty singers and dancers visited Czechoslovakia. After performing in Prague, Bratislava and other parts of Czechoslovakia, the group headed to Poland.²¹

In January 1958, the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Viliam Široký, visited Indonesia.²² During Široký’s visit an agreement of cooperation was established between the two countries for culture and science, declaring Indonesia’s economic and geographic potential and its “moral political significance”, which was understood to mean the fight against feudalism and imperialism. The text of the agreement also provided access for Indonesian students to Czechoslovak universities and for the possibility of Czechoslovak students to study in Indonesia. However, the latter opportunity was rarely taken up. Among those who did study in Indonesia was the aforementioned Miroslav Oplít, who lived in the country for half a year in 1957²³. The study examines these students in further detail below.

20 *Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí* (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereinafter AMZV), f. Teritoriální odbor-tajné (TO-T), Indonésie, 1955–1959 (Territorial Department-Secret, Indonesia, 1955–1959), k. (Box) 1, Čtvrtletní přehledy styků za léta 1955–57, Indonésie (Quarterly overview of the relations with Indonesia, 1955–57); *Československý filmový týdeník* (Czechoslovak Film Weekly), No. 593 – see <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1130615451-ceskoslovensky-filmovytydenik/206562262700036/> (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

21 AMZV, f. TO-T, Indonésie 1955–1959, k. 1, Čtvrtletní přehledy styků za léta 1955–57.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

Sukarno visited Prague again in May 1961 and in January 1963 Czechoslovak president Antonín Novotný travelled to Indonesia, accompanied by his wife and a delegation.²⁴ Cooperation "in the cultural field" included the organisation of exhibitions, tours of artistic groups and the publication of literature, both classic and specialised.

Through bilateral agreements, Czechoslovakia also undertook to provide technical assistance to Indonesia, which in contemporary terms meant that experts (geophysicists, energy engineers, builders, health workers, agricultural engineers) travelled to Indonesia, where they helped to build industrial facilities (sugar and wood processing factories). Supplies of military equipment were also sent and Czechoslovak military instructors provided training for Indonesian pilots. Josef Kebza, a writer, instructor and officer in the Czechoslovak People's Army (Československá lidová armáda, ČSLA), participated in such a mission²⁵, and a few years later published his novel *Letka Sarangan* based on his impressions.²⁶ The story somewhat schematically depicts the local population and customs as foreign to Europeans and defines itself against the paternalistic behaviour of other Westerners who resided in Indonesia. Real Indonesian paratroopers appear in the sole Czechoslovak-Indonesian coproduction, the film entitled *Akce Kalimantan* (Operation Kalimantan).²⁷ The movie was made in 1962 and directed by Vladimír Sís. Among Sís's other works was the then well-known and acclaimed film *Cesta vede do Tibetu* (The Road Leads to Tibet) from 1954²⁸, in which he captured the country shortly before its annexation by China, thus making it an invaluable source for that period even today. *Akce Kalimantan* tells the story of the struggle for Kalimantan Island and despite it being an adventure/action film, for today's viewers it is rather slow-paced. It features Czechoslovak actors in the role of the Dutch occupiers (for example, Martin Růžek), as well as the famous Indonesian actor Bambang Hermanto.

Special reports from Hanzelka and Zikmund

Jiří Hanzelka (1920–2003) and Miroslav Zikmund (1919–2021), the famous travelling duo, visited Indonesia on their second trip. The two classmates from the Business School of the Czech Technical University (České vysoké učení technické, ČVUT) in Prague first went to Africa between 1947 and 1950. From their trips abroad they

24 ZÍDEK, Petr: *Češi v srdci temnoty. Sedmadvacet historických reportáží o prvním čtvrtstoletí komunistů* (Czechs in the heart of darkness. Twenty-seven historical reports on the first twenty-five years of Communism). Knižní klub, Praha 2013, pp. 262–271.

25 Josef Kebza (1933–1990) was a military pilot who served in the army from 1954 to 1965. Apart from Indonesia (1963–1964) he was also deployed in Egypt, Syria, India and China. *Internetový Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* (the online Dictionary of Czech literature since 1945) – see <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=767&hl=Josef+Kebza> (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

26 KEBZA, Josef: *Letka Sarangan* (The Sarangan squadron). Mladá fronta, Praha 1980.

27 Kalimantan is the Indonesian name of the island of Borneo.

28 For the book see SÍS, Vladimír – VANÍŠ, Josef: *Země zastaveného času* (The land where time stopped). Mladá fronta, Praha 1959.

prepared regular newspapers and radio reports, collected material for their books and became immensely popular figures in Czechoslovakia. Circumstances also contributed to their success. During their trip to Africa, Czechoslovakia was taken over by the Communists, the borders of the Republic were shut, and free travel was no longer possible. Thus, their travel reports represented the only possible contact for Czechoslovaks with distant lands. Upon their return, they reached a *modus vivendi* with the regime: they could carry on travelling, but their work was to be used for contemporary propaganda purposes.²⁹

In 1953 the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences supported their second trip to Asia, because it believed that the trip had political and scholarly significance. The pair set off to tour Asia and Oceania in 1959 and returned to Prague in 1964. The two travellers visited Sri Lanka (Ceylon), India, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and Japan. They did not publish their experiences in a book format, but their *Zvláštní zpráva č. 1*, and 2 (Special Reports No. 1, and No. 2) of the journeys to Indonesia and Western New Guinea (West Irian) were stored in the Archives of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They prepared these reports for the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and for the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Politické byro Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa, PB ÚV KSČ). *Zvláštní zpráva č. 3* (Special Report No. 3) covers their trip to Japan. Their trip is best known, however, for *Zvláštní zpráva č. 4* (Special Report No. 4)³⁰, covering their journeys in the Soviet Union, where their five-year expedition ended.

Their report on the situation in Indonesia³¹ was compiled between 31 December 1961 and early January 1963. The two authors focused on the socio-economic conditions of the islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali and the situation of the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), which they based on meetings with many ordinary members and officials in Java and Bali. They also summarised their experiences of the archipelago in general. In addition to the interviews with people of various social positions, they also relied on the expertise of Czechoslovak and Soviet diplomats and on employees of the Soviet press and radio. In light of the dramatic developments that soon followed in Indonesia, it is surprising to find in these reports a complete misunderstanding of domestic developments and the misjudgement of the role played by the local Communist party. Hanzelka and Zikmund believed that the party had a strong position in Indonesia and that it was decisive for the further development of the country.

29 ZÍDEK, Petr: Cestopisy snů a skutečnosti (Travelogues of dreams and reality). *Lidové noviny*, 16. 2. 2019, pp. 19–20.

30 HANZELKA, Jiří – ZIKMUND, Miroslav: *Zvláštní správa č. 4*. *Lidové noviny*, Praha 1990.

31 AMZV, f. TO-T, Indonésie, 1960–1964, k. 2, *Zvláštní zpráva výpravy inženýrů M. Zikmunda a J. Hanzelky o poznatcích z 9 měsíčního pobytu v Indonéské republice* (Special report on the expedition of engineers M. Zikmund and J. Hanzelka on the findings of their 9-month stay in the Republic of Indonesia).

An Indonesian tragedy

In September 1965, there was an attempt at a communist coup in Indonesia, the circumstances of which have not yet been wholly clarified. On the night of 30 September 1965, communist militias, with Sukarno's consent, launched a government coup. Six generals were murdered in the hope that the absence of leadership would disorient the army. However, General Suharto immediately took command and, with the support of right-wing generals, he stayed in power and ruled until 1998.

The country was plunged into utter chaos and things ran amok – as a matter of fact, the word amok comes from Indonesian – to which around half a million people fell victim. This wave of violence resulted in the worst genocide since the Second World War. The island of Bali was the worst affected, with around five percent of the population killed. For example, an entire dance troupe was murdered on the island simply because they had toured socialist countries in Europe. The victims included those associated with the Communist Party or those who were suspected of such sympathies as well as people who had contacts with the Soviets, but they also included random casualties and people of Chinese ethnicity. A concentration camp for about 20,000 people was set up on the island of Buru (in the Maluku islands).

Jiří Dienstbier (1937–2011), a special correspondent for Czechoslovak radio was in Jakarta from February 1966, where he attempted to analyse the course and the circumstances of the coup through his extensive reportage.³² He returned again a year later and, in several reports, he captured the end of Sukarno and the consolidation of the new regime.³³

Sukarno was forced to sign his resignation in March 1966 and lived under house arrest in Bogor until his death in 1970. The Suharto regime, referred to as the New Order (*Orde Baru*), ended cooperation with the Communist bloc and turned towards the West, with a focus on economic development and growing prosperity for the country and its people. The standard of living rose and, although many of their freedoms were restricted, the majority of the population lived in a quiet reconciliation with the new regime.³⁴

Indonesian students in Czechoslovakia

In the late 1950s Indonesian students most often reached Czechoslovakia by boat via the Singapore – Gdynia route, from where they transferred onto trains. A regular air route between Jakarta and Prague was only established in 1960. Selecting

32 DIENSTBIER, Jiří: *Noc začala ve tři ráno* (The night started at three in the morning). Vydavatelství časopisů MNO, Praha 1967.

33 DIENSTBIEROVÁ, Jiřina (ed.): *Jiří Dienstbier. Rozhlasový zpravodaj 1958–1969* (Jiří Dienstbier. Radio newsletter, 1958–1969). Radioservis, Praha 2013. After the Velvet Revolution, Dienstbier became a politician, and he was, in 1989–1992, Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs.

34 PETRŮ, Tomáš: *Jago a preman – kontroverzní hrdinové indonéské historie*, p. 118.

the students was the task of the Indonesian side and the Czechoslovak embassy probably only intervened in the selection by setting quotas for individual fields of study. The Indonesian authorities intended to select groups of students nationally, thus giving the opportunity to an (ethnically) heterogeneous group from the various islands within Indonesia to study abroad, which was in line with Sukarno's policy of national unification. At this point it should be stressed that Indonesia was and is a multi-ethnic state with many ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. It was crucial for Sukarno's nationalist policies, therefore, to support the adoption of an overarching, unified Indonesian identity. One woman was even selected to go to Czechoslovakia from Western New Guinea (formerly West Irian), although her case was highly exceptional since that area of Indonesia was the least developed and people from that region had little opportunity to receive an education.³⁵ I believe this instance is particularly worth noting, since the area was also a disputed territory that was fought over between the Indonesian and Dutch armed forces. During this period, young people from Indonesia mostly went to Japan for their higher education, where they were offered scholarships as part of the reparations for the occupation between 1942 and 1945, or they left for the Netherlands and the socialist states of Europe. It is safe to assume that the choice of Japan was based on rather random criteria, such as support for the country or a desire for adventure. In any case, studying abroad carried with it the promise of prestige and ensured good job opportunities once the students returned to their homeland. The cost of studying was covered either by scholarships (such as from the government or from civic organisations) or by the students themselves, by paying for their own expenses. In some cases, if the Indonesian authorities also allowed it, the graduates were allowed to remain in the host country to gain further experience.

Foreign students at Czechoslovak universities³⁶

In 1961, the University of 17 November (Universita 17. listopadu, USL)³⁷ was established in Prague. Its purpose was to provide institutional support for all foreign students in Czechoslovakia, providing them with language learning opportunities at a network of regional training centres, helping them to adapt to the local conditions while, last but not least, its representatives helped with the resolution of any conflicts. Some of the incoming students continued their studies at USL, where they could choose from a wide range of programmes designed specifically for the

35 Author's interview with Vincent Rumahloine, 30. 4. 2019.

36 I deliberately paid attention only to students of Czechoslovak public universities (no military schools etc.).

37 For more information, see HOLEČKOVÁ, Marta Edith: *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity. Universita 17. listopadu (1961–1974) a její místo v československém vzdělávacím systému a společnosti* (The story of a forgotten university. The University of 17 November /1961–1974/ and its place in the Czechoslovak education system and society). Filozofická fakulta UK, Praha 2019.

needs of the developing world, or they could choose to go to other Czechoslovak universities. Indonesian students were mainly interested in the technical subjects, medicine and economics, as well as in the arts, for example, puppet theatre at the Theatre Faculty of The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (Divadelní fakulta Akademie múzických umění, DAMU).

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, all Indonesian students (and other citizens) abroad were summoned to the Indonesian embassies to sign a declaration of loyalty to the new regime. Any person who refused to sign had their passport confiscated and was deprived of the opportunity to return to their homeland. People who refused to sign could then apply for citizenship, long-term residence permits or claim political asylum in their country of residence. There was, of course, also a fear of returning to Indonesia, because anyone “suspected of Communism” was at risk. After 1965, the cultural attaché of the Indonesian embassy also remained in Czechoslovakia. The fates of returnees, for the most part, are unknown. One exception is the case of Leonard Tobing (born 1944), who graduated from the University of Economics in Prague (Vysoká škola ekonomická, VŠE) in 1968³⁸ and returned to Indonesia with his Czech wife. He worked as a career diplomat and served on various foreign diplomatic missions. In the 1990s he became ambassador to the Czech Republic in Prague. In 2013 he received the Gratias Agit Award from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for promoting the good name of the republic abroad. Thanks to him, the zoos in Prague and Pilsen are in possession of a rare Komodo dragon each.

The Indonesian students in Czechoslovakia formed a union in September 1966 in response to their country’s domestic crisis. The union was comprised of about sixty students who supported Sukarno and opposed the “government of the general” and its methods. They did not recognise the Indonesian embassy in Prague and on three occasions refused to sign the declaration that they recognised the new government. Instead, they sought temporary political asylum in Czechoslovakia. All were granted the right of permanent residency. For those students whose scholarships from Indonesia were cancelled, the International Union of Students (Mezinárodní svaz studentstva, MSS) stepped in and provided them with its own scholarship, allowing them to complete their studies in Czechoslovakia. The 1967 resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the KSC pledged to *provide moral, political and, if necessary, material assistance to Indonesian students and to provide scholarships to Indonesian students in line with the government.*³⁹

38 For more information, see the list of Gratias Agit Award recipients on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – mzv.cz/file/2724783/Sbornik_laureatu_Gratias_agit_2013.pdf (quoted version dated 11. 10. 2021).

39 AMZV, f. Teritoriální odbor (TO), Indonésie, 1970–1974 (Territorial department, Indonesia, 1970–1974), Záznam o jednání na Universitě 17. listopadu (Record of a meeting at the University of 17 November), 15. 5. 1970.

Indonesian diplomats and embassy staff described the students who refused to side with Suharto as people *who could not deal with reality*.⁴⁰

The Indonesian Student Union, just as any other student union, was monitored by the leadership of the USL. In addition to the students, the union also brought together the Indonesian graduates of Czechoslovak universities and had around eighty members. According to reports that describe the union and its members, the Indonesian students were polite, modest and well-behaved.⁴¹

As with the other Asian students, Indonesian students drew much of their information from Chinese sources. Only three out of the eighty students were members of the PKI. University staff observed that in the early days of their forced exile, most Indonesian students suffered from “immigrant psychosis”; a state of deep homesickness whereby they wanted to return to their homeland and very likely engage in partisan struggle. According to USL documents,⁴² a degree of division appears to have arisen within the union in 1969: about a third of its members believed that *the general’s government can only be overthrown by fighting*, and some of its members travelled to China and to Central Java to fight against the new regime. There were differences of opinion between pro-China students and others. On the other hand many students married Czechoslovak citizens. The chairman of the union, Pierre Kansil, a student at USL’s Faculty of Social Sciences married an Indonesian woman who was studying in Bulgaria. Their daughter, Juanita, today runs the restaurant Jávanka in Prague’s Vinohrady district.⁴³

Tensions arose between the Indonesian and Czechoslovak authorities in 1970. A bulletin from the Coordinating Committee of the Association of Indonesian Students in Europe, written in Indonesian, started to circulate abroad. The student dormitories in Jarov, Prague had been given as the correspondence address. According to Tahir Pakuwibowo, the chairman of the Coordination Committee and a student of national economics and planning at the University of Economics in Prague, the Committee’s members were all the Indonesians living in Europe who opposed Suharto. The bulletin was distributed to Indonesian addresses in Europe and was also disseminated at the Movement of Non-Aligned conference in Tanzania. The dissemination of the bulletin provoked a protest from the Indonesian embassy in Prague. An explanation was demanded from the Czechoslovak chargé d’affaires in Jakarta and a commission was set up by the Czechoslovaks to explain the matter. The Czechoslovak side was careful to maintain good diplomatic rela-

40 Ibid., Záznam o přijetí indonéského tituláře vedoucím OKS (odboru kapitalistických států) (Record of the reception of the Indonesian embassy staff by the head of OKS – Department of Capitalist States), 1. 12. 1969.

41 Ibid., Informace – indonéžští studenti (Information – Indonesian students), 12. 5. 1970.

42 NA, f. Univerzita 17. listopadu (USL), k. 136, inv. č. (Inventory No.) 261, Referát pro svazy (Report for the unions), undated.

43 Nevím, proč je tak těžké to pochopit. Rozhovor Pavly Řezníčkové s Juanitou Kansil (I do not know why it is so hard to understand. Interview with Juanita Kansil by Pavla Řezníčková). *Respekt*, 2000, Vol. 11, No. 5 (24. 1. 2000), p. 17.

tions with Indonesia even after Sukarno's fall, probably because the Czechoslovak state had previously provided Indonesia with several loans and thus wanted to seem helpful so as to receive a full repayment.

The commission consisted of representatives of the 7th Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education (Ministerstvo školství), the International Department (Mezinárodní oddělení) of the Central Committee of the KSČ and of the USL. The chairman of the Coordination Committee was urged to avoid any political commentary and to devote himself to collecting information on student life.⁴⁴

Those students who decided to settle in Czechoslovakia after graduation easily integrated into Czech society. Small in number, they are almost invisible today. Rony Marton (real name Jaroni Surjomartono) is an exception, having left his mark on popular culture as the singer of the group Matahari and of Petr Hannig's band.⁴⁵

In response to the events of 30 September 1965 numerous Indonesian diaspora communities formed around the world, numbering thousands of people. In this context, there is often talk of a "lost generation of Indonesians", consisting of former students, diplomats, businesspeople and other groups of Indonesian society. In the international scholarly community, it is an oft-discussed topic, supported by a wealth of scholarship. While this is a marginal topic in the Czech context, as the local community was small in number, I believe that it deserves more attention. The topic offers an opportunity to reflect on more general issues related to the formation of identity (or multiple identities), to the mentality and dynamics of the diaspora and related issues. At the same time, this case study shows that even though on the one hand the Czechoslovak side had no interest in allowing foreign students to stay in the country and, in cooperation with their national embassies, it tried to prevent such cases, if necessary, it was on the other hand able to "punch above its weight" in favour of these students. Czechoslovak institutions acted to save this group of people, regardless of existing rules and customs, and inadvertently proved that the concept of "socialist internationalism" could have a concrete meaning based on solidarity.

In connection with recent trends in historiography, the question arises as to whether research should be carried out with oral history interviews on this group and, if so, how. Given the trauma they experienced, this method is a challenge to use. The statements the interviewees made repeatedly emphasised that Indonesians became well integrated into the local society, they adapted and faced no external difficulties. However, these statements must also be understood as individual strategies – the most effective one possible, in the given conditions.

44 AMZV, f. TO, Indonésie, 1970–1974, Záznam o přijetí indonéského tituláře vedoucím OKS (Record of the reception of the Indonesian embassy staff by the head of OKS), 1. 12. 1969.

45 *Zpěvák a judista Rony Marton*.

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