

ACTUALIZING BANDUNG SPIRIT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: THE STUDY OF INDONESIA AND EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT. The Bandung Conference 1955 is an essential foundation of Indonesia and Eastern African nations under the scope of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, Kenya. Yet, contemporary trends in trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement indicate that revitalizing this spirit requires new approaches amid a global economy driven by pragmatic interests. Therefore, this paper studies how the Bandung Conference spirit of solidarity is exercised in the contemporary Indonesia and Eastern Africa nations relations especially in terms of economy and politics. The paper uses the perspective international cooperation theory in scope of the global political economy which emphasizes that there are essential reciprocal relations between aspects of politics and economics between two actors in global politics with the insight from postcolonialism. Furthermore, this paper utilizes a qualitative research approach based on qualitative data for both primary and secondary data with direct observation as paramount data collecting method. This paper contributes to the academic discourse by bridging historical ideals with contemporary realities, offering a refined framework that extends traditional notions of solidarity to address modern economic imperatives. The findings suggest that although the Bandung legacy remains a pivotal theoretical foundation, its principles are inadequately reflected in both state and non-state interactions, as evidenced by limited trade volumes, modest diplomatic initiatives, and weak reciprocity in business relations. The study concludes that actualizing the Bandung spirit in contemporary Indonesia–Eastern Africa relations should prioritize enhancing collaboration among business sectors and other non-state actors.

Keyword: Bandung spirit; Asia-Africa Relations; East Africa; Indonesia; Postcolonialism

INTRODUCTION

The 1955 Asian and African Conference (Bandung Conference) marks a pivotal moment in Indonesia's relations with Eastern African nations like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (Acharya, 2016; Phillips, 2016). The resulting "Bandung Spirit" embodied unity and solidarity among newly independent states, symbolizing their resistance against colonialism and response to shifting post-WWII geopolitics (Acharya, 2016; Weber & Winanti, 2016). This spirit later underpinned political-economic cooperation and non-aligned movements, fostering mutual support among these nations (Acharya, 2016).

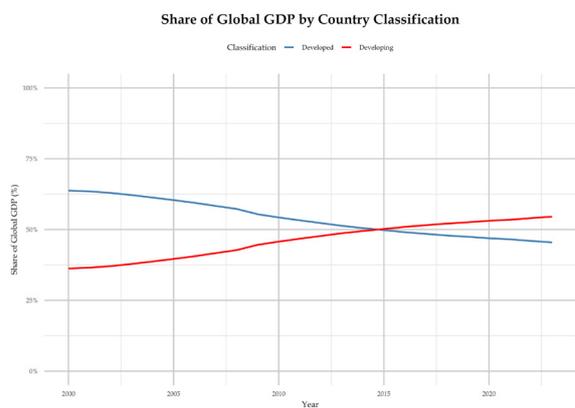
Weber and Winanti (2016) and Lee (2009) argue that the Bandung Spirit is an actual manifestation of a postcolonial spirit against any form of neocolonialism. However, as Vukovich (2013), Das & Roy (2022), and Flesch (2023) argue, the relevance of postcolonialism as a movement and as a perspective of International Relations (IR), is jeopardized in perceiving the contemporary cosmopolitan global political economy. Das and Roy (2022) question the relevance of postcolonialism in the sense of its resistance towards neocolonialism in the era of contemporary advanced globalization. Furthermore, Vukovich (2013) also questioned the relevance of postcolonialism in the sense of

solidarity against neocolonialism in an era where Asia, notably China, became one of the centers of the global system.

Furthermore, recent dynamics in Asia-African countries suggest that the relevance of the Bandung Spirit is also doubtful as a result of economic disparities and the lack of cohesion between countries in those two regions. This is reflected in the economic status of many postcolonial Asian countries in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (nominal) and Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted, as well GDP Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) per capita above most African countries (World Bank, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). We argue that the contrasting economic conditions between Asian and African countries generate the necessity to adapt a new perspective of solidarity between the countries in those two continents.

Despite persistent critiques, the postcolonial economic narrative remains compelling, particularly given the sustained economic dynamism of Global South nations. Postcolonial countries in Asia and Africa continue experiencing rapid economic advancement, consistently achieving average GDP growth exceeding 3% in contrast to their developed ex-colonizer counterparts (Mahbubani, 2024). While these nations still demonstrate lower GDP per capita compared to developed economies, their collective GDP share is demonstrably outpacing traditional economic powers, as illustrated in Figure 1 (World

Economics, 2024). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2024) suggests that, in terms of economy, the trade volume between South-South growth rates outperformed the rate of the South-North trade volume. This report solidifies the previous reports that South-South trade valuation increased from approximately \$1.6 trillion in 2000 to \$4.7 trillion in 2017 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2019). This economic trajectory underscores the imperative for post-colonial developing countries to forge robust, strategic economic cooperation mechanisms that can catalyze sustained growth and global economic repositioning.



Source: World Bank, 2024

Figure 1. Comparison of Share of GDP of the Global North and Global South

However, recent economic cooperation between post-colonial countries remains largely region-based, with limited cross-regional multilateral or bilateral engagement. For Indonesia and Eastern African nations, this is evident in sparse ASEAN-EAC economic initiatives (Personal communication, 2024) and reinforced by World Bank (2024c) data showing Asian and African countries prioritize intra-regional trade. Cross regional business relations remain underdeveloped, with enterprises favoring regional or developed-country partners. Exacerbating factors include socio-cultural and political divides, as well as limited sub-national interaction initiatives between Indonesia/ASEAN and Eastern Africa such as Indonesia that has only one embassy in Nairobi, accredited to Kenya, Uganda, DR Congo, Somalia, and UNEP/UN-Habitat (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, n.d.).

On the other hand, attention towards Eastern Africa from developed countries is growing substantially, and many observers suggest that this region could be well transformed from a conflict zone to a global economic center in the future (African Development Bank Group, 2023; Belhaj, 2024; Razvadauskas, 2023). The region's collaboration

with external actors in handling the Somali Crisis is a perfect example of how they can collaborate to eliminate an existential threat to their economic development and regional stability (Arifin & Juned, 2023; Getachew, 2024; Waga, 2024).

On the other hand, Indonesia and ASEAN, are key actors in the current global economic hotspot of the Indo-Pacific (Indraswari, 2022). ASEAN's combined GDP in 2023 was 3.6 trillion USD or fourth largest in the region and fifth largest globally (ASEAN, 2024). Furthermore, Indonesia is also considered a global economic power by being a member of the G20, which is predicted to become a developed nation in the next 25 years (Nurumillah, 2021). Nevertheless, closer relations between Indonesia and Eastern African countries can generate mutual benefits in pursuing their economic interests. However, regardless of these supporting factors, Indonesia-Eastern Africa's relations are yet fully developed into a more comprehensive partnership beyond the New Asian African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) and bilateral relations.

Therefore, this study investigates the paradoxical disconnect between historical solidarity and current limited cooperation, arguing that complex, interrelated factors beyond economic compatibility explain the unrealized potential of bilateral engagement. We argue that there is urgency to investigate the mentioned gap in a more pragmatic approach based on the contemporary complexity in Indonesia-Eastern Africa to answer why the potential beneficial cooperation under Bandung Spirit has yet to flourish. In this regard, by adopting a pragmatic analytical approach, we seek to unpack the unique characteristics inhibiting comprehensive economic collaboration and transform normative middle power diplomacy into substantive mutual benefit.

Therefore this study employs a multi-layered analytical approach to examine Indonesia-Eastern African relations which is integrating external political-economic conditions, historical contexts, and contemporary diplomatic practices. The combination of postcolonialism and ICT the study critically examines the Bandung Spirit and shared post-colonial identities, exploring how these historical dynamics inform current diplomatic and cooperative interactions (O'Neill et al., 2004). This approach enables a comprehensive deconstruction of the intricate geopolitical and relational dynamics between these nations. In addition, the political economy perspective is also used in the background, and economic diplomacy is used in the systemic background.

In the method, this study uses descriptive qualitative research methods based on a literature

review and observations in the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, Kenya. The literature review helps the author describe the complexity of this issue as it is intertwined with diverse aspects from the historical background of the post-colonial era, contemporary political economic conditions, and economic diplomacy in the ICT framework. Furthermore, observation helps the author to understand diplomatic practice as an application of how the background is being done in the relations between Indonesia and Eastern African countries.

In this regard, we perceive that the studies of Acharya (2016), Weber and Winanti (2016), Vukovich (2013), and Tenzin (2022) suggest that the Bandung Spirit as the spirit of postcolonialism is an essential foundation for Asia-Africa relations as well as South-South relations, even though its application in the contemporary context, such as in Indonesia-Eastern Africa, requires reexamination. For instance, Das and Roy (2022) and Tenzin (2022) put a question mark on post-colonial sentiment in the context of contemporary globalization and China's rise as a superpower. In this regard, we perceive that contrasting perspectives should not be perceived as right or wrong, but as a more comprehensive discussion. In this regard, postcolonialism can explain post-colonial sentiment in the Bandung Spirit as a strong historical foundation for Asia-Africa relations; there is a need for further elaboration using a more practical perspective.

Furthermore, we use the International Cooperation Theory (ICT) to acknowledge the complexity of Indonesia-Eastern African country relations in our endeavor to investigate the actualization of the Bandung Spirit in contemporary international cooperation. ICT has become more essential in the multipolar post-Cold War era of global politics, which has a distinctive pattern of cooperation between countries in contrast to the traditional perspectives of international corporations based on value-based liberalism (Dai et al., 2017; Sterling-Folker, 2002). In this regard, we put Bandung Spirit from the perspective of postcolonialism as the historical foundation for Indonesia-Eastern African countries' relations as a manifestation of the global south movement (Davies & Boehmer, 2018; Eslava et al., 2017), third worldism (Lee, 2009, 2015). We argue that the spirit of solidarity between postcolonial nations provides a reputational advantage for the postcolonial nations to form mutually beneficial cooperation in the contemporary era, however it also requires reciprocity in its actualization.

We argue that understanding this research topic requires more than viewing the Bandung Spirit

solely through a post-colonial lens, given today's multipolar global political economy and its complex, intertwined interests. Rising multipolarity—often asymmetric due to the growing role of non-state actors—does not eliminate state anarchy, yet it still permits cooperation (Juned & Sutiono, 2024; Milner, 1992). Contemporary ICT, as Dai et al. (2017) suggest, focuses on how cooperation occurs amid anarchy or conflict. Key factors such as reciprocity, reputation, different strategic settings, relative gains, the number of actors, and domestic politics are essential tools of analysis in determining the success rate of the cooperation.

ICT is a cornerstone of international relations research that has emerged and evolved over the past few decades, with a primary focus on rational choice and game-theoretic approaches (Dai et al., 2017). In general terms, CT refers to the processes of policy coordination by which states and other entities, such as multinational corporations or non-governmental organizations, adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences in the form of cooperation for their own mutual benefits (Dai et al., 2017). In general terms, ICT refers to the processes of policy coordination by which states and other entities, such as multinational corporations or non-governmental organizations, adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

In order to deepen our understanding of aspects of ICT analysis in the relations between Indonesia and Eastern African countries, this paper uses postcolonial in the analysis of different strategic settings, reciprocity, and reputation, and domestic politics are greatly in debt to the perspective of postcolonialism, which offers alternative explanations regarding how colonial sentiments work in the relations between postcolonial nations in the lens of ex-colonized people. Postcolonialism, in general, focuses on how the legacy of colonialism exists and influences ex-colonized nations and manifests in diverse aspects, especially in the cultural legacy of colonialism and critical analysis towards the ambiguity in the global political economy system, which is perceived as a product of colonialism (Wilkens, 2017). Perception of the strategic settings, reputation of a country, and reciprocity tendency in a relationship as well as domestic politics are well defined in postcolonialism, which is perceived as being influenced by the colonial experience stored in the collected memory of a nation.

However, reputation in this contemporary context between postcolonial nations is not only the memory of colonial subjugation, but also mutual identity as postcolonial nations which are bound

by the Bandung Spirit of solidarity that serves as a normative strategic setting. Similarly, the principle of reciprocity in ICT is re-evaluated to account for enduring asymmetries in power and trust that are legacies of colonialism which are not only reflected in governmental Global South Movement, but also in the sub-state actors such as business sectors in the shaping the implementation agenda of Bandung Spirit in the domestic level. However, this paper cautiously uses postcolonialism as it is criticized for its subjective bias in defining the IR phenomenon, as well as its lack of analysis towards contemporary issues, especially global political issues (Felsch, 2023; Wilkens, 2017).

This study employs economic diplomacy as an analytical framework to examine the political economy of Indonesia-Eastern African relations. By critically analyzing how economic instruments—trade, investment, aid, and agreements—intersect with diplomatic strategies, the research illuminates how economic priorities shape national interests in global politics (Kukharyk & Nübling, 2021; Pattinussa & Tambunan, 2023). The approach integrates commercial diplomacy, institutional dynamics, and policy structures to reveal the complex mechanisms through which nations strategically align economic and political objectives in international relations (van Bergeijk & Moons, 2009).

This research innovatively recontextualizes the Bandung Spirit through a sophisticated, multi-dimensional analytical framework examining contemporary Indonesia-Eastern African relations. Diverging from conventional historical and symbolic postcolonial narratives, the study integrates International Cooperation Theory, postcolonial perspectives, and economic diplomacy to critically interrogate the complex interactions between governmental initiatives and non-state actors. By synthesizing comprehensive literature review with empirical observations from the Indonesian Embassy in Nairobi, the research unveils the nuanced tensions between formal state-level cooperation and limited grassroots engagement, revealing the persistent impact of colonial legacies on modern diplomatic practices. This multi-layered analytical approach generates novel insights into South-South cooperation's evolving dynamics, challenging established paradigms and advocating for adaptive strategies within the rapidly transforming global political economy.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive analytic qualitative method to investigate the relationship between

Indonesia and Eastern African countries. Creswell and Creswell (2023) argue that qualitative methods, in general, provide flexibility to the researcher to conduct in-depth and/or expand research, as the researcher becomes the key instrument of the research. Furthermore, descriptive analytic qualitative method is a type of qualitative method that is intended to generate analytic description regarding elements of the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for researchers to understand the complexity of this issue and provide a detailed research report.

This research employs a sophisticated, multi-stagemethodologicalapproachtoinvestigateIndonesia-Africa relations through a comprehensive analytical framework. The preliminary research systematically delineates the scope of economic cooperation and diplomacy, grounding the investigation in the historical context of the Bandung Spirit. Methodologically, the study constructs an innovative theoretical framework utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a foundational perspective, strategically integrating postcolonial theory and economic diplomacy as critical analytical instruments. This methodological design enables a nuanced, multi-dimensional examination of bilateral relations, with each research stage—from theoretical triangulation to data collection and analysis—carefully calibrated to generate robust, contextually rich insights into the complex dynamics of South-South cooperation

This research, in its application of descriptive analytic research, uses two major data collections from literature studies and direct observation in the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, Kenya, regarding diverse related aspects in the relations between Indonesia and Eastern African Countries such as political and economic perception towards Indonesia and implementation of Indonesia's economic diplomacy as well as its existing obstacles. Literature studies mainly use secondary data from three sources: academic research, relevant articles from news outlets, and official reports from related institutions. The Indonesian Embassy in Kenya is an essential data source for the observation as it is a representation of the Indonesian government not only for Kenya, but also for several Eastern African countries such as Uganda, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, UN-Habitat, and UNEP.

The methodological design systematically triangulates diverse data sources, categorizing and analyzing information through the theoretical lens of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) components. By examining governmental documents, diplomatic communications, and contextual

implementation of economic diplomacy, the research constructs a nuanced analytical description of Indonesia-Eastern African bilateral relations. This multi-dimensional approach enables a sophisticated exploration of the complex political and economic perceptions that shape contemporary diplomatic interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bandung Spirit and Contemporary Relations of Asian and African Nations

The Bandung Spirit embodies solidarity and cooperation among post-colonial nations, emerging from the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia (Acharya, 2016). It became a symbol of anti-colonialism, laying the groundwork for the Non-Alignment Movement and South-South Cooperation (Weber & Winanti, 2016) and representing a collective awakening for nations striving for independence and development (Acharya, 2016; Phillips, 2016). In terms of post-colonial studies, the spirit is also the voice of the subalterns against the Western-based ex-colonizer structure of global politics that challenges not only the existing Western dominance perspective but also the Cold War as the new dynamics of global politics.

While the Bandung Spirit legacy towards the independence movements in Asia and Africa as well as the Non-Alignment Movement, is undisputed, the contemporary global dynamics generate major challenges. First, its relevance in today's multipolar global order is questioned; second, it is critiqued from a post-colonial perspective for promoting an inauthentic hybridization—akin to colonial mimicry—especially in economic relations (Park, 2019; Yousfi, 2013; Zein-Elabdin, 2009). The Bandung Spirit remains a pivotal conceptual framework for understanding South-South diplomatic relations, particularly in the evolving geopolitical landscape of Asian and African interactions. This historical paradigm continues to provide a substantive foundation for strategic cooperation, demonstrating remarkable resilience in the face of complex global dynamics. The emergent hybridization of diplomatic engagement among Global South nations reflects a sophisticated response to contemporary geopolitical challenges, wherein strategic partnerships are recalibrated to pursue nuanced national interests through adaptive, multilateral mechanisms

However, such hybridization is often criticized by the postcolonial IR scholars as inauthentic, which is the latest version of the colonial empire in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's term (Kim, 2015). South

Korea's aid programs in Africa (Kim, 2015; Kim & Garland, 2019) and China's dual role as both an ex-semi-colonized nation and a new colonial agent (Tenzin, 2022). In this regard, the ambiguous position towards the evolution of post-colonial countries in post-colonial studies, especially in terms of economy, represents obstacles in manifesting the Bandung Spirit into the contemporary political economy relations between Asia and Africa.

Even though the critique of postcolonialism on the Bandung Spirit could easily be countered for its bias political tendency and lack of recentness in perceiving contemporary Asian and African's political economy relations, the author perceives that it is still relevant to be applied in perceiving the relations between Asian people and African people. In this regard, authentic hybridization at the governmental level does not represent the Western-based colonial perspective in the minds of the people in perceiving a certain region and its people. For instance, despite acknowledging the Bandung Spirit's role in development, many in Indonesia still view Africa as poor and underdeveloped, dampening business interest. This condition becomes a burden to initiate closer and stronger initiation as the contemporary manifestation of the Bandung Spirit, as there are doubts that those initiatives will work if the good reputation and reciprocity between people and business sectors in Asia and Africa are not well built.

Our investigation reveals the complex limitations of the Bandung Spirit in contemporary South-South relations, particularly regarding non-state actor engagement. While governmental discourse lauds this solidarity framework as a foundational diplomatic mechanism, its practical implementation among civil society and business sectors remains constrained by persistent postcolonial psychological narratives. In the Indonesian context, for instance, deeply entrenched perceptual barriers manifest through stereotypical representations of African nations as economically underdeveloped and politically unstable, despite significant 21st-century developmental trajectories.

These cognitive impediments systematically undermine potential transnational business initiatives, reflecting a nuanced intersection of historical colonial legacies and contemporary geopolitical imaginations. The resultant disjuncture between governmental rhetorical commitment and grassroots economic engagement illuminates the profound challenges confronting substantive South-South cooperation. Specifically, the attenuated political will and diminished entrepreneurial interest reveal how

historical narratives continue to mediate economic imagination, constraining potential collaborative economic strategies between Indonesia and Eastern African nations.

In contrast, government-to-government relations continue to strengthen through initiatives such as the New Asian African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), and New South-South Health Cooperation. Bilateral agreements in trade, investment, and aid from countries like China and South Korea are also on the rise (Kim & Garland, 2019; Tenzin, 2022). A report by Mills et al. (2020) highlights growing trade values, suggesting that as Asia seeks new investments and Africa requires further funding and technical support, their cooperation—as envisioned by the Bandung Spirit—remains both relevant and promising.

Bandung Spirit as the Settings for Cooperation between Indonesia and East African Countries

From the ICT perspective, these conditions suggest that the Bandung Spirit has influenced the shaping of strategic settings for cooperation, building reputation and reciprocity, and influenced domestic politics, particularly in formulating related policies accordingly in the past. However, in the contemporary era, Bandung Spirit influences are eroded in that while it is maintaining its influence in setting for cooperation and reputation, the lack of cohesion at the non-state level is responsible for the lack of reciprocity among the grassroots and business levels, which leads into incongruence between the foreign policies represented in the government-to-government cooperation agreement.

In this context, similar condition exists in Indonesia, which is in its phase of rapid economic growth and demographic bonus, and will require suitable partners to sustain its development, especially in trading and investment. Eastern Africa, on the other hand, is an emerging region rich in natural resources, potential markets, and geoeconomic advantages, and solid regionalism as a foundation for its future development (African Development Bank Group, 2023; Delanova, 2021). This domestic condition is strengthened by their historic relations with the Bandung Spirit and common problems in their economic development, such as bureaucratic issues, transition from natural resource dependency, corruption, etc. (Mills et al., 2020). These conditions not only make them economically compatible, but also increase the possibility of comprehensive strategic partnerships, which are based more on their needs and characteristics, rather than following Eurocentric paths.

The framework of NAASP as a continuation of the Asia Africa Conference in the contemporary era reflects the Bandung Spirit as the foundation for building strategic settings for cooperation between Indonesia and Eastern Africa. In strategic settings, this condition is ideal to facilitate further relations and cooperation between the two sides, particularly in the aspects related to the NAASP. Historical background of de-colonialism in the Bandung Spirit, which is well reflected in the Global South Movement, Non-Aligned Movement, and the most recent NAASP, provides essential reputation at governmental level for further cooperation. Furthermore, the socio-economic condition of Indonesia and Eastern African countries suggest that, theoretically, a more comprehensive partnership is not only feasible in strategic settings, but also a necessity in the long term which are reflected in the discussion regarding Indonesia-East Africa Community (EAC) Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) (Shofa, 2024).

However, the strategic settings for cooperation are not well reflected in the positive reputation and reciprocity of the relations between Indonesia and Eastern Africa at the non-governmental level. Nevertheless, the process of the Bandung Spirit initiated in 1955 and its derivative initiations are at the governmental level, although some of them are also intended to generate closer relations between civil society and business sectors. For instance, racial sentiment and the perception of permanently least developed, hostile, and hunger are still lingering in the minds of many people in Indonesia regarding East Africa (Personal communication¹; Syadullah, 2021; & Dorigne-Thompson, 2022). On the other hand, knowledge of Indonesia in Eastern Africa is also limited, as the Bandung Conference takes place. In this regard, even though the Bandung Spirit is essential in shaping a good reputation between Indonesia and Eastern African countries in the governmental level is not well translated in the relations between the non-state actors, which leads to less reciprocity between the two sides, which is reflected in the less effective cooperation initiatives between Indonesia and Eastern African countries reflected in the low trading and investment volume (see **Figure.2**) as well the absence of trade attache in Eastern Africa.

This condition highlights the gap between global intergovernmental frameworks and domestic realities, echoing postcolonial critiques of the Bandung Spirit. While the Bandung Spirit focuses on governmental cooperation, it fails to engage non-state actors—an

¹Personal communication with a staff of Republic of Indonesia's Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya

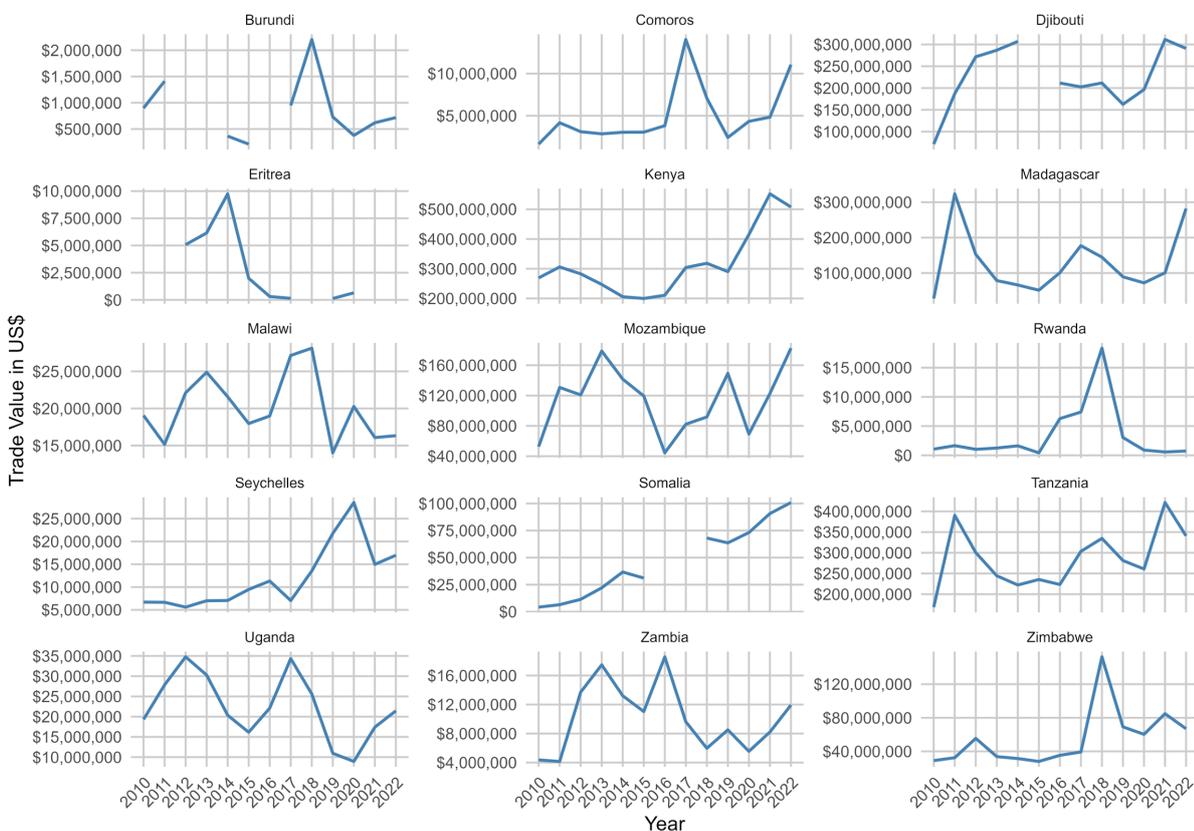
essential element for effective collaboration. The colonial legacy in collective memory hinders the establishment of robust non-governmental economic partnerships. As a result, despite frameworks like NAASP, bilateral implementation remains limited due to minimal engagement from business sectors and individuals. In Indonesia and Eastern Africa, NAASP has not significantly increased trade and investment, as evidenced by the relatively low and stagnant volumes in figure 2, except for Kenya despite its Covid-19 downturn. (Figure 2)

Postcolonialism argues that the enduring legacy of colonialism is embedded in the memories of ex-colonized nations, shaping how they view themselves and others (Bachleitner, 2021). The lingering impact of racial segregation influences mutual perceptions in these regions, affecting cooperation frameworks like NAASP and guiding domestic policies. For instance, Indonesia’s persistent negative view of Africa is rooted in its colonial past that dampens cooperation by weakening Africa’s reputation and reciprocal responses from non-governmental actors. Conversely, in many developed Northeastern Asian countries, a strong economic vision of Africa as a future global powerhouse fosters active business engagement and shapes supportive policies (Kim & Garland, 2019; Tenzin, 2022).

Economic Diplomacy of Indonesia in Eastern Africa

Indonesia’s diplomatic relations with Eastern Africa cannot be separated by the larger settings of Indonesian and African relations. In this regard, besides the NAASP, Indonesia also employs several other initiatives, such as the Indonesia-Africa Forum (IAF) and the Indonesia-Africa Infrastructure Dialogue (IAID), which then translated into several bilateral forums and agreements between Indonesia and African countries, such as the Indonesia-Ethiopia Business Connect (IEBC) and the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Mozambique (Delanova, 2021; Dorigné-Thomson, 2022). Furthermore, the economic diplomacy of Indonesia in Africa is also implemented using trade attaches and the Indonesia Trade Promotion Center (ITPC) (Republic of Indonesia Trade Ministry, n.d.) to promote closer economic ties between Indonesia and African business sectors.

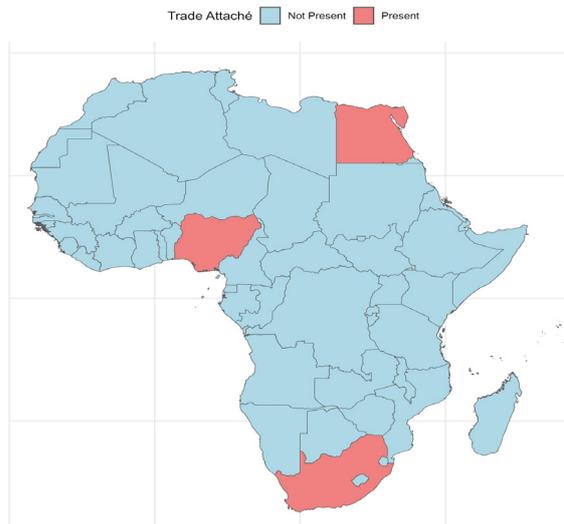
Figure 3 reveals that for Indonesia and Eastern Africa—particularly under the Indonesian embassy in Nairobi—economic diplomacy channels are absent. Indonesia’s trade attaché is present only in Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa, with none in Eastern Africa. Although Africa has been prioritized in Indonesian diplomacy following the 2005 Golden



Source: Data taken from the World Integrated Trade Solution (2024), as visualized by the author

Figure 2. Indonesia - Eastern Africa total trade volume (2010 – 2022)

Commemoration and the 2015 60th Anniversary of the Asia Africa Conference, its economic diplomacy remains underdeveloped compared to other regions (Tarrosy, 2016). Data from the Republic Indonesia Trade Ministry (n.d.) confirm that Eastern Africa is the only region without a trade attaché or ITPC, highlighting a gap in implementing the Bandung Spirit and NAASP in Indonesia's economic diplomacy.



Source: Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, n.d., visualized by the author.)

Figure 3. Indonesia's trade attaché and ITPCs in Africa

Furthermore, Indonesia's economic diplomacy in Eastern Africa was hindered by the limited number of official representatives in the region. For instance, the Indonesian Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya also acts as official representatives for the Republic of Uganda, Federal Republic of Somalia, and Democratic Republic of Congo besides also being a representative of the international organization of UNEP and UN-Habitat (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, n.d.) (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, n.d.). Similarly, the Indonesian Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania also acts as a representative of Burundi. The limited number of embassies in contrast to areas covered contributes to less optimum economic diplomacy, as the embassies' staff will have extra workloads in their duties that lead essentially to minimum economic promotion of Indonesia as well as ineffective potential mapping from the areas covered².

However, the limited number of Indonesian embassies in Eastern Africa indicates that public awareness of Indonesian people towards Eastern African countries is also limited. Applying the aspects of reputation and reciprocity mentioned in ICT requires not only active government initiatives

and solid bilateral or multilateral cooperation, but should also be supported by the business sectors and the people that determine the success of the cooperation, particularly in the context of economic diplomacy to form mutual reciprocity. In this regard, the author argues that for many business actors in Indonesia, Eastern Africa is still considered an alternative among many for prolonged trade and investment partners besides more traditional partners of ASEAN and Northeastern Asia, as well as Europe and the US. Furthermore, it also indicates that the colonial-influenced perspective in perceiving Africa in an inferior position is also more prevalent than the potential economic growth and the Bandung Spirit itself.

However, a policy paper from the Republic of Indonesia Ministry of Funds from Syadullah (2021), which is supported by our findings during observation, suggests that trade and investment in Indonesia and Africa in general is hindered by the factors of negative perception towards Africa among Indonesian people and business sectors, the lack of a comprehensive framework for trade and investment, and the conventional style of diplomacy by the government of Indonesia. Similarly, even though many people in Africa also suggest that Indonesia has a good reputation as a fellow postcolonial nation and potential low cost high-quality goods, there is doubt that Indonesia has capability to become a long term economic partner amid its limited engagement as well as ongoing Eastern Africa trade deficit (Nkwame, 2024). Furthermore, as reflected previously in Figure 2, both Indonesia and Eastern African countries are not significant trade partners to each other by volume while the trend does not show significant growth in the last 5 years.

The historical data from World Trade Integrated Solutions (2024) suggest that even though the total trade volume between Indonesia and Eastern African countries under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Indonesian Embassy in Nairobi never exceeded 1 billion USD yearly in 2010-2022, the average trade with African countries showed an increasing trend before being halted by the global Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022)³. Furthermore, trade with these countries also contributes to a trade surplus for Indonesia, such as Indonesia-Somalia trade which contributed 60-100 million USD trade surplus during 2018-2022 (OEC, n.d.). As one of the regions with the fastest economic growth, trade volume is expected to rise and will become more essential in the future. In response to this condition, the government of Indonesia initiated

² Based on the observation in the Republic of Indonesia Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya.

³ Global pandemic in this case refers to Public Health Emergency of International Concern by World Health Organization (WHO)

more economic initiatives by discussing PTA with the EAC and Rwanda to boost its economic and trade relations with countries in Eastern African (Shofa, 2024).

The PTA, when it is being realized, adds leverage for Indonesian from the perspective of economic diplomacy in East Africa by providing a framework that allows business sectors to employ a more pivotal role by providing more supportive regulations, and maximizing the potential of international norms of Asia Africa reflected in NAASP. However, the addition of traditional diplomatic tools is also essential to support the implementation of the current PTA in the early discussion with Rwanda and the EAC. The existing condition suggests that the limited embassies and diplomatic staff of Indonesia in Eastern Africa are also generated by the low interest, reputation, and reciprocity from the Indonesian people and business sectors towards Eastern Africa in general, reflected not only by a low number of trade and investment, but also by a less significant number of Indonesian citizens and business sectors representatives in Eastern Africa (International Trade Centre, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c; Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, n.d., personal communication).

In addition, the enhancement in trade and investment between Indonesia and Eastern African countries is also essential to eradicate the negative stigma towards Africa left by previous colonialism and strengthened by the continuous armed conflicts and human insecurities in the region. The author argues that the essence of the Bandung Spirit, founded in 1955, should also generate positive changes in people's relations between Asia and Africa that can be reflected in the solid trade and investment between the two regions. Furthermore, negative perceptions as a colonialism legacy, which was perceived as the major obstacles in building comprehensive Global South relations, should also be eradicated by building a new perspective that is relevant to existing conditions, such as the enhancement of trade and investment between Asia and Africa, as reflected in Indonesian and Eastern Africa relations that will nurture more positive perspectives towards each other.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia-Eastern African countries' contemporary relations represent the existing problem of Bandung Spirit implementation in the contemporary Era Bandung Spirit represents the revivalist movement from nations whose negative impacts from colonialism during European imperialism directly and indirectly. The spirit manifested in diverse

government-to-government initiatives to support each other during its early era after its birth in 1955, particularly political economy initiatives with a strong nuance of the Cold War. However, its implementation in the contemporary era requires more adaptive and suitable cooperative initiatives that are relevant to the global political economic condition, which is an economically generated multipolarism. In this regard, the new initiative of NAASP is hindered by the colonial legacy reflected by diverse domestic and regional problems, as well as negative perceptions among the non-state actors towards their fellow postcolonial nations that influence the stagnation in the building of the contemporary comprehensive partnership, which requires active non-state actors' involvement.

The ICT perspective used in this article suggests that the Bandung Spirit implementation in Indonesia-Eastern African economic relations, particularly in trade and investment, has a positive impact on strategic settings, particularly in historic and strategic economic settings. However, the positive impacts of the Bandung spirit in building reputation and reciprocity are limited only to government-to-government relations, while the negative sentiment from the past colonialism in shaping the perspective of the non-state actors remains significant. This condition leads to the third aspect regarding domestic politics and policies, especially economic diplomacy, which have become too normative and conservative because of their lack of support and criticism from the non-state actors in initiating more comprehensive partnerships based by promoting more non-state actor based initiation particularly to the business sector. In this regard, the government of Indonesia is expected to act proactively by facilitating more comprehensive business information channels such as trade attache in Eastern Africa and providing more official representatives in the region.

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