

# Prince Wan Waithayakon's Attempt for Rapprochement with the People's Republic of China at the 1955 Asian-African Conference at Bandung

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## Abstract

After the end of the Second World War, newly emerging nations were being divided up geopolitically into ideological camps – the so-called “Free World” led by the United States and the ‘Communist Bloc’ under the leadership of the Soviet Union. At the same time, there was rising demands for self-determination by national leaders who did not wish to commit exclusively to either ideological camp, as they perceived this to be a form of neo-imperialism. A leading group within this third way of thinking was the Colombo Group. In the midst of this intense three-way struggle, post-war Thailand under the leadership of Premier Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram was heavily influenced by the US in the earliest stages of the Cold War. In the attempt to renegotiate and re-balance Thailand's position in the heightened political tension of the region, the premier sent the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Wan Waithayakon, to represent Thailand at the Asia-Africa Conference – initiated through the cooperation of the Colombo Group earlier in May 1954 – in April 1955. At this conference Prince Wan exercised independent diplomacy by meeting and negotiating with the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in an attempt to re-balance Thailand's relations with world powers in both the Free World and the Communist Bloc. This meeting would have significant ramifications for Thailand's diplomacy throughout the Cold War and has impacted the kingdom's relations with the People's Republic of China up to the present day.

## Keywords

anti-imperialism – small states – Prince Wan Waithayakon – independent foreign policy – rapprochement

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on the role of Prince Wan Waithayakon in the negotiation at the 1955 Bandung Conference.<sup>2</sup> Prince Wan was a career diplomat who served in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs for over five decades. After graduating from the University of Oxford in the UK and the École libre des Sciences Politiques in France,<sup>3</sup> he was immediately enrolled in the Thai diplomatic corps as Third Secretary at the Thai Embassy in Paris. He attended the post-war 1917 peace negotiation in Versailles and was assigned to several important positions, particularly, the Siamese Minister in London and the Permanent Representative of Siam to the Secretariat of the League of Nations from 1928–1930. Prince Wan returned to Siam and accepted the professorial chair at the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University during a transitional time in Thai politics. He was appointed by the People's Party (Boonthanondha 2022, 232) as the new regime's mentor in foreign affairs and diplomacy due to his pro-regime change stance during the 1932 “Khana Ratsadon” movement.

After Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram became Prime Minister in 1938, Prince Wan gradually gained the Premier's trust. He was involved in the ceasefire negotiation with the Japanese on 8 December 1941. Later, he was assigned by Premier Phibunsongkhram to be the head of the Thai delegation to the Greater East Asia Conference in November 1943. Even after World War II, Prince Wan Waithayakon was sent to the United States (US) to negotiate Thailand's membership in the United Nations. In 1947, he became the Ambassador of Thailand to Washington and the United Nations.

Prince Wan served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under every government from 1917, even when Phibunsongkhram assumed the role of premiership for the second time in 1948. At that time, Premier Phibunsongkhram, who was perceived to be a revisionist during his first mandate, had adopted a radically different position in his post-war regime. Knowing that he needed support

1 Prince Wan Waithayakon borne the formal name as His Royal Highness Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh, hereafter referred to as Prince Wan Waithayakon in this article.

2 Ceylon, Indonesia, Burma, India and Pakistan.

3 Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram assumed power for the second time in April 1948.

from the US, he opted for a position friendlier towards the monarchy and fiercely anti-communist so as to improve relations with the “Free World” superpower. Having previously worked with the Phibunsongkhram during the Second World War, Prince Wan had been entrusted to convey the government’s position, particularly to convince different stakeholders in the US about the government’s legitimacy and the changes of Phibunsongkhram’s agenda at the beginning of the Cold War (Boonthanondha 2022, 232).

During his tenure, Premier Phibunsongkhram pursued a foreign policy under the shadow of the US and the “Free World.” The sole purpose of Thailand was to seek stability, and military and economic assistance from the US. To demonstrate his alignment with the US, Premier Phibunsongkhram sent a troop of 4,000 men to join the US-led UN coalition forces in the Korean War. During that time, Premier Phibunsongkhram underwent many policies of economic openness, emphasizing a liberal economy. At the same time, he also pursued a psychological war against communism inside Thailand via public advertisement and media (Pawakapan 2018, 58–59). Numerous adjustments in Thai foreign policy came between 1948 and 1955. These changes included (1) the adjustment of Thailand’s position vis-à-vis the new powerplays between major powers, (2) the adjustment in terms of relations with major powers and newly independent countries, especially in Southeast Asia, and (3) securing the country from the expansion of communism; more particularly, the communist movement in Thailand, which was believed to be supported by the People’s Republic of China. This movement also included the training of the Thai community in Yunnan, to be trained for infiltration through the Thai border, an action which, if taken, would affect Thailand’s national security. The group was believed to be trained by Pridi Banomyong, who was seeking political asylum in the PRC at that time (Chinvanno 2020, 52).

In the meantime, the US saw the geopolitical location of Thailand as being strategically important to prevent communist expansion. On 10 February 1949, H.E. Mr. Edwin F. Stanton, then US Ambassador to Thailand, pointed out in his telex to Washington, D.C. (reporting to the US Secretary of State<sup>4</sup>) that the US should prioritize Thailand to enable the prevention of communist influence in the region (Pawakapan 2018, 58–59). In 1950, Thailand was among the countries in the Mekong region that were affected by the spread of communism. Most of the movements in these countries (e.g., Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) were said to be supported by the PRC. The Thai government also suspected that the PRC was behind the establishment of the “Thai Movement” in Yunnan.

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4 Mr. Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State during 21 January 1949–20 January 1953.

Phibunsongkhram's decision to rely on the US and the Free World since the beginning of the Cold War was strongly influenced by the above-mentioned factors. Nevertheless, he was also well aware of the changes in the political dynamism at the international level. Consequently, the changes in political dynamism led to several meticulous changes in the positioning of Thailand vis-à-vis its major power counterparts. This resulted in the decision of Thailand to attend the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung (18–24 April 1955). Ironically, this decision to be involved in the Bandung Conference was carried out with the support of the US, thinking that Thailand would be a voice of the Free World at the ideologically questionable gathering in Bandung (Ampiah 2007, 73).

Bandung would be one of the best opportunities to explain Thailand's stance on joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and also to try to find a solution to its concerns regarding the intensive movement of the Communists believed to be backed by the PRC. At the same time, even though Thailand overtly presented itself as a close ally of the US, Thailand's discrete move to seek rapprochement with the PRC was closely monitored by the US (FRUS Depcirtel No. 340 and 351. 1955–1957 Volume 21). The strategy for Thailand, therefore, was to maintain good relations with the US and to try to find an opportunity to connect with the PRC to solve its concerns regarding the Communist movement in Thailand and the movement of "Thais" in Yunnan.

Prince Wan Waithayakon, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, was assigned by Phibunsongkhram to attend the Bandung Conference in 1955 as an observer. Prince Wan would use this occasion to try to convince other countries to understand Thailand's concerns regarding communist threats and the reasons why Thailand needed to join SEATO at the meeting. At the same time, Prince Wan needed to find a chance to meet with the Chinese leader to talk about communist expansion. It was a difficult situation for Prince Wan since he had to maintain his position as an ally of the US while trying to approach the PRC's leader. The main focus of this article will be to analyze the following question: what impact did the participation of Prince Wan at the Bandung Conference have on the relations between Thailand and the major powers such as the US and the PRC? In this context, this article will examine the role and the position of Prince Wan during the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung and will further analyze the impacts of Prince Wan's actions on the relations between Thailand and the major world powers at that time. The first part of this article will explain the context leading up to the 1955 Bandung Conference. Secondly, it will shed light on the PRC's influence in Bandung. Lastly, it will analyze the role of Thailand at the Bandung Conference and Prince Wan's agency in independent diplomacy.

## 2 The Context Leading up to the 1955 Bandung Conference

After the Korean War (1950–1953), the PRC demonstrated willingness to adjust its foreign policy by making it appear more peaceful towards countries in Asia and Africa. In December 1953, Zhou Enlai, then assuming the position equivalent to Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India. During the meeting, both agreed on Zhou Enlai's proposal regarding the five principles for peaceful coexistence. The five principles included (1) acceptance of religious and ideological differences, (2) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (3) non-aggression, (4) non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and (5) equality and peaceful coexistence. In their perceptions, both Zhou Enlai and Nehru thought that the five principles would attract the attention of many countries and help to create an alliance of nations against the new wave of imperialism (Qiang 1992, 107).

In 1954, Mao Zedong sent Zhou Enlai to meet with leaders of different countries in Asia such as India, Indonesia, and Burma. The purpose of these meetings was to (1) reduce fear vis-à-vis the PRC, and (2) try to establish an understanding of the Chinese initiatives regarding the creation of "the united front against imperialism" (Tudda 2015, 38) with the leaders. Later on, the aforementioned group of countries agreed that the situation necessitated an Asian policy to enable Asia to have an alternative to the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the US.

Between 28 April and 2 May 1954, leaders from Burma (Prime Minister U Nu), India (Prime Minister Nehru), Pakistan (Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali), Indonesia (President Sukarno) and Sri Lanka (Prime Minister John Kotelawala) gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The meeting was known as the "Colombo Conference." The purpose of the meeting was to find the possibility to organize an international conference between Asian and African countries, which would be held in Bandung in the following year. Amidst the efforts to organize the conference, the US's attempt to prevent such a conference from happening remained a problem for the group. The US intensified its efforts to prevent the gathering when it saw Zhou Enlai's position and diplomatic strategy at the Geneva Peace Conference in 1954.

In Geneva, Zhou Enlai presented the idea of five principles for peaceful coexistence and tried to reduce the tension arising from the Indochina War. One of the reasons for introducing the aforementioned idea was that the PRC would like to focus more on its economic development after suffering serious losses from the Korean War (Qiang 1992, 111). The US perceived the PRC's proposal and the formation of an anti-imperialist sentiments among

the developing countries as conducive to the spread of communism and the increase of anti-Western sentiments in Asia.

On 21 July 1954, the meeting in Geneva finally ended and reached a final declaration to restore peace in the Indochina region. The US perceived it as a winning moment for the PRC and started to intensify the Communist containment movement in Southeast Asia. John Foster Dulles (US Secretary of State) and Anthony Eden (UK Prime Minister) saw the great necessity to establish a security organization similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Anthony Eden proposed that the organization should also include the five countries of the Colombo group. The US had a different view and wanted to include only France, the UK, and other Southeast Asian allies of the free world. In August 1954, the US started to draft a preliminary proposal for the said security cooperation. It was followed by the meeting on 8 September 1954 in Manila where the US, the UK, Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand gathered. After the meeting, those countries agreed to sign the Manila Pact to establish the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) amid the Formosa crisis (Tudda 2015, 44).

On 19 October 1954, Nehru met Chairman Mao to discuss the Bandung Conference. Both leaders agreed that the conference should put a great emphasis on how to deal with imperialism. Later in December 1954, the Colombo Group gathered again in Bogor, Indonesia to discuss the five principles for peaceful coexistence. On 29 December 1954, the Colombo group formally declared the organization of the Bandung Conference, scheduled for April 1955.

For the US, neutralism and the anti-imperialist ideas of the Colombo Group had a high potential to increase the anti-western movements in Asia and the US's idea of the "Free World." One of the main concerns of the US was a series of crises that had occurred such as the incident of the Malaya Emergency,<sup>5</sup> the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu, the Korean War, and the Formosa crisis.<sup>6</sup> The peaceful strategy of Zhou Enlai at the Geneva Conference also greatly troubled them. The US, therefore, reacted in response to these threats by perceiving those who were not on their side as their enemy. Moreover, the US also felt that they could no longer tolerate the movement of the Colombo Group and would have to do something to prevent the Bandung Conference from

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5 The Malayan Emergency can be perceived as a war between the Commonwealth and the Communist guerilla army (backed by the PRC) called Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) for the liberation of the Malaya from Western Imperialism.

6 The 1st Taiwan Strait Crisis (started from the beginning of September 1954) started with the invasion of Kinmen and Matsu Islands by the PRC. This led the US sending its 7th fleet to preventing the crisis from further escalation. In December 1954, the US declared that it would protect the two Islands as it did for Taiwan.

happening (Ampiah 2007, 63). A telex sent from John Foster Dulles to the US Ambassador in Jakarta on 10 December 1954 emphasized that the US should avoid and refrain from expressing any interests regarding the organization of the Bandung Conference (FRUS No. 34).

At the very beginning of 1955, the memorandum from the Bureau of East Asian Affairs from the US Department of State indicated that the attempt at the normalization of the relations between the PRC and other countries in Asia was ingenious (Tudda 2015, 65) and should not be ignored. What followed suit was the reaction of the US during the first half of January 1955; the US was extremely concerned about the PRC's diplomatic strategy. The discussion within the Department of State was preoccupied with Beijing's friendly diplomacy vis-à-vis Asian countries and the conference in Bandung. On 7 January 1955, a meeting was held in the office of the Secretary of State. The participation of Zhou Enlai in the conference worried the US since Zhou's paternalistic manner would likely (Tudda 2015, 65) persuade those attending the conference to favor the PRC's position. It was also believed that there was the possibility that the PRC would introduce anti-imperialist ideas at Bandung. The US felt that such ideas could ultimately lead to the creation of an anti-US bloc.

At the same time, the US was also trying to better understand the opinion of its major allies, especially the United Kingdom. On 8 January 1955, John Foster Dulles instructed that a telex should be sent from Washington to the US Embassy in London to seek information regarding the UK's position towards the Bandung Conference. The main purpose of the telex stated that: "if without strong-arm methods [the] conference could be prevented or a considerable number [of] significant countries influenced to decline [to] attend [the] US would welcome [the] outcome" (Tudda 2015, 72). On 12 January 1955, the US received an answer. The UK held a different opinion from the US, suggesting that it would be difficult to prevent the meeting in Bandung from happening and, on the contrary, it would be more beneficial if the US encouraged its non-communist allies to join the conference so they could be another voice of the US and dilute the intensity of the communist propaganda (Tudda 2015, 74).

Upon learning the British viewpoints, the US started to change its perception towards the Bandung Conference by adopting a much softer strategy. During a meeting at John Foster Dulles' office on 18 January 1955, advisors presented the idea that the US should encourage its allies to attend the Bandung Conference. To pursue this strategy, the US planned to provide clear directives to instruct all its representations in Asia and Africa (FRUS, January 18, 1955). The Secretary of State declared, "We must work up a list of subjects that will possibly be raised by the Communists during the Bandung Meeting. In effect, we shall



need to make a briefing book for our friends ... We wish the conference were not held; but if it is to be held, we must try to get the best representatives of friendly countries to Bandung, and they must be armed with the best available information" (FRUS. January 18, 1955).

Even though the policy's direction seemed to be much clearer after the meeting, the US was not certain whether the Bandung Conference would take place or not. However, Dulles closed the meeting with the observation, "it seems likely that many nations will hesitate to decline the invitation until the last minute and will ultimately accept ..." (FRUS. January 18, 1955). In the end, the US finally accepted that it could no longer prevent such a conference from happening and sent out a telex on 25 January 1955 to many of its different representations in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.<sup>7</sup> The said telex mentioned that:

1. [The] question whether [to] attend is for decision by local government but on balance the US believes [it] would be preferable for friendly Asian countries to attend.
2. If local government decides [to] attend, [the] US believes it would be advantageous [to] common interests that itsend [the] ablest possible representation.
3. Local government is of course aware[that] Communists will be well prepared for [an] attempt [to] bend [the] Conference [towards] their ends and should be guided accordingly.
4. If non- ommunist delegations cooperate effectively, [the] onference might conceivably provide [an] opportunity [to] frustrate communists and achieve constructive results

FRUS. 1955–1957. Volume XXI

On 10 February 1955, Mr. Carlos P. Romulo (then permanent representative of the Philippines to the United Nations) met an important advisor of the US Secretary of State to discuss matters related to the Bandung Conference. Romulo emphasized the necessity to receive the information and guidelines from the US and went on to further highlight that he could be useful for the Free World bloc because he could coordinate with representatives of non-communist countries such as Prince Wan Waithayakon from Thailand, Mr. Chaudhry Muhammad Ali (then Prime Minister of Pakistan), a representative from Turkey and representatives from the Arab countries at Bandung (FRUS. 1955–1957. Volume XXI). After the 1st SEATO Meeting in Bangkok on 23 February

7 Telex was circulated to Tokyo, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Hanoi, Saigon, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong.



1955, SEATO members such as France feared that the SEATO meeting would be the target of the discussion at Bandung (FRUS, 1955–1957, Volume XXI).

The context of the intensive communist expansion to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia would urge the US to finalize its position vis-à-vis the Bandung Conference. On 25 February 1955, during the SEATO Meeting, the State Department circulated another telex to different representations (the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey) saying that there was a necessity to start full and frank conversations regarding the Bandung Conference and tried to persuade the US allies to find a common position and create a bloc during the meeting. One of the important aspects was that the telex emphasized that all the conversations undertaken by US representatives should be undertaken discretely to avoid any negative backfire during the meeting (Tudda 2015, 78–79).

At Bandung, even though the US could not attend the meeting, the allies sent a special delegation to observe the meeting and to report back to Washington (Tudda 2015, 79). The US was worried that the PRC would seek support from its counterparts during the Bandung Conference regarding the Formosa crisis. Zhou Enlai might influence the conference, and the conference could become a platform for the PRC to exercise and expand its influence (Tudda 2015, 80). The US was following the conference closely, wishing that the result of the conference would not be successful and that all the attendees would not fall under the communist's influence.

### 3 PRC's Influence at the Bandung Conference

The context of the Cold War was the main issue discussed during the meeting even though the agenda was set on the development of the cooperation between developing countries and the anti-imperialist movement. The conference itself turned out to be an opportunity Zhou Enlai to present his diplomatic strategy and initiatives, by persuading the participants to agree with the principles for a peaceful coexistence (Ampiah 2007, 84).

Zhou Enlai adopted a diplomatic course to convey his message to the participants. In the US' telex, it was mentioned that Zhou highlighted the importance of being resilient and noted his unflinching position. It was also reported that the PRC would like to sit and discuss with the US regarding the Formosa crisis. Zhou said that the people of China wish to befriend the American people and China did not want to enter into war with the US. The government of the PRC would like to sit down and talk with the US Government

to discuss relaxing the tension in the far east, especially the tension over the area of Taiwan (Ampiah 2007, 86).

As for the meeting, it was concluded that: "Free from mistrust and fear, and with confidence and goodwill towards each other, nations should practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors and develop friendly co-operation based on the following principles:

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
3. Recognition of the equality of all races and the equality of all nations large and small.
4. Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country.
5. Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. (a) Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defense to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers.  
(b) Abstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries.
7. Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement as well as other peaceful means of the parties' own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of mutual interests and cooperation.
10. Respect for justice and international obligations

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#### 4 Thailand in the Bandung Conference

After the US set a clear agenda regarding its position vis-à-vis the Bandung Conference, the Department of State sent a telex to its Ambassador in Bangkok on 1 February 1955 with the following message:

Should Thailand decide to accept the invitation to the conference, the embassy should encourage Prince Naradhip, who could serve as a skillful protagonist in the interest of the West, to attend

AMPIAH 2007, 73

The telex clearly showed the willingness of the US to encourage Thailand, by sending Prince Wan Waithayakon (perceived as an ally of the US) to be the voice of the US at the Bandung Conference.

The Communist expansion in the region and Thailand was a serious concern for Premier Phibunsongkhram as stated earlier. The Thai security authority strongly believed that the PRC was backing communist movements in Thailand including the establishment of the Thai community in Yunnan Province believed to be trained by Pridi Banomyong and backed by the PRC with the aim to operate in Thailand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 2011). The communist movement accused Phibunsongkhram's regime of being a string puppet for Western imperialism (Neher 1993, 636).

The participation of Thailand in SEATO was another factor that highlighted the thinking that Thailand was a close ally of the US. The invitation to attend the Bandung Conference, therefore, presented a very good opportunity for Thailand to explain its stance with other developing countries. Thailand could also use this opportunity to establish contact with the PRC (Charoensri 2003, 125).

According to an interview conducted by Daniel Fineman with Rak Panyarachun and Karuna Kusalasai (an intimate friend of Sang Phatthanathai who was an important figure in Premier Phibunsongkhram's decision for the opening contact with the PRC), the Bandung Conference was a place where the Thai representative could meet with Zhou Enlai even though nobody knew whether the Thai Premier had this factor in mind when accepting Sukarno's invitation by early February 1955. However, just before Prince Wan left for Bandung, Phibunsongkhram ordered Prince Wan to try to meet Zhou Enlai in Bandung and use that opportunity to find out what the PRC's intentions towards Thailand were. Moreover, Premier Phibunsongkhram went further by paying for a delegation of Thai media to cover the event saying that they wanted to see the important change in the Thai foreign policy. The Thai Premier even emphasized that the reason for Prince Wan to attend the conference was "to show the conference that we [Thailand] intended to cooperate with all sides in building world peace" (Fineman 1997, 213).

At Bandung, Prince Wan was initially attending the conference as an observer but ended up becoming the rapporteur. According to Sirin Phatthanathai, as mentioned in her memoirs entitled "The Dragon's Pearl," Zhou Enlai initially disapproved of the fact that Prince Wan was nominated to be the rapporteur (Phatthanathai 1995, 45). Zhou Enlai saw Thailand as a great supporter of the United States. Fortunately, a representative from Sri Lanka explained that Prince Wan was a highly experienced diplomat who also had the most experience regarding international conferences. Zhou Enlai then not only took

back his words but also supported Prince Wan to be the rapporteur. Prince Wan's goal was to explain the reasons why Thailand joined SEATO and try to establish an understanding with other countries, raise the issue regarding the overseas Chinese and the impact on Thailand's security and explain to the other countries about the Vietnamese refugee situation in Thailand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 2011, 62).

In Prince Wan's statement at Bandung, he started by mentioning the position of Thailand that upheld the principle of "self-determination and the independence for all peoples of Asia and Africa" (Chinvanno 2020, 49). Later, Prince Wan would pose questions regarding the principle of peaceful coexistence saying:

Does it mean "live and also let live," which is the right principle? Does it imply the practice of tolerance as is explicitly stated in the Charter of the United Nations? For the Charter says: "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors

CHINVANNO 2020, 52

The latter referring to the principles of the United Nations would provide more security guarantees than the previous one. Prince Wan then went on to further emphasize the concerns of the Thai government saying:

These doubts in my mind must first be cleared up, for it is a fact, of which in all responsibility I have to take account, that Pridi Banomyong, a Thai politician, is being openly allowed or even supported to organise the training of Thai-speaking Chinese and persons of Thai race in Yunnan for the purpose of infiltration in Thailand and subversion in Thailand

CHINVANNO 2020, 52

As for Thai membership in SEATO, Prince Wan shed light on the fact that Thailand needed to protect itself from external threats. He indirectly explained the Thai position by citing the Buddhist tales, emphasizing the fact that Thailand was trying to preserve peace. Therefore, Thailand should not be criticized for its engagement with SEATO. The statement was said to be widely accepted by the participants at Bandung (Charoensri 2003, 27).

Meanwhile, during the meeting of the political committee in Bandung, Prince Wan used the opportunity of being the rapporteur to include the Principle of the United Nations Charter as the basis of the meeting's conclusion by stressing on the respect of the rights to self or collective defense (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 2011, 63). For Prince Wan, it was a challenge as he

had to negotiate a compromise between Zhou Enlai and Sir John Kotelawala as the two leaders held different perceptions of colonialism. The differences started with Sir John Kotekawala saying that there were two forms of colonialism: one was from the West, and the other one was from communism. Zhou Enlai, however, perceived colonialism as having only one form, which originated from the West colonizing other countries. Prince Wan, then, tried to propose a much more conciliatory terminology. He proposed using the word “manifestations” instead of using “form.” Zhou Enlai agreed with it and the conclusion was that the word manifestations was used to express that the conference did not agree with all manifestations of colonialism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 2011, 63). In Prince Wan's personal writing, he referred to the situation by saying:

I have carefully thought and saw that if [they] agreed to use the Charter of the United Nations as a basis, it would be much easier to find an agreement. Once the meeting for the political committee started, I said to Zhou Enlai that I had noticed that at the Conference about Korea in Geneva in 1954, Zhou Enlai was not disturbed by the Principles of the United Nations ... Therefore, we could use the United Nations Charter as a basis [to find the solution to the problem] of this Conference. Was that possible? Zhou Enlai replied by saying “Why not? China was the founding member of the United Nations, didn't you know?”

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THAILAND 2011, 63

In this case, Prince Wan was using the tactic of trying to find a mutual agreement between Zhou Enlai and Sir John Kotekawala by using the terms of the United Nations Charter. At the same time, Prince Wan also saw that the matter of self-defense and protection were issues of great concern for Thailand. He decided to use a word that could be understood as all disapproved of colonialism in all of its manifestations. This was not only a term that satisfied the Thai party, but also other countries at Bandung.

During the meeting, Prince Wan managed to find the opportunity to talk to Zhou Enlai (Phathanothai 1995, 46). Prince Wan was trying to talk to Zhou Enlai to find a solution to Thai concerns, particularly the communist infiltration and the training of Thai-speaking Chinese and persons of Thai race in Yunnan. They met at a dinner (Pongpichit 2015, 124) and talked about the issues that were of great concern for Thailand. Zhou Enlai informed Prince Wan the following:

1. Pridi Banomyong was only seeking political asylum and could not conduct any political activity. If Prince Wan was worried, the PRC

was ready to invite Prince Wan to visit the PRC to witness the real situation for himself. “To see something once is better than hearing about it a hundred times” (Phathanothai 1995, 46).

2. In regard to the so-called persons of dual nationality, this was an old issue, and the PRC was ready to discuss this matter with Thailand to find a solution to the problem.
3. Regarding the presence of 50,000 Vietnamese refugees, Zhou Enlai would use his personal relations with the Prime Minister of North Vietnam to meet Prince Wan to discuss this matter.

As for the establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations, Zhou Enlai said to Prince Wan that “the PRC can wait” (Pongpichit 2015, 24). After returning to Thailand, Prince Wan reported the matter to Premier Phibunsongkhram.

Even though the issues seemed to be resolved and Prince Wan returned to Thailand afterwards, the United States was following Prince Wan's moves with great interest. The then Ambassador of the United States asked Prince Wan about the meeting with Zhou Enlai. He reported to Washington in a telex saying: “Prince Wan said he had sent [the report to] his Prime Minister, now in the United States, a summary of his conversations with [Zhou] but had not yet prepared a full report for his government or completed his own reflections as to what conversations really meant and what might next be done” (FRUS. 1995–1997. Volume 2).

When Phibunsongkhram visited Washington in May 1955, the representatives of the US Department of State raised the issue during the meeting and the Thai premier said that he received Prince Wan's report and was also informed that Zhou Enlai had invited Prince Wan to visit Beijing. However, Phibunsongkhram cabled back instructing Prince Wan not to visit Beijing. He told the US representatives that Zhou was trying to persuade Prince Wan that the PRC was not hostile to Thailand. Moreover, he highlighted that the subversive attempt of the PRC in Southeast Asia continued as before and that the Viet Minh's position in the two Northern provinces of Laos was an attempt to further spread its influence in mainland Southeast Asia (FRUS. 1995–1997. Volume 22).

In the eyes of the United States, there were two analyses regarding the impact of Prince Wan's meeting with Zhou Enlai. One was the United States perceived Prince Wan as falling under the charm of Zhou Enlai which resulted in changes to Thailand's position vis-à-vis the PRC (FRUS. 1995–1997. Volume 21). The other was the United States was doubtful of Prince Wan, seeing his meeting with Zhou Enlai as part of a strategy for Thailand to diversify their international relationships (FRUS. 1995–1997. Volume 22).

## 5 Conclusion

The participation of Prince Wan at Bandung enabled Thailand to explain its position regarding its SEATO membership to 29 countries. Prince Wan Waithayakon was following the guidelines of the Thai government and achieved the goal of meeting with Zhou Enlai. The meeting between the two representatives did not only allow Prince Wan to discuss the issue that concerned<sup>8</sup> the Thai government but also enabled Thailand's rapprochement with PRC. After the meeting in Bandung, the Thai government secretly attempted to open the channel of contact with the PRC. Ari Pirom, then an official of the Thai Public Relations Department and Karuna Kusalasai were asked by Sang Pathanothai, a close aide to Phibulsonggram, to visit the PRC on a secret mission<sup>9</sup> at the end of 1955. They met President Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. The premier himself went to Burma on a secret mission to establish a diplomatic relationship with the PRC in December of the same year. After that, several informal delegations were sent to create ties but the contact was fully suspended after the 1957 coup that overthrew Premier Phibunsongkhram.

Even though the relations with the PRC were suspended for almost twenty years, the meeting between Prince Wan Waithayakon and Zhou Enlai remained an important milestone which paved the way for the establishment of a formal Sino-Thai diplomatic relationship in 1975. At the same time, though Premier Phibunsongkhram was no longer in power, Prince Wan Waithayakon was still serving different governments in foreign affairs until 1969.

Regarding relations with the US, even though the US was suspicious about Thailand's position after the meeting between Prince Wan and Zhou Enlai, the US still considered Thailand as its major ally in the region. This was largely due to Thailand's geographical location which was crucial for the US to pursue its containment policy in a region where most communist movements were backed by the PRC. Despite this fact, the US continued to support Thailand and Prince Wan. On 12 December 1955, Prince Wan discussed with US representatives in Washington regarding his candidature for the Presidency of the UN General Assembly, and the US pledged to support Prince Wan (FRUS. 1995–1997. Volume 22).

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8 Those were (1) the infiltration of the Communists in Thailand that could led to political unrest, (2) the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand.

9 They were accompanied by Amphorn Suwannabol, MP from Roi Et and Sa-ing Marangkur, MP from Buriram.



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