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Anti-communist Violence and the Ethnic Chinese in Medan, North Sumatra

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The story of the three million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in the aftermath of the September 30th Movement remains largely untold. Among the few publications that do consider the plight of the Chinese during those tumultuous years, many refer incorrectly to massacres.¹ The fact is, of course, that victims of the pogroms were overwhelmingly members of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) and its affiliated mass organisations. In their critical appraisal of this myth of a Chinese massacre, Robert Cribb and Charles Coppel call the popular misrepresentation of the Chinese experiences in 1965–66 a “genocide that never was”.² They argue that the ongoing currency of this myth can be attributed to the trope equating the social position of Chinese in Indonesia to that of Jews in Europe and claiming that their mobilising power lies in combating past and present discrimination against Chinese Indonesians. The myth has also persisted because so little is known about what happened to the Chinese during this period. Most of the news

¹ Examples are discussed in Robert Cribb and Charles A. Coppel, “A Genocide that Never Was: Explaining the Myth of Anti-Chinese Massacres in Indonesia, 1965–1966”, *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, 4 (Dec. 2009), especially pp. 451–4.

² Cribb and Coppel, “A Genocide”.

accounts of violence against ethnic Chinese in 1965–66 originated from either Antara, the Indonesian state news agency, or Xin Hua (and the associated China News Agency). Xin Hua, in particular, had a strong tendency to perceive individual incidents of violence as “local” manifestations of a “national” wave of anti-Sinicism. Such decontextualised reporting made it difficult for contemporary and later observers to understand those incidents in their local context.

This chapter examines the experience of the ethnic Chinese in the multi-ethnic city of Medan from October 1965 until early 1967. It does so by drawing on declassified US diplomatic telegrams, newspaper archives and oral interviews with a dozen Medan Chinese informants. While the US reports provide a wealth of local information through which a chronology of regional events regarding the 1965–66 violence can be reconstructed, the interviews show how people experienced those fateful months. Most of the people whose stories we retell here were members of the left-leaning Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia, Baperki), whose branches proliferated in North Sumatra before 1965, only to be crushed shortly afterwards. The combination of sources reveals a complex network of political identification and affiliation within the Chinese community and an economy of violence that connected the Medan Chinese to the local Army and the various youth forces that spearheaded the mass killings. The chapter concurs with Coppel and J.A.C. Mackie’s conclusion that ethnic Chinese were not the target of extensive massacres,³ though it shows that at three key moments (October 1965, December 1965 and March–May 1966) the building and renegotiation of an anti-communist coalition in North Sumatra resulted in attacks against and the long-term detention of ethnic Chinese in Medan.

The Ethnic Chinese and Baperki

In the late colonial era, North Sumatra was dominated by a mode of production involving North Atlantic capital, agricultural plantations

³ J.A.C. Mackie, “Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959–1968”, in *The Chinese in Indonesia: Five Essays*, ed. J.A.C. Mackie (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), pp. 117–8; Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983).

and indentured labour from southern China and Java.⁴ After Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945, parts of the East Coast plantation belt as well as neighbouring Aceh saw the outbreak of social revolution against the old aristocracy, though by 1947 Republican forces had restored a semblance of order. The PKI built large constituencies, particularly among Javanese estate workers and Batak peasants, by means of the plantation and peasant labour unions (Sarekat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia, SARBUPRI, and Barisan Tani Indonesia, BTI).⁵ However, the PKI's growing influence in North Sumatra did not go unchallenged. Taking advantage of the declaration of martial law in March 1957 and Sukarno's order to seize Dutch-owned enterprises late the same year, the Army took over the big estates in the region. This brought the Army and the PKI into increasingly direct conflict.⁶

During the early 1960s, the PKI in North Sumatra moved well beyond its traditional base in labour and the peasantry. The Party enjoyed growing support from the upper echelons of North Sumatran society, including Governor Ulung Sitepu and large segments of the provincial bureaucracy. It also developed strong influence over the press, the state news bureau (Antara), radio, youth organisations and schools. According to one estimate, by 1965 the PKI in North Sumatra had 120,000 members, making it the largest PKI branch outside Java.⁷ Expressing deep concern, a US diplomatic telegram in 1965 characterised North Sumatra as a communist stronghold where the PKI and its affiliated organisations had "most levers of political power in or near its hands".⁸

⁴ See Karl J. Pelzer, *Planter and Peasant: Colonial Practice and the Agrarian Struggle in East Sumatra, 1863–1947* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); and Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870–1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵ This was particularly true of the Karo Batak. Mary Steedly, *Hanging without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Post-colonial Karoland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 267.

⁶ Karl J. Pelzer, "The Agrarian Conflict in East Sumatra", *Pacific Affairs* 30, 2 (1957), pp. 151–9.

⁷ Audrey Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity, 1926–1998* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 244.

⁸ Airgram A-912, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 28 May 1965, Record Group 59, State Department Central Files 1964–1966, POL 2 INDON, National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter RG59 1964–66 documents referred to by file code and NARA].

The arrival of Major General Mokoginta, the new interregional commander for Sumatra, in November 1964 led to a further deterioration in Army-PKI relations.⁹ A devout Muslim, Mokoginta seconded Army personnel to the big estates, established pro-Muslim and pro-Army newspapers,¹⁰ cultivated militant youth groups by enlisting the services of local toughs and, in the context of Indonesia's policy of Confrontation with Malaysia, even began arming members of the Army's own unions.¹¹ There were a growing number of violent incidents in the first half of 1965, most notably the killing of warrant officer Sudjono by BTI squatters and the subsequent revenge attack at the Bandar Betsy plantation in Simalungun District in June.¹² In short, North Sumatra was a region with a strong PKI support base and a growing military-Muslim alliance waiting to strike back.

Where did the ethnic Chinese stand in this delicate political milieu? North Sumatra has had a strong Chinese presence since the late nineteenth century. The census of 1930 showed that ethnic Chinese accounted for one-third of Medan's population and that more than 10 per cent of the population of the entire Residency (then called Sumatra's East Coast) was Chinese; by 1943 there were 280,000 ethnic Chinese in the Residency.¹³ In the post-war years Malay, Batak and Javanese migrants poured into the city, but the ethnic Chinese continued to dominate small-scale industry and the retail sector and were a prominent part of the multi-ethnic mosaic.

Although few ethnic Chinese joined the PKI, like other Indonesians many sought to articulate their political aspirations via the leftist programme and vocabulary of the day. Many also took pride in the establishment of the People's Republic of China and were its ardent supporters. Most of all, the Chinese found themselves increasingly disadvantaged by policies intended to benefit "indigenous" Indonesians by curtailing the economic position of those categorised

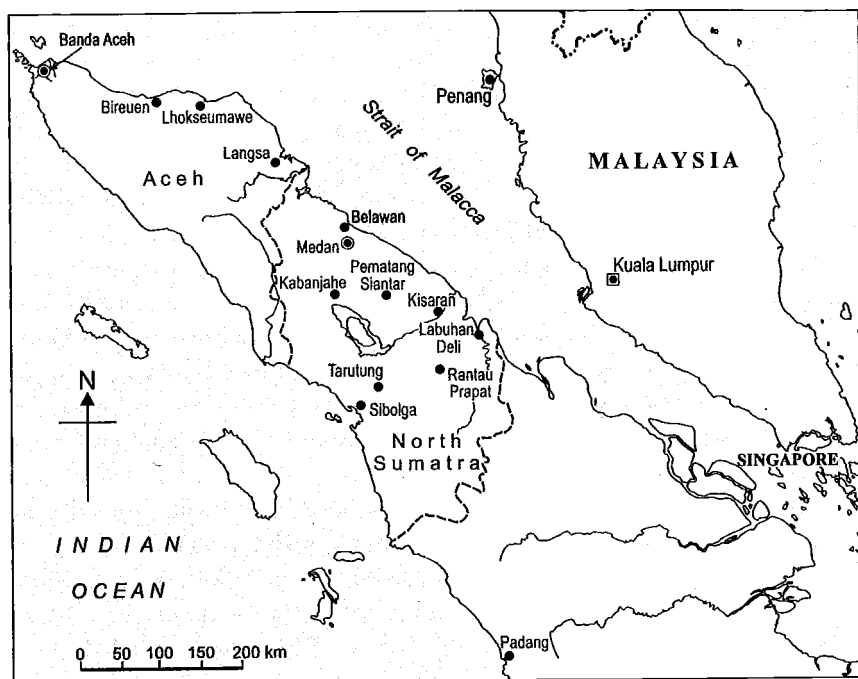
⁹ He was subsequently installed as the Authority for the Execution of Dwikora in Sumatra (Pepelrada/Sumatra).

¹⁰ Muhammad T.W.H., *Perlawanan Pers Sumatera Utara terhadap Gerakan PKI* (Medan: Yayasan Pelestarian Fakta Perjuangan Kemerdekaan RI, 1996), pp. 195–6.

¹¹ Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, p. 239. See also Airgram A43, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 15 Mar. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

¹² Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 87–96.

¹³ Pelzer, *Planter and Peasant*, p. 126.



Map of North Sumatra and Aceh

as “alien” (that is, those without Indonesian citizenship), which led to bureaucratic discrimination against *all* ethnic Chinese, including those with Indonesian citizenship. In North Sumatra, as elsewhere, nationalised Chinese found Baperki the best defender of their interests.

Baperki, the brainchild of journalist-cum-parliamentarian Siauw Giok Tjhan, was the first and largest Chinese mass organisation in Indonesia after Independence. Founded in 1954 in response to surging debates over the dual nationality issue, the organisation quickly expanded and worked to defend Chinese Indonesians against official and unofficial forms of racial discrimination.¹⁴ Its activities involved policy campaigns as well as practical efforts to assist those Chinese applying for citizenship and licences. In North Sumatra, such tasks often included translation for the region’s largely Hokkien- and Mandarin-speaking Chinese. A successful businessman who became

¹⁴ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, pp. 44–63.

the Treasurer of the Baperki branch in Kisaran, a plantation town in the South, commented that he viewed the organisation as little more than a “service bureau” for its hundred-odd members, most of whom spoke very little Indonesian.¹⁵

Baperki also became involved in education. The 1957 “Djuanda Order” resulted in tight controls over “alien schools” throughout Indonesia; in North Sumatra it caused the closure of 80 per cent of all Chinese-language schools and a sharp drop in student enrolment. Local Baperki branches worked to convert “alien schools” into Indonesian-language “national schools” and to establish new schools under their organisational umbrella.¹⁶ Ten Baperki schools were registered in North Sumatra in 1961; by 1965, these had been joined by the Andalas primary and secondary schools and the Medan campus of Res Publica University (URECA).¹⁷

The leaders of Baperki branches in North Sumatra were drawn from diverse backgrounds. The chairman of the provincial chapter, Chang Hsi Sek [張希石], born in Asahan in 1909, was a third-generation Sumatran and Peking-educated radical who survived persecution from both Kuomintang warlords in China and Dutch intelligence in the Netherlands Indies. After returning to Medan in the 1950s, he became active in publishing, journalism and education and belonged to a dozen other organisations in addition to Baperki.¹⁸ Yoe Sim Boen, born in Tarutung in 1924, was a mestizo former revolutionary guerilla fighter who served as chairman of Baperki Medan from 1954 until 1965 and was an advocate for lower-class Chinese residents of Medan.¹⁹ Tan Ho Lan [陳荷蘭], who was born

¹⁵ BA, interviewed 27 May 2009, Jakarta, by Cindy Tan, who kindly provided access to the transcript.

¹⁶ See Lee Kam Hing, *Education and Politics in Indonesia, 1945–1965* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1995), pp. 151–2; and Mary Somers Heidhues, *Chinese Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, South-east Asia Program, Cornell University, 1964), pp. 20–2.

¹⁷ G.T. Siau, *Lima Jaman: Perwujudan Integrasi Wajar* (Jakarta: Yayasan Teratai, 1981).

¹⁸ Information obtained from an unpublished manuscript written by Chang Hsi Sek, accessed on 4 June 2009, Hong Kong, kindly provided by Zheng Guanghuan [鄭光煌].

¹⁹ After being imprisoned in 1965–74 and again in 1975–78, Yoe died in obscurity in 2006. Yoe Sim Boen, interviewed by Dirk Buiskool, 21 Aug. 1994 and 17 Sept. 1994, Medan; transcripts kindly provided by Buiskool.

in Kabanjahe and became the treasurer of Baperki Medan, had connections with the local military command as well as both the pro-Kuomintang/Taiwan and the pro-communist/Beijing camps in Medan's Chinese community. Unlike the Indonesian-speaking professionals who typically dominated Baperki leadership in Java, these men and other Baperki branch leaders in North Sumatra were transcultural figures whose life trajectories resist the conventional dichotomy between foreign-born (*totok*) and locally born/assimilated (*peranakan*).

The early 1960s witnessed a sharp leftward turn of the Baperki leadership in both Jakarta and North Sumatra. After the May 1963 anti-Chinese riots in West Java, the general apprehension pushed Baperki to prove its loyalty to Indonesia.²⁰ This meant aligning with Sukarno and, to the extent that Sukarno seemed to protect the PKI, the Left as well.²¹ This move to the left was particularly dramatic in North Sumatra in mid-1965. During this period, the PKI experienced a dramatic increase in membership in North Sumatra. In concert with this, new Baperki branch offices were established in district towns throughout the province.²² As the PKI aligned itself more closely with the Chinese Communist Party after the split of the international communist movement, Baperki in North Sumatra also moved closer to the Association of Overseas Chinese (Huaqiao Zhonghui [華僑總會], hereafter Hua Zhong, the umbrella organisation of alien Chinese in Indonesia) through organisational activities and political alliance. Andalas school students, for example, banded together with students from the Hua Zhong schools to celebrate International Labour Day. *Harian Harapan*, the news organ of both Baperki and the PKI in North Sumatra campaigned against three pro-Taiwan secondary schools in Medan until their forced closure in mid-1965 on charges of being "anti-communist nests" (*sarang anti-Komunis*).²³

²⁰ On anti-Chinese riots in the early 1960s, see Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia," pp. 93–4, 97–110.

²¹ Airgram A-7, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, "Fearful Mood of Chinese in Java Pushed Them Leftwards", 2 Sept. 1965, POL 12 INDON, NARA.

²² Airgram A-59, American Consul Medan to US Embassy Jakarta and State Department, 2 June 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

²³ *Harian Harapan* was published by Chang Hsi Sek and edited by Tan Fhu Kiong [陳富強], a Java-born Chinese who was a PKI member, secretary of Baperki North Sumatra, and head of the provincial branch of the Indonesian Journalists' Association. Muhamad T.W.H., *Perlawanan Pers Sumatera Utara*, p. 192.

Within just a few months, Baperki and Hua Zhong were to become a convenient target of anti-communist attacks.

The September 30th Movement and the First Wave of Violence

When news of the September 30th Movement reached Medan on the morning of 1 October, regional officials were initially in the dark about the course and meaning of the events in Jakarta. Recognising, however, that the Movement provided an opportunity for the Army to move against the PKI, that night the American Consul in Medan sent a cable to the embassy in Jakarta requesting permission to provide “non-sensitive information” to Major General Mokoginta, commander of the Sumatra Interregional Command (Komando Antar Daerah 1, abbreviated Koanda 1), in order to “help Anti-Communist elements here make right decisions”.²⁴ By the next morning the senior military officers in Koanda 1, together with Kostrad deputy commander Brigadier General Kemal Idris, had concluded that the September 30th Movement was a leftist plot engineered by Foreign Minister Subandrio, who happened to be in Medan at the time, and set about mobilising anti-communist forces.

That afternoon the newly formed North Sumatra Youth Action Command (Komando Aksi Pemuda), spearheaded by Pemuda Pancasila, the youth wing of the Army-backed League of Upholders of Indonesian Freedom (Ikatan Penerus Kemerdekaan Indonesia, IPKI), held a mass rally in downtown Medan to oppose the PKI.²⁵ On 5 October Mokoginta issued an “order of the day”, declaring that the September 30th Movement was a tool of foreign powers intent on destroying the Indonesian revolution.²⁶ In conjunction with this statement the Youth Action Command staged a second mass rally, this time demanding that the PKI be banned. The crowd turned violent, smashing windows and looting the provincial PKI headquarters, but reportedly took sufficient care to collect documents containing

²⁴ Telegram 219, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 1 Oct. 1965, POL 23 INDO[N?], NARA.

²⁵ Telegram 813, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 2 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 INDO[N?], NARA.

²⁶ Telegram 877, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 6 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 INDO[N?], NARA.

membership information. In the subsequent days the Youth Action Command widened the attack to include houses owned by PKI leaders as well as Baperki and Hua Zhong schools.²⁷

The course of anti-communist violence in the city of Medan cannot be understood in isolation from the course of developments throughout northern Sumatra. Closely following cues from Jakarta and Medan, and with direct encouragement from the regional military commander, on 6 October anti-communist forces in Aceh held mass rallies and began to round up hundreds of PKI members and sympathisers and turn them over to the Army, which, over the following days, released them back into the hands of civilians to be executed.²⁸ Although the PKI was a minor party in devoutly Muslim Aceh,²⁹ the mass killings there — the first anywhere in Indonesia — proceeded at an extraordinary pace: they were over by mid-November, and the press carried cryptic reports that the province was “calm”.³⁰ In a cable, the American Consul in Medan wrote: “General Mokoginta on 25 December told me there are only 120 PKI left in Atjeh, and a [word deleted] source on Mokoginta’s staff reported 6000 have been killed there.”³¹

²⁷ Telegram 956, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 11 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 INDON, NARA; S.B. Nasution, *Kisah Nyata Aksi Massa Pemuda Sumatera Utara Dalam Penumpasan Gerakan 30 September/PKI di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Yayasan Pembaharuan Pemuda Indonesia, 1992), pp. 102–28.

²⁸ On events in Aceh during the first week of October, see Jessica Melvin, “A Silent Massacre: The Indonesian Communist Party and the Mass Killings in Aceh”, BA Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 2009.

²⁹ Siegel estimates that the Aceh branch of the PKI had 2,000–3,000 members. James Siegel, *Rope of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 408. The PKI’s affiliates certainly had more members.

³⁰ “Atjeh Tenang”, *Berita Yudha*, and “Atjeh kembali tenang”, *Angkatan Bersendjata*, both 11 Nov. 1965.

³¹ Source on General Mokoginta’s staff, quoted in Telegram 924A, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 27 Dec. 1965, POL 23-9 P [INDON?], NARA. An Army publication from Aceh states that 1,941 members of the PKI, its affiliates and Baperki were “kidnapped/arrested”. See Kodam-1, “Laporan Tahunan Lengkap Kodam-1/Kohanda Atjeh, Tahun 1965”, n.d., pp. 6–7. David Mozingo reports that “several hundred” ethnic Chinese were killed in Aceh but does not provide a source or specify whether this was during the October–November 1965 anti-PKI pogrom or during the March–April 1966 second-wave attack on ethnic Chinese. David Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia, 1949–1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 251.

The situation in North Sumatra was far more complex. The PKI and its affiliates had a huge following in the province, and Governor Ulung Sitepu, though not a Party member, was on the Left. Rumours circulated that Party members were gathering in the southern part of the plantation belt, in the Karo region west of Medan, and near Sibolga on the west coast in preparation for an offensive. On 13 October, a US diplomatic cable warned that "fighting was expected"; it had not yet commenced.³² The key factor was that the Army was divided sharply along institutional and ideological lines. Koanda I commander Major General Mokoginta was a staunch anti-communist but had few troops under his direct command. During the second week of October, Army units from Java that had been posted to North Sumatra in the context of Confrontation were ordered to return home, leaving a vacuum in key areas south of Medan. The commander of the North Sumatra Regional Military Command (Kodam II/Bukit Barisan), Brigadier General Darjatmo, had leftist sympathies, as did many within the officer corps and large numbers of troops.³³

Concerned that he was not in a strong enough position to carry out an anti-communist drive, Mokoginta moved cautiously to appoint new officers to key posts, purge the strongly PKI civil defence forces, and provide weapons to anti-communist plantation workers.³⁴ He and his staff also encouraged the Youth Action Command and other anti-communist elements in Medan to step up their own militancy. One target of this was the PRC Consulate, which refused to fly its flag at half-mast as requested by the Army.³⁵ This stoked racial

³² Telegram 994, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 13 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 INDON, NARA. The notion that mass killings in North Sumatra began in early October seems to originate from the hyperbolic account in John Hughes, *The End of Sukarno: A Coup that Misfired, A Purge that Ran Wild* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1968), pp. 19, 141.

³³ US sources estimated that 30 per cent of troops in Kodam II/Bukit Barisan were pro-communist. Telegram 1098, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 20 Oct. 1965, POL 18 INDON, NARA. This is the same as estimates for Central Java.

³⁴ Telegram 994, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 13 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 INDON, NARA. This began in March 1965.

³⁵ *Huaqiao Ribao*, 24 Oct. 1965, citing Radio Malaysia as its source.

tensions and led to further attacks on Baperki property.³⁶ Rising anti-communist militancy also provoked street fighting between rival youth groups, which resulted in the murder of two anti-communist university students by members of the PKI's People's Youth (Pemuda Rakyat) organisation on 25 October. The fact that this case became a *cause célèbre* suggests that large-scale killings had not yet begun. Indeed, as late as 28 October, a US Embassy telegram noted that "there are as yet no reports of trouble in North Sumatra".³⁷

The turning point came the next day. On 29 October, Bukit Barisan commander Brigadier General Darjatmo was replaced by Brigadier General Sobiran, whom US officials described as being "violently anti-Communist".³⁸ Confident that it had consolidated control over its own ranks, the Army wasted no time initiating mass demonstrations. On 2 November, an estimated 100,000 people rallied in downtown Medan to demand that the PKI be disbanded, Governor Sitepu be removed from office, diplomatic ties with the PRC be severed, and Baperki be disbanded and its property confiscated. This demonstration was the cue for the assault on the PKI and its affiliated organisations. On 8 November, the US Embassy reported a "systematic drive to destroy PKI in northern Sumatra and wholesale killings".³⁹ Two weeks later, according to US officials, a "Sumatra military officer reported that Army, while counseling public restraint, is actually encouraging Moslems to kill all PKI cadres, and that hundreds are presently being killed every day in North Sumatra".⁴⁰

³⁶ For an extensive list of attacks on property, see Pusat Penerangan Angkatan Darat, *Fakta2 Persoalan Sekitar "Gerakan 30 September"* (Jakarta: P.N. Balai Pustaka, 1966), pp. 181-6.

³⁷ Telegram 1317A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 28 Oct. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA. See also Airgram A-15, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 18 Nov. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

³⁸ "Brigjen P. Sobiran Pangdam II/BB", *Berita Yudha*, 2 Nov. 1965; the quote is from Airgram A-15, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 18 Nov. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

³⁹ Telegram 309A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 8 Nov. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA; repeated in Telegram 798A, 22 Nov. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA.

⁴⁰ Airgram A-16, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 6 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

Meanwhile, the Army and its allies in North Sumatra intensified the attack on Baperki, which, the Army argued, had financed the September 30th Movement. On 12 November, Brigadier General Sobiran ordered the seizure of all Baperki and Partindo property and the suspension of both organisations' bank accounts.⁴¹ Ten days later, all members of Baperki and its affiliates were ordered to report to the military authorities.⁴² Nevertheless, violence against the ethnic Chinese community was confined to attacks on Baperki and Hua Zhong schools and the confiscation of their property. While several informants noted the murders of particular individuals, such as Tan Fhu Kiong, the secretary of the provincial Baperki branch and editor of the PKI daily *Harian Harapan*, no one recalled any systematic effort to arrest or kill ethnic Chinese.

The Army was sending mixed signals: while it supported the violence, it was clear that some officers were serious about bringing the violence under control. At the same time, rising tensions within the anti-communist civilian alliance led to the Ansor having violent clashes with Pemuda Pancasila radicals, on the one hand, and the pro-Sukarno Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI), which was accused of harbouring communists, on the other.⁴³ On 30 November, the US Consul in Medan reported on a meeting during which he learnt about the formation of a secret organisation that, despite the Army's order for a "slowdown", planned to continue the "silent killings". This informant insisted that he was "not under direction of Army, which he regarded as too slow and too uncertain", and stated that he had been detained by the Army for a week because of his involvement in "unauthorised killings". He claimed to have recruited 4,000 men, mostly from Pemuda Pancasila in Medan, and planned to extend the killings to other areas of North Sumatra.⁴⁴ Mass killings were now well under way, but there was also growing friction within the anti-communist alliance. The resolution would

⁴¹ Partai Indonesia (Partindo) was a left-leaning, nationalist party.

⁴² Telegram 838A, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 23 Nov. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA.

⁴³ Airgram A-15, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 18 Nov. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁴⁴ Cable 1037A, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 30 Nov. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA.

take place on the streets of Medan and involve attacks against Baperki in particular, and the ethnic Chinese more generally.

The 10 December Killings

The combination of mixed signals from Army commanders and competition between anti-communist civilian groups made for a volatile situation. While the Army's public calls for a "slowdown" may have dissuaded some within IPKI, it pushed the most radical members of Pemuda Pancasila to adopt ever more violent aims. The Army also encouraged the entry of other anti-communist umbrella groups. Splits within the PNI led to the establishment of a right-wing Democratic Youth Front that took to the streets of Medan. The Islamic Students' Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) was also busy expanding its membership, claiming on 4 December that it had just admitted 1,900 new members. At the same time, Mokoginta spoke at the inauguration of the new North Sumatra Muslim Joint Committee, which was heeding calls issued by religious leaders for holy war. On 9 December, Mokoginta again addressed this group, urging his audience to extend their organisation down to the district and even village level in order to "undertake an Islamic offensive" against the PKI.⁴⁵ The intense competition between anti-communist forces and their respective, often competing patrons within the Army set the stage for the next wave of violence in Medan.

On the morning of 10 December 1965, the Pemuda Action Command, "[s]pearheaded by Muslim youth from Atjeh and extremist elements of the Medan Pemuda Pancasila", held a mass rally in front of the PRC Consulate in southeast Medan.⁴⁶ Protesting against the pro-communist views aired by Radio Beijing, the crowd bombarded the consulate with stones and bricks, wounding three members of the consulate staff. When Indonesian police fired shots into the crowd, killing at least one demonstrator, hundreds of incensed demonstrators ran from the scene yelling "Kill Chinese" and brandishing weapons. The crowd "rampaged through the city, pulling Chinese off pedicabs

⁴⁵ The previous three sentences are based on Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to State Department, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁴⁶ Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to State Department, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

and motor scooters, hacking them with long knives, ransacking their stalls in the Central market, killing or wounding all who resisted".⁴⁷ A US Embassy telegram noted: "According to [the] official estimate, Chinese casualties numbered four dead and 161 wounded while [US] Consulate sources in Chinese community place death toll at 20 and [name of source deleted] reported 100 dead."⁴⁸

News accounts of what happened in Medan on 10 December 1965 provide a simple master narrative: sparked by a clash in front of the Chinese Consulate, the violence spread to the city centre and then dispersed to the outskirts and other towns in the region. This narrative suggests that the violence was the work of an agitated crowd gone wild. Yet interviews with a dozen ethnic Chinese residents who experienced the day first-hand suggest a more complex picture. For example, an informant who taught at the nationalised Sutomo school and was in his sixties at the time of the interview remembered 10 December as a partially premeditated event with selected targets ranging from Baperki leaders to teachers of the Andalas school and staff of Hua Zhong. Leaving school on his motorcycle, he witnessed a small crowd attacking the shop of a Baperki member; but when he arrived home, he found that his family shop was still open. A friend telephoned around 2 p.m. to inform him of outbreaks of "Chinese beating" [Hokkien: *pa denlan*, 打唐人] in the outskirts of Medan. Soon afterwards, a crowd turned up on his street to attack the radio shop that belonged to Chang Hsi Sek, the chairman of North Sumatra Baperki. The crowd looted the expensive radios and burned the remaining merchandise in the street.⁴⁹

This informant's recollection highlights the selective nature of the 10 December attack as it took place in downtown Medan. Even though the man witnessed the looting of shops belonging to Baperki

⁴⁷ Quoted in Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, pp. 60–1. The attack is all the more remarkable because two days earlier the Supreme Operations Command (Komando Tertinggi) had assigned the Institute for the Promotion of National Unity the task of "mend[ing] the problem of the Chinese community organisation Baperki". See Airgram A-390, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 13 Dec. 1965, POL 13-3 INDON, NARA.

⁴⁸ Telegram 451A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 13 Dec. 1965, POL [illegible] 2 [INDON?], NARA; Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to State Department, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁴⁹ BB, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 21 Dec. 2008, Medan.

members on two occasions in one day, he did not perceive an imminent threat to his own security — as he did when he heard of instances of *pa denlan* in the city outskirts. He was quite certain at that time that violence against Baperki members was of a different nature from *pa denlan*. Other interviewees suggested that outbreaks of *pa denlan* in Medan outskirts such as Tembung, Belawan and Labuhan Deli on 10 December victimised the Chinese in a more arbitrary fashion.⁵⁰

Declassified US documents provide an extraordinary picture of the motivations behind the 10 December violence. A US Consulate source “high in the all-Sumatra army command” noted that the Youth Action Command planned the riot and that the plan was condoned by the Army. However, this source quoted Major General Mokoginta “saying that he does not care if the entire Chinese quarter is burned, but he will not permit physical injury to Chinese persons”. Although Army troops were not sent to protect the PRC Consulate, on the afternoon of 10 December “troops were out in force throughout the threatened areas of the city, and for several hours Medan echoed with gunfire as troops repeatedly broke up attacks on Chinese persons and Chinese establishments”.⁵¹ Over the ensuing days the violence spread to smaller towns surrounding Medan. There are numerous reports of attacks on Chinese-owned shops and even the rape of Chinese women. The spread of anti-Chinese violence gave rise to higher casualty estimates, ranging from 30 killed and hundreds injured to as many as 200 killed.⁵²

It appears that the violence was only partly “anti-Chinese” in nature; it also involved the Army opening fire on rioting youths and taking many into custody. Furthermore, there are remarkable reports about the involvement of Acehnese youths. According to a cable from American Consul Theodor Heavner, “the rioters were in fact led by the Medan Pemuda Pancasila and the Pemuda Tanah Rentjong from Atjeh”. The same cable noted that a week later the Army “stopped five truckloads of Atjehnese youth bent on attacking the Chinese and

⁵⁰ BC, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 3 Jan. 2009, Medan; BD, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 2 Jan. 2009, Medan.

⁵¹ Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to State Department, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁵² Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, p. 191fn36. The riot was never reported in the Jakarta press.

forced them to return to Atjeh".⁵³ Despite the crackdown, inflamed exchanges between the Army and the PRC government continued. On 29 December General Mokoginta was reported to have warned the PRC to drop what he saw as an "anti-Indonesian campaign", while urging Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent to "show clearly whether or not they are loyal to Indonesia".⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the onslaught against the Left in North Sumatra was in full swing. By the end of 1965, there were reports about widespread killings throughout the East Coast plantation belt, the PKI stronghold among the Karo Batak, and beyond. In Rantau Prapat, the district military commander stated that 400 people had been killed and another 800 remained in detention; he set a nightly "quota" of victims. In neighbouring Asahan District, it was estimated that 2,500 people had been killed. A plantation manager noted that "at least 100 headless corpses [had been] left on his estate in recent weeks".⁵⁵ In contrast with Java and Bali, there is very little information about the overall number of people killed in North Sumatra. In late December, an IPKI activist told an embassy officer that 15,000 people had been killed across the province;⁵⁶ three months later, extrapolating from the death toll on a single plantation, the British Consul estimated that between 27,000 and 40,000 people had been massacred.⁵⁷ Despite the scale of the savagery, and belying the degree of Army direction, on 29 December US Ambassador Green cabled Washington: "North Sumatra still bloody but situation never really out of control there except perhaps in certain districts."⁵⁸

⁵³ Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to State Department, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁵⁴ 蘇島司令製造反華藉口, 大公報 ["Sudao siling zhizhao fanhua jiekou", *Da Gong Bao*], 29 Dec. 1965.

⁵⁵ All cases reported in Airgram A-19, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 20 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁵⁶ Telegram 991A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 29 Dec. 1965, POL 23-9 INDON, NARA. Curiously, a 1966 Army publication claims that the September 30th Movement had plans to kill 15,000 people in North Sumatra; see *40 Hari Kegagalan "G-30-S" 1 Oktober–10 November*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Staf Pertahanan Keamanan, 1966), pp. 112–3.

⁵⁷ Cited in Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, p. 244. See also Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, pp. 163–4.

⁵⁸ Telegram 991A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 29 Dec. 1965, POL 23-9 INDON, NARA.

Detention

The large number of detainees presented a very real problem for the military. In early December, Brigadier General Sobiran "revealed that the Army is holding 11,000 PKI prisoners in the province of North Sumatra"; then in late December 1965, General Mokoginta said that there were 15,000 communists under detention.⁵⁹ The vast majority of the detainees, being members of PKI-affiliated peasant and plantation worker unions, were held in rural areas. Some sources noted that the Army had allocated a budget to deal with the huge number of detainees and was busy building detention centres, suggesting that not all detainees would be killed. The largest of these centres, intended to hold up to 3,000 detainees, was to be built on a rubber estate owned by American company Goodyear.⁶⁰ There were, however, persistent rumours that the budget allocated for detention centres was insufficient and so the Army intended to kill many of the prisoners, perhaps even transporting them to Aceh for execution.⁶¹

In contrast with the plight of peasants and plantation workers, detainees in urban areas were far less likely to be killed. This is particularly true of the ethnic Chinese members of Baperki. Although there is little documentation about detention, interviews provide a glimpse into the experience of ethnic Chinese under detention in Medan. In North Sumatra, as was the case elsewhere in Indonesia, many detention camps or "rehabilitation centres" were set up in large buildings that had been confiscated from civilians accused of being pro-PKI. Torture was commonplace in the detention camps, murder not infrequent. One of the most notorious detention centres in Medan was housed in the clubhouse of the North Sumatran Teochiu Association, known as the Teochiu Huikuan [潮州會館]. For more than a decade after 1965, the Operations Command to Restore Security and Order (Kopkamtib) and its much-feared Special Task Force (Laksus Kopkamtib, established circa 1967) used the building to incarcerate, interrogate and torture political prisoners. Among those

⁵⁹ Telegram 924A, US Embassy Jakarta to State Department, 27 Dec. 1965, POL 23-9 [INDON?], NARA.

⁶⁰ Airgram A-16, US Consulate Medan to US Embassy Jakarta, 6 Dec. 1965, POL 2 INDON, NARA.

⁶¹ J.B. Wright to British Embassy, 8 Feb. 1966, Records of the Foreign Office, 810-25, 1966, United Kingdom National Archive.

known to have been held at the Teochiu Huikuan from 1967 to 1970 were four members of the Kisaran Baperki: two died of wounds soon after their release, and the other two are still very apprehensive about recounting their ordeal.⁶²

The experience of ethnic Chinese detainees in Medan is aptly illustrated by another ethnic Chinese informant. On 20 December 1965, he was told to report to the detention centre that had been set up in the clubhouse of the Association of the Xinghua Chinese in Medan, known as the Xingan Huikuan [興安會館]. He was in a mixed batch of 108 detainees, most of whom were Baperki members from Medan, with the remainder coming from other ethnic groups and organisational affiliations. He remembered particularly that several female teachers from the Andalas school were in the camp with their children. Although he was taken into detention in December 1965, his case was not “processed” until May 1966. The interrogations were conducted by a team from the regional military command, led by a man known as “As Rangkuti”.⁶³ Each detainee was required to state his/her political affiliations and whereabouts on 30 September/1 October 1965.⁶⁴ After wrapping up their investigations at the Xingan Huikuan, the team of military officers moved on to the former Teochiu Huikuan, where they dealt with the PKI members.

For many Baperki members the experience at the Xingan Huikuan was not particularly traumatic, and in one sense the detention centre provided Baperki members with protection from hostile anti-Chinese youth groups. Detainees were allowed to organise amongst themselves for food, cleaning, purchasing, security and sports activities, while Baperki members who were not detained supported those in the camps.⁶⁵ With a special permit, the detainees were even allowed to go home during the day. These recollections correspond with that of Oei Tjoe Tat, a Minister of State under Soekarno and a Baperki member who visited Medan as part of the Presidential

⁶² BE, interviewed by Cindy Tan, 27 May 2009, Jakarta; transcript kindly provided by Tan. For an account of the Teochiu Huikuan building, see Yen-ling Tsai, “Through a Building Darkly”, *Inside Indonesia* 95 (2009).

⁶³ Most likely an ethnic Batak “assistant” on the Kodam I/Bukit Barisan staff.

⁶⁴ BF, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 23 Oct. and 24 Dec. 2004, Medan.

⁶⁵ BG, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 6 Jan. 2009, Medan.

Fact-Finding Mission in late December 1965. At a Chinese school, he observed about 300–400 prisoners who were mostly members of Baperki and the Indonesia Party (Partai Indonesia, Partindo).⁶⁶ Having already seen the abuse of Baperki leaders in camps in East Java, Oei was impressed by the cooperativeness of the commander of the detention camp, who readily provided information and allowed Oei unhampered access to the detainees. Before leaving the camp, Oei later wrote:

... the former Chinese school reverberated with the sound of hundreds of detainees, both men and women, dutifully singing [the national anthem] Indonesia Raya. They did not seem too oppressed and were full of certainty in Bung Karno's policies. I was moved hearing the national anthem sung by people in such adverse circumstances and it was difficult for me to hold back tears⁶⁷

The rather benign situation inside the Xingan Huikuan partly reflected the wealth and social connections of the Baperki detainees. One of these detainees was Tan Ho Lan. In the years before 1965, Tan had befriended the regional military command through his active participation in the local football scene, resulting in the commander granting Tan a lucrative concession to import bulk steel from the USSR to North Sumatra. The relationship between Tan's family and the military remained strong despite Tan's detention. The commander continued to grant licensing privileges to Tan's son and held shares in his glass factory, while Tan's father, having fled to Singapore after spending three months in detention, became the overseas supplier to the family business.⁶⁸ Others, however, came to understand their detention as part of an ongoing process of victimisation. Yoe Sim Boen, the chairman of the Medan branch of Baperki, who was transferred from one camp to another over the course of 13 years, noted that detention allowed the Army not only to keep him away from local politics but also to blackmail anyone the Army chose to accuse

⁶⁶ Oei Tjoe Tat, *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat: Pembantu Presiden Soekarno*, ed. Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Stanley Adi Prasetyo (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1995), pp. 189–90.

⁶⁷ Oei, *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat*, p. 190. Bung Karno is the affectionate nickname for President Sukarno.

⁶⁸ BH, interviewed by Yen-ling Tsai, 10 Oct. 2004, Medan.

of being his acquaintance or a Baperki member, or anyone who had simply sought assistance from Baperki when applying for Indonesian citizenship.⁶⁹

The Third Wave, 1966

The first two-and-a-half months of 1966 were marked by intense political manoeuvrings between Sukarno and Suharto's forces in Jakarta. Sukarno attempted to reassert his authority, first by encouraging the formation of a mass-based "Sukarno Front" to challenge the Army's Action Front to Crush the September 30th Movement (KAP-Gestapu), then by reshuffling his cabinet and dismissing Army Chief of Staff General Nasution. These efforts energised the PNI and Sukarnoists, but only served to sharpen the focus of the Army and its allies. On 11 March 1966, under intimidation and threat, Sukarno was forced to sign the "Order of 11 March" (Surat Perintah 11 Maret, abbreviated Supersemar), authorising Lieutenant General Suharto to "take all measures considered necessary to guarantee security, calm, and stability of the government and the revolution".⁷⁰ The next day Suharto used his new powers to ban the PKI. Suharto's victory in Jakarta provided a trigger for a new round of demonstrations and violence in Medan and other parts of northern Sumatra.

Once again, Baperki and ethnic Chinese provided a convenient target for the most radical anti-communist factions. Between 26 and 31 March 1966, hundreds of youths took over buildings and schools belonging to 13 Chinese organisations in Medan. Similar takeovers occurred in towns all over North Sumatra into April.⁷¹ These actions prompted Major General Mokoginta to issue a "stiff order [on] April 21 forbidding acts of racialism or disturbances of peace" and "specifically forbade pillaging or burning of shops and stores and promised stiff actions against any who disturbed normal life of 'certain layers of

⁶⁹ Yoe Sim Boen, interviewed by Dirk Buiskool, 21 Aug. 1994 and 17 Sept. 1994, Medan.

⁷⁰ Crouch, *Army and Politics*, p. 189.

⁷¹ 印尼反動派對華僑進行瘋狂迫害與掠奪, 人民日報 ["Yinni fandongpai dui huaqiao jinxing fongkuang puohai yu lueduo", *Renmin Ribao*], 2 May 1966.

our society' (i.e. Chinese)".⁷² By then, however, 31 Chinese schools had been seized.⁷³

The attack on ethnic Chinese was even more severe in neighbouring Aceh. In April there were anti-Chinese riots in Lhokseumawe, Bireuen and other towns, and the Hua Zhong buildings in Banda Aceh and Langsa were taken over.⁷⁴ Ironically, in late April the police barred the Chinese from leaving Langsa,⁷⁵ but two weeks later the military authority ordered the Chinese leaders to leave the province by June and all "alien Chinese" to leave by 17 August. The campaign to purify Aceh of all alien Chinese influence was so intense that the same authority also barred cohabitation of alien Chinese with those who held Indonesian citizenship, even if they belonged to the same family.⁷⁶ Thousands of ethnic Chinese fled south to Medan, joining the estimated 10,000 who had already poured into the city in late 1965. The North Sumatra Military Command ordered all pro-PRC Chinese to report their property holdings,⁷⁷ required all "ex-PKI, ex-Baperki and all Indonesian citizens of foreign descent" to attend a Pancasila Indoctrination programme,⁷⁸ and in mid-May banned the Hua Zhong.⁷⁹

The anti-Chinese violence in North Sumatra was widely seen as part of a nationwide campaign in which various student action fronts

⁷² Incoming Telegram 615, Department of State received from US Consulate Medan, 22 Apr. 1966, POL 23-8 INDON, NARA.

⁷³ 文匯報 [*Wen Hui Bao*], 1 Apr. 1966. See also "Nasution Calls for Settlement of 'Chinese Issue'", *South China Morning Post*, 30 May 1966.

⁷⁴ Incoming Telegram 646, US State Department received from US Consulate Medan, 4 May 1966, POL 23-8 INDON, NARA.

⁷⁵ 印尼反動派對華僑進行瘋狂迫害與掠奪, 人民日報 ["Yinni fandongpai dui huaqiao jinxing fongkuang puohai yu lueduo", *Renmin Ribao*], 2 May 1966.

⁷⁶ 印尼反動派反華排華暴行日益猖狂, 人民日報 ["Yinni fandongpai fanhua paihua baoxing ri yi changkuang", *Renmin Ribao*], 24 May 1966.

⁷⁷ 印尼棉蘭親中共華人奉令需登記財產, 工商日報, 人民日報 ["Yinni mianlan qing zhonggong huaren fongling shu dengji caichan", *Gongshang Ribao*], 1 May 1966.

⁷⁸ Reported in "Indoktrinasi di Kota Madya Medan", *Sinar Harapan*, 3 July 1966, and "WNI Turunan Asing dan Exanggota PKI Selesai. Diindoktrinasi", *Sinar Harapan*, 2 Aug. 1966.

⁷⁹ 印尼反動派反華排華暴行日益猖狂, 人民日報 ["Yinni fandongpai fanhua paihua baoxing ri yi changkuang", *Renmin Ribao*], 24 May 1966.

that had earlier demonstrated against Sukarno and PKI-related organisations redirected their attacks to target Chinese-owned property.⁸⁰ But while demonstrations of a similar kind had gradually died down in other places by May 1966, anti-Chinese militancy in North Sumatra and Aceh escalated. The exodus of ethnic Chinese from Aceh set the stage for a third wave of violence, targeting not property but refugees housed in 14 makeshift refugee camps scattered throughout the city and its outskirts. Living conditions inside the camps were dire, and conflicts often arose between refugees and youth groups. A US diplomatic telegram noted that many ethnic Chinese were desperate to leave the country altogether:

Chinese in Medan are extremely nervous. Talk of departure is widespread. If ships were to be provided right now for repatriation to mainland China several estimates indicate that as many as 20 or 30 thousand might go from this area. On [a] smaller scale, those with money are seeking to immigrate to Europe or anywhere else.⁸¹

In May 1966, the PRC announced that it would send ships to pick up its “nationals” who wished to be repatriated.⁸² Only four voyages were made, repatriating only a few thousand people.⁸³ The arrival of each ship provided an occasion for further violence. The largest unrest occurred on 9 November 1966, three days after the Chinese-flag

⁸⁰ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, pp. 63–6; Mackie, “Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia”, p. 116.

⁸¹ Incoming Telegram 768A, Department of State received from US Consulate Medan, 22 Apr. 1966, POL 2-1 INDON, NARA.

⁸² Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia*, p. 250.

⁸³ The first ship arrived at the Belawan port on 26 September 1966 (中共輪船抵棉蘭港, 工商日報 [“Zhonggong Luchuan di Mianlanggan”, *Gongshang Ribao*], 27 Sept. 1966); the second ship called on 6 November 1966 (第二批受害僑胞乘光華輪離印尼回國, 人民日報 [“Dierpi shouhai qiaobao cheng kuanghualun huiguo”, *Renmin Ribao*], 25 Nov. 1966) and left on 20 November 1966 (在棉蘭陸軍監獄中英勇鬥爭四十天的四十一名難僑青少年, 中國新聞 [“Zai Mianlang lujunjianyu zhong yingyong douzheng sishitiang de sishiyiming nanqiao qingshaonian”, *Zhongguo Xinwen*], 27 Nov. 1966); the third ship arrived back in China on 5 February 1967, and the fourth and final ship called at Belawan on 14 April 1967 (光華輪駛抵棉蘭港外五日印尼政府仍無理阻撓我國接僑, 中國新聞 [“Guanghualun shili Mianlang ganwai wuri Yinni zhengfu ren wuli zurao woguo jieqiao”, *Zhongguo Xinwen*], 20 Apr. 1967).

liner *Guang Hua* had made its second call at Belawan and one day after an official representing the Bukit Barisan Military Command had guaranteed the safety of the refugees in a meeting with PRC diplomats from Jakarta. According to Chinese sources, two crowds, numbering over 400 and 100 respectively, launched attacks and hurled rocks at the refugees outside the camp.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the youth groups continued to pressure the municipal and North Sumatran provincial authorities,⁸⁵ demanding the expulsion of all alien Chinese by the end of the year as well as a nationwide withdrawal by the Ministry of Trade of the trading licences of all alien Chinese. None of these demands were met.

Like the 10 December 1965 riot, the conflicts between radical youth groups and displaced refugees from Aceh revealed a discord between the local Army command and the youth groups. "Throughout the second half of 1966," Mackie explains, "the authorities seem to have been very much on the defensive against the student militias of the ethnically heterogeneous and hard-boiled city of Medan."⁸⁶ Indeed, on 9 November 1966 Mokoginta again issued a stern threat of action against "actions aimed at disturbing society", insisting that "demands for the repatriation of foreign Chinese should be made through legal channels".⁸⁷ The warning did not seem to have had much effect, and anti-Chinese incidents in Medan occurred well into 1967.

One of the main sources of friction between the regional Army command and radical IPKI, KAMI and KAPPI youths in Medan was control over property confiscated from the PKI, Baperki and other leftist organisations. While authorities in Jakarta regularised the take-overs in May 1966 by banning all alien schools, they did not stipulate the future of the properties, thereby leaving the decision to the discretion of the regional military command. The authority of local military commanders was not always honoured by the youth groups, for whom "the school buildings were part of the spoils of victory of

⁸⁴ 印尼反動派又在棉蘭迫害華僑，人民日報 ["Yinni fandongpai youzai Mianlan pohai huaqiao", *Renmin Ribao*], 11 Nov. 1966.

⁸⁵ See the Introduction in this volume for youth demands regarding Sukarno and his use of the term "Gestok".

⁸⁶ Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959–1968", p. 117.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959–1968", p. 118.

the New Order".⁸⁸ One such instance involved a stand-off at the North Sumatra headquarters of Hua Zhong in Medan. Having occupied the building in early 1966, the Youth Action Command barricaded the building in order to resist the Army's taking over. Several youths were subsequently detained, but the Youth Action Command was eventually allowed to keep the building collectively with several other youth organisations for two years. When Brigadier General Sarwo Edhie Wibowo was appointed commander of the Bukit Barisan Regional Military Command in June 1967, he banned the PNI and sought to address the problem of seized properties.⁸⁹ Eventually the Youth Action Command surrendered the Hua Zhong building to the Army, though in exchange it received the Xingan Huikuan building, which to this day is the headquarters of the Communication Forum of the Sons and Daughters of Military Retirees.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Aceh and North Sumatra are recognised to have been the regions where the Chinese suffered most heavily during 1965–66,⁹¹ but it does not necessarily follow that the general populace, the Youth Action Commands or the Army there were any more "anti-Chinese" than elsewhere in Indonesia. That anti-Chinese violence occurred in a particular place because people there were anti-Chinese is just a tautology. Instead, this chapter has looked into the local condition of violence, where discord within the anti-communist camp in North Sumatra developed before it manifested itself in a series of anti-Chinese outbreaks. The particular constellation of Party, ethnic and Army cleavages made it necessary for the Army to solidify the anti-communist alliance in urban areas before venturing to eliminate PKI strongholds in the East Coast plantation belt and other rural areas.

⁸⁸ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, p. 66.

⁸⁹ Crouch, *Army and Politics*, pp. 234–6.

⁹⁰ See Nasution, *Kisah Nyata Aksi Massa Pemuda Sumatera Utara*, p. 134.

⁹¹ See Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959–1968", pp. 117–8.

⁹² Joshua Oppenheimer, "Freemen: When Killers Make Movies", www.final-cut.dk; Joshua Oppenheimer and Michael Uwemedimo, "Show of Force: A Cinéma-Séance of Power and Violence in Sumatra's Plantation Belt", *Critical Quarterly* 51, 1 (2009): 84–110.

This chapter has shown that violence against ethnic Chinese occurred in distinct phases that corresponded to shifts in the anti-communist alliance in North Sumatra. Throughout October 1965, the coalition-building mass actions in Medan were directed against not only PKI offices and select leaders but also the PRC Consulate and property belonging to Baperki and other ethnic Chinese organisations. Mass killings began in early November but were not directed against the ethnic Chinese *per se*. By early December, as factions emerged within the anti-communist coalition, the ethnic Chinese community, now swollen with newcomers fleeing the bloodbath in Aceh and rising tensions in district towns, again provided a convenient target for the Youth Action Commands looking for new enemies and new ways to remain active. The result was the 10 December 1965 anti-Chinese riot and killings. During 1966, as the Army sought to bring the hardliners under greater control and repress Sukarnoism, a third wave of attacks targeted ethnic Chinese, this time threatening the large number of displaced ethnic Chinese huddled in camps and seeking to gain control over property. For ethnic Chinese with Indonesian citizenship, the brutal detention process was paradoxically also a form of protection; for those without citizenship, life in makeshift camps was a prelude to further attacks and the icy institutional violence of the new regime.

Far from being forgotten, the anti-communist violence in North Sumatra has been commemorated in a bizarre way and from the most unlikely of sources. A British filmmaker has produced a documentary about several members of the civilian killing squads in North Sumatra, who at the time of writing were prominent and feared public figures in Medan. They themselves were making a movie about the mass executions they had carried out four decades ago.⁹² In the documentary, one of the characters speaks cheerfully of how, on 10 December 1965, he stabbed every Chinese person he met between the PRC Consulate and the heart of the Chinese quarter, where he and his friends looted and burned Chinese property.