

Visions of Empire. Changing American Perspectives on Dutch Colonial Rule in Indonesia between 1920 and 1942*

FRANCES GOUDA

The impact of American diplomatic pressure on the Indonesian struggle for independence after world war II was controversial. Some Dutch government officials, civil servants, or ordinary residents of the former Dutch East Indies have deplored the American record of ignorance about the particularity of Dutch colonial society in Southeast Asia, and many amongst them have faulted Americans for advocating a capricious and simplistic anti-colonialism that wreaked havoc in post-war Indonesia and elsewhere. A few, in fact, have complained bitterly about the political constraints imposed upon the Dutch nation by the outside world, especially by the US foreign policy establishment and the United Nations, which neither 'trusted nor understood us and forced us to take a course of action which was not of our own choosing'¹.

However, American policies towards the decolonization of Indonesia during the years following the second world war did not emerge in a vacuum. Accordingly, in this essay I wish to explore the evolution of American diplomats' views regarding Dutch colonial rule in Southeast Asia between the early 1920s and 1942, the year the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies. Through an examination of the steady stream of reports which US diplomats in Batavia, Medan, and Soerabaya transmitted to the Department of State in Washington DC, one can gain insights into the official perceptions and popular stereotypes that shaped Americans' understanding of Dutch colonial rule. After all, the formulation of US foreign policy — as was true for the diplomatic relations of many other democratic nations — relied not only on 'perceptions of the official mind' but also heeded an array of more nebulous public opinions².

Even though the US consuls' dispatches about the social and political situation of the Dutch East Indies had only minimal impact on the actual implementation of US foreign policy in the Pacific, which was crafted primarily in the corridors of power in the White House and the State Department in Washington DC, their reports mirrored fluctuations in both official and popular attitudes. In general, diplomats in the field tried to respond to the issues that most preoccupied their superiors, while their correspondence also echoed changes in public sentiments regarding either Dutch colonialism or European imperialism in general.

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1 D. van der Meulen, 'Hoe nu verder?', *Oost en West*, jubileum-nummer, XLII, vii (May 3, 1949) 24. See also Harry J. Benda, 'Decolonization in Indonesia. The problem of continuity and change', *American Historical Review*, LXX, iv (July 1965) 1058-1073, and Evelyn Colbert, 'The road not taken. Decolonization and independence in Indonesia and Indochina', *Foreign Affairs*, LI, iii (April 1973) 608-628.

2 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Changing perceptions of Japan in the Netherlands and Netherlands East Indies before 1942', *Journal of the Japan-Netherlands Institute*, II (1990) 43-66.

Hence, these diplomatic missives served as a kind of barometer of the shifting American interpretations of Dutch East Indies' governance between the 1920s, when they offered praise and admiration, and the 1930s, a decade in which US diplomats became quite critical of the colonial government's repressive policies towards native politicians and condemned its tendency to incarcerate individual Indonesians without a formal judicial hearing. Towards the end of the 1930s and in the early 1940s, when the Japanese threat in the Pacific loomed larger than life, American judgments about Dutch colonial rule altered once again, at this time incorporating both positive and negative evaluations in order to develop a realistic assessment of the Dutch East Indies as a credible American ally in a potential military clash with Japan, while acknowledging the legitimacy and strength of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

A variety of both tangible and intangible factors molded Americans' visions of empire in the Dutch East Indies and their change over time. First, America's own particular colonial experience in the Philippines played a distinct role in determining US diplomats' attitudes towards the imperial policies of other Western nations, whether the Dutch in the Indonesian archipelago, the British in India, or the French in Indo China. Second, the immediate economic concerns with protecting American financial investments in the Indies informed their attitudes towards Dutch colonial rule. Third, the military and strategic interests of the United States in the Pacific affected American judgments about the validity of Dutch colonial mastery. The new social commitments of president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 'New Deal' in the 1930s and the more liberal ideological tenor of his State Department constituted a fourth factor that colored American interpretations. The social agenda of the Roosevelt administration inaugurated a new political discourse about the protection of the economic position and civil rights of poor and disenfranchised American citizens. This novel political vocabulary emphasizing due process of law or the basic civil liberties and legal entitlements of individual citizens, regardless of their racial or economic background, also reverberated in American diplomatic discussions about colonial Indonesia in the 1930s. Thus the manner in which individual diplomats incorporated this new political idiom added a fifth component to the shifting American attitudes towards Dutch rule in the Indies.

These more or less concrete factors were further compounded by elusive, cultural forces. American observers stationed in Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s also relied on their own unique sense of history when they attempted to disentangle the social and political realities of Dutch colonial rule. In this context we can more or less assume that the US consuls general who were posted in Batavia, or the American consuls assigned to Medan and Soerabaya, were not among the most senior officers the US diplomatic corps could muster. They tended to be mid-level diplomats, whose outlook on the world revealed some of the limitations inherent in the average educated American's comprehension of European or Southeast Asian history, geography, and international politics. In their reports to the State Department in Washington DC, members of the American consular corps stationed in the Dutch East Indies between 1920 and 1942 occasionally created a story about Dutch history that was shaped less by an astute

analysis of Dutch East Indies politics but articulated, instead, a more inchoate sense of the history of the Dutch nation in the European métropole, which they perceived through a uniquely American prism.

To many Americans, the image of Dutchness was a highly positive one, embodying 'good citizenship, stubborn courage, industry, resourcefulness, and cleanliness'³. In American folklore, Holland and its wealthy burghers were represented as staunch supporters of the United States' struggle for independence from Britain in 1776 and as friendly trading partners and fellow democrats ever since. As the historian Gerlof Homan has recently maintained, beginning with the seventeenth-century New Netherlands, Americans have esteemed the Dutch nation 'as a model of a stable and progressive democracy, inhabited by an industrious and peace-loving population'⁴.

In the twentieth century the State Department in Washington DC, and American diplomats in general, continued to view the Netherlands primarily as a sympathetic democratic ally full of like-minded, wily businessmen. Many of the US consuls' interpretations of the nature of Dutch colonial mastery in Indonesia thus reflected Americans' instinctive understanding of Dutch history in Europe, in which stories about Hans Brinker and Father Knickerbocker may have loomed larger than most Dutch people realize. A. T. Steele, a foreign correspondent for *The Chicago Daily News* and *The Washington Star*, for instance, invoked the same hackneyed images in his reports from Java as late as April of 1941: 'the Dutch are first of all businessmen and realists. Sentiment is one of their secondary qualities'⁵.

In American vernacular speech, though, the flipside of this imagery was expressed in phrases such as 'going Dutch', 'Dutch uncle', and 'Dutch courage', which associated the shrewd business practices of Dutchmen with avarice or even an intoxicated, and therefore dubious, integrity. Thus, between the early 1920s and the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in 1942, American observers in Southeast Asia incorporated in their diplomatic appraisals a mixture of concrete economic concerns, political agendas, and personal sensibilities as well as more ambiguous cultural clichés. The ways in which these distinct elements either overlapped or sequentially dominated American perspectives during the decades of the 1920s, the 1930s, and the early 1940s provide a historical background to American policies towards the Indonesian struggle for independence in the post-world war II era.

Americans' rosey-colored perspectives in the 1920s

'The Philippines are a mere incident in the life of the United States', wrote Chas L. Hoover, the US consul general in Batavia, to the secretary of state in 1925, 'while the

3 Frank Freidel, 'The Dutchness of the Roosevelts' in Robert P. Swierenga and J. W. Schulte Nordholt, ed., *A bilateral bicentennial. A history of Dutch-American relations, 1782-1982* (BMGN, XCVII (1982) ii) 156.

4 Gerlof D. Homan, 'The Netherlands, the United States, and the Indonesian question, 1948', *Journal of contemporary history*, XXV (January 1990) i, 125.

5 National Archives, Suitland, Maryland (hereafter NA/Suit), A. T. Steele, 'War strengthens US ties with Netherlands Indies', *The Washington Star* (April 18, 1941). Record Group 165 (hereafter RG 165), Records of the war department, general and special staffs, military intelligence division, 'Regional File', 1922-1944, Netherlands East Indies (hereafter WD, Reg. NEI), Box 2632.

continued possession of the [Indonesian] islands is essential to the very life and prosperity of the Netherlands⁶. Hoover hit the nail on the head. Although the role of colonial overlord of a region of islands in Southeast Asia was a new and unaccustomed one for the United States, most Americans familiar with their nation's colonial performance glorified their administrative track record in the Philippines. Since the US colonial expansion into the Philippines was primarily a project of the Republican party, supporters of a sequence of Republican presidents, beginning with president William McKinley in 1900, wholeheartedly embraced the stated goal of bringing 'happiness, peace, and prosperity' to Filipino natives. The US intervention in the Philippines, as was the case with American intrusions elsewhere in the world, was legitimized by appealing to an evangelical sense of mission or a 'manifest' historical destiny⁷. As Hoover noted, however, the possession of the Philippines was only tangential to the identity of the United States. Besides, as far as the nation's economic wellbeing was concerned, the Philippines represented more of a financial drain than an economic asset⁸.

Soon after they were firmly ensconced in their new position as colonial masters, though, Americans went to work with their customary, indomitable optimism. Within a little more than a decade or so, the US boasted of a lengthy list of conspicuous accomplishments, proud of having constructed longer roads and dug better sewers than any colonial power in Asia. American expenditures on health care enabled the Filipino population to double in size between 1900 and 1920, and American education fostered a rise in literacy rates from 20 percent to 50 percent within one generation; by 1909 the US administration exulted in having established 4000 elementary schools for Filipinos⁹. Yet at no time did the Philippines represent either a real benefit or a genuine threat to the lifeblood of the American nation. Besides, when the (William Atkinson) Jones Act — a bill sponsored by a Democratic member of Congress stipulating Filipino autonomy and eventual independence as soon as Filipinos could establish a 'stable government'—passed the House of Representatives in October, 1914, and was signed into law by Democratic president Woodrow Wilson in August, 1916, Americans officially acknowledged the ephemeral connection between the mother country and colony¹⁰. But Woodrow Wilson cautioned that Filipinos, in order to achieve true political democracy, should first accept American tutelage so they might not only learn

6 National Archives, Washington DC, Records of the Department of State (hereafter NA/DC), Chas L. Hoover, the US consul general in Batavia, in a long report to the secretary of state (hereafter Sec State), April 17, 1925, 14. M-682, Records of the Department of State relating to the internal affairs of the Netherlands, 1910-1929 (hereafter Records, 1910-1929), Roll 30, political matters, 856D.01-.0491.

7 Stanley Karnow, *In our own image. America's empire in the Philippines* (New York, 1989) 197. See also Richard Barnet, *The roots of war* (New York, 1972), 'The imperial creed rests on a theory of lawmaking ... and organizing the peace', 21.

8 Hoover, April 17, 1925, 14. Theodore Friend confirmed this opinion in *The blue-eyed enemy. Japan against the West in Java and Luzon, 1942-1945* (Princeton, 1988)19.

9 Karnow, *In our own image*, 197-207.

10 Friend, *The blue-eyed enemy*, 12, 29, and Karnow, *In our own image*, 246-247.

to love 'discipline and order' grounded in constitutional law but, above all, learn 'to yield to it instinctively'¹¹.

According to Raymond Kennedy, a professor of government and political science at Yale University in the late 1930s, American dominance in the Philippines constituted a 'deviation' from the universal patterns of colonial rule elsewhere in the world¹². From the outset the American government tried to downplay its official role as an imperial power and avoided the addition of a separate colonial department to its bureaucratic structure. Instead, president McKinley created a Bureau of Insular Affairs for the political and administrative oversight of the Philippines that became part of the War Department. Because the American people had always felt a 'deep repugnance' to both the conquest of distant lands and 'the assumption of rule over alien people', political scientist Rupert Emerson argued at the outset of world war II, the official policy vis-a-vis the Philippines was to nurture an independent Filipino state from the very beginning¹³. In general, as Edward Said has written in his recent *Culture and imperialism*, Americans tended to cloak their imperial ventures abroad in altruistic overtones, despite much evidence that their true goal was to garner financial profit; in American popular mythology, Said argues, US foreign incursions were presumably dedicated to the defense of freedom and democracy, to extend the rule of law and the American dream to less fortunate people elsewhere in the world¹⁴.

The situation of America's colonial neighbor in Southeast Asia was fundamentally different. In the Netherlands, wrote Richard Tobin, a diplomat assigned to the American embassy in The Hague on December 27, 1927, the situation in the Indies is the subject of great anxiety among all classes. 'The prosperity of the Dutch nation is almost wholly dependent on the colonies. The loss of the colonial possessions might result in financial as well as political ruin...'¹⁵. Nonetheless, Richard Tobin demurred, the current nationalist agitation in British India and China have been viewed with a lack of true concern by a country that is convinced it has governed its colonial possessions 'with more wisdom than the British and with more vigor than the French'¹⁶.

This vigorous wisdom, according to an American consul in Batavia in the early 1920s, resided in a form of government that was 'paternal and therefore not in any sense democratic'. While these conditions had caused considerable dissatisfaction

11 Quoted by George W. Stocking jr., 'Lamarckianism in American social science, 1890-1915' in *Race, culture and evolution. Essays in the history of anthropology* (1968; repr. Chicago, 1982) 253.

12 Raymond Kennedy, 'The colonial crisis and the future', in Ralph Linton, ed., *The science of man in the world crisis* (1945; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1980) 308.

13 Rupert Emerson, *The Netherlands Indies and the United States* (Boston, 1942) 72.

14 Edward W. Said, *Culture and imperialism* (New York, 1993) 5, 285-288.

15 NA/DC, Richard M. Tobin, minister of the legation of the USA in The Hague, to Sec State, December 27, 1927, M-682, Records, 1910-1929, Roll 28,856D.00-40. Friend, in *The blue-eyed enemy*, mentioned that while the Indies' contribution to Dutch national income was around 14 percent in the late 1920s and 1930s, prominent businessmen, government officials, and decisionmakers across the board assumed that the Indies-derived national income was much higher, i. e. as high as 40 to 50 percent, 19-20. See also J. B. D. Derksen and J. Tinbergen, 'Berekeningen over de economische beteekenis van Nederlandsch-Indie voor Nederland', *Maandschrift van het Centraal bureau voor statistiek*, XL (October/December, 1945) 210-216.

16 *Ibidem*.

among the educated native and European residents, he admitted that on the whole it had worked well and had served the best interests, political and commercial, of the colony, especially with regard to the needs and protection of the native population: 'perhaps in no other way could these needs be so fully and completely met than by such an autocratic power intelligently applied'¹⁷. One of the secrets of the Dutch success, wrote another American diplomat from Soerabaya in 1924, is that indigenous peoples are left free to adhere to their 'own customs or *adat*' as long as they are peaceful and 'do not interfere with European exploitation'¹⁸. A scion of a famous American family, Nicholas Roosevelt, concurred that the Dutch always tried to improve the welfare of the natives and never interfered with their traditions and superstitions; whereas the average American or Englishman, he wrote in 1925, had little patience with habits that were impractical but which were deeply rooted and important to the natives, 'the Dutch accept it and make the most of it'¹⁹.

Consul general Chas Hoover agreed with this appraisal: the present government of the Indies, he wrote in 1925, is the heritage of long years of patient effort on the part of the Dutch to rule the archipelago 'with a minimum of expenditure of blood and treasure'. He conceded, though, that this system of government entailed throughout the 300 years of Dutch colonization a 'toleration of features which were distasteful to the progressive, liberty-loving Dutch, but which had become fixed in the very lives of the apathetically conservative people of these islands'²⁰. Hoover acknowledged that the Dutch fostered the participation of a growing number of natives in the affairs of local government, while carefully respecting *adat* in 'all matters not regulated by Dutch codes'²¹. He went on to report that experiments of this kind have not been brilliantly successful in other countries where people are at a low stage of development, but in the Dutch East Indies, he said,

the system of training for the responsibilities of self government may be more intelligently directed than where it is attempted to clothe a people with powers of whose proper use they have not the slightest conception²².

Hoover's successor, Coert du Bois, also gave the Dutch colonial administration a boisterous pat on the back and a ringing endorsement. In a lengthy report submitted to the State Department in 1929, he predictably pointed to the Dutch control of the archipelago's economic resources and their military might. But probably most important, he wrote, was 'that the whites — particularly the 30,000 Dutch who are doing it — are experts in the art of government'. By government, Du Bois specified,

17 NA/DC, Henry P. Starren in Batavia to Sec State, November 18, 1921. M-682, Records, 1910-1929, Roll 28, 856D.00-40.

18 NA/DC, Rollin R. Winslow in Soerabaya to Sec State, November 1, 1924. M-682, Records 1910-1929, Roll 46, 856E.00.

19 Nicholas Roosevelt, *The Philippines. A treasure and a problem* (New York, 1926) 160.

M NA/DC, Chas L. Hoover to Sec State, April 17, 1925, 1,18.

21 *Ibidem*, 3.

22 *Ibidem*, 18.

he did not imply merely the collection of taxes and the punishment of offenses. Instead, he described the magnificent organization, construction, and operation of irrigation works to grow rice for the densest population in the world, the diligent provisions of public health and the prevention of epidemics, the maintenance of public order among potentially hostile peoples and tribes, the suppression of piracy, the slave trade, and the prevalent abuses of the native rulers. Dutch civil servants, said Du Bois, provided 'sympathetic and paternal' care to a people

incapable of planning it and carrying it out for themselves: the present Dutch government in the Indies would seem to deserve the whole-hearted support of every Western government whose nationals have interests here²³.

Du Bois's praise knew few limits: he described the typical Dutch government official in the Indies as honest, courteous, sympathetic, broadminded and highly educated. He brought to his work an infinite capacity for obtaining all the facts before making a decision, 'but when he says no he means it and resents being urged to reconsider'. Du Bois commended Dutch civil servants, too, for their 'willingness... to meet, examine, and discuss with friendly interest the aspirations of the brown people to learn how to govern themselves'²⁴. Raymond Kennedy, who became a senior policymaker in the newly created Southwest Pacific affairs division in the State Department towards the end of world war II — where he could rely on his extensive scholarly knowledge of Indonesia — reiterated this judgment in 1942. Kennedy said that Dutch civil servants in Indonesia were 'the best colonial administrators in the world'²⁵.

Secure in their military foothold in the Philippines — the Filipino bases of the US army and navy were paid for directly by taxpayers in the United States and did not strain the annual colonial budgets — Americans in the 1920s did not yet worry about the strategic importance of the Indonesian archipelago, if only because the incipient aggression of Japan, and its eventual thirst for oil, were still elusive. Thus, the operative words in their rose-colored and congratulatory assessments of Dutch colonial policy during the 1920s were erudition, vitality, thoroughness, intelligence, and paternalism — a characterization that would have prompted many a Dutch civil servant, planter, or businessman to smile in agreement and to burst with pride²⁶. Whether one was hyper ethically inspired and had genuine faith in eventual Indonesians' independence, or whether one held a more jaundiced view of Indonesians' capacity to rule themselves, this laudatory American evaluation would have validated the self image of a large segment of the Dutch community in the Indies and nurtured the conviction that 'they

23 NA/DC, Coert du Bois to Sec State, voluntary report, part V (The European Population), August 27, 1929, M-682, Records 1910-1929, Roll 33, 856D.00-40. 26-28.

24 *Ibidem*, 10, 27.

25 Raymond Kennedy, *The ageless Indies* (1942; repr. New York, 1968) 118.

26 Roosevelt, in *The Philippines. A treasure and a problem*, refers to 'that thoroughness which is so characteristic of Dutch colonial enterprize', 135 John Sydenham Furnivall, in *Progress and welfare in Southeast Asia. A comparison of colonial policy and practice* (New York, 1941) said similarly that 'thorough has always been the motto of the Dutch', 32.

were accomplishing something great over there'²⁷. Conversely, some critics of Dutch colonial rule—ranging from committed Dutch socialists to Indonesian nationalists—might have dismissed these judgments as evidence of Americans' inherent political naivete or of their desire to stay in the Dutch colonial government's good graces in order to safeguard the profitability of US oil and rubber ventures in the Dutch East Indies²⁸.

Trade between America and the Indies reached a record high in the 1920s; US imports from the Indies in 1920 amounted to 167 million dollars, while American exports to the Indies totaled 59 million dollars. These figures continued to grow throughout the decade, and during its last five years American products constituted on the average 9.7 percent of total imports annually; the US share of the Indonesian export trade averaged 13.5 percent²⁹. In 1924, several US companies furnished about 20 percent of the total rubber production of the Indies and represented a capital investment of 41 million dollars. The American proportion of the aggregate financial investments in rubber plantations on the east coast of Sumatra hovered between 16.1 percent in 1913 and 18 percent in 1932, whereas approximately 45 percent of the rubber exports from Deli in the 1920s was destined for the United States and provisioned the flourishing automobile industry in Detroit³⁰. On the whole, American investments in the Dutch East Indies did not fall far behind the commitment of capital to its own colonial possessions in the Philippines. In 1929, direct US investments in the Philippines constituted 80 million dollars, while the amount was 66 million dollars for the Dutch East Indies; in 1936, direct financial commitments to the Philippines comprised 92 million dollars, whereas the capital investment was 70 million dollars in colonial Indonesia³¹.

Initially, in 1919 and 1920, America's keen interest in the oil reservoirs of Sumatra had yielded diplomatic wrangling between the Dutch and American governments. After vast oil supplies were located near Djambi in central Sumatra in 1918, the US State Department, in fact, complained in 1920 about Dutch 'measures of exclusion' and a violation of the 'principle of equal opportunity' of foreign countries to gain access to the economic resources of the Indies. Although these diplomatic exchanges were 'rather less sinewy' than the ones between the State Department and Downing Street in London regarding the controversy between the United States and Britain over the oil fields in Mosul, located on the Tigris river near Nineveh in northern Iraq, they

27 W. H. van Helsdingen, H. Hoogenberk, ed., *Daar werd wal groots verricht... Nederlandsch-Indië in de XXste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1941). This book of essays was the epitome of 'ethical' idealism of Dutch colonial governance in the twentieth century.

28 D. M. G. Koch, in *Verantwoording. Een halve eeuw in Indonesië* (The Hague/Bandung, 1956), used the term 'banker for western capital' to describe the Indies government, 174.

29 Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War. The United States and the struggle for Indonesian independence, 1945-1949* (Ithaca, 1981) 45-46.

30 Glenn D. Babcock, *History of the United States Rubber Company. A case study in corporation management* (Bloomington, 1966) 172-188; J. de Waard, 'De oostkust van Sumatra', *Tijdschrift voor economische geografie* VII (1934) 257, and F. J. J. Dootjes, 'Deli, The land of agricultural enterprises', *Bulletin of the colonial institute of Amsterdam*, II (1938-1939) 130.

31 US department of commerce, bureau of foreign and domestic commerce, *American direct investments in foreign countries* (Washington DC, 1930) 26, and *Ibidem*, 1938, 16.

did not lack emphasis, a 'rare characteristic of diplomatic notes in those days'³². The following year, the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey achieved an agreement with the Dutch state, which begrudgingly recognized the American company's right to operate in the Indies, and by 1936, the newly configured Standard-Vacuum Oil Company's total possessions in the Dutch East Indies were valued at approximately 72 million dollars and constituted the largest American financial venture in the Dutch East Indies³³. According to a newspaper article in 1941, consular personnel in Batavia asserted that overall US properties in the archipelago were worth 'no less than 500 million dollars', and that the true figure was ostensibly 'much higher'³⁴.

Although not the leading foreign investor — the British and Franco-Belgian stakes in the economy were greater—American economic holdings in the Indies were clearly substantial³⁵. Nonetheless, Rupert Emerson asserted in 1942 that the American financial investments in the Indies, although of great significance, did not determine 'American policy in that part of the world'³⁶. Some modern analysts, however, have disagreed. The historian Gerlof Homan, for example, has argued straightforwardly that 'American attitudes were strongly influenced by United States' economic interests in Indonesia'³⁷.

The reality most likely resided somewhere in the middle. During the decade of the 1920s, the predominant American diplomatic assessment of Dutch East Indies 'society combined a keen concern with sheltering American economic interests with a series of residual stereotypes or unexamined truisms about Dutch history. Such phrases as the 'progressive, liberty-loving Dutch', or 'the Dutch may be considered democratic from a European point of view' reflected American consular officers' admiration for the Dutch colonial state's shrewd management of the Indonesian economy in the 1920s and the huge financial revenues it generated for both Dutch and foreign investors³⁸. American diplomats articulated their intuitive admiration for Dutch resourcefulness and commercial ingenuity, a vision of Dutchness that seemed to simulate the American embrace of big business and capitalist ideology during the 'Roaring Twenties', a

32 Bainbridge Colby to William Phillips in the US Embassy in The Hague, September 4, 1920, in *Foreign relations of the United States* (Washington DC, 1936) 3, 276, and M. Mantner, 'American capital in the Netherlands Indian Petroleum Industry', Economic and trade note no. 32, submitted to the War Department by US trade commissioner in Batavia, Donald W. Smith, on 21 July, 1937; in NA/Suit, RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box. 2632. See also Gerald D. Nash, *United States oil policy, 1890-1964* (Pittsburgh, 1968) 61-68.

33 Irvin H. Anderson, *The Standard Vacuum Oil Company and the United States East Asian policy, 1933-1941* (Princeton, 1975) 31-37.

34 A. T. Steele, 'War strenghtens U.S. ties with Netherlands Indies', *The Washington Star* (April 18, 1941).

35 Overall, American investments in agriculture — *cultures* — in the Dutch East Indies comprised 2.5 percent in 1929, and ranked third behind the investments by the Netherlands of 70 percent, 13.2 percent by England, and 5 percent by Franco-Belgian financial interests. See J. Tinbergen and J. B. D. Derksen, 'Nederlandsch-Indië in cijfers', in Van Helsdingen, *Daar werd wat groots verricht*, 511.

36 Emerson, *The Netherlands Indies and the United States*, 62.

37 Gerlof Homan, 'The United States and the Netherlands East Indies. The evolution of American anticolonialism', *Pacific Historical Review*, LIII (November 1984) iv, 424.

38 NA/DC, Coert du Bois to Sec State, voluntary report, part V (The European Population), August 27, 1929, 4.

decade dominated by the conservative Republican presidencies of Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover. As the businessmen's newspaper par excellence, the *Wall Street Journal*, reported in November, 1925, the Dutch East Indies were a 'marvelously wealthy colonial empire, excellently governed, with many of the modern facilities for comfortable living'. The islands, the article stated, are rich in raw materials and offer 'attractive opportunities for large-scale production'³⁹.

Besides, given their own efforts in the 1920s at helping to install a 'stable government' in the Philippines—the precondition for Filipino independence as promised and agreed upon in 1916—and to develop a viable economy, Americans were astonished, for instance, by the fact that the average annual amount of rice produced per hectare was 2200 kilos in Java and 3000 kilos in Bali, while the figure was only 1200 kilos per hectare in the Philippines⁴⁰.

At the same time, American diplomats in the 1920s also absorbed prevalent Eurocentric perceptions of colonized, indigenous peoples. They scrutinized Indonesian society and culture through the same colonial looking glass as any Westerner and the 'gaze of empire' affected their powers of observation, too. Americans regularly concocted images of childlike colonial subjects, such as the Javanese or Filipinos, that revealed their Western biases⁴¹. In October, 1928, consul general Coert du Bois, for example, came up with the simple-minded binary generalization that the Javanese were either 'aristocratic dreamers' or 'land-grabbing peasants'. He registered his admiration for the average Javanese aristocrat, whom he described as a 'gracious, polished, and intelligent' gentleman. Du Bois depicted the average Javanese peasant, however, as a 'superstitious, docile, and half-hearted Moslim'⁴². In 1931, the American consul stationed in Medan, Daniel Braddock, painted a picture of Javanese coolies employed as contract laborers on rubber or tobacco plantations, as

a child, carefree, improvident of the future. As long as he is well treated ... he has little desire to leave the estate and seek work elsewhere. As with a child, he is apprehensive of the unknown⁴³.

Among the American diplomats stationed in Batavia, Medan, and Soerabaya between 1920 and 1942, Walter Ambrose Foote may have been one of the few who truly learned to speak and read Malay — he published a Malay grammar used to train US soldiers during world war II — while Coert du Bois's reports suggested he could read Dutch-

39 NA/Suit, 'Dutch E. Indies invite investments', *The Wall Street Journal* (November 9, 1925) RG. 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2634.

40 NA/DC, Fred G. Heins in Manila to Kenneth S. Patton in Batavia, April 17, 1931, Record Group 84 (hereafter RG 84), post records of the US consulate general in Batavia, 1930-1939 (hereafter post records), part 7, [class800b-811.11](#).

41 Ella Shohat, 'Imaging terra incognita. The disciplinary gaze of empire', *Public Culture*, III, (Spring, 1991) ii, 41-70.

42 NA/DC, Coert du Bois to Sec State, voluntary report, part II (The Native Population), October 2, 1928, M-682, Records, 1910-1929, Roll 33, 856D.00.40.

43 NA/DC, Daniel M. Braddock, vice consul in Medan K. S. Patton in Batavia, voluntary report no. 20, 45, July 3, 1931. RG 84, post records (1931), part 9, class 842-855.

language newspapers. Despite his familiarity with Malay, though, professor Schermerhorn in 1947 described Foote as a man 'who has lived here for 20 years in a colonial atmosphere, and should be regarded as any old colonial'⁴⁴. The same unfamiliarity with native social or political conditions prevailed among American diplomats in French Indochina in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1931, for example, the State Department chastized the US consul in Saigon for being too gullible, since the French had been 'stuffing him with a lot of hot air' about the threat of communism and he had failed to discriminate between what 'the French call communism and what any one else would call native nationalism'⁴⁵.

In their own colony, meanwhile, Americans insisted that primitive Filipinos had to do an 'apprenticeship of obedience' before they would be capable of ruling themselves, but they complimented themselves on the lack of communist ideology among native nationalists⁴⁶. But their patronizing opinions about the lethargy or backwardness of colonized peoples, whether Indonesians or Filipinos, prompted Americans to focus on the clever Dutch management of the lucrative Indies economy, wondering, perhaps, whether it could provide a model for Americans to follow. The American governor general of the Philippines in 1931, Dwight F. Davis, for instance, attributed the high annual yields of the rice harvests in Java and Bali to the Dutch confidence in 'scientific development' and the 'centers of agricultural research' maintained by the government in conjunction with the private sector, which 'are of particular interest to the Philippines' because Java was ahead of the Philippines by '30 or 40 years'⁴⁷.

However, the Great Depression of the 1930s reduced the Indies' financial revenues to a shadow of their former corpulent selves. The Depression, meanwhile, was engendered in part by the United States, where the Republican party's unrestrained celebration of the free forces of capitalism had ended abruptly in October, 1929, when Wall Street crashed and American financial markets crumbled like a house of cards. When American economic access to the world's resources was threatened, or when Japan became a more palpable military danger in the Pacific, while the US government continued to formulate provisions for the eventual independence of the neighboring Philippines, Dutch colonial rule began to pale in comparison to America's supposedly 'benevolent' colonial enterprise in the Philippines⁴⁸. Moreover, the chronological

44 C. Smit, ed., *Het dagboek van Schermerhorn. Geheim verslag van prof. dr. ir. W. Schermerhorn als voorzitter der commissie-generaal voor Nederlands Indië (20 September, 1946-7 October, 1947)* (2 vols.; Groningen, 1970)1,15,54. After serving as consul in Medan from May, 1927 to December, 1929, and again from May, 1930, to January 1931, Walter Foote had returned to Washington DC. He was reassigned to Batavia as consul general in September, 1934, and stayed until April, 1938. He became consul general again in Batavia in August, 1940, through July, 1942, when he was reassigned to Canberra, Australia. He was appointed consul general in Batavia once more on June 18, 1945 through July 2, 1947. In 1948 he was reassigned to Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

45 Cited by Ann L. Foster, 'Early nationalist movements in colonial Southeast Asia. The European, Southeast Asian, and American perspectives' (Dissertation, Cornell University, forthcoming).

46 Karnow, *In our own image*, 200, and Kennedy, *The ageless Indies*, 119, 130-131.

47 NA/DC, Fred G. Heins to Kenneth S. Patton, April 17, 1931; See also Friend, *The blue-eyed Enemy*, 15.

48 Karnow, *In our own image*, 255.

proximity of the ascendancy of Bonifacius Cornelis de Jonge to the position of governor general in 1931 and the Republican party's loss of the American presidency, after controlling it for twelve years, had an indelible impact, too. De Jonge's repressive reign, which did not exhibit much respect for the civil liberties or free speech of either Indonesian nationalists or Dutch critics of the Indies government, flew in the face of the emerging socio-economic concerns of the Roosevelt administration.

A final factor that shaped the different, and more discerning, judgments of US diplomats assigned to colonial Indonesia in the 1930s was the delayed effect of the Rogers Act of 1924, which had amalgamated the formerly separate diplomatic and consular services and radically restructured them into the foreign service of the United States. The Rogers Act had aimed to attract experienced, highly skilled and well-trained personnel into the diplomatic service, men who would exhibit the intellectual range and ability to conduct diplomacy in an expert manner. Introduced to the US Congress by representative John Jacob Rogers from Massachusetts, the act had opened the foreign service to all qualified applicants rather than restrict it to the privileged few whose wealth, political contacts, and social snobbery had dominated the American diplomatic establishment until then. The Rogers Act laid the foundation for the 'professionalization, democratization, and specialization' of the US foreign service, but it would not be until the 1930s that these goals began to be realized⁴⁹. Walter Foote, for example, was allowed to complete both a master's degree and doctorate in international relations at the American University in Washington DC during the mid-1930s before he returned to Batavia as consul general. Although he wrote a dissertation about the US neutrality board during world war I rather than Southeast Asian politics, the mere fact that he managed to earn a doctorate registered the State Department's desire for foreign service officers with a greater intellectual sophistication.

Americans' more critical 'visions of empire' in the Dutch East Indies during the 1930s

US diplomats in the 1920s had not failed to notice the growth of the Indonesian nationalist movement. They routinely sent long lists of all the native political organizations to their superiors in the State Department. But, as consul general Coert du Bois had argued in 1929, the measures of the government — quietly backed up by an efficient and highly centralized police, army, and navy — are 'disarming to the native agitators and the likelihood of anything resembling a general, open, armed, and organized rebellion against Dutch rule is remote'⁵⁰. Two years earlier Nicholas Roosevelt, too, had dismissed anti-Dutch agitation as the evil doings of a tiny clique of self-interested, upper-class natives who wished to expand their power base⁵¹.

American observers—ironically so, because within the United States itself they were no strangers to an exaggerated fear of communism — offered wry commentary on the

49 'The Rogers Act of 1924', *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York, 1992) 580.

50 NA/DC, Coert du Bois to Sec State, voluntary report, part HI (The Native Population), December 31, 1928, M-682, Records 1910-1929, Roll 33, 856D.00-.40.

51 Roosevelt, *The Philippines. A treasure and a problem*, 136.

'curse' that rested on certain members of the Dutch community, whose 'shortsightedness' seemed to confuse Indonesian nationalism with evidence of communist propaganda⁵². They did not object to governor general Dirk Fock's 'high-handed authoritarianism', as Takashi Shiraishi has labelled his reign, in the face of popular nationalist agitation during the first half of the 1920s⁵³. About the carefully plotted communist uprisings in Western Java and West Sumatra in 1926 and early 1927, the US consul general had written to his superiors in the State Department that he was convinced that anyone who participated in these actions barely knew such a place as Russia existed and knew nothing about the communism: the average Indonesian 'loves theatricals, is easily led, and has the mild hatred of the dark man for the white man and his oppressive civilization'⁵⁴. Hoover argued paradoxically that it might be convenient for some Dutch officials to raise the 'specter of communism in order to divert the attention from their own incapacity as administrators'⁵⁵. But in the early 1930s, doubts about the legitimacy of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, and a general critique of the inherent injustice of all European imperial regimes in Asia, began to inform the official discourse of the State Department.

Once the Roosevelt administration inaugurated its 'New Deal' and a legalistic concern with the 'underdog' and social justice became part of the political grammar of US domestic and foreign policy, the official stance towards the plight of colonized people changed. The US Congress's acceptance of the McDuffie-Tydings Act in 1934, which stipulated the unequivocal independence of the Philippines in ten years, was an indirect expression of this attitudinal shift⁵⁶. On a more mundane level, this different approach was already palpable in the early 1930s during the state visit of the US governor of the Philippines to the Dutch East Indies, who was accompanied by two Filipinos serving as secretary of commerce and secretary of agriculture. At the last minute consul general Kenneth Patton in Batavia received a telegram from Manila, requesting that during the official segments of the visit 'the American and Filipino flags should be displayed together'⁵⁷.

While the Republican era of the 1920s had celebrated the uninhibited flow of the capitalist market without any government interference, the new Democratic administration in the 1930s embraced an activist agenda of economic intervention and protective social legislation. A majority of Americans, meanwhile, supported Roosevelt's liberal commitments and public works programs by reelecting him in 1936, 1940, and 1944. Public opinion with regard to European imperialism underwent a shift, too. In the case of the Dutch East Indies, several articles in important American

52 Governor general De Graeff used the words 'curse' and 'shortsightedness'. See: P. J. Drooglever, *De Vaderlandse Club, 1929-1942. Totoks en de Indische politiek* (Franeker, 1980) 53.

53 Takashi Shiraishi, *An age in motion. Popular radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca, 1990) 232.

54 NA/DC, Chas L. Hoover to Sec State, November 15, 1926. M-682, Records 1910-1929, Roll 46, 856E.OO.

55 NA/DC, Chas L. Hoover to Sec State, March 15, 1927. M-682, Roll 29, Records, 1910-1929, 856D.800-.40.

56 Homan, 'The United States and the Netherlands East Indies', 436.

57 NA/DC, telegram from Dwight F. Davis to K. S. Patton, March 5, 1931, RG 84, post records (1931), part 7, class 800b-811.11.

newspapers throughout the 1930s raised thorny questions about the Dutch economic exploitation of Indonesia, their failure to provide educational opportunities to the indigenous population, or their lack of response to native demands for dominion status⁵⁸. These more pessimistic reports in the media culminated in John Günther's superficial if widely read book *Inside Asia*, which both reflected and contributed to public opinion. 'The Indies tail is what wags the Dutch dog', noted John Günther, and he portrayed Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia by conjuring up an infinite array of trite clichés about the greed and miserly habits of the Dutch⁵⁹.

At the same time Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal criticism of European colonialism was more than a mere rhetorical posture, because he seemed genuinely horrified by the living conditions of colonized people in Africa and Asia⁶⁰. Roosevelt reserved his most eloquent anti-colonial oratory for the French in Indo-China, but in his public pronouncements, at least, he appeared more ambivalent about Dutch colonial mastery in Indonesia⁶¹. Roosevelt, after all, revelled in his Dutch *provenance*, and he liked to refer to Holland as the 'country of my origin'; he said in 1935 that Americans had inherited from their Dutch forebears a 'quality of endurance against great odds — the quiet determination to conquer obstacles of nature and obstacles of man'⁶².

Whatever fortitude his Dutch ancestry may have bestowed upon him, Roosevelt needed all the strength of character—as well as political savvy—he could muster to restructure American society in the face of a devastating economic depression. Elsewhere in the world the Great Depression of the 1930s had given rise to myriad monopolistic trade practices in colonial economies — higher tariffs, production quotas, preferential trade agreements and so on — in order to protect the interests of the mother country; such protective policies, in turn, caused anxiety in the United States about its dearly beloved principles of free trade. The Smoot-Hawley Act, however, had erected around the United States one of the highest tariff walls in the world, and the concern about free trade focused unilaterally — and hypocritically — on America's unfettered access to the world's markets⁶³.

58 One of these articles, Robert Aura Smith, 'Java asks for dominion status', in the Sunday *New York Times* (May 16, 1937) prompted a series of exchanges between the US Consulate in Batavia and the State Department. See Walter A. Foote to Sec State, October 1, 1937, record group 59 (hereafter RG 59), records of the Department of State, incoming correspondence, 1930-1939 (hereafter Incoming Corr.), 856D.001/26.

59 John Günther, *Inside Asia* (New York, 1939) 322.

60 Roosevelt judged European colonialism's brutal exploitation of native populations as the seeds of future political chaos: 'Exploit the resources of an India, a Burma, a Java; take all the wealth out of these countries, but never put anything back into them, things like education, decent standards of living, minimum health requirements—all you're doing is storing up the kind of trouble that leads to war'; quoted in Elliot Roosevelt, *As he saw it* (1945; repr. Westport, CT, 1974) 74-75.

61 'The Indo Chinese thought: anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule; France has milked it for one hundred years ... the people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that'. In: Roosevelt, *As he saw it*, 115, 251.

62 Freidel, 'The Dutchness of the Roosevelts', 158. Homan, 'The evolution of American anticolonialism' states unequivocally that 'Roosevelt was pro-Dutch', 429.

63 As Cordell Hull remembered: 'unhindered trade dovetails with peace; high tariffs, trade barriers, and unfair economic competition with war'. See: *Memoirs* (2 vols.; New York, 1948) I, 81.

Inevitably, the world-wide economic depression of the early 1930s profoundly affected the Indonesian export-driven economy and also jeopardized the viability of US financial interests. Between 1929 and 1933 the total value of Indonesian exports dropped precipitously from 1488 million guilders to 525 million guilders. The market value of the Javanese sugar production alone declined from 350 million guilders during 1928-1929 to a paltry 19.5 million in 1934-1935. While rubber prices had deteriorated more gradually, the market price for tin, tea, and quinine dropped quickly and ominously in a few years⁶⁴. When the demand for cash crops fell and world prices plummeted, the 'phantom' prosperity of the Indies ended⁶⁵. Domestic industry in the Indies could produce few consumption goods, not even the most mundane necessities of daily life, such as 'textiles, paper, bicycle tires, plates, or cups' and widespread suffering was the result. The fact that the articles of consumption furnished by the Japanese were less expensive than similar Dutch or other European products, reported Patton in 1933, created a 'sympathetic feeling for Japan' among Indonesians and tended to destroy their 'community of interest' with Holland⁶⁶. According to Joel C. Hudson in Soerabaya in 1935, the Japanese were trying to 'secure the goodwill of the natives'. Although he wrote that they did so mostly to gain 'economic advantages', he conceded that Japan would 'welcome any successful Pan Asiatic movement'⁶⁷.

Accordingly, Americans' moral objections to the worst excesses of colonial rule were moderated by the growing fear of Japan's burgeoning dominance in Asia, whereas the desire to shield American financial holdings in Indonesia also influenced the formulation of American foreign policy. The Japanese threat in the Pacific tempered the Roosevelt administration's residual anti-colonialism in the hope of nurturing a political middle ground between extreme nationalists — who might look towards Japan as their saviour and liberator—and repressive colonial regimes. Patton reported in 1933 that after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria educated Indonesians denounced the Japanese as imperialists who had 'violated the right to self determination'. But now that the Depression had produced dire economic conditions in the Dutch East Indies, a feeling prevailed that 'Japan, being a dominant and growing power in the Far East' offered Indonesian nationalist politicians 'a lever for action against the Dutch government'⁶⁸.

Governor general De Jonge had encountered this bleak economic landscape and volatile political climate — threatened by the thunder and lightning of domestic

64 Rubber prices fell from 1,74 guilders per pound in 1925 to 0.54 in 1929, to reach their lowest point in 1932 at 0.08 guilders per pound. See G. Gonggrijp, *De sociaal-economische betekenis van Nederlands-Indië voor Nederland. De Nederlandse volkshuishouding tussen twee wereldoorlogen* (Utrecht/Brussel, 1948) xv/11-17, and Colin Barlow and John Drabble, 'Government and the emerging rubber industries in Indonesia and Malaya, 1900-1940', in Anne Booth, e. a., ed., *Indonesian economic history in the colonial era* (New Haven, 1990) 191.

65 Margono Djojohadikusumo, *Herinneringen uit drie tijdperken* (Amsterdam, 1970) 90 and Gonggrijp, *De sociaal-economische betekenis*, xv-10, both use the term *schijnwelvaart*.

66 Djojohadikusumo, *Herinneringen*, 90, and NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, August 21, 1933, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.001/76.

67 NA/DC, Joel C. Hudson in Soerabaya to Walter A. Foote in Batavia, July 16, 1935, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/94.

68 NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, August 21, 1933, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.001/76.

turmoil and international economic tensions — in May of 1931, when he was named the new governor general. US consul general Kenneth Patton informed the secretary of state that in the Indies the news was received with total surprise, and that De Jonge was viewed as a 'dark horse' because he had no real background in colonial affairs, given his past experience as minister of war during world war I and as managing director of the Royal Dutch Shell since then. The Dutch commercial element, he commented, was 'frankly delighted' since they expected the new governor general to represent their 'interests against those of the native population'⁶⁹. The socialist press, in contrast, was full of gloom and doom, owing to its conviction that De Jonge's appointment signalled the triumph of reactionary forces and 'oil capital'. Patton, for his part, concurred: he informed the secretary of state that he expected De Jonge to initiate an administration 'favorable to big business' that would be less 'sympathetically inclined to native political aspirations'⁷⁰.

The government in Holland had given De Jonge detailed guidelines. He was instructed to balance the budget, to restructure the economy, to promote political decentralization, and, above all, to assure social peace and order by suppressing all revolutionary commotion⁷¹. The new governor general, meanwhile, expressed firm opinions about the task at hand. Rather than maintain its dignity, the hyper-ethical government of the Indies had 'flirted with the unreliable big mouths of the nationalist movement' and had embraced the eventual independence of Indonesia not only as acceptable but as simply a matter of time; the danger, De Jonge argued, resided not in the nationalist movement but in the defeatist and weak-kneed mentality of Europeans⁷². Instead, the government should guide the nationalist movement 'into fixed channels' and forcefully oppose all attempts at revolution, however petty or insignificant they might seem⁷³.

The installation of B. C. de Jonge as governor general provoked a new awareness among American diplomats that the stoic self-confidence of the Indies government was rattled due, in large part, to the chorus of nationalist voices demanding to be heard. The irony was that De Jonge's arbitrary suppression of native politicians made Americans more sensitive to the aspirations of the nationalist movement. After 1931, the tone of American diplomats' missives to Washington began to strike a more disapproving note. De Jonge, they commented, not so much bludgeoned as condescendingly mocked his critics on the political left and he imperiously silenced Indonesians who demanded a political voice. Patton reported that the new governor general exhibited a lack of 'good temper', which did not 'enhance his prestige'⁷⁴.

69 NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, May 12, 1931, including English translations of various Dutch language newspaper articles. RG 84, post records, (1931), part 7, class 800-811.4.

70 NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, September 22, 1931. RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.001/28.

71 S. L. van der Wal, ed., *Herinneringen van jhr. mr. B. C. de Jonge met brieven uit zijn nalatenschap* (Groningen, 1968) 78.

72 *Ibidem*. The Dutch phrase was *coquetteren met de onbetrouwbare schreeuwers van de nationalistische groepen*, 79, 105.

73 Article in *Het Volk* (May 9, 1931) based on an interview with a correspondent who had awaited the governor general-designate at Hoek of Holland upon his return from London after his appointment. Translation in NA/DC, RG 84, post records (1931), part 7, class 800-811.4.

74 'Ce n'est que le ridicule qui tue', in De Jonge, *Herinneringen*, 106, and NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, October 13, 1931. RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.001/29.

In the 1930s a sequence of American consular officials assigned to Batavia began to employ a typically American legalistic idiom to register their misgivings about the government's censorship of the press, restriction of the freedom of speech and assembly, and its unforgivable policy of placing nationalist politicians under preventative arrest. Patton, for instance, commenting upon the arrest of Soekarno on August 21, 1933, reported that De Jonge's decision to employ his authority to intern Soekarno as an undesirable is 'essentially a political action resting entirely on the discretion of the executive'. He noted further that this measure was a radical departure from the policies pursued by governor general De Graeff, who had judged it 'not *politic* to use his arbitrary authority to intern native political leaders, and that it was preferable to prosecute them for actual violations of the criminal code'⁷⁵. A year later, Sidney Browne, an officer in consulate-general in Batavia, mentioned regarding the arrests of Ardjono, president of the central committee of the PNI, Moerad, the party's secretary-treasurer, and Soekra, one of its commissioners, that they would be interned but not prosecuted since 'prosecution might cause disturbances and it was considered more important to maintain public law and order than to determine whether or not the troublemakers were legally punishable'⁷⁶.

Walter Foote wrote that De Jonge's reign had forced native politicians to regroup, since any Indonesian politician, whether suspected of communist sympathies or not, was now 'at risk of being summarily banished' as a preemptive measure to, among others, the malaria-infested internment camp of Boven Digul in New Guinea created in the late 1920s⁷⁷. *The Chicago Daily News's* foreign correspondent, A. T. Steele, used more straight-forward language in his description of the 'policy of prevention'. A Dutch official had reputedly told him that the motto of the colonial government was

don't educate the people and they won't want things they don't need and shouldn't have; prevent the spread of subversive propaganda and you won't have unrest; exile or imprison the worst of the radicals and you needn't fear serious revolt⁷⁸.

In their earnest attempts to disentangle the intricate web of the many political parties of the Indies, both native and European, US foreign service officers in the 1930s chronicled the nationalist movement with greater urgency and frequency, and they questioned the identification of nationalism with communism. In order to walk the intellectual tightrope between the residual anti-colonialism of the Roosevelt administration and an Indonesian independence movement that might celebrate 'Asia for Asians' under Japanese tutelage and would welcome Japanese expansionism, they either downplayed or openly scorned the Dutch proclivity to conflate nationalism with

75 NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, August 21, 1933, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/12.

76 NA/DC, Sidney Browne to Sec State, September 22, 1934, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/106.

77 NA/DC, Walter A. Foote to Sec State, May 20, 1935, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/87. J. M. Pluvier, in *Overzicht van de ontwikkeling van de nationale beweging in Indonesië* also noted that 'the coercive policies of governor general De Jonge compelled the nationalist movement to reorient and reorganize', 197.

78 A. T. Steele, *The Washington Star* (April 28, 1941).

communism. Instead, they blamed De Jonge's antagonism towards the best interests of the Indonesian people for bringing about a 'crystallization' of native nationalist parties⁷⁹. 'Pure communistic doctrines', asserted consul general Erie Dickover in 1938, had never gained many adherents in the Netherlands Indies since such ideologies are 'beyond the comprehension' of a people who know little or nothing of the modern industrial, financial, and political world⁸⁰.

Walter Foote announced that the apprehension about the spread of communism among the Indonesian Chinese population had also captured the imagination of the colonial state⁸¹. Important Dutchmen, he reported, blamed the Filipino independence movement for much of Indonesia's political unrest⁸². Later in the 1930s Albert E. Clattenburg in Batavia wrote that a native employee of the US consulate had been practicing his English lessons, which included a definition 'brute = white man. Clattenburg declared, however, that this did not mean that the native was a communist, but merely that the white man was 'losing his traditional semi-deified status here just as he lost it in the Philippines years ago'⁸³. A journalist for *The Washington Star* reported as late as the Spring of 1941 that the Dutch believed that Filipinos had been 'spoiled' by too much education and too much prosperity — that they 'would be a happier and less restless people had they been given fewer of the 'benefits' of civilization'⁸⁴.

On the whole, American observers rejected the idea of a pervasive communist plot and they no longer celebrated the thoroughness, wisdom, and intelligence, as their predecessors in the 1920s had done, of the Dutch East Indies government's policies. Instead, US diplomatic officials criticized the Dutch political strategy of trying to divide the archipelago into more autonomous political regions in order to guarantee the continuation of Dutch rule in the Indies. This plan's calculating logic was not lost on American observers, who noted that the recognition of regional autonomy would separate 'the sheep from the goats' and might dissipate the desire for Indonesian independence on a national scale and would thus 'ensure Dutch sovereignty of the islands as a whole'⁸⁵.

As the Roosevelt administration nurtured its official support for an autonomous democracy in the Philippines, American judgments about the Dutch East Indies in particular, and European imperialism in general, became more negative. But the confluence of the world-wide economic Depression, the substantial US holdings in Indonesian oil and rubber production, and the growing menace of Japanese imperia-

79 NA/DC, K. S. Patton to Sec State, June 7, 1932, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/09.

80 NA/DC, Erle R. Dickover to Sec State, October 31, 1938, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/109.

81 NA/DC, Walter A. Foote to Sec State, July 23, 1935, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/91.

82 NA/DC, Walter A. Foote to Sec State, May 20, 1935, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/87.

83 NA/DC, Albert E. Clattenburg, Jr. to Sec State, July 14, 1938, 27, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/114.

84 A. T. Steele, *The Washington Star* (April 28, 1941).

85 NA/DC, Memorandum from J. H. M. in the division of Western European affairs to Mr. Moffatt in the Far Eastern division, in response to a confidential dispatch from Walter A. Foote of May 21, 1935, June 20, 1935. 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/67.

lism prevented the American foreign policy establishment from morally condemning the Dutch colonial regime outright. After all, they would need Dutch military cooperation in case of a war with Japan. It is also possible that Roosevelt's personal pride in his Dutch ancestry, and his emerging friendship with queen Wilhelmina, may have made cunning foreign services officers, anxious to protect their professional careers in the US diplomatic service, a bit more cautious in their moral censure of Dutch colonial rule, while daring to be more critical of the French in Indo China or the British in India.

Thus, in articulating their disapproval of the repressive policies of governor general De Jonge, US diplomats employed a formalistic lawyerly vocabulary that expressed their dismay with Dutch violations of due process of law and the arbitrary infringement of Indonesians' civil rights. They argued that the governor general's hostility to the native population had subverted the advisory character of the *Volksraad* and converted it into nothing but 'an organ of opposition'. De Jonge's rampant abuse of his discretionary powers and the government's practice to banish individual Indonesians without formal adjudication was condemned as an infraction of the kinds of standard legal procedures that were a hallmark of all civilized societies. US diplomats judged the state's decision to require a declaration of loyalty from its civil servants to be 'provocative without strengthening the hands of the government' since anyone who was 'politically minded would sign falsely such declarations'. American diplomats denounced the governor general's 'police-state' methods and mentioned in 1935 that the government was now referred to by some Dutch people residing in the Indies as 'the fascist government'. They further criticized measures restricting the right of public assembly and legislation on censorship as responsible for 'driving the native political movement underground and into secrecy', and they predicted that sooner or later the government will find itself facing a 'powerful movement which can not be controlled by mere ordinances'⁸⁶.

However, when the appointment of De Jonge's successor was disclosed, Walter Foote informed the State Department in July, 1936, that the new governor general's reputation was a 'very liberal' and 'scrupulously honest' one. Thus Americans could anticipate a more broad-minded and humane policy towards the natives in economic as well as in political matters, although one of Foote's informants had allegedly told him that 'too much honesty is bad' for the Dutch East Indies and 'political liberalism and humanitarianism is fatal'⁸⁷. After 1936 US foreign service officers in Batavia subjected Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer to less personal criticism than they had heaped upon his predecessor — and mentioned on various occasions that the new governor general's wife was American—but they continued to raise moral objections to the Indies government's encroachment upon the freedom of the Indies press or the civil liberties of Indonesians.

86 NA/DC, K. S. Patton, Walter A. Foote, and Sidney H. Browne in Batavia to Sec State; dispatches sent between 1931 and 1936. RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.00/(var).

87 NA/DC, Walter A. Foote to Sec State, July 14, 1936, and internal memorandum of the division of Far Eastern affairs, August 19, 1936, RG 59, Incoming Corr., 856D.001/32.

The late 1930s and early 1940s. Towards a balanced American perspective

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, to quote a memorandum written on January 22, 1940, by Erie Dickover in Batavia to the State Department, 'many weird and unpredictable changes are taking place in the world today'⁸⁸. In light of the new configuration of global politics — when fascists were firmly ensconced in power in Germany and Italy and when the potential threat of Japanese military designs on the Dutch East Indies and other regions in Asia had become glaringly apparent — American appraisals of Dutch East Indies society became more thoughtful and measured. In 1938, for instance, an American diplomat in The Hague, George A. Gordon, had maintained that the ruthless Japanese aggression in China had alarmed Dutch naval opinion about the zeal of Japanese militarists and their ambition to increase 'by the sword the glories and grandeurs of the Japanese Empire', which no one might be able to contain in the near future. No longer automatically counting on it, by 1938 the Dutch 'hoped' for British support in case of a possible Japanese attack. He also suggested that, despite their 'great disillusionment' and 'bitterness' at the prospect of America's abandonment of the Philippines in the wake of the Mc Duffie-Tydings Act of 1934, the Dutch speculated whether the United States might come to their rescue⁸⁹. The chargé d'affaires of the US legation, though, mentioned that the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs as well as military officials had predicted to him that before the Philippines would obtain their freedom, Japanese aggression will have 'turned southward' and as soon as Japan would threaten British and Dutch interests it 'will necessarily also involve the Philippines and therefore ourselves'⁹⁰. In summing up the Dutch attitude towards Japan, George A. Gordon in The Hague paraphrased Teddy Roosevelt's motto 'speak softly but carry a big stick'. Because the Dutch knew they did not carry a big stick, he noted, they spoke very softly indeed⁹¹.

Suddenly American observers became more sensitive to the complicated links between the mother country and the Indonesian archipelago. They also began to comprehend the major financial burden that Indonesia's military defense entailed and that it functioned as a bone of contention between Holland and its overseas colonies. In the European métropole, wrote consul general Erle Dickover from Batavia in January 1939, Dutch people considered themselves citizens of a very small country who lived in an atmosphere of 'satiation and contemplation' as they counted 'their savings'. In the Indies people thought they belonged to a magnificent empire, filled with 'exuberant youth and impetuosity', well worth defending against foreign aggression even if it were to take the very last penny of the empire's resources. Without the Indies, Holland would quickly degenerate to a 'small farm on the shores of the North Sea', but people in the Netherlands, he wrote, continued to dismiss the Indies as

88 NA/Suit, Erle R. Dickover to Sec State, No. 456, January 22, 1940, RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2629.

89 NA/Suit, George A. Gordon to Sec State, No. 166, February 4, 1938, RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2631.

90 NA/Suit, Warden McK. Wilson to Sec State, No. 533, September 4, 1936, RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2631.

91 NA/Suit, George A. Gordon, No. 166, February 4, 1938.

'hysterical', while the Dutch community in Indonesia repudiated the mother country as 'cowardly and imbued with defeatism'⁹². The US should pay attention to these matters, a US journalist in Manila proclaimed in 1940, because the East Indies had a far greater economic importance to the US than the Philippines. Moreover, the Indies geographic location and size gave them a more 'strategically commanding position' in the Western Pacific, even if they belonged to 'the politically insignificant Netherlands'⁹³!

At the same time, the US foreign service officers also acknowledged the political sensibilities of Indonesians, and the ways in which the 'underprivileged classes' of the Indies resented the prerogatives possessed by 'European overlords'; they applauded Indonesians' yearning for a system under which they might be able to obtain 'equal rights' with Europeans⁹⁴. With more than a hint of self-satisfaction, some Americans were convinced that in the eyes of a small but growing number of educated Indonesians, the Philippines were the most 'inspiring political example' in the world, even though Dutch officials viewed don Manuel L. Quezon as a more 'subversive character than Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin rolled into one'. If the Indonesian nationalists could not obtain what they had long struggled for under the Dutch flag, intoned various American pundits, then the 'desired alternative is progress and security along with the Philippines under the flag of the US'⁹⁵.

Conclusion

As an unapologetic capitalist nation, American foreign policy was intent on protecting US financial investments in the Indonesian economy and equally determined to maintain American access to oil and rubber resources. Thus, economic arguments alone do not illuminate the shift in diplomatic reporting about Dutch colonial rule in the Indies, although they may have reinforced some of the prevailing stereotypes about the shrewd and commercially oriented Dutch in the 1920s. Rather, the changing character of American diplomats' interpretations between 1920 and 1942 was linked to a transformation in the understanding of America's military and strategic interests — inevitably incorporating economic concerns as well — especially when Japanese military expansionism became a formidable threat in the Pacific. Moreover, the novel ideological tenor of the State Department during Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s

92 NA/Suit, Erle R. Dickover to Sec State, No. 132, January 6, 1939; he cited as his source mr. P. Kerstens' articles in *De nieuwe tijd* and *Het nieuws van de dag*, December 20, 1938; RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box no. 2631. See also Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Het moreel van de Europese burgerbevolking in Nederlands-Indië 1936-1941', in Petra Groen and Elly Touwen-Bouwsma, ed., *Nederlands-Indië, 1942. Illusie en ontgoocheling* (Amsterdam, 1992) 13-32.

93 NA/Suit, Wilbur Burton, editor of *Philippine Magazine*, in *Living Age* (November 1940) RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2634.

94 NA/Suit, Erle R. Dickover to Sec State, January 22, 1940.

95 NA/ Suit, Burton, in *Living Age*, and 'Next on Jap menu? The prize plum in the coming grab game of empire are the fabulously rich Dutch East Indies', in *Daily Mirror* (August 12, 1940) RG 165, War Dept, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2634.

furnished American diplomats with a new political language that prompted them to criticize both European imperialism, in general, and Dutch colonial rule, in particular. Being of a higher intellectual caliber than their predecessors in the 1920s owing to the impact of the Rogers Act of 1924, they castigated the Dutch colonial state, especially during the tenure of governor general De Jonge between 1931 and 1936, for abandoning due process of law, suppressing free speech, and violating civil liberties.

While their praise of Dutch economic and administrative accomplishments in Indonesia in the 1920s had appealed to quintessentially American clichés about the free-trading and liberty-loving Dutch, US diplomats' criticism in the 1930s also expounded on uniquely American preoccupations. Despite their privileged position as 'outsiders', they translated the complex society of colonial Indonesia into their own vernacular and approached it through an American looking glass. Based on the prototype of America's colonial enterprise in the Philippines—heralded as a 'model of enlightenment' — many faulted the Dutch East Indies government for not being more like them⁹⁶. American observers elevated their own 'exemplary' policy of stipulating a specific date for the unequivocal independence of the Philippines as a blueprint for other imperial nations to emulate. Besides, their conceit about the health-care and Western schooling they had provided for Filipinos and, in contrast, the relatively anemic educational infrastructure in Java, prompted Americans to repudiate colonial rule in Indonesia as a 'Dutch Treat'⁹⁷.

Despite the more realistic and benign assessment of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia that had emerged in the early 1940s, the post-war era placed Americans decisively in the anti-imperialist camp, aided and abetted by the Indonesian nationalists' direct appeal to, or 'shrewd manipulation' of, international opinion⁹⁸. In light of the escalating Cold War antagonism with the Soviet Union, the United States may also have been eager to curry the partisan favors of a newly independent Indonesia. But the heavy-handed role of the American foreign policy establishment in the Indonesian war of independence in 1945-1949 was not a purely capricious one and did not derive merely from a 'lack of trust or understanding' as Van der Meulen lamented in 1949. Instead, America's support of Indonesian independence mirrored the State Department's constantly shifting evaluation of America's geo-political interests; it reflected, too, the lingering commitment of the Democratic Party during Harry Truman's presidency — who followed, after all, in the footsteps of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt — to the right of self determination.

96 Karnow, *In our own image*, 197 and 254-255.

97 Günther, *Inside Asia*, 322. NA/suit, *The Chicago Daily News* on July 8, 1940 carried a headline 'Dutch laggard in educating East Indians', RG 165, WD, Reg. NEI, Box No. 2632.

98 Gerald Macdonald, 'Symbolic place and national identity in Jakarta, Indonesia', *Political Geography* (forthcoming) 22; see also: A. M. Taylor, *Indonesian independence and the United Nations* (London, 1960).

KPM: Macht, markt en ruimte

bespreking van

J. N. F. M. à Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij. Stoomvaart en staatsvorming in de Indonesische archipel 1888-1914* (Dissertatie Leiden 1992; Hilversum: Verloren, 1992, 756 blz., f120,-, ISBN 90 6550 403 6).

JOH. DE VRIES

Van dit werk dat de auteur tot proefschrift diende aan de Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, was de mare in dagbladrecensie (J. de Jong, *De Volkskrant* van 6 februari 1993) en tijdschriftbespreking (F. Broeze in *NEHA-bulletin*, i, 1993) vooruitgesneld. Mijn interesse was in de eerste plaats van zakelijke aard met betrekking tot de bedrijfsgeschiedenis van Nederland overzee maar bezat daarnaast ook een persoonlijk element. De bedrijfshistoricus A. Heerding, auteur van twee delen geschiedschrijving van Philips, vertelde destijds in geuren en kleuren hoe hij in de nadagen van de Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (hier verder aangeduid als KPM) archiefbestanddelen van de onderneming voor vernietiging had behoed en deze bij zich thuis had ondergebracht. Hij was bij de KPM zijn loopbaan begonnen en had zich voorgenomen na Philips de geschiedenis van de KPM te schrijven. Daarvan is het door zijn vroege dood niet gekomen maar de herinnering eraan bracht mij ertoe vooraf de lijst van archivalia in het boek van À Campo te raadplegen. Dit leverde een voor een proefschrift ongewone confrontatie op want een lijst van archivalia ontbreekt in dit werk. Wel bevat het een literatuurlijst (724-751) en natuurlijk geeft À Campo verwijzingen naar het KPM-archief, maar geen afzonderlijke lijst van archivalia die met name van belang kan zijn voor een inzicht in de structuur van een bewaard gebleven archief. Aldus blijf ik met een eerste punt, meer van informatie dan van discussie, zitten: waarom ontbreekt een lijst van archivalia die tot dusver zo typisch voor historische proefschriften was?

Dit was wat als een toevallige persoonlijke opmaat in de eerste plaats trof. Uiteraard moet de inhoud van dit volumineuze boek in de beschouwing vooropstaan. Reeds in de tweede zin van zijn tekst kondigt À Campo aan dat hij de uitgangspunten van zijn onderzoek in de inleiding weergeeft en het is met interesse dat de lezer zich voor de probleemstelling daarnaar wendt, mede omdat hierin toch in de eerste plaats ratio en legitimatie voor de grote uitvoerigheid van de auteur liggen. À Campo is ten aanzien van de probleemstelling glashelder: wat was de rol van de KPM in het Nederlandse imperialisme in de Indonesische archipel in de periode tot aan de eerste wereldoorlog? Dit lijkt op het eerste oog voldoende maar À Campo neemt hier een voorschot op de navolgende uitvoerigheid door de probleemstelling te nuanceren. Bij dit Nederlandse imperialisme is staatsvorming of nog beter: hervorming van de koloniale staat in het geding, bij de onderneming een sociaal-technologisch (of sociotechnisch) systeem en bij de rol van de KPM in het Nederlandse imperialisme blijkt het om het in elkaar grijpen van twee tegelijkertijd optredende processen te gaan: de ontwikkeling en hervorming van de koloniale staat en de groei van de pakketvaart als sociaal-technologisch systeem. Uitvoerig analyseert de schrijver hier zijn thematiek. Dat is te waarderen vanuit een noodzaak tot tekening en afbakening van de probleemstelling en het aangeven van achtergronden, zolang de zucht tot uitleg niet ontspoot. Dit is helaas het geval wanneer geconstateerd wordt dat de vraag naar de rol van de pakketvaart in de koloniale staatsvorming van Indonesië uitnodigt tot een beschrijving van het bedrijf als actor. Dat was al duidelijk maar is nog relevant. Wanneer evenwel daarop volgt dat in de navolgende hoofdstukken '... de geest en het gedrag van de onderneming, dus het bedrijf als actor worden beschreven' (36), is de theoretische diepgang overgegaan in schijnindiepzinnig-