Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and anticolonialism among Indonesian students in Europe, 1917-1931

Stutje, K.

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In this chapter, expressions of regional, national and international affiliations are examined. I will argue that the main innovation of the Indonesian students in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia was not so much the substitution of regional affiliations with a unitary national identity, but rather the emergence of a national identification as a cause and effect of a new international orientation, and the redrawing of an imaginary map of engagements. The intellectual biography of Samuel Ratu Langie is taken as a case in point.

The exemplary function and ideological influence of the Perhimpoenan Indonesia on the emerging Indonesian movement for independence has consistently been recognised by Indonesia scholars. Already in 1931, the government official and author of the first handbook on Indonesian nationalism Petrus Blumberger regarded the post-1922 Indonesian association “as the precursor of the Indonesian nationalist movement”. This was acknowledged in Kahin’s 1952 classic, where the PI was characterised as “of greatest importance in determining the character of the Indonesian nationalist movement”. More recently Robert Elson remarked that “the Netherlands was the major site for the development and refining of new ideas about the nature and trajectory of the strange new concept of Indonesia”, while John Ingleson even started his work on the Indonesian nationalist movement between 1927 and 1934 with a preceding chapter on student activism in the Netherlands from 1922 onwards.

An important contribution of the PI to the evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement was, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the formulation of some basic tenets of revolutionary nationalism. From 1925 onwards, the students in PI advocated solidarity across regions, religions and classes, non-cooperation with the colonial authorities, and a strategy of self-help and autonomy in all economic and societal sectors. The ultimate goal of all this was a fully independent, unitary and secular Indonesian state. This objective was fundamentally different from the organisational base of the many regional associations and student

\[152\] Petrus Blumberger, *De nationalistische beweging*, 187.
organisations in the Dutch Indies, of socio-religious organisations such as the Sarekat Islam, or primarily class-focused organisations such as the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). From 1924 onwards, newly established study groups began to pursue the same unitary goals as the PI, but they did this with explicit reference to the pioneering work of the Dutch student organisation.

The sensation of being part of a pioneering organisation was, at least in retrospect, also appreciated by former students themselves. The young student Ali Sastroamidjojo, who enrolled in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia in the winter of 1923, was not politically unexperienced, as he had been a member of the Javanese student society Jong Java, and was in contact with progressive Muslims within the Sarekat Islam. However, his introduction to the PI in the Netherlands “shattered all the ideas and convictions I had brought with me from home”. In 1979 he described in his autobiography:

The concept of the unity of the Indonesian people had not yet received the attention of Jong Java, and I was only conscious of my own nationality as a Javanese. But living through and participating in the radical transition period [of the Perhimpoenan Indonesia] caused a radical mental and spiritual change in myself. Very quickly the feeling of being only a Javanese diminished when I began to realise that more importantly I belonged to a larger nation, the Indonesian nation, and that I was no longer an Inlander, Inheems (Dutch for ‘indigenous’), or a bumiputra (Indonesian for ‘indigenous’), but an Indonesian with a new country called Indonesia.

Another former student, Arnold Mononutu, confirmed in 1981 that his experience with the PI had been formative to his thinking:

[The Indonesian students in the Netherlands, coming from various ethnic groups [suku] such as the Javanese, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Tapanuli, Minahasans, Amboinese and Timorese, realised that they all descended from the same Malayan family [rumpun Melayu], and were in the same colonial boat. In the Netherlands they breathed free air just like other Dutch citizens. In the Netherlands they felt that they were free and independent Indonesians, without having to comply with the colonial laws and regulations in their Fatherland.]

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155 Petrus Blumberger, De nationalistische beweging, 7, 187; Pluver, Overzicht van de ontwikkeling der nationalistische beweging, 27; Poeze, Politiek-Politionele Overzichten, 1:xli-xl; Poeze, In het land van de overheerser, 1:176; Elson, The Idea of Indonesia, 45; Bachtiar, “The Development,” 35; Legge, Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia, 19.
156 Petrus Blumberger, De nationalistische beweging, 189-199.
157 Sastroamijoyo, Milestones on my Journey, 23.
158 Sastroamijoyo, Milestones on my Journey, 23; my translation, original in the appendix.
159 Nalenan, Arnold Mononutu, 34; my translation, original in the appendix.
Regional identification – national identification – international identification

The notion that the students in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia pioneered in substituting regional identities with a unitary Indonesian identification gave them a central role in later analyses of the internal dynamics of the Indonesian movement for independence. In this notion, the Indonesian students in the Netherlands were at the root of a decades-long antagonism between unitary Indonesian nationalists on the one hand – often with former PI students in leading roles – and regional patriots and separatists on the other. In many historical accounts the history of the Indonesian movement for independence is essentially a long debate and eventually a power struggle between ‘narrowly particularistic’ groups, that orientated exclusively on the interests of their regions and were vulnerable to Dutch divide-and-rule tactics, and ‘purely nationalist’ groups that tried to overcome internal weaknesses by agitating for a unitary and centralised Indonesian nation state. Between these two extremes were parties and organisations that started out as regional ventures, but that moved in the course of the 1920s and 1930s in the direction of a unitary front against Dutch colonialism.\(^{160}\)

The many separatist postcolonial conflicts in for example Aceh, Maluku and Papua, have only reinforced this notion of an oppositional binary between regionalism and unitary nationalism.

However, in this analysis, the antagonism between regionalism and nationalism within the Perhimpoenan Indonesia gets too much emphasis. For many of the PI students, a strong attachment to the region and culture of origin was not necessarily in conflict with a unitary nationalist strategy. To them, Indonesian unitary nationalism was not so much an answer to regional particularism and cultural divisions, but rather the consequence of a new perception of the wider world surrounding them. Rather than countering regional traditionalism, the invention of Indonesia served the important goal of challenging the Dutch colonial rule, and claiming a respectable position for Indonesia amidst the peoples of the world.

No person represents the duality of regionalist and nationalist affiliations better than Samuel Ratu Langie. Although this person is known as a lifelong defendant of the interests of his home region Minahasa, Indonesian nationalist ideas gained prominence in his encounters with other Asian people and Pan-Asian thought in Europe. In the following pages, the political writings of this student during his years in the Netherlands and in Zürich will be examined. Although his stay in the Swiss city itself remains somewhat shrouded in

uncertainty and took place a few years before the events described in the other chapters, it was a transformative intellectual and political experience for Ratu Langie. More importantly, his adventures and the establishment of an Asian student association in that city were regarded as an inspiring example of foreign work by subsequent generations of Indonesian students in the Netherlands.

The life of Ratu Langie

Gerungan Saul Samuel Jacob Ratu Langie was born in 1890 near the town of Tondano, in the heartland of Minahasa on the easternmost tip of North Sulawesi. As with so many Indonesian cultures and regions, the self-conception of the Minahasan population was traditionally quite strong.161 The peninsula was among the first regions to be physically controlled and Christianised by European colonising powers. Around 1560, Spanish traders first established two coastal settlements in the area, and in the course of a century, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch forces occupied most of the coastal areas. Through a series of extorted treaties and alliances with Minahasa walak leaders, the Dutch succeeded in surpassing the Spanish and Portuguese colonial powers and made Minahasa one of their most important strongholds in the archipelago. Economically, the peninsula was gradually converted from a rural area of rice farmers into a colonial export economy, producing gold, coffee, cocoa and nutmeg. Religiously, the area became one of the few Christianised regions in the Dutch Indies. Especially in the nineteenth century, German Lutheran and Dutch Calvinist missionaries converted large parts of the animist population through mass conversions.162 This Christian denomination made Minahasa also an important recruitment area for the Dutch colonial army KNIL. It was believed that Christian soldiers would be less inclined to sympathise with local populations when on duty in Islamic areas of the archipelago.163 The strong colonial relation of the Minahasa region was enforced through its large European and Eurasian community, that had developed along with a military fortress, several administrative facilities and European education institutions.

162 Henley, Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context, 45-66.
163 It should, however, be added that the colonial army was not exclusively Christian and also recruited many Javanese and Madurese Muslim soldiers. They were often deployed outside Java and Madura.
Also personally, Ratu Langie’s social position was strongly related to the Dutch colonial situation. His father held a respectable position as a teacher at the regional school for village heads, and two of his uncles, as well as his grandfather were government appointed walak district chiefs. Ratu Langie was to succeed one of them, but this had become more complex in the previous decades. As was the case with so many indigenous aristocracies in the archipelago, the Minahasan elite had been made tributary to the colonial state. In the nineteenth century the walak chiefs had a great deal of autonomy and authority in the inland areas of Minahasa, but with the advent of more direct colonial rule and administrative reorganisations the number of these indigenous leaders was diminished to only a handful towards the end of the colonial period. From the turn of the twentieth century, this high social position was no longer hereditary, and a good education was necessary to ensure a profitable position. This also determined Ratu Langie’s prospects.164

Initially, the young Ratu Langie was educated in his father’s regional school for indigenous village heads in Tondano. However, after he died in 1904, Ratu Langie at the age of 14 was sent to Batavia to enrol in the newly established technical high school to become engineer in the railway sector. After four years of training, Ratu Langie worked two years as an engineer in West Java, but he soon grew disillusioned with racist regulations. As the highly anecdotal Indonesian biography of Ratu Langie recounts, the latter was appalled by the fact that during construction works European and Eurasian personnel were accommodated in hotels while Indonesians were housed in malaria-ridden kampongs. Also he

164 Henley, Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context, 39-40.
found out that his salary was only half the sum paid to European personnel. He resigned to try his luck elsewhere.\textsuperscript{165}

Around 1911, Ratu Langie planned to follow in the footsteps of his father and to obtain the necessary requirements for a teacher’s position in a school on European level. To this end, he decided to continue his studies in the Netherlands, probably inspired by stories of recently returned students such as Abdul Rivai.\textsuperscript{166} In 1912, at the age of 22, he arrived in the Netherlands and found a room overlooking the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. Within four years, he acquired both a general teacher’s degree and a special mathematics certificate, the first at the University of Amsterdam and the second at the protestant Free University in that same city.\textsuperscript{167} Initially, he lived on a considerable inheritance, which he received after the death of his mother in 1911. However, after he ran out of money, he successfully applied for a bursary from the Tjandi Stichting. As an addition to his income, Ratu Langie also published articles in several smaller and larger magazines, and profited from the money of his newly wedded wife Emilie Suzanna Ratu Langie-Houtman.\textsuperscript{168} Suzanna was born in the Dutch Indies from Indo-European parents. She studied medicine in Amsterdam and even obtained a doctorate as a medical student. It was in the same city that the couple first met.\textsuperscript{169}

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\caption{Portrait of Suzanna Ratu Langie-Houtman and Samuel Ratu Langie, 1915-1920.}
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Source: Ratulangie family; Indischhistorisch.nl.
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\textsuperscript{168} NL-HaNA, Commissariaat Indische Zaken, 2.10.49, inv. nr. 2692, jaarverslag 1918, 26.

The personality of Ratu Langie remains somewhat obscure, as no elaborate contemporary account of him exists. But reading his articles, a proud Minahasan comes to the fore. In several lectures and in various journals, such as *De Indiër*, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, *Hindia Poetra*, and *Indië*, Sam Ratu Langie discussed the history, culture, and economy of Minahasa, as well as the position of Minahasan women, the Minahasan education system and its political life.\(^{170}\) He described how European colonisation had initially been damaging to the peninsula, but that active missionary work in the nineteenth century had brought civilisation to the people.\(^{171}\) As a consequence, the Minahasan population was to a large extent Europeanised. More than in other regions, Ratu Langie claimed, Minahasans dressed in European style, were relatively well educated and often spoke Dutch.\(^{172}\) Also remarkable was the position of Minahasan women in society. A mixture of indigenous cultural traits and the civilising influence of Christianity, he argued, had brought them a more equal and independent position than women in Islamic parts of the colony.\(^{173}\)

These distinct circumstances had shaped the colonial relationship between the Minahasans and the Dutch. As a Christianised and ‘developed’ people, they were allies with, rather than subjects of the Dutch colonial authorities. Approvingly, Ratu Langie quoted a fellow Minahasan, F. Laoh, who emphasised that Minahasan chiefs in the seventeenth century voluntarily entered an alliance with the Dutch East India Company, and that they were never subjected by force of arms.\(^{174}\) As such, there were no direct feelings of suppression by the Dutch colonial authorities. “We want to declare, that the divisive element of separatism is far from us in our relationship with the Dutch East Indies state”, Ratu Langie wrote. “We fully accept the sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies government!”\(^{175}\) However, this loyalty was not unconditional. Ratu Langie also argued that the Dutch authorities needed

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\(^{175}\) Ratu Langie, “Uit de Minahassa,” *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 6 (October 1917): 1331.
to answer the loyalty of the Minahasan people with an active improvement of educational possibilities for Minahasan youth, especially for girls, and a removal of colonial burdens, such as forced labour service and the disproportionate number of Minahasan boys in military service.\textsuperscript{176}

The writings of Ratu Langie about Minahasa in his student years – between 1912 and 1919 and still in a largely ethical environment – mirror his lifelong dedication to the Minahasan cause. As can be read in various biographical accounts, Ratu Langie would soon after his return to the colony in 1919, and especially after 1924, assume a position as a prominent proponent of Minahasan interests vis-à-vis the Dutch authorities and in relation with the other populations in the archipelago. He did this in a variety of capacities: first as a secretary in the advisory Minahasa Council between 1924 and 1927, and as a government appointed representative of the larger province of Celebes (later known as Sulawesi) in the Volksraad from 1927 onwards. He was also the founder and first president of the Persatoean Minahassa (‘Minahasan Union’) from that same year onwards, and eventually the governor of Celebes for the Republican Indonesian government, from August 1945 until he was arrested and deported to New Guinea by the Dutch army. In 1949 he died after imprisonment had seriously affected his health. When his body was returned to his place of birth, Tondano, he was hailed as “the father of the whole Minahasan people”.\textsuperscript{177}

\textbf{Ratu Langie and other regions}

Easy as it may be to illustrate Ratu Langie’s lifelong Christian Minahasan orientation with articles about his native soil from his student years, more interesting steps in his personal political development took place in interaction with students from other parts of the archipelago, and beyond. Ratu Langie did not write solely about Minahasa.

Already in November 1913, he issued a lengthy brochure in the series \textit{Onze Koloniën}, in which he gave proof of his broader awareness of political events in the colony. In a 32-page article, he discussed the spectacular rise of the Sarekat Islam and the Indische Partij, arguing that it was not just the agitation of individuals against the Dutch colonial authorities that triggered the remarkable mobilisation of the population, but a constant refusal of the Dutch and indigenous bureaucracy to take the demands of the impoverished population seriously. In this brochure, Ratu Langie did not necessarily call for anti-Dutch resistance


himself, but he argued that the Dutch authorities were wrong in obstructing the justified and constructive Indonesian opposition to their power. He lamented the aggressive press campaigns and repressive measures of the colonial government against popular leaders such as Ernest Douwes Dekker, Tjipto Mangoenkeesoomo and Suwardi Suryaningrat. Instead of marginalising these voices, the authorities needed to work towards a true development and democratisation of the colony, because “history can show us no example of a people that has been subjected for ever”.178

However, Ratu Langie also had his reservations about the main political organisations in the colony, such as the Javanese nationalist Boedi Oetomo and the Islamist Sarekat Islam. Although he defended their right to exist and supported their general objective of social and economic emancipation of the native population and more democratic influence on decision making, he deemed the former organisation too narrowly Javanese, and the latter too narrowly Islamic. In his lengthy article on the Sarekat Islam Ratu Langie argued:

While the Boedi Oetomo requires the Javanese nationality of its members, the Sarekat Islam is more extreme […] and asks of its members to be Mohammedans. And when the SI fights for the Mohammedan population, she clashes right away with non-Mohammedans, whose interests are sometimes in immediate opposition to those of the former. Then we get the situation: Islam against non-Islam.179

So, although Ratu Langie wrote and continued to write articles about the unique features of his own region of birth, and although he was fascinated by the sudden emergence of mass organisations such as the Sarekat Islam in other areas, he did not support regional, religious or sectarian divides and antagonisms in Indonesian society. The understandable dissatisfaction and even anger among large segments of the Indonesian population with the colonial authorities needed to be mobilised differently, under the inclusive banner of unity, of course without denying the cultural and religious specificities of the various regions. Alongside articles on Minahasa, Ratu Langie during his student years also began to write about the “fraternity of nationalities and sub-races in Indonesia” as the “only solution to our social problems”.180

This dual stance also manifested itself during his presidency over the Indische Vereeniging, between November 1914 and November 1915. He stepped away from the loyalist and Javanese focus of the previous chair, Noto Soeroto, and stressed the importance of keeping a close watch on political and social developments in the fatherland. Each student had the duty to study his own discipline to ensure that he could assist the emerging political movement at large, upon returning to the fatherland. This postponed activism, however, also implied that the IV itself remained aloof in the issue between unitary parties such as Insulinde or the emerging socialist parties, or particularist organisations such as Boedi Oetomo and Sarekat Islam. This attempt to avoid political dominance of either Muslims or Javanese was also reflected in the multi-regional board Ratu Langie compiled. While the boards under Noto Soeroto consisted mostly of young Javanese, Ratu Langie asked a Minahasan student, one Malay and two Javanese to take a position in the board. The board year of Ratu Langie was not very successful. He did not manage to revive the ailing association, which suffered from a general lack of interest and commitment of the remaining Indonesian students in the Netherlands during the First World War. After a year, Ratu Langie was succeeded by Loekman Djajadiningrat.

Ratu Langie in Zürich

More memorable than his board term, and equally determining for the political development of Ratu Langie and the Indonesian student community as a whole, were Ratu Langie’s endeavours beyond the borders of the Netherlands. As mentioned before, Ratu Langie had come to the Netherlands to obtain the necessary requirements for an educational career in the Dutch Indies. Within four years, he acquired both a general teaching qualification and a special mathematics and physics certificate, which should have granted him access to a teaching position at a HBS school in the Dutch Indies. However, as a ‘Native’ he would stand no chance on the labour market against European candidates. Therefore, he requested the Ministry of Colonies to ask the colonial government to deploy him as a government teacher in a secondary school, or otherwise as an official in a bureau of statistics. The government refused, suggesting him that he could work as a primary school teacher instead. This was not to the taste of Ratu Langie. Partly as an alternative career path, partly

as an attempt to further improve his qualifications, he instead chose to start a doctorate study at the University of Zürich, Switzerland.

In the summer of 1917, at the age of 27, Ratu Langie arrived in Zürich on the advice of Abendanon, who as an advocate of indigenous education counselled many Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Ratu Langie also received recommendations from one of his professors at the University of Amsterdam, D.J. Korteweg, who introduced him to his colleague M. Schröter in Zürich. Not many details about Ratu Langie’s life in Zürich are known, for instance on where he studied or lived. The city must have been a stimulating environment during the First World War. It was not only an important hideout for leftist revolutionaries such as Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, but Switzerland also provided temporary shelter to many students, activists and political personalities from the colonised world, such as the Pan-Islamic organiser Shakib Arslan from Lebanon, and Indian activists such as Champakaraman Pillai, Jnanendra Dasgupta and Har Dayal. Also many intellectuals and artists found refuge in Zürich, such as James Joyce and the Dadaïst Tristan Tzara.

The sources reveal no contacts between Ratu Langie and these personalities. Several historical accounts mention that Ratu Langie met prominent figures, such as Jawaharlal Nehru of the Indian National Congress, and the future Japanese army general and fascist Hideki Tōjō. Both rumours are unfounded and probably the products of mythmaking afterwards. Also Ernest Douwes Dekker, who moved to Switzerland soon after his arrival in exile in the Netherlands in 1913, had left the country two years before Ratu Langie arrived. In this period, Ratu Langie mainly worked on a geometric dissertation which he claimed to have finished around the end of 1918 under the title ‘Kurven-Systeme in vollständigen Figuren’.

Nevertheless, Ratu Langie can take pride in his initiatives in the student circles of Zürich. In June 1918, he established the Société des Étudiants Asiatiques/Asiatic Student Society (SDEA), in collaboration with engineer student Sieng Trie from Siam as secretary, and the Korean student Kwan Yong Lee as treasurer. The aim of the society, which had its secretariat in a building of the Swiss Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (better known

185 Van Klinken, Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation, 94; Jawaharlal Nehru would indeed meet Indonesian students in the Netherlands, but this happened only later in the context of the League against Imperialism, see chapter four.
186 Aditjodro, “Sam Ratulangie,” 86.
187 Van Klinken argues that Ratu Langie never actually finished this dissertation, and throughout his further life used the title of doctor unauthorised: Van Klinken, Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation, 94.
as ETH Zürich), was to unite the Asian student community, consisting of Indonesians, Thai, Koreans, Indians, Ceylonese, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. As a long term objective the association intended to establish branches in every European country with a significant Asian student population, “to promote mutual understanding between Asian nationalities, and to stimulate feelings of friendship among them”. One of the underlying principles behind this Asian association was the idea that Asian students had an important role to modernise their colonised homelands towards independence, with respect for the respective cultures.

The association was particularly successful in approaching Chinese student communities in Switzerland and beyond. Also the Chung Hwa Hui was approached by the SDEA. Around 1918, the IV and the CHH had frequently moved together against Dutch student associations in larger pan-organisational structures, such as the Indonesisch Verbond van Studeerenden. At several conferences, representatives of the Indonesian and peranakan group had concertedly agitated for the accessibility of higher education and democratic representation in the colony. Apparently, this collaboration found an extension abroad when in October 1918 the CHH members agreed to join the SDEA. This decision was not reached without internal debate, however. It is remarkable to see the hesitancy with which the peranakan in CHH engaged with the Zürich association. An internal CHH-report was to examine the moral standing [deugdelijkheid] of the SDEA as organisation. According to the report there were no objections for the peranakan against the principles of the SDEA, as long as the organisation would observe strict neutrality towards any of the belligerents of the First World War, and as long as it would refrain from “concrete” struggle against “any form of imperialism”. After Ratu Langie ensured in an official letter that the SDEA would not make propaganda for any of the belligerent parties the CHH joined the SDEA.

Originally, the SDEA had planned to organise a general European Asian congress within a couple of months, to discuss the establishment of a transnational confederation. The CHH would get the opportunity to present a paper on “the Chinese community in the

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189 “Société Asiatische,” Algemeen Handelsblad, June 30, 1918, 7.
190 IISH, Archief Chung Hwa Hui, inv. nr. 11, letter to Société des Étudiants Asiatiques, 7 October 1918.
191 IISH, Archief Chung Hwa Hui, inv. nr. 12, report by Lie Tjwan Tan considering the Société des Étudiants Asiatiques, 11 May 1919.
192 IISH, Archief Chung Hwa Hui, inv. nr. 11, letter from Lie Tjwan Tan to the General Meeting, 11 May 1919; original emphasis.
193 IISH, Archief Chung Hwa Hui, inv. nr. 11, letter from Ratu Langie, 21 September 1918.
Netherlands Indies”. However, the congress never took place and for reasons unclear the SDEA soon dissolved. After Ratu Langie left Zürich in the April 1919 and returned home to the Netherlands Indies, the chair position was adopted by treasurer Kwan Yong Lee from Korea, with D. Ledesma from the Philippines as secretary. Judging from the place of domicile of the chair, the bureau may have shifted to Paris. The contact with the Indische Vereeniging and the Chung Hwa Hui was disrupted and cooperation came to an end.

I ideological influences of the SDEA experience: ‘New Asiatism’

Important is that in the context of the Société des Étudiants Asiatiques Ratu Langie broadened his political focus considerably. While Ratu Langie from time to time continued to publish about Minahasan culture and politics, he now also discussed the international situation. He no longer analysed Minahasan or Indonesian politics in a limited colonial frame, but as part of a wider political trend among the peoples of Asia. And even when he discussed the colonial relation, he stressed that Indonesia was no longer the younger brother, but wanted to be regarded as an equal partner that “thankfully accepted well-intended help and assistance from outside, but only put confidence in itself.” The implicit devaluation of the Netherlands from a colonial guardian to ‘just’ a foreign power that assisted Indonesia from outside, automatically made new foreign relations and constellations conceivable. Illustrative is one of Ratu Langie articles in Hindia Poetra, two months after the establishment of the SDEA, in which he wrote in an ornate style:

I place enough confidence in this student generation to face the future, and to be convinced that once in the foreseeable future the ideal of freedom will reign over our tropical fatherland. Yes indeed, soon the mighty edifice of our National Unity will arise, buttressed on the lush islands of Indonesia and from the blue waters of the Pacific and Indian Ocean. It will bear witness of the holy wish of us, Indonesians, to maintain our position in the ranks of the peoples of East Asia.

Ratu Langie did not stress the importance of national unity as against centrifugal regional and religious identities, nor as a necessary prerequisite for struggle against the colonial status quo.

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194 “Chung Hwa Hui-Prijs,” Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, January 6, 1919, 1.
195 IISH, Archief Chung Hwa Hui, inv. nr. 20, letter from Asiatic Students’ Society 13 May 1919.
196 Ratu Langie, “Congres van het Indonesisch Verbond van Studeerenden,” Algemeen Handelsblad, September 1, 1918, 6; my emphasis.
Rather, he interpreted the Indonesian struggle for independence – a country between the Pacific and Indian Ocean – as an integral part of a broader fight for autonomy in larger Asia.

Also in other publications, the “ranks of peoples of East Asia” was a recurrent topos, both in the writings of Ratu Langie and of IV members in general. Telling was the opening statement of Ratu Langie at a conference in Wageningen of the Indonesisch Verbond voor Studeerend, with Dutch, peranakan and Indonesian students, in which he said:

Not as a Minahasan, which I am of birth, nor as an Indonesian, but I will speak to you as an Asian. Because the topic [of the existence of an Asian identity] can only be discussed if one places oneself on an Asian standpoint, if one overcomes the internal differences and expresses ‘the feeling, that there is something that is common to us all’, as was the expression of the Korean [SDEA board member] Kwan Yong Lee in a propaganda circular.198

This new Asian self-identification of Ratu Langie, that seemed to fulfil in the need for an international affiliation, is surprising, because it did not seem to have played a role in his pre-Zürich writings. It was both the product of ideological inspiration from fellow Asian students, as of the structural position of these students in an overwhelmingly white environment. Analogous to the transformation of Javanese, Minangkabau and Minahasans into Indonesians in the Netherlands, Indonesians seemed to turn into Asians amidst Chinese, Indians and Koreans in Europe. Ratu Langie mentioned that he regarded himself as an Asian amidst and against the European student masses. “[O]ne feels rejected and searches for racial brethren [rasgenooten] and fellow coloureds [medekleurlingen].”199 A fact that certainly helped this Asian integration was that Zürich sheltered Asian students of many nationalities, but no national group had sufficient members to establish a national club of its own.

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198 Ratu Langie, “Het nieuw Aziatisme,” Koloniaal Tijdschrift 8 (January 1919): 45; my translation, original in the appendix.
Apart from these structural circumstances, Ratu Langie also mentioned ideological sources of inspiration. In an elaborate account of his activities in Zürich and the SDEA, he described the power of a “young Asian spirit”, which he dubbed “New Asiatism”, within the Asian student community in Zürich. This spirit was evoked by Asian authors and intellectuals such as the Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, the Japanese university president Nitobe Inazō and the Malayan Chinese author Gu Hongming. Although Ratu Langie nowhere really analysed the oeuvres of these intellectuals, nor clarified what aspects he found particularly interesting, he hinted at their ability to modernise and revitalise their respective cultures, without conceding to a merely Europeanised version of modernisation. Ratu Langie rejected the tendency among some Asian intellectuals and elites to discard their own cultural background, and to establish an “imitation Europe” through the naive adoption of Western ideas and ideals and Western forms of government. Approvingly, Ratu Langie cited the Japanese politician and university president Nitobe Inazō, who argued that “a phoenix can only arise from its own ashes”, and that true development could only take place when the European element was rooted on an Asian basis.

This equilibrium between Eastern origin and Western influence was also the objective of the “New Asiatism”. According to Ratu Langie, this concept – the origin of the term is not clear – expressed the ambition to strengthen the Asian consciousness, in order to get on an equal level with the European identity. This was a necessary precondition for mutual appreciation and respect between both cultural blocs. “An Asia that has abandoned its Asiatism and uncritically copies the West, can hardly receive the respect of Europe. We want to strengthen Asiatism, to be able to counter Europe on an equal basis [ebenbürtig]. We do not want to drive a wedge between the East and the West.” As an ideology, New Asiatism contrasted to ‘old’ Asiatism in that the latter was a conservative tendency to fend off any Western influence, while it acknowledged the inevitability of Western influence and

200 Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a Bengali artist, writer and spiritual leader who became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. This brought him world fame, and greatly popularised his writings about Indian art and Asian spirituality. Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933) was a Japanese author, educator and politician, with a long academic career in the United States, Germany and Japan. His book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1900) about Samurai ethics and spirituality became a best seller in the Western world, and aroused the interest in Japanese culture. Gu Hongming (1857-1928) was a Malayan Chinese intellectual, who began his literature studies at the University of Edinburgh, after which he continued his academic career in Leipzig and Paris. In 1915, he became a professor at the University of Beijing, where he advocated Confucian values in an increasingly hostile environment in China.


tried to bring the two in equilibrium. Japan was the best example of a country in which this New Asiatism was fully developed.203

Ratu Langie’s conceptualisation of terms such as Asianism, New Asiatism, the East and the West, was not particularly advanced, and in no way reached the analytical depth of Tagore and the other sources of inspiration. Nevertheless, some Asianist conceptions can be distilled from Ratu Langie’s reportings on the SDEA. In an elaborate article, Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné have mapped out three different strands of Asianist thought: a self-orientalising tendency, a culturalist orientation on Central Asia, and a modernist Young Asian movement. They also emphasised that the three tendencies had considerable personal and ideological overlaps.204 Indeed, Ratu Langie’s thinking seemed to comprise elements of Tagore’s self-orientalisation of Asia as the spiritual antithesis of Europe, while he also did not want to discard all aspects of ‘Western modernity’, and argued for a ‘Young Asianist’ open approach towards Western systems and sciences. To him, Pan-Asianism, or New Asiatism as he called it, was not so much an anti-Western endeavour, but rather a pragmatic bond of Asian peoples to reach a more equal and harmonious relation with the West.205

I ideological influences of the SDEA experience: A student identity

A second political identity that was explored and cultivated in the Société des Étudiants Asiatiques in Zürich, and that later found translation in official policy of the Indonesian student society in the Netherlands, was the idea that the student elite in particular had a central role to play in the emancipation of their respective fatherlands. As Ratu Langie argued, commenting on the relevance of the SDEA: “The current student society carries in it the spiritual leadership of the future […]. Every Asian who has the privilege to study Western sciences should be fully aware of this.”206

The self-assured idea that students and intellectuals, and knowledge and science in general, were an important asset in the struggle for independence would in subsequent decades find continuing support among elite sections of the Indonesian movement for independence. Although at times political tactics of mass mobilisations and popular civil disobedience put great pressure on the colonial authorities – for instance by the PKI in 1926,

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203 Ratu Langie, Indonesia in den Pacific, Kernprobleem van den Asiatischen Pacific (Soekaboemi: Soekaboemische Snelpersdrukkerij, 1937), 110-111.
206 Ratu Langie, “Het nieuw Aziatisme,” Koloniaal Tijdschrift 8 (January 1919): 47, 49; See also Gedenkboek Indonesische Vereeniging, 7.
and by Soekarno’s PNI in 1927-1929 – Legge demonstrated the existence of an equally deep-rooted technocratic and intellectualist tendency in the Indonesian nationalist movement throughout the interwar years and beyond. This tendency found an early articulation within the Perhimpoenan Indonesia itself, incarnated in Hatta’s and Sjahrir’s PNI Baru, would tacitly survive the suffocating repression of the 1930s, and would eventually regain strength within the first governments of the Indonesian Republic after 1945 and Sjahrir’s Partai Sosialis.207 This self-conscious intellectualism – though more a political practice than an ideology in itself – emphasised the importance of long-term ideological education, cadre training and the development of political skills, as opposed to populist tactics of confrontation, immediate agitation and mass action. A typical awareness of the international stage was also part of this tendency.208

The idea that intellectuals had an important role to play in educating the masses and building the national movement was reinforced by the awareness that students – especially those studying abroad – were in a unique position to meet other nationalists and activists. From the beginning of the 1920s onwards, and with the SDEA as an often mentioned example, articles in Hindia Poetra and later in Indonesia Merdeka reminded the Indonesian students in the Netherlands to establish contacts abroad. Interestingly, these articles were often written by foreign authors at the invitation of Indonesia Merdeka. The Indian journalist K.M. Panikkar, about whom later more, pointed out, for example, that it was hardly possible to forge a Pan-Asian unity in Asia itself because of the aggressive interference of Western colonial secret services. “[T]he Asian students in Europe need to establish that unity, because it is possible in the European capitals to meet each other and to find common ground. Also because these Asian students will later become leaders of their suppressed peoples.”209

Another Indian, T.B. Cunha – who will be described later as well – used an epistemological argument. He argued that Asian students were educated by colonial powers themselves to assist in keeping the respective populations under control. These students became directly acquainted with the principles and rationales of the colonial oppressors. As soon, however, as the students became politically aware, they could use their insights and skills to attack the colonial government on an equal level. “Cette classe intellectuelle

207 Legge, Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia, vi, 19-21, passim.
208 Legge, Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia, 12, 28, 38.
occidentalisée constitue ainsi un état-major qui a été formé pour ce rôle et a été initié aux méthodes et à la tactique de lutte dans le camp même de ses adversaires.”

Both notions – that the Indonesian movement for autonomy was an integral part of an international Asian struggle, and that students had an important role to play in educating the movement and forging foreign relations – were developed in the context of the Société des Étudiants Asiatiques in Zürich, and would in the course of the early 1920s develop into two core tenets of the Indische Vereeniging/Perhimpoenan Indonesia.

Ratu Langie returns

Ratu Langie himself, however, would not be part of this development. Although he had received some financial aid from the Tjandi Stichting and borrowed money from his wife Suzanna Ratu Langie-Houtman, his savings were nearly depleted. Between December 1915 and March 1919 he wrote several requests to the Ministry of Colonies to be employed as a government teacher in the Dutch Indies. Initially, this was to no avail, to the explicit frustration of Ratu Langie. In October 1918, Ratu Langie again wrote an urgent letter to the Minister of Colonies from Zürich, indicating that he ran out of money and wanted to leave for the Dutch Indies as soon as possible. “[O]ne needs to make compromises in life, and one loses contact with reality if one sticks too much with one’s principles”, he urged the Minister. He repeated his preference for a teaching position at a secondary school level, but he also suggested a function at the census bureau in Bandung or at a pension fund in Batavia.

Eventually, Samuel Ratu Langie and his wife set sail to the Dutch Indies in April 1919. At a farewell celebration in the Indische Vereeniging, both Suzanna and Samuel were honoured, with explicit mention to Samuel’s activities in Zürich. Upon returning, he was indeed appointed as a mathematics teacher at the well-regarded technical AMS Prinses Juliana School in Yogyakarta, but after a period of three years he moved to Bandung, where he began a lifelong political career, first in the Bandung Municipality and later at the national level.

With a tentative conclusion that the Indonesian self-identification did not just develop in antithesis with regionalism – again, Ratu Langie continued to publish about his Minahasan

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210 T.B. Cunha, “Le rôle des étudiants dans les mouvements nationaux des pays coloniaux,” *Indonesia Merdeka* 4.3-4 (June-July 1926): 35: “This Westernised intellectual class constitutes as such a leading party, which has been educated for that role, and initiated into the methods and battle tactics of the adversaries themselves”.

211 NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Openbaar Verbaal, 2.10.36.04, inv. nr. 1939.

212 NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Openbaar Verbaal, 2.10.36.04, inv. nr. 1939.


birth ground – but was connected to a widening world view, it remains to be examined how
the Indonesian community as a whole remembered the Zürich experience. In itself, the
activities of Ratu Langie in Zürich were only semi-political and lasted for little more than a
year. Compared to, for instance, the clandestine activities of Ernest Douwes Dekker in that
same city, Ratu Langie’s endeavours can hardly be called spectacular. However, in
contrast to Douwes Dekker’s adventures, the days of the SDEA and Ratu Langie’s attempts
to unite and represent the Asian student groups in Europe, were regarded as the immediate
pre-history of the Indische Vereeniging/Perhimpoenan Indonesia by subsequent generations
of Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Both in the jubilee issue of the Perhimpoenan
Indonesia in 1924, and in a jubilee number of the Chung Hwa Hui in 1926 the hope was
expressed to establish a “new Union of Asian students” in Europe to revive the “intra-
Asian” spirit of solidarity. As such, Zürich was relevant not only for Ratu Langie’s
personal political development, but also for the Indonesian community in the Netherlands
as a whole. Later attempts to establish contacts abroad were based on and motivated by the
SDEA as part of the collective memory of the students.

Indonesians in Europe and the world

Before the next chapter continues with a close examination of the official IV/PI policy to
explore the world beyond the borders of the Netherlands, two observations will make the next
chapters more understandable. Firstly, when we say that Indonesians in the Netherlands,
following the example of Ratu Langie, started to explore the countries beyond the borders of
the Netherlands from the beginning of the 1920s onwards, we do not need to take this too
literally. Politically or not, the Indonesian students in the Netherlands were already very
mobile, and had made various trips to foreign capitals and popular holiday destinations before
these started to get a political edge. Secondly, the conscious attempts to build networks with

215 This great-nephew of the famous Eduard Douwes Dekker who later changed his name to Danoedirdja
Setiaboedhhi, moved to Switzerland soon after he was expelled to the Netherlands by the Dutch authorities in
He even started working for the Berlin-based Indian Independence Committee under Virendranath
Chattopadhyaya, about whom we will hear more in chapter four and five, and became involved in the notorious
Hindu-German Conspiracy. He left Switzerland before Ratu Langie arrived. See also Frans Glissenaar, D.D.,
Het leven van E.F.E. Douwes Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 107-114; Paul W. van der Veur, The Lion
and the Gadfly: Dutch Colonialism and the spirit of E.F.E. Douwes Dekker (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2006), 314-
216 Gedenkboek Indonesische Vereeniging, 18; Gedenkboek Chung Hwa Hui 1911-1926 (Delft: Chung Hwa Hui,
1926), 7. See also “Rond het Pan-Asiatische congres te Nagasaki,” Indonesia Merdeka 4.5-6 (October-
activists abroad were ideologically prefaced by a broader awareness of the foreign world in the publications of the students, most notably in the *Hindia Poetra/Indonesia Merdeka*.

To begin with the first observation, the countries surrounding the Netherlands did not need to be ‘discovered’. Indonesian students, coming from a country where the size of Java alone equalled the distance from Amsterdam to Milan or Warsaw, did not shy away from travelling over distance. The autobiographies of the students mention many shorter and longer holiday trips abroad. Mohammad Hatta, for example, who arrived in the Netherlands in September 1921, recalls how he spent three weeks Christmas holidays in 1921 in Hamburg, Berlin and Vienna. In May 1922 he returned to Hamburg, Berlin and Dresden for four months to study and relax, and in the summers of 1923 and 1924, he spent a few months in Paris and Lyon, and in Paris and Grenoble respectively. The next summer, he travelled to Scandinavia, as well as to Vienna and Budapest. These trips, often with an Indonesian friend, combined tourism and leisure time with studying for exams and writing for the Indonesian association in the Netherlands. Moreover, Hatta used his time in Grenoble, at the foot of the French Alps, to follow an intensive language course. Other students followed the same trails. Achmad Soebardjo mentioned trips to Paris, Berlin and London, while Ali Sastroamidjojo and his wife spent several months in Grenoble and Paris in 1924 to get used to “the European way of life”. An additional motivation for students to spend their holidays and reading weeks abroad was the rampant currency inflation in Germany and Austria, that made a stay in these countries particularly cheap. With Dutch guilders in their pockets, the Indonesians could save money by going abroad. Hatta remembers in his autobiography how he bought a suitcase full of books for less than 20 guilders in Hamburg, and how his rent in that same city was only a third from the rent he used to pay for an apartment in Rotterdam.

Probably for the same reasons, a few Indonesian students found permanent residence abroad, such as the Minangkabau entrepreneur Usman Idris, who had failed with a firm in construction work in Amsterdam but found employment at the University of Hamburg as an assistant teacher of Malay. Another example is the student Sosrokartono, who had studied

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217 Luttikhuis makes a similar argument regarding European and Eurasian workers on furlough for whom Europe was an integrated destination and the Netherlands little more than a port of entry and a base of operations: Luttikhuis, *Negotiating Modernity*, 286.
222 Hatta, *Memoir*, 115; NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Kabinet-Geheim Archief, 1901-1940, 2.10.36.51, inv. nr. 368, 19 November 1931 H12.
Oriental Languages in Leiden before the First World War, and lived the life of an aristocrat working as a news reporter for an American newspaper in Vienna. These Indonesians were not politically or organisationally active for the Indische Vereeniging, but they often functioned as a liaison for later political networks.

In itself, the various travels to German and French cities and Swiss mountains were part of the bourgeois life of many of the Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Incidentally, however, these holiday trips yielded direct political advantages and led to further collaboration. Achmad Soebardjo recalls in his autobiography, for instance, how the former IV chair Pamontjak crossed the path of an Indonesian-looking young man on the Boulevard St. Michel in Paris, in the summer of 1924. After he approached the man, asking him in the Malay language who he was, he turned out to be Mariano de los Santos, who was dean of the newly established University of Manila in the Philippines. Together with his brother and sister, this lawyer had started the university to educate Filipino youngsters in Law, Letters, Education and Business. On his way back from a two years study trip in the United States, after which he would assume the rectorate of the university, he visited London, Berlin and Paris, and as such he crossed paths with Pamontjak.

Pamontjak immediately asked De los Santos to change his schedule and to visit the Indonesian students in the Netherlands. He agreed and stayed in September 1924 in Leiden for four days. Upon leaving, he left a call to the Indonesian students in Indonesia Merdeka. In this “reminder to my brothers of the Indonesian Union” he argued that centuries of foreign oppression had drifted the different peoples of the Malay race apart. This was the time to use modern communication and transportation techniques to bridge the distances between the Philippines and Indonesia. “We must learn from each other’s experiences. We must not forget that we are bound by the same interests; have the same purpose; a single aim: Our Independence.” The editors in Indonesia Merdeka were enthused by the words of Mariano de los Santos, and they called upon the Indonesian youth to go study in the Philippines.

Another example that demonstrates the political relevance of these holiday trips abroad, can be found in the same autobiography. Soebardjo remembers:

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223 Hatta, Memoir, 116, 118; NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Kabinet-Geheim Archief, 1901-1940, 2.10.36.51, inv. nr. 261, 26 February 1925 Q2; NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Kabinet-Geheim Archief, 1901-1940, 2.10.36.51, inv. nr. 267, 27 July 1925 C10.

224 Subardjo, Kesadaran nasional, 162-166.

On our voyages outside the Netherlands, among which trips to Paris, Berlin or London, many Europeans assumed that we [Indonesians] were Chinese or Japanese. When someone asked whether I was from China, I felt humiliated, because my national pride prevented me from saying that I was from the Dutch Indies. Therefore, I used to answer: ‘I am from Java’, to which they often replied: ‘Oh, Java Coffee’ or ‘Oh, Java Sugar’. On these instances, I remembered what a friend of mine, an Indian, once said when we walked on Oxford Street in London. My friend asked an Englishman for a light for his cigarette, and the Englishman asked: ‘Are you from British India, Sir?’ My friend replied: ‘No Sir, I am from Indian India.’ It was a spontaneous expression of Indian nationalist feeling. At the same time it inspired me with the feeling that we had to give another name to our Fatherland than the Netherlands Indies.226

As becomes clear from this example as well, walking around in a foreign environment was already a formative experience. Just as was the case with Ratu Langie in Zürich, many Indonesian students were inspired, provoked and politicised by encounters with other peoples, Asians and non-Asians alike.

A new international orientation in IM
A second observation that helps to explain the conscious attempts of Indonesian students in the Netherlands to reach out to fellow activists beyond the borders of the Netherlands, was the fact that the students in official publications developed a characteristic interest in what happened elsewhere. As described above, Ratu Langie’s adventures in Zürich corresponded with a changing focus in his texts, from a predominant interest in Minahasa, to a distinctly international interpretation frame. The same discursive development can be discerned in the writings of the Indonesian association at large.

In the previous chapter is described how after 1922 the Indische Vereeniging changed under various circumstances into a politicised organisation under the name of the Perhimpoenan Indonesia. This change of direction of the IV towards the PI had repercussions for the tone and content of Hindia Poetra as well. Henceforth, the journal endorsed the principles of the PI on independence, self-reliance and the unity of the Indonesian people, and only published articles that were written in the spirit of ‘revolutionary nationalism’.227 It is not easy to describe the modifications of the style of writing in HP/IM, but the next international overview is illustrative:

226 Subardjo, Kesadaran nasional, 119; my translation, original in the appendix.
227 “Voorwoord,” Indonesia Merdeka 2.1 (March 1924): 1-2. Technically, the journal was still called Hindia Poetra when it made a restart in January 1923. In March 1924, the journal was renamed Indonesia Merdeka.
The bombshell has dropped. The fuse has been smoldering already for quite a while. In the hearts of the so-called uncultivated the bitter hatred against whites, which has long been dormant, has ignited.

Yonder in Morocco, yonder the cannons roar. Blood-stained bayonets flash brightly in the moonlight. [...] Yonder in Cairo, yonder passionate nationalists are sent to the gallows. [...] Yonder in China murderous British bullets pierce the bodies of Chinese students. Xenophobia is rampant, long being repressed. The prologue of the drama is in full swing, the same scene almost as in Morocco. [...] Yonder in Damascus the Haute Commissaire organised a massacre of the population; while in Beirut guns were aimed at the masses. [...] And yonder in Indonesia? In our Fatherland? ‘Inaudible the rice fields grow.’

As is visible in this fragment, not only the tone changed, but also the focus of *Indonesia Merdeka* broadened considerably. The international stage got a new and much more prominent role. With regard to foreign news, the IM was no longer, as its predecessor *Hindia Poetra* had been, a journal primarily focused on the position of the Dutch East Indies within the colonial realm. It became a nationalist-oriented propaganda journal with a characteristic interest in nationalist struggles elsewhere. This was conscious policy. In the programme of activities of the Perhimpoenan Indonesia in 1925, the board explicitly intended: “to evoke the interest of the members in international issues through lectures, study trips etc.” At the end of that year, the association issued a manifesto “to the Indonesian nation”, in which it urged the various political forces to come together and to unite. As an encouragement, the manifesto read: “Look at Egypt, look at Morocco, look at Syria! [Look at the] indomitable and unbreakable will of the nation. Look at China, which doesn’t allow the foreigners to humiliate her”.

Examining the content of the international articles in *Indonesia Merdeka*, it becomes clear that they were mainly intended to examine the common aspects and differences of the Indonesian struggle for independence with other movements in the colonised world. In March 1924, the political atmosphere in the colony and the gradual alienation of the ‘moderate’ Sarekat Islam from the Volksraad parliament was related to contemporary radicalisation in British India. “It is curious, how political developments in these two colonised countries correspond, although our big neighbour turned to action far more early.” In a subsequent article the political reforms in Turkey and Atatürk’s assertive foreign policy were praised,

228 “Ginds…,” *Indonesia Merdeka* 3.6-7 (Augustus-September 1925): 85-89; my translation, original in the appendix.
229 Petrus Blumberger, *De nationalistische beweging*, 189.
230 NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Kabinet-Geheim Archief, 1901-1940, 2.10.36.51, inv. nr. 280, 2 July 1926 S10, Manifest van de Perhimpoenan Indonesia aan de Indonesische natie!, 25 December 1925.
followed by a review of a biography on Gandhi and a comparison of the education systems in Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia. In general, the editors of IM in the period after 1923 were particularly interested in countries with emerging national liberation movements, most notably British India, Turkey, China, Egypt and Morocco. ‘European’ events, such as the coming to power of Mussolini, developments in the Weimar Republic, and the Stock Market Crash of 1929 were hardly discussed. It is also interesting to see that Sub-Sahara Africa and Latin America were not on the Indonesian radar.

Regarding British India, the rise and the configuration of the nationalist movement was observed with great interest. The nationalist students were well aware of the different political tendencies within the Indian National Congress. Gandhi’s teachings on non-cooperation and mass action were discussed in IM, as well as the call for unity of the Indian people. However, other components of Gandhian philosophy, like the somewhat spiritual emphasis on nonviolence, self-sacrifice and determination, were met with less enthusiasm by the Indonesian students. A similar selective orientation applied to Turkey. The successful military campaign of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the harmonious patriotism that he taught his people received much attention. Atatürk’s difficulties in keeping his movement together and his regular use of intimidation and authoritarian leadership to achieve his goals were not mentioned. It may be clear that the international focus of the Indonesian students was selective, not only geographically, but also thematically, and was above all an exercise in defining themselves, in relation to the peoples and places with which they interacted.

The approach of Indonesië Merdeka vis-à-vis international issues is strikingly different when compared to the older Hindia Poetra. But also interesting are the similarities with contemporary issues of the Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih, the journal of the Chung Hwa Hui, and publications of De Indiëër, a magazine in which Suwardi Suryaningrat and Ernest Douwes Dekker wrote a decade before. With regard to the former, the Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih also began to publish articles with a distinct international focus. Obviously the Chinese world was often discussed, but also anticolonial movements in other parts of the world were described as well. In 1926, the CHH board member and future chair Khouw Bian Tie

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concluded, for instance: “in all countries of the East, the awakening process takes place, here slow, there faster and yonder already in completed form. ‘Comme dans un songe mystique l’Asie est restée des siècles attendant le jour de l’action. Elle est éveillée aujourd’hui’.” 235

Also in publications of De Indiër, a short-lived nationalist journal in 1913-1914 edited by the Indo-European journalist Frans Berding, a remarkable interest in the foreign stage comes to the fore. A random issue, such as the one in July 1914, discussed the Egyptian nationalists around Saad Zaghlul, Tagore’s literature, and the Panama Canal, followed a month later by a report on political developments in Mexico and India and a reflection on nationalism on the Balkans.236

The examples of De Indiër and Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih support the impression that the emergence of an anticolonial tendency went hand in hand with an expanding synchronic global historical consciousness, not only for the Indonesians in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia, but also for other groups.237 The examples set by other nationalist movements, and the professionalism displayed in anticolonial politics worldwide, instilled in these groups a consciousness of a reality beyond that of everyday politics in the Dutch Indies. In April 1924 the editors wrote in an anniversary issue of IM: “The arising country of Indonesia consciously tries to evaluate the position it occupies within the international community. It feels that it constitutes an independent link in the great world chain.”238 The international context gave them a reason to criticise the Dutch colonial authorities when they did not comply with the tendency for democratisation that seemed to push boundaries worldwide. It could even made sacrifices more bearable against the backdrop of those made by colonised peoples around the world. It is only natural that the Indonesian students in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia sooner or later actively began to pursue contacts with foreign activists in the bigger cities of Europe. In the same programme of activities of 1925 in which the PI board announced that it wanted “to evoke the interest of the members in international issues”, it desired “to bring the Indonesian question under the international attention”.239 In the next chapters, three other students will be introduced who, at different times, in different cities and with different political objectives in mind, entered the international arena of anticolonial politics.

235 ‘Like in a mystical dream, Asia has been waiting for centuries for the day of action. Today, it has awoken.’: ‘Khouw Bian Tie, “Kantteekeningen op het ‘vredeswerk’ te Locarno,” in Gedenkboek Chung Hwa Hui, 43.
238 “Ons lustrumnummer,” Indonesia Merdeka 2.2 (April 1924): 17; Gedenkboek Indonesische Vereeniging, 18.
239 Petrus Blumberger, De nationalistische beweging, 189.