

Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1930–1957

Edited by
**Hans Antlöv and
Stein Tønnesson**

Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

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AND
SOUTHEAST ASIAN
NATIONALISM
1930–1957**

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONALISM**

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In memory of
Anders Tandrup
1942-1993
journalist, scholar and friend

Glossary

Key: [i] Indonesian [m] Malaysian
 [b] Burmese [v] Vietnamese
 [j] Japanese

adat [i/m]	tradition
Angkatan 1945 [i]	Generation of 1945
Bahasa Indonesia [i/m]	Indonesia's national language
bangsa Melayu [i/m]	'the Malay race'
Barisan Pelopor [i]	Vanguard Column
Dewan Rakyat [i/m]	People's Assemblies
đình [v]	village communal temples
Độc Lập [v]	independence
đồn điền [v]	military colonies
Gerakan Rakyat Baru [i]	New People's Movement
Giyu Tai [j]	Volunteer Corps
Giyu Gun [j]	Volunteer Army
Gunseikanbu [j]	Japanese military government
haji [i/m]	a person who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca
Heiho [j]	Japanese-sponsored army in Indonesia
Indonesia Raya [i/m]	Greater Indonesia
kampung, kampong [i/m]	village
Kenpeitai [j]	Japanese military police
Khâm Sai [v]	imperial delegate
kraton [i]	royal court
masa kosong [i]	'empty period'; power vacuum
Melayu Raya [i/m]	Greater Malaya
Mentri-mentri besar [m]	Prime Ministers
Merdeka [i/m]	freedom; independence
Moi [v] (moï in French)	derogative term for Montagnards
Myochit [b]	'Lovers of the Nation'
Panca Sila [i]	'Five Pillars'; the national ideology of Indonesia

pangreh praja [i]	native civil service
peci [i]	Islamic male headdress
pemuda [i/m]	youth
Peta [i/m]	Defenders of the Fatherland
pongyis	Buddhist monks
priyayi [i]	native aristocracy
raja [i/m]	king; ruler
rakyat [i/m]	'common people'
Sang Merah Putih [i]	'The Red and White' (the Indonesian flag)
Syonan [j]	Singapore
thanh niên [v]	Youth

Abbreviations

AFO	Anti-Fascist Organisation (Burma)
ALFSEA	Allied Land Forces South East Asia
AMACAB	Allied Military Administration, Civil Affairs (formerly NICA— Dutch)
ANM	Arkib Negara Malaysia, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur
AOM	Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix en Provence
ARA(-II)	Algemeen Rijksarchief (Tweede Afdeling), The Hague
AS	Algemene Secretarie (file in ARA)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AVDP	Archief Van der Plas (file in ARA)
BB	Binnenlands Bestuur
BMA	British Military Administration (Malaya)
BTMSA	Bataillon des tirailleurs montagnards du Sud-Annam
CAD-MvD,	Centraal Archieven Depot, Ministerie van Defensie,
HKGS-NOI	Hoofdkwartier van de Generale Staf in Nederlands Oost-Indië
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CG	Consul General
CLC	Community Liaison Committee (British)
CO	Colonial Office, London
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CRA	Commonwealth Records Archives, Canberra
DOS	Department of State, Washington, D.C.
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ECAFE	Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East
EFEO	École Française d'Extrême-Orient
FLHPC	Front de Libération des Hauts Plateaux du Champa
FO	Foreign Office, London
FULRO	Front Unifié de la Lutte des Races Opprimées
GCMA	Groupes de Commandos Mixtes Aeroportés
GPO	Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
HMG	His/Her Majesty's Government
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
INF	Indochine Nouveau Fonds (file in AOM)

KNIL	Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger
KNTW	<i>Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de tweede wereldoorlog</i>
KRIS	Kesatuan [Kerajaan] Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung, Union of Peninsular Indonesians
KVP	Katholieke Volkspartij (Dutch)
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
MMP	Malcolm MacDonald Papers, Durham University
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MRE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army (formerly MPAJA)
NEFIS	Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service
NICA	Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (later AMACAB)
NLF	National Liberation Front of South-Vietnam
NSB	Nationaal Socialistische Beweging
OBNI ^B	<i>Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen, 1945-1950</i>
OSS	Organisation of Strategic Services, Washington, D.C.
OSVIA	Opleidings School voor Inlandse Ambtenaren
PAP	People's Action Party, Singapore
PETA	Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Fatherland
PG	Procureur Generaal (file in ARA)
PID	Politieke Inlichtingensdienst, Netherlands East Indies
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia
PMS(I)	Pays Montagnard du Sud(-Indochinois)
PNI	Partai Nasional Indonesia
POW	Prisoner of War
PRCNA-2	People's Republic of China National Archives House no. 2, Nanjing.
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London
QM	Questions Moï (file in Cornell University Archives and Manuscripts Department, Ithaca NY)
RD	République Démocratique
RG	Record Group (in USNA)
RH	Rhodes House, Oxford
RSA	Résidence Supérieure d'Annam (file in VNA2)
RECOMBA	Regeringscommissaris voor Bestuursaangelegenheden

RVD	Regeeringsvoorlichtingdienst
RvO-IC	Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Indisch Collectie, Amsterdam
SACSEA	Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia
SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, Paris
SPCE	Service de Protection du Corps Expéditionnaire (file in AOM)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
USNA	United States National Archives, Washington, D.C.
VNA2	Vietnam National Archives 2, Ho Chi Minh City
VNQDD	Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng
Viet Minh	Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh
WO	War Office, London

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Introduction

by Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson

In 1930, the Kingdom of Siam was the only part of the region we now call Southeast Asia which was not ruled by Europeans. To the west and south of Siam was the British imperial sphere: Burma, Malaya, Singapore, British Borneo. Further south was a Dutch-ruled archipelago: the Netherlands East Indies. To the east was French Indochina and further east the American Philippines.

One generation later, in the late 1950s, Siam had been transformed into the nation state of Thailand, and was surrounded by other independent states: Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the Philippines. Only a few European colonies remained, notably Singapore, Brunei, and East Timor.

Yet a generation later, in the 1990s, Singapore and Brunei are also independent, though not perhaps exactly nation states, while East Timor is still struggling for independence, this time from Indonesia, and Vietnam is unified. Southeast Asia is today being drawn into a world-wide academic and political debate over the concepts of 'ethnicity', 'nationality', 'nationalism' and the 'nation state'. In the spring of 1993, while the foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were preparing for their yearly meeting, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) organised an international conference in Copenhagen to discuss the role of the European empires in the process that transformed Southeast Asia from an appendix of the European state system into an association of independent states.¹ Our intention at NIAS was to organise two conferences, the first in May 1993 focusing on the European role, the second in May 1994 analysing the internal construction of national identities in Asia in a comparative perspective. The idea was to view the same process first from the European perspective ('decolonisation'), then from the Asian angle ('national liberation'). The papers that were presented at the first workshop quickly defied our intention by transcending the

¹ The title of the first conference, which was held from 14 to 15 May 1993, was *Colonial Power and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*. The title of the second conference, held from 26 to 28 May 1994, was *Comparative Approaches to National Identity in Asia*. It is expected that selected papers from this conference will also be published by NIAS and Curzon Press.

European-Asian (or imperialist-nationalist) dichotomy, applying instead alternative perspectives on the struggles of the 1930–1957 period. The present book is the result of the workshop. The aim of this introduction is to present these alternative perspectives, match the articles together in five pairs and, finally, advocate a *triangular approach* to the construction of nationality in Southeast Asia.

The general question which was perhaps not explicitly asked at our workshop, but was indirectly present all the time, could be phrased as follows: what role (or which roles) did the European empires play in the construction of Southeast Asian nationalities during the last three decades of imperial rule?

The first couple of answers to be matched here are given by two mature, erudite professors. Anthony Short is British, based in Aberdeen; he has specialised in the history of the Malayan emergency and the Vietnam wars. William Frederick is a prominent American historian specialising in Indonesia, based in Athens, Ohio. The match between the two may perhaps be seen as a *mésalliance*: they lack much common ground, and they approach their subject in extremely different ways. Yet put together, the two papers give us a first insight into how the imperial powers lost their Southeast Asian colonies.

Anthony Short provides a well-phrased introduction to the topic in a keynote address with the impressionistic title 'Pictures at an Exhibition'. He starts out with a few startling quotations to demonstrate the strength of the European convictions in 1944–45 that their empires could still be maintained for many years, if not centuries. Then he goes back to the beginning of Southeast Asia's road to independence, finding it not in Southeast Asia, but in the demand of the Indian Congress in 1929 for the complete independence of India, and in subsequent British concessions. However, until World War II, the situation remained highly complicated in all of Southeast Asia, with no clearcut lines of conflict and little reason to believe in the emergence of any unified and forceful independence movements. The United States promised independence to the Philippines, and the British opened the prospect in India, but although Burma received formal autonomy when it was separated from India, neither Burma nor Malaya was anywhere near independence. The Dutch and the French were loath to admit anything that even hinted at independence for their colonies. This was the situation when World War II broke out and the Japanese destroyed the European colonial empires, an event whose importance can hardly be exaggerated. In 1945, the most remarkable and fateful European choice, in Short's view, was Admiral Mountbatten's decision to recognise Aung San as Burma's national leader, thus paving the way for Burmese independence. Burma had got a national leadership in consequence of

Japanese occupation and the war, and the British were able to recognise the change. In Indonesia and Vietnam, national leaders had also emerged, but here the Dutch and the French were unwilling to recognise them, and in Malaya the British looked in vain for a suitable nationalism with which to work.

Anthony Short asks what can explain the difference between the Dutch, the French and the British attitudes to their colonies and to nationalism in Southeast Asia. He seems to hint that the answer might be found in their respective political elite cultures. The Dutch, he says, followed the device of the House of Orange: *je maintiendrai*. The French were dominated by their republican heritage: *the Republic One and Indivisible*. The French and the Dutch were convinced that the British were self-interested, unprincipled manipulators, the *perfide Albion*. The British themselves, however, do not think highly of anyone thinking badly of the British. Since self-praise is moreover, not, a British stance (unless it is phrased self-ironically), Short falls short of spelling out what seems to be his conclusion: a differentiation of European roles: staunch, uncompromising roles for the Dutch and the French, a more flexible role for the British.

Far from providing any similar overview from the American angle, William Frederick presents an intensive biographical study of one particular Dutch colonial official: Charles Olke van der Plas, a man who came close to the top of the colonial bureaucracy during the war. He was not, as so many have wanted us to believe, a caricature colonialist: he spoke several Indonesian languages, was seldom staunch or uncompromising, had a great sense of flexibility, manipulation and deception, and combined this with a modernising outlook—yet also with a profound hatred of Sukarno. Van der Plas has come down in Indonesian history as a villain, worse than his boss Hubertus van Mook. Frederick equivocally calls him 'The Man who Knew too Much', and then uses Van der Plas's career to ask some general questions about the role of the Dutch in shaping Indonesia's future. Was Van der Plas just a wasted talent who deserves to be forgotten by historians? Or does his life have something to offer as 'the opposite, a synthesis and sign of the times'? Van der Plas was anti-Sukarno and strongly anti-communist, but never anti-Indonesian. He was committed to the idea of an Indonesia that would be free of rule from the Netherlands, though still linked to the Netherlands in some way. He favoured a multiethnic society free of racial discrimination, a culture based on harmonisation of differences, evolutionary rather than revolutionary change, a civilian government that could bridge differences between cultures and territories, an economy based on a revitalised agricultural base and the development of a modern, pragmatic middle class. Van der Plas had a positive programme, based on a sensitivity to local conditions, and was

often criticised by Dutchmen for his *inlander liefde* (love for the natives). In 1949, Van der Plas had to leave Indonesia, which in many ways was his native country, and was never to return. Now, forty-five years later, Frederick suggests that we might afford to learn something from studying the career and ideas of Van der Plas. The ideas of the Dutch 'villain' had perhaps less to do with 'colonialism' than we are used to thinking.

What links Short and Frederick together, despite their divergent perspectives, is an urge to avoid the nationalist-colonialist dichotomy, and a desire to focus not only on structural conditions but also on the people responsible for them. Short does this mainly in the British case since he concentrates on the ability of the imperial powers to recognise national leaders with a solid following. The British recognised Gandhi, Nehru, Aung San and, later, Tunku Abdul Rahman in Malaysia, although none of these was the sort of leader the British would themselves have preferred to see emerge. Mountbatten was also able to see the necessity of recognising Sukarno and Hồ Chí Minh, but failed in 1945–46 to make the Dutch and the French do the same. From Short's perspective we can get this far, but Frederick goes on to view the Southeast Asian future more broadly, not merely as a question of national leadership and formal independence. He finds that even the ideas and career of a historical loser like Van der Plas may have something to contribute to our understanding of the course of Indonesian history. Not all Dutch and French colonialists shared Short's cartoon-like features. Let us add that there were other losers around, also worthy of scholarly attention. There was Edward Gent with his Malayan Union. There was Léon Pignon with his Indochinese Federation and his *Bảo Đại* solution.

The conclusion from this first attempt at matching pairs is that we need to go beyond the striving of the Europeans to hold on to imperial power, and analyse a variety of attempts to influence and shape the construction of Southeast Asia, some of which were based on deeply held individual convictions. Historically, though, most of these attempts failed, even where the British stood behind. Yet by association the European modernisation projects were not without consequences. At the very least, they contributed to preventing the local institutions they particularly favoured from gaining national legitimacy. In Malaya the British wanted a union with individual citizenship. The result was a federation with community rights. In Indonesia and Indochina the Dutch and French wanted federations. The result was unitary nation states. In Burma..., etc.

The second scholarly match is between younger scholars: one American and one British who focus on successful European anti-communist repression. Anne Foster, of Cornell, has looked at the European and American reactions to the 1930 Nghệ Tĩnh uprising; Karl Hack, of Oxford,