

Indonesian Identities Abroad

International Engagement of Colonial Students in the Netherlands,
1908-1931¹

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This article describes the forging of networks and the articulation of solidarities by Indonesians in the Netherlands with various other colonial organisations and movements in European countries in the 1910s and 1920s. Living in the centre of the Dutch empire multiple factions of Indonesians, each in their own words and actions, interacted with the world beyond the confines of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Foreign news reports in Dutch-Indonesian journals and concrete journeys of Indonesians abroad will be examined to describe the variety of worldviews within the Indonesian migrant community. The article also demonstrates that the Indonesians in the Netherlands serve as a telling example in the Dutch imperial context of Alan Lester's remark that 'colonised subjects themselves could and did forge new, anti-colonial networks of resistance, which similarly spanned imperial space' (Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass* 4:1 (2006) 134).

On 30 August 1945, less than two weeks after the Indonesian *Proklamasi* of independence from the Netherlands, Mohammed Hatta, brother-in-arms of Sukarno, called upon his 'old comrades wherever they may be' to revive the spirit of unity among the colonised peoples of the world. In a public message he referred back to the days when he was a student in the Netherlands, and when he engaged with various prominent activists from the colonial world. '[D]uring all these years, I have treasured their memory in my heart, and I now look forward to getting in touch with them once more'.² Who were these comrades? What did these encounters signify for the Indonesian student community in the Netherlands, for the development of Indonesian nationalism, and for the Indonesian national cause in general?

In previous studies the Indonesian students in the Netherlands, and the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* [Indonesian Association, PI] in particular, were either regarded as a peculiar group within the Indonesian political landscape or described in the context of Dutch anti-colonial politics. From the first perspective, the students took a literally eccentric place among the various Indonesian political organisations, such as the *Sarekat Islam*, the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* and the *Partai Nasional Indonesia*.³ In literature of the second category, the complicated relationship of the nationalist students with the Dutch Communist Party, with revolutionary socialists such as Henk Sneevliet and Henriette Roland Holst and with the Dutch labour party was the main concern.⁴ However, these approaches neglect the Indonesian students' activities and orientations beyond the borders of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Although interactions between the motherland and the colony remain of major importance to our understanding of the dynamics of Indonesian politics, many insights can be derived by expanding our view to a transnational stage. As the Israeli historian Erez Manela stated:

1 I would like to thank Marieke Bloembergen, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, Hugh Mc Donnell, Remco Raben and several anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

2 Mohammad Hatta, *Verspreide geschriften* (Jakarta, Amsterdam, Surabaya 1952) 314.

3 See John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia and the Indonesian Nationalist Movement, 1923-1928* (Melbourne 1975); John Ingleson, *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement 1927-1934* (Singapore 1980); George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (New York 1952); Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca 1965); R.E. Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia: A History* (Cambridge 2009).

4 See Harsja W. Bachtiar, 'The Development of a Common National Consciousness among Students from the Indonesian Archipelago in the Netherlands', *Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra Indonesia* 6:2 (May 1976); Joop Morriën, *Indonesië los van Holland. De CPN en de PKI in hun strijd tegen het Nederlands kolonialisme* (Amsterdam 1982); Harry A. Poeze, *In het land van de overheerser, I. Indonesiërs in Nederland 1600-1950* (Dordrecht 1986). Biographies tend to focus less on one of the two contexts: René Karels, *Mijn aardse leven vol moeite en strijd, Raden Mas Noto Soeroto, Javan, dichter, politicus 1888-1951* (Gouda 2008); Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir, Politics and Exile in Indonesia* (New York 1994); Harry Poeze, *Tan Malaka, strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid. Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* (The Hague 1976); Mavis Rose, *Indonesia Free: A Political Biography of Mohammad Hatta* (Ithaca 1987).

Much of the history of anticolonial movements has been written as if it occurred solely within the boundaries of the emerging nation, or of the imperial enclosure from which it emerged.[...] When we expand our field of vision and place anticolonial nationalist histories within an international context, it is easy to see [...] that after World War I, the circumstances for decolonization were generated as much from the international situation as any other.⁵

By transcending the national and imperial framework and by exploring the international activities of Indonesian students, we can see how the rise of nationalism inspired the creation of new networks extending beyond the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies. The Indonesian student community can serve as a good example in the Dutch imperial context of the idea among British historians that the Imperial Project was not only an act of intrusion of a colonial power in foreign lands, but to some extent also worked in the opposite direction with regards to the circulation of people, ideas and political forces. As Alan Lester points out, 'it is easy to overlook the fact that colonized subjects themselves could and did forge new, anticolonial networks of resistance, which similarly spanned imperial space'.⁶

This article supports Lester's remark and expands it by describing the variety of factions within the Indonesian community in the Netherlands and the corresponding variety of networks and visions of the world. Internationalism was not just a nationalist inclination. Various international movements and developments attracted Indonesians with diverging visions of the future. In the inter-war period, international communism became an increasingly dominant force, which in the thirties tended to eclipse the more nationalist oriented Indonesians on the international stage. Indo-Chinese students had a distinct worldview in which China and Chinese nationalism played a determining role. Students inspired by the Dutch 'ethical' liberal tradition cherished their own set of international visions, whereas some Islamic Indonesians in the Netherlands

5 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford 2007) xi. See also F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Periphery: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in: idem (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Los Angeles, London 1997) 1-56, there 28.

6 Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass* 4:1 (2006) 124-141, there 134; Cf. Cooper and Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Periphery', 28.

chose to focus on Pan-Islamic networks in Europe.⁷ The specific characteristics of the engagements abroad differed from group to group and from time to time. To be clear, all of these groups were active in the Netherlands throughout the interwar period and succeeded each other chronologically only in organisational strength and ideological articulation.

The Indonesian students participated on the international stage in two ways, which will be evaluated successively. By analysing some of the Dutch Indonesian journals on content and international focus it will become clear that the editors created an international landscape corresponding with their political preferences and open to public concern and political agitation.

Secondly, Indonesian students in the Netherlands shaped 'real geographies' by maintaining regular contacts with key figures and organisations from the colonised world, such as Messali Hadj from French Algeria, leaders of the *Guomindang* Party in China and Jawaharlal Nehru in British-India, to name a few.⁸ Delegates of the nationalist *Perhimpunan Indonesia* regularly attended international conferences, in which the different aspects of anti-colonial struggle were discussed. By describing the gradual integration of various factions of the Indonesian students into international politics, and the nationalist students were the most active group, the dynamism and volatility of international movements and momentums come to the fore.

Moderate journals, narrow perspectives

As a consequence of the social background of most students, the Indonesian community in the Netherlands has not always been susceptible to what happened abroad. The cohorts of students before the First World War were predominantly of Indonesian aristocratic descent. This class was made tributary to the Dutch colonial administration for its wealth and social position in the course of the nineteenth century. Unable to maintain the traditional way of life, many (lower) aristocratic families chose to adapt to

7 Among Dutch imperial historians the 'Ethical' tradition refers to a set of reformist social liberal ideas on colonial development that was current in the first decades of the twentieth century among colonial ideologues and politicians. As such, it does not bear a normative connotation. For a study to the manifold character of the Ethical Political tradition, see Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten. Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische Archipel 1877-1942* (Utrecht 1981)

176-208. Regarding Indonesians and Pan-Islamic networks in Europe, first steps have been made by Umar Ryad, 'Among the Believers in the Land of the Colonizer: Mohammed Ali van Beetem's Role among the Indonesian Community in the Netherlands in the Interwar Period', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5 (2012).

8 The terms 'imaginary' and 'real' geographies are derived from David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28:3 (2004) 320-341.

the new power system and sent their sons to Europe for higher education.⁹ Accordingly, the first associations founded by the students – for example the *Indische Vereeniging* in 1908, the Indo-Chinese organisation *Chung Hwa Hui* in 1911 and the *Indonesisch Verbond van Studeerenden* in 1918 – were law-abiding, royalist and moderate in their political convictions. Although some students were inspired by the principles of the Dutch ‘Ethical’ Policy and advocated democratic reforms and economic development in the Netherlands Indies, they usually abstained from political agitation.

Although these ethical liberal organisations were explicitly apolitical and instead aimed to focus on arts, culture and science, they were politicised in effect. By only discussing current issues with an observational distance, the moderate journal *Hindia Poetra* of the *Indische Vereeniging* implicitly expressed confidence in the ability of the Dutch colonial state to reform. It recognised colonial rule, which after all, allowed its readers to start an administrative career. This attitude of confidence in the Dutch authorities was translated into a seemingly uninterested conception of the wider world. The absence of commentaries on foreign news in *Hindia Poetra* was a choice inspired by political preferences. The journal focussed mainly on the relation between the motherland and the colony – the relation that mattered most to the political view and the socio-economic position of its readers.

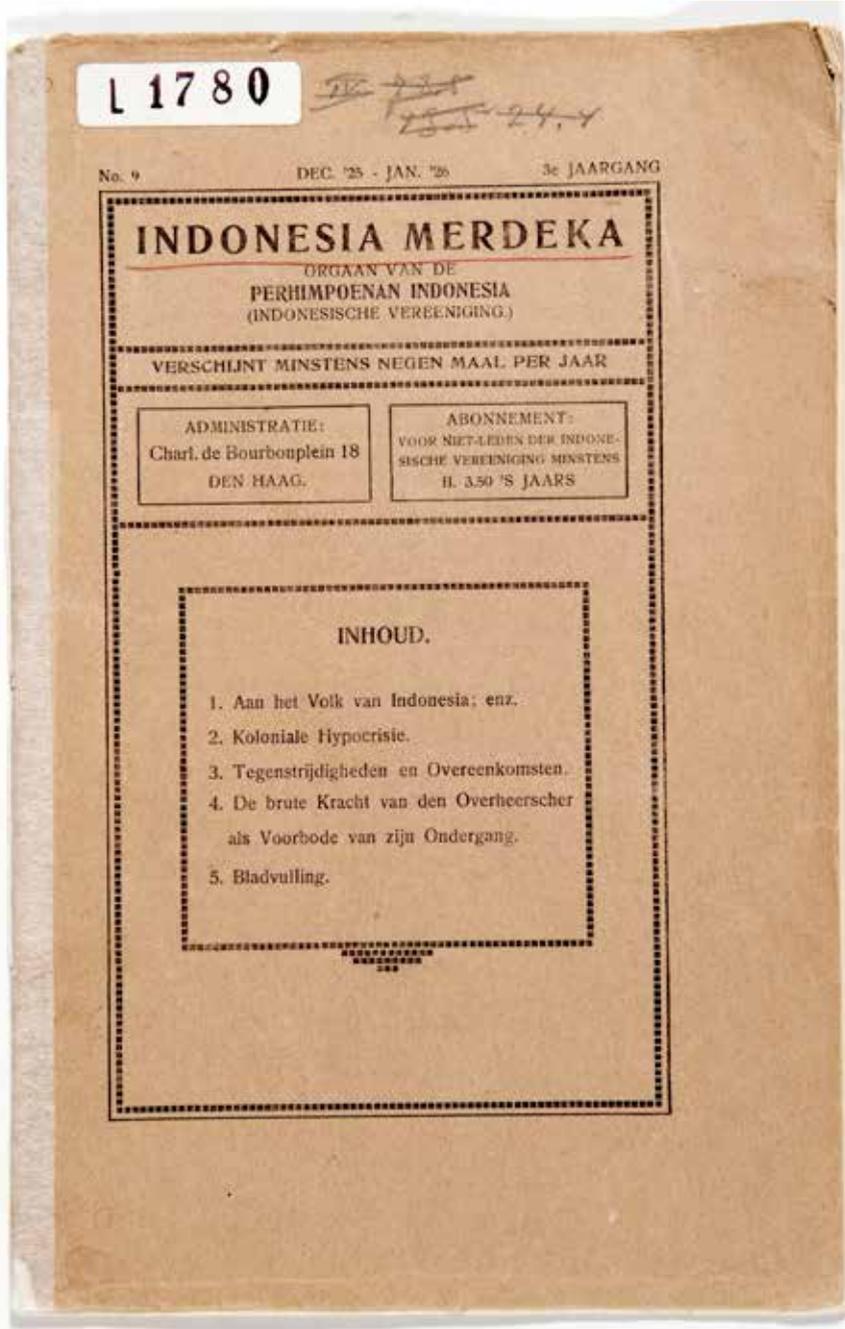
As early as 1913, individuals within the *Indische Vereeniging* started to push the organisation in a nationalist direction, mainly inspired by Gerungan Ratulangie and the exiled Soewardi Suryaningrat and Tjipto Mangoenkoesomo. Nevertheless, Indonesians with nationalist leanings were not able to change the cooperative stance within the ethical circles of the *Indische Vereeniging* and the *Indonesisch Verbond* until after the early 1920s.¹⁰ Only then, the *Indische Vereeniging* changed its course, influenced by new and more politicised generations of students from the colony. The new cohorts were no longer predominantly of aristocratic descent but more often members of the urban elite and higher commercial classes. They had enjoyed better education under the new ‘Ethical’ Policy, but lacked career opportunities or tertiary education facilities in the colony. Furthermore, they had often been involved in the various nationalist study groups in the Netherlands Indies.¹¹ The political

9 H.A. Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore 1979) 144.

10 Klaas Stutje, *The Rising Tide of Colour: Indonesische studenten en de ontdekking van hun wereldgemeenschap* (MA thesis Amsterdam University 2010) 27; Hans van Miert, *Bevlogenheid en onvermogen, Mr. J.H. Abendanon (1852-1925) en de Ethische Richting in het Nederlandse kolonialisme*

(Leiden 1991) 98; Poeze, *In het land der overheerser*, 105, 116.

11 Stutje, *The Rising Tide of Colour*, 24-27; Poeze, *In het land der overheerser*, 175-177; Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, 2, 4-7; Rose, *Indonesia Free*, 34; Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia*, 49; McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 30-33; Robert van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite* (The Hague 1960) 223-224.



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The cover page of the nationalist journal
Indonesia Merdeka, March 1924.
Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam,
Coll.nr. 6063-1.

shift of the *Indische Vereeniging* around 1923 was so profound that one can even speak of a nationalist coup in the Indonesian community in the Netherlands at large. The renaming of the politically moderate platform *Indische Vereeniging* to the highly nationalist *Perhimpoean Indonesia* (PI) was paralleled in the reform of its moderate periodical *Hindia Poetra* to the politically outspoken monthly *Indonesia Merdeka* (IM). From January 1924 onwards, the journal endorsed the principles of the PI aiming for political independence, economic self-sufficiency and unity of the Indonesian people.¹²

Compositions of foreign news

Contrary to its predecessor *Hindia Poetra*, the IM was no longer a journal primarily focused on the position of the Netherlands Indies within the colonial realm. It became a nationalist oriented propaganda journal with a characteristic interest in nationalist struggles elsewhere. In the March 1924 issue the political atmosphere in the colony and the gradual alienation of the ‘moderate’ *Sarekat Islam* from the *Volksraad*-parliament was related to contemporary political shifts in British India. ‘It is curious, how political developments in these two colonised countries correspond, although our large neighbour turned to action far earlier’.¹³ In a subsequent article the political reforms in Turkey and Atatürk’s assertive foreign policy were praised, followed by a review of a biography on Gandhi and a comparison of the education systems in Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia.¹⁴ A month later, in April 1924, the editors wrote in an anniversary issue of IM:

The rising 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.¹⁵

However, despite the widening scope after 1923, not all historic milestones in the twenties – the coming to power of Mussolini, developments in the Weimar Republic, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 – were covered. Developments in the Western world, apart from the Netherlands, were usually beyond the range of the Indonesian students in the Netherlands. Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America also received hardly any mention. In the period 1923–1931 the

12 ‘Voorwoord’, *Indonesia Merdeka* (IM) 2 (1924) 1-2.

13 ‘De situatie in Idonesië’, IM 2 (1924) 7-10.

14 ‘Rondom het jongste besluit van de Turksche nationale vergadering’, IM 2 (1924) 11-14; ‘Varia’, IM 2 (1924) 15-16; ‘Onderwijsproblemen’, IM 2 (1924) 24-27.

15 ‘Ons lustrumnummer’, IM 2 (1924) 17; *Gedenkboek Perhimpoean Indonesia 1908-1923*, 18.

editors of *IM* were particularly interested in countries with emerging national liberation movements, most notably British India, Turkey, China and Egypt.

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 the 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.¹⁶ A similarly nuanced orientation applied to Turkey. The successful foreign policy of Kemal Atatürk and the harmonious patriotism that he taught his people received considerable attention. Atatürk's difficulties in keeping his movement united and his regular use of intimidation and authoritarian leadership were not mentioned.¹⁷ It might be clear that internationally focused Indonesian nationalism was rather an exercise in defining a political identity than a distanced observation of the wider world.¹⁸

As opposed to the wider scope of the nationalist students, the view of the ethical liberal students, still a considerable group after the 'coup' of 1923, remained geographically limited. This becomes clear from the journal *Oedaya*. As soon as the *Indische Vereeniging* changed its course in a nationalist direction, the prominent Indonesian publicist Noto Soeroto turned away from *Hindia Poetra/Indonesia Merdeka*, which he had helped to establish, and founded a new bilingual journal: *Oedaya – Opgang*.¹⁹ Although the journal differed from the old *Hindia Poetra* in some respects, the similarity in political orientation and geographic scope is striking. Again much of the content discussed the arts, the different cultures within the empire and the fruitful cooperation between 'East' and 'West'. Again political issues were avoided, and again the journal contained few articles dealing with foreign news and reflections. It was basically an 'imperial' journal, discussing the relations between the Netherlands and the Indies within the framework of their colonial relationship.²⁰

A noteworthy faction within the Indonesian student society was the group of ethnic Chinese *peranakan* students. In 1911 fourteen of them

16 K.M. Pannikar, 'The National Movement in India', *IM* 4 (1926) 2-6; 'Extract van de lezing van K.M. Panikkar getiteld "The Necessity of Asiatic Unity" gehouden op de Alg. Vergadering te Den Haag', *IM* 4 (1926) 56-59.

17 'Nationale aanspraken I', *IM* 2 (1924) 79-104; 'Rondom het jongste besluit van de Turksche nationale vergadering', *IM* 2 (1924) 11-14.

18 See also Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', 330.

19 Karels, *Mijn aardse leven*, 67-69. Noto Soeroto stayed member of the PI but was suspended after an article in *Oedaya* (1923) in which he praised the legacy of General J.B. van Heutsz.

20 *Oedaya* 1 (March 1923); 'Mededeeling', *Oedaya* 3 (September 1926) 186.

established an organisation, *Chung Hwa Hui*, which officially pledged loyalty to the Dutch crown.²¹ Like *Hindia Poetra* and *Oedaya*, the journal *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih* abstained from writing on political issues abroad, with the exception of China. The country the members of *Chung Hwa Hui* considered as their fatherland from the 1920s onwards was the chaotic scene of a civil war in which numerous factions – warlords, various social classes, both an emerging communist and a nationalist party and foreign colonial armies – fought over the remains of the decayed Qing-dynasty. It is remarkable how the editors of *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih* framed this highly complicated civil war. The periodical did not write about the dramatic divides between communists and nationalists, between nationalists and regional warlords, or on the social backgrounds of the hostilities – a discussion that would make the proceedings of the Chinese civil war more comprehensible, but that would also divide the Indonesian community in the Netherlands. As was the case in *IM*, the majority of the articles on China primarily condemned the influence of the foreign powers occupying the coastal East and South of China and called for national unity.²²

European political networks

The political transformations within the Indonesian student community in the Netherlands not only translated into an increasing awareness of news from the colonised world. The actual establishment of contacts with movements abroad and the integration in internationally active political networks was also deemed fundamental, in particular by the nationalist and communist factions. One of the main motives for nationalist students to be active abroad was the belief that the problems in Indonesia remained unknown to the outside world. The absence of a critical Indonesian nationalist movement in Europe implied that Dutch government propaganda about peace and tranquillity in the archipelago under the blessings of the Dutch rule remained unchallenged.²³ In the second half of the twenties, the PI actively established contacts with other organisations to develop a more tangible community of colonised peoples.

Paris was the gravitational centre of the foreign work of the PI. In January 1925 the vice-president of the association, Arnold Mononoetoe, born on the outer-island of Celebes (Sulawesi) as Arnold Wilson, exchanged

21 *Gedenkboek Chung Hwa Hui 15 april 1911-1926*, Phoa Liong Cie, Sim Ki Ay, Thung Tjenc Hianc (eds.) (Leiden 1926) 2.

22 Tan Swan Bing, 'Een industrialisatieplan van dr. Sun Yat Sen', *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih* (CHHTC) 6 (1928) 88-106; Khouw Bian Tie, 'Enkele

opmerkingen betreffende het Chineesche familie-systeem in verband met het socialisme', *CHHTC* 6 (1928) 191-210.

23 'Onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 4 (1926) 67-72.



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The most famous artist in the Indonesian community, who often collaborated with Noto Soeroto, was Raden Mas Jodjana.

Nederlandsch Indië oud en nieuw. Maandblad gewijd aan bouwkunst, archaeologie, land- en volkenkunde, kunstnijverheid, handel en verkeer, cultures, mijnbouw, hygiëne, 14:6 (1 October 1929).

Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, Coll.nr. 256101.

Rotterdam for Paris. He told his parents and administrative supervisors that he wanted to study at the prestigious *Institut d'études politiques* in Paris, but in reality he never enrolled. Instead, he sought contact with Asian groups and Indonesians living in Paris, among whom the students Achmad Soerbardjo (Abdul Manaf), Sukiman Wirjosandjojo and Mohamad Nazif. He also tried to introduce the Indonesian cause to the Parisian public by approaching prominent periodicals to get the PI-manifesto published. Among these were the pacifist journal *Le Clarté* of Henri Barbusse, the anti-colonialist monthly *Le Paria*, founded by Nguyen Ai Quoc (better known as Ho Chi Minh), and *L'Humanité*, the widely read Communist daily, but without much success.²⁴

Around that time the Parisian group was invited by a Chinese Professor from Beijing and a Chinese student in Paris to join the *Association des étudiants de l'Asie* and the cultural organisation *Association pour l'étude des civilisations orientales*. The PI joined because, in the words of chair Mohammed Hatta, they were of the opinion that 'only a unified Asia [was] able to resist the brutal invasion of barbarians from the far West'.²⁵ Within the *Association*, Mononoetoe soon occupied a board position as representative of the Indonesian members. Other board members included Chinese, Syrian and Vietnamese students and activists.²⁶ In February 1926 the cultural department of the *Association* initiated a *Fête orientale artistique*, to which the PI sent a large delegation. They were well aware of the political value of cultural propaganda in Paris. As each country was given the opportunity to perform a piece of music or dance, the Indonesians chose a Javanese Wireng dance.²⁷

The *fête orientale* is an illustration for the importance assigned to art and culture in the political domain. This was not only a nationalist characteristic. Noto Soeroto for example, mentioned above as a leading figure in Indonesian ethical circles in the Netherlands, spoke three times at cultural events in Copenhagen (1922), Paris (1923) and Berlin (1925). In Copenhagen he and eight Indonesian students, most likely from the *Indische Vereeniging*, gave a gamelan concert. In the other two cities Noto Soeroto lectured about Javanese culture, using examples of Indonesian songs and dances as well. These performances were not so much to show the audience the repressed and curtailed beauty of the Indonesian culture – as seemed to be the purpose of the

24 Nationaal Archief (National Archives of the Netherlands), The Hague (NL-HaNA), Koloniën/Geheim archief, 2.10.36.051, inv.nr. 301.

25 'Onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 4 (1926) 69 (my translation K.S.).

26 NL-HaNA, Commissariaat Indische Zaken, 2.10.49, inv.nr. 2692; Archive de la Préfecture de Police de Paris, Dossiers des Associations, 643: Association pour l'Etude des Civilisations Orientales. The

board-members were Tch'eng Yin-chang, Ting Tchao-Tsing and Tchang Ki Tsinen from China, Kouchakji from Syria and Duong van Giao from Vietnam.

27 'Indonesië op het Fête Orientale', *IM* 4 (1926) 17-19; 'Petit Carnet', *Le Gaulois* 10-02-1926, 2; NL-HaNA, Koloniën/Geheim archief, 2.10.36.051, inv. nr. 301.

nationalist cultural manifestations in Paris – rather Noto Soeroto mentioned the Javanese traditions to demonstrate the diversity and viability of the different cultures within the Dutch realm, thereby following the imperial tradition of showing off subject cultures at world exhibitions and cultural festivals.²⁸

On communist waves

There were more nationalist events abroad. The politicised festivities in February 1926 in Paris can be regarded as the first in a series of international conferences and meetings between 1926 and 1930. Actually, there were examples of international engagements of Indonesians prior to this period, including Ratulangie who established a short-lived Asiatic Students Society in Zürich in 1918 and Ernest Douwes Dekker who spent most of his exile-years from 1914 until 1916 in Switzerland and Berlin.²⁹ However, these contacts were not enduring and did not integrate the Indonesian and Indo-Chinese students in the Netherlands in international networks on a structural basis. This was probably due to the students' position in the Netherlands. Unlike in colonial capitals such as Paris and London, where intellectuals and activists from different parts of the colonised world studied and worked, the Indonesians in the Netherlands remained relatively isolated. Contrary to the French Communist Party which provided young colonials possibilities for association with militant French intellectuals and *résidents* from other colonies in organisations such as the *Comité d'Etudes Coloniales* and the *Union Intercolonial*, Dutch political parties did not regard the organisation and political incorporation of colonial citizens as an important task.³⁰

However, after 1926 the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* succeeded in integrating on the international stage because events abroad took place at a faster pace and because the network of anti-colonialists seemed to link up with networks of the international labour movement. At the *fête orientale artistique* the members of the *Association* agreed to form an Asiatic bloc at the *Congrès International Démocratique* in August 1926 in the northern French town of Bièrville. After this *Congrès* new events followed. Each subsequent event generated new invitations for meetings and manifestations.

28 Karels, *Mijn aardse leven*, 67-77.

29 'Société asiatique', *Algemeen Handelsblad* 30-06-1918, 7; *Gedenkboek Perhimpunan Indonesia*, 18; *Gedenkboek Chung Hwa Hui*, 7; Poeze, *In het land der overheerser*, 122; Frans Glissenaar, *Het leven van E.F.E. Douwes Dekker* (Hilversum 1999) 107-114.

30 Brent Hayes Edwards, 'The Shadow of Shadows', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11 (2003) 11-49, there 17-18.

In addition, in the second half of the nineteen twenties the Indonesians took advantage of enforced international political activity within the Communist Left. The driving force was the Soviet Union, which had adopted a new international political line in 1922, aimed at cooperation with other anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements and parties.³¹ The more interventionist international policy of the USSR resulted in the establishment of multinational organisations such as the Comintern and the International Red Aid, and coordinating offices in several European countries. Regularly international conferences were organised on the initiative of communists groups. The participants of these events could reclaim travel and accommodation expenses – not unimportant for individuals and small organisations that lacked money. The communist networks could facilitate the aspiration of the Indonesians to manifest themselves internationally.³²

The aforementioned *Congrès Democratique International* was also part of this growing international cooperation of leftist European organisations. The attendance of the Asians at the congress was felt by the Indonesians to be a significant milestone in their international work.

For the first time the Western pacifists saw Asia being represented at their congress. And for the first time they heard Asia's voice, which declared in clear language that no lasting peace is possible as long as the oppressed peoples are not free of the foreign yoke.³³

More important, for the first time the Indonesians entered the terrain of politics abroad. Previously, the nationalist message was implicitly presented in cultural performances, such as the one at the *fête orientale* in Paris, but in Bièrville the nationalist thought was explicitly articulated in resolutions and manifestos. The Indonesians felt that they had a mission to introduce their country and its national claims to the foreign public. How literally this goal was pursued, can be discerned from the speech that Hatta gave – in fluent French – on behalf of the Indonesians:

C'est sans doute pour la première fois que vous entendez de parler de l'Indonésie, j'espère que ce ne sera pas la dernière. L'Indonésie est le nom de l'Archipel de la Sonde, composé de Sumatra, Java, Bornéo, Célèbes et autres îles, avec une population de plus de cinquante millions d'habitants, se trouvant entre le continent de l'Asie et l'Australie, voisin des Philippines.³⁴

31 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 131, 158; Harry A. Poeze, *Politiek-politioneële overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië (PPO)* (Leiden 1982-1988) part I, xcvi-xcvii.

32 Rose, *Indonesia Free*, 39.

33 'Onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 4 (1926) 67-72, there 70-71 (my translation K.S.).

34 Hatta, *Verspreide geschriften*, 154.

The fact that the name 'Indonesia' was officially recognised by the Congress was deemed the most important result for the Indonesians so far.

The League against Imperialism

The climax of the international work of the nationalist Indonesians followed only half a year later. From 10 to 15 February 1927 the *Kongress gegen Koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus* took place in Brussels, at the luxurious classicist Palais d'Egmont.³⁵ It was organised at the instigation of the Communist International Red Aid and the Comintern and bore a strong Communist imprint.³⁶

The *Kongress* was considered a great success and radiated the spirit of international camaraderie across the boundaries of nations and races. Widely known people such as Jawaharlal Nehru of the Indian National Congress and the Senegalese-French Communist Lamine Senghor of the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* contributed to the prestige of the *Kongress*. Political organisations from 34 countries were present from across Europe, North and South America, Africa, the Maghreb and Asia.³⁷

With five participants the Indonesians were a medium-sized delegation. Apart from Mohammed Hatta, who had just been re-elected as chairman of the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, the nationalist Indonesian delegation included three other students from the Netherlands, all between 25 and 30 years old. They also acted on behalf of a number of parties in the Netherlands Indies. The fifth Indonesian representative was the Communist Semaoen, representing the *Sarekat Rakyat*.³⁸

35 On the League against Imperialism, see L. Gibarti, Edo Fimmen and Moh. Hatta, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont. Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen Koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus, Brüssel, 10-15 Februar 1927* (Berlin 1927); M. Dreyfus, 'La Ligue contre l'impérialisme et l'oppression coloniale', *Communisme* 2 (1982) 49-71; John D. Hargreaves, 'The Comintern and Anticolonialism: New Research Opportunities', *African Affairs* 92 (1993) 255-261; Rolf Italiaander, *Schwarze Haut im Roten Griff* (Düsseldorf 1962) 21-52; Poeze, PPO part I, xcix-ci; Tania Schlie and Simone Roche, *Willi Münzenberg. Ein deutscher Kommunist im Spannungsfeld zwischen Stalinismus und Antifaschismus* (Frankfurt am Main 1995).

36 NL-HaNA, Justitie, 1915-1955, 2.09.22, inv.nr. 16609. III, personal archive Henriette Roland Holst, inv. nr. 39, collections of articles on The League against Imperialism.

37 NL-HaNA, Koloniën/Geheim archief, 2.10.36.051, inv.nr. 291.

38 The three students were Nazir Pamoentjak, Gatot and Soebardjo (Manaf). The mandate was given by the parties *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, *Partai Sarekat Islam*, *Boedi Oetomo* and several student societies, united under the banner of *Nationale Concentratie*. 'Het Brusselsche Congres tegen Imperialisme en koloniale onderdrukking en onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 5 (1927) 14-20; Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 235; Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, 34; Poeze, PPO part I, ci.

On Monday afternoon, the fourth day of the congress, the situation in Indonesia was discussed. In forty-five minutes Hatta explained where Indonesia was located, the natural resources it possessed, the history of its colonisation and the human suffering that resulted from its occupation.³⁹ He then gave an overview of the genesis of the nationalist movement and the suffocating nature of colonial repression. As a rhetorical climax, Hatta mentioned the latest news from the Netherlands Indies. The Brussels Congress in February 1927 followed only two months after the repression of communist uprisings in Java and Sumatra in late 1926. Although Hatta slightly criticised the lack of discipline of some of the leaders of the revolt he praised the courage of his people. His main conclusion was:

Es ist nicht Indonesien, das für die Unabhängigkeit nicht reif ware, sondern es ist Holland, das nicht fähig ist, ein Volk, größer und mit einer älteren Kultur, als es selbst besitzt, zu erziehen.⁴⁰

Finally, the speaker proposed a resolution expressing solidarity with the insurgents and demanding an immediate end to the repression of the colonial regime.

Returning from their journey to Brussels, the Indonesians were very positive about their appearance at the conference, despite the fact that the Dutch and foreign press had hardly paid attention to their contribution.⁴¹ However, the main result of the activities of the Indonesian students in Brussels was not political but rather organisational. At the last evening of the Congress a permanent league was established, the *Liga gegen Imperialismus, koloniale Unterdrückung und für nationale Unabhängigkeit*, with an Executive Committee in which Mohammed Hatta had a seat.⁴² Later Semaoen was also

39 Letter of the head of the Dutch secret service *Centrale Inlichtingendienst* to the Minister of Colonial Affairs dd. 08-03-1927, 2, NL-HaNA, Koloniën/Geheim Archief, 1901-1940 (nr. 2.10.36.051), inv.nr. 291; Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 131-142.

40 Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 141.

41 'Het Brusselsche Congres tegen Imperialisme en koloniale onderdrukking en onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 5 (1927) 14-20; Jan Romein, 'Contra Tyrannos, Het Brusselsche congres tegen koloniale onderdrukking en imperialisme', *De Groene Amsterdammer* 18-02-1927, 5; Articles concerning the *Kongress gegen Imperialismus*

in Brussels, IISH, League against Imperialism Archives, inv. nr. 65. The liberal Walloon journal *Le Soir* 12-02-1927, 14-02-1927, nor the Catholic Flemish paper the *Standaard* 14-02-1927, nor the anti-clerical daily *La Dernière Heure* 14-02-1927 mentioned the Indonesians in their commentaries. The Dutch journal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* 14-02-1927 did refer to the resolution formulated by the Indonesians, but did not write on the Indonesian presence in the rest of the full-page article.

42 'Het Brusselsche Congres tegen Imperialisme en koloniale onderdrukking en onze buitenlandse propaganda', *IM* 5 (1927) 14-20.



Eine Sitzung des Kongreß-Präsidiums zwischen zwei Plenumsitzungen

Unter den Anwesenden befinden sich: Mohammed Hatta (Indonesien); Chen Kuen und Liau Hansin (China); Henri Barbusse und A. Fournier (Frankreich); Dr. Marteaux (Belgien); Fernando Sanchez (Latein-Amerika); Manuel Gomez und Roger Baldwin (U.S.A.); R. Bridgeman (England); Jawahar Lal Nehru (Indien); Willi Münzenberg, Georg Ledebour, Prof. Alfons Goldschmidt (Deutschland); Prof. Nejedli (Tschechoslowakei).

▲
Mohammed Hatta in a multinational meeting at the
Kongress gegen Imperialismus in Brussels, February 1927.
L. Gibarti, Edo Fimmen and Moh. Hatta, *Das
Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont. Offizielles Protokoll
des Kongresses gegen Koloniale Unterdrückung und
Imperialismus, Brüssel, 10-15 Februar 1927* (Berlin 1927).

elected to the League's board. The main tasks of the Executive Committee were to represent the League between the conferences, to determine the agenda and to spread propaganda. It also acted as coordinator between the many member organisations.⁴³ In his capacity as board member, Hatta had to stay in regular contact with other members and had to be present at the board meetings that were organised every few months, each in another European city.⁴⁴ In this way he built an extensive network of contacts. Within the Executive Committee Hatta worked for the first time with Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the upcoming leaders of the Indian National Congress. A strong friendship developed between the two men. The 'intense, tall and thin' Senegalese communist Lamine Senghor was also a member of the Executive Committee until his arrest and subsequent death later in 1927. The Algerian leader of the *Étoile Nord-Africaine* Messali Hadj was one of the most visible members.⁴⁵ The fact that Hatta met the same persons in different contexts, and the higher frequency with which the congresses and meetings took place, indicate that in the context of the *Kongress gegen Imperialismus* in February 1927 the Indonesians established firm contacts with the anti-colonial networks in Europe and beyond.

Collapsing networks

However, things would not remain as they were. Just as the Fourth World Congress of 1922 worked in favour of the Indonesian nationalist movement, the new political line of the *Comintern* from 1928 onwards, known as the 'Third Period', urged communist parties worldwide to be more irreconcilable towards social democrats, revolutionary socialists, anarchists and colonial nationalists.⁴⁶ This political turn influenced the Indonesian political landscape both in the Netherlands and on the international stage.

In the Dutch context, the members of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) had never felt the need to join the ranks of the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*. The first exiled communists from the Netherlands Indies – such as Darsono, Tan Malaka and Bergsma – were more embedded in Dutch and

43 Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 228.

44 The board meetings following the congress in Brussels took place in Amsterdam (March 1927), in Cologne (Augustus 1927), in Paris (November 1927) and again in Brussels (December 1927). On the meeting in Amsterdam, where the PI-member Abdul Sukur was chair and where Darsono and

Abdulmadjid held a speech: Poeze, *PPO* part II, 127.

45 Rose, *Indonesia Free*, 35-36; Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 241; Messali Hadj and Renaud de Rochebrune (eds.), *Les mémoires de Messali Hadj 1898-1938* (Paris 1982).

46 Poeze, *PPO* part I, xcvi-xcvii; Morriën, *Indonesië los van Holland*, 86.



▲
A poster of the Dutch branch of the League against
Imperialism, 'White and brown united will liberate
humanity.'

International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

international communist circles than in the student milieus of Indonesian students in Leiden or The Hague. Many Indonesian communists expected a communist revolution to occur soon in Germany and Holland, through which independence for Indonesia would be obtained automatically. Darsono and Tan Malaka moved to Berlin and Moscow soon after they arrived in Europe.⁴⁷ Notable exceptions to this uninterested stance were Semaoen, who was exiled to the Netherlands in 1923, and Roestam Effendi, who arrived in 1927. They were active members of both the Dutch Communist Party and the PI and began to exert great influence on their compatriots within the PI.⁴⁸

However, notwithstanding the seemingly uninterested attitude of communists towards the PI, the latter would undergo a second ‘coup’ around 1930, this time in a communist direction. Although the *Perhimpunan* seemed to be in good shape at the Brussels *Kongress* of 1927, it proved to be internally weak in the late nineteen twenties. Several factors – such as the end of deportations of political activists to the Netherlands, the economic crisis of 1929 and improved opportunities for education in the Netherlands Indies – caused the number of Indonesians living in the Netherlands to decline. Accordingly, the number of members of the PI also dropped. Leading nationalist PI-members – Mononoetoe, Soerbardjo and Hatta to name a few – left or focused on the completion of their studies.⁴⁹ In fact the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* was open to new initiatives and the communists stepped into this vacuum. In 1931 Abdulmadjid Djojoadhiningrat stood for the presidency of the PI and was elected unanimously. He manoeuvred the ailing association onto a communist course and strengthened the ties with the *Communistische Partij Holland* [Communist Party Holland] and related organisations.⁵⁰ From 1931 the PI can be regarded as little more than a front organisation of the Dutch Communist Party.⁵¹ The remaining nationalists that opposed the new course, such as Mohammed Hatta and Soetan Sjahrir, were expelled.

For *Indonesia Merdeka* the alterations not only implied a more bombastic and communist tenor in the articles. The way in which the editors perceived events abroad also changed. Before 1931, the ‘rising tide of colour’ to which the Indonesians declared loyalty consisted of an imagery of oppressed peoples and races. After 1931, the emphasis was on suppressed classes of workers and peasants around the world. Consequently, the mutual class interest of workers in Europe and in Asia became a central theme in the renewed *IM*, and the

47 McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 165.

48 Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, 14; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, 268; Poeze, *In het land van de overheerser*, 186-188; Poeze, *PPO* part I, lxi-lxii; Fritjof Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet 1888-1942. Een politieke biografie* (Amsterdam 1974); Mrázek, *Sjahrir*, 40; Rose, *Indonesia Free*, 10.

49 Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, 64-68.

50 *Ibid.*, 246.

51 Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, 37; Poeze, *In het land van de overheerser*, 257.

nationalist cause per se was abandoned. By doing so, the editors of *IM* followed the directives from Moscow that stressed the importance of international workers' solidarity above nationalist interests.

The appreciation of the champions of the anti-colonial struggle in the *PI* and *IM* also changed dramatically. The expulsion of Mohammed Hatta revealed how the *PI* under the direction of Abdulmadjid valued her former nationalist leaders. An *IM*-article in 1933 decried Hatta as 'an agent of Japanese Imperialism', and its judgment on other nationalist movements was no less negative. The *Guomindang* was condemned as a reactionary henchman of capitalism and the Indian National Congress of Gandhi and Nehru, in the opinion of *IM*, was an insidious clique.⁵² With a new political orientation the journal of 1931 undeniably held a new vision of the world:

Only after the fall of the white and yellow international imperialism, with all its overt and covert supporters, will this ideal be realised by the working people of Asia as a step further to the voluntary brotherhood of all the truly free peoples of the world!⁵³

Within the League Against Imperialism the more aggressive stance was also noticeable as the communist delegations took a more uncompromising stance against social democrats and the revolutionary left. The general atmosphere deteriorated to such an extent that the second congress of the League Against Imperialism, in the summer of 1929 in Frankfurt am Main, was seen by the nationalist delegations as a great failure. The communist hardliners stood diametrically opposed to the other members of the congress.⁵⁴ Backing Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Hatta rejected the communist reproaches that the nationalist groups focused too little on the masses, but in vain. In May 1931 the most important non-Communist members of the Executive Committee of the League were expelled, 'denn sie [...] sich als direkte Helfer und Agenten des Imperialismus gezeigt haben'.⁵⁵ Hatta also fell victim to this political purge and was replaced by Abdulmadjid. As such, the rise of institutional Indonesian Communism in the Netherlands and abroad coincided with the decline of organisational Indonesian nationalism in the Netherlands and beyond.

52 'Mohammad Hatta als agent van het Japansche Imperialisme', *IM* 11 (1933) 20-27.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Documents concerning the Second World Congress of the League against Imperialism in Frankfurt am Main, 4, NL-HaNA, Justitie, 1915-1955

(2.09.22), inv.nr. 16666; 'Een nabetrachting van het Tweede congres der Liga tegen imperialisme en voor nationale onafhankelijkheid te Frankfurt', *IM* 7 (1929) 83-88; Poeze, *PPO* part II, 242-244.

55 NL-HaNA, Koloniën/Geheim archief, 2.10.36.051, inv.nr. 381.

The nationalist movement in the Netherlands would not regain the strength to establish international cooperation with other nationalist movements until after the Second World War, after the Indonesian proclamation of independence, when Hatta called upon his 'old comrades wherever they may be' to revive the spirit of unity of Bièrville and Brussels and to rally behind the Indonesian cause.⁵⁶

Concluding remarks

The international activities of Indonesian students in the Netherlands did not come to an end in 1931, when institutional nationalism lost its strength. Nor does this article offer an exhaustive account of every Indonesian engagement with or action on the international stage in the years before 1931. Rather, it shows how each of the most important (socio-)political trends within the Indonesian student community in the Netherlands cherished their own set of international visions, which inspired them and positioned them in the wider world. Especially for the nationalist students, the group that received most attention in this piece, international engagement was at the core of their political work. The associations, conferences and festivals were all part of a slow process towards the integration of the Indonesian political elite in the international anti-colonial nationalist networks of Europe.

The question is to what extent the nationalist students gained something from these interactions: what influences at the ideological or organisational level might have affected the nature and trajectory of the Indonesian nationalist movement as it developed from the late 1920s onwards. It would be too much to say that the international contacts have accelerated the process towards independence of Indonesia in a direct sense. On the contrary, the colonial government's fear of foreign (communist) interferences exacerbated the political repression in both the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies.

The importance of articles in journals such as *IM* and of contacts with foreign movements should be sought rather in the moral support for the Indonesian struggle that these students gained and built on. Although any concrete form of anti-colonial opposition in the Netherlands Indies was suppressed after the early 1930s, the examples set by other nationalist movements, and the professionalism displayed in anti-colonial politics at the conferences, instilled in Indonesians of various denominations a consciousness of a reality beyond that of everyday politics in the Netherlands Indies. The international context gave them a reason to criticise the Dutch colonial authorities when they did not comply with the tendency for democratisation

56 Hatta, *Verspreide geschriften*, 314.

that seemed to push boundaries worldwide. It could even have made sacrifices more bearable against the backdrop of those made by colonised peoples around the world.

Another fundamental result of the foreign activities of the Indonesian students was a display to the world of a substantial body of educated Indonesians who desired independence, had a coherent ideology and commanded a mass following in Indonesia. As such, long before actual sovereignty was transferred to an independent Indonesian state, its self-proclaimed representatives announced themselves on the international stage.

Finally, regardless the concrete benefits of these networks and contacts for the Indonesians, it might be clear that the indigenous elites from various colonial countries made use of the imperial centres to which they were drawn to establish contacts with key figures from other colonised countries. I want to avoid the impression that imperialism provided equal opportunities to engage on the international stage for both colonisers and colonised. The freedom of movement, of capital circulation and of ideas was undeniably more to the benefit of the colonial side. Nonetheless, counter-imperial networks of engagement and agitation were created by various groups from the colonised world as well.⁵⁷ Historiography of anti-colonial movements that focuses too much on the emerging nation or on the imperial enclosure from which it emerged, risks overlooking this anti-colonial internationalism. The international activities of the Indonesian students provide strong evidence of this.

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