

# Chinese Gang Wars in the Netherlands Indies: A Colonial War on Terror in the Age of the League of Nations

YAMAMOTO Nobuto<sup>1)</sup>

1. INTRODUCTION: The question of historiography
2. BUREAUCRATIC POLITY
3. DEPORTATION
4. GANG WARS
5. POLITICIZATION OF TERRORISM
6. CONCLUSION

## 1. INTRODUCTION: The question of historiography

The historian Harry J. Benda opened his 1966 article to *Journal of Asian Studies* thusly, “The history of Indonesia in the last two or three decades of Dutch colonial rule still has to be written, and it can only be written when the abundant archival materials for this period, both in Indonesia and in the Netherlands, come to be opened up for scholarly investigation” (Benda 1966: 589). A half-century later, it is unfortunate to say that there are still many parts and aspects of the history of colonial Indonesia from the 1910s through the 1940s which remain to be written. Over the last fifty years, archival materials have become well cataloged and preserved, and been made available for researchers to use. It cannot be denied, however, that some materials have been intentionally destroyed by governments, while others once available have gone missing for unclear reasons. The historical research about colonial Indonesia has not been improved as much as Benda expected.

---

1) The original version was prepared for the Regional Conference, the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas held at Nagasaki University, Nagasaki, Japan on 17–19 November 2017.

Writing history, however, does not always rely on the availability of the archival materials; it is also a matter of the researcher's perspectives and investigative efforts. A particular history will not be written if, for instance, researchers do not find anything significant, or if they subscribe to a conventional view (Paul 2011). The history of the Chinese in colonial Indonesia is a case in point of this kind of unwritten history. There are of course many works on the Chinese in colonial Indonesia, and yet many focus on the so-called *peranakan* (creole) Chinese in Java. In fact, when writing the history of the Chinese in colonial Java, researchers tend to start their description by differentiating *peranakan* and *totok* (newcomer) Chinese as if there were two clearly distinguished and independent Chinese communities (for instance, Suryadinata 1976). This practice, or framing, reflects the long-established national-oriented or nationalistic history writing. It situates the so-called Chinese in the *longue durée* of Java-centric Indonesian history; because *peranakan* leaders and intellectuals were closely interwoven into the Indonesian anti-colonial nationalist movement, their activities have been relatively well-recorded and retold. But the history of other Chinese (*totok*) – those that do not fit into the narrative of the nation – or the Chinese in the Outer Islands, is relatively neglected.<sup>2)</sup>

Archival materials concerning the Chinese in colonial Indonesia may be limited, and in particular many Chinese Malay and Chinese language newspapers and magazines remain inaccessible to the researchers. Nevertheless, many aspects of the history of the Chinese in Indonesia can be gleaned and therefore written by closely consulting colonial documents – classified or otherwise. One particular case that I gleaned from classified colonial documents and subsequently analyzed in this article indicates the kind of people (including Chinese) the Netherlands Indies government paid attention to, and how it treated such people in a particular context.

---

2) Departing from *peranakan* Chinese-oriented studies, two exceptional works deserve to be mentioned. Mary Somers Heidhues (2003) presents a detailed description and analysis of the Chinese social history in West Kalimantan, whereas Peck Yang Twang (1998) examines the role of the Chinese commercial bourgeoisie, and the emergence of partnerships between Chinese businessmen and Indonesian revolutionaries.

The case features six Chinese (*totok*) gangsters and their related gang conflicts in the 1930s in a small village located in East Java. It was closely recorded by the Indies authorities in classified colonial documents. It revealed partially the social history of the local Chinese. It is an extraordinary case in two folds: as I will detail later, the authorities deported Chinese individuals even when their activities were not related to politics; and they justified the deportation by charging the six Chinese with “terrorist acts.” I argue that this case demonstrates how in the 1930s the authorities, or the Indies state, attempted to stabilize and regain the law and order in the colonial society; that the authorities “politicized” terrorism in the age of the League of Nations, and applied it to this case involving Chinese gang members. For the sake of discussion, I will first explain what kind of colonial state the Indies state was and how it operated, then elaborate how the state dealt with and expelled radical political activists from the 1910s, and finally describe and examine the case. My description heavily draws from the classified colonial documents, and my explanation demonstrates how the colonial state monitored and dealt with the case. It confirms how the so-called bureaucratic polity worked in the colonial setting, and reveals a partial history of the (*totok*) Chinese life in the Indies.

## 2. BUREAUCRATIC POLITY

Ever since Benda described the Dutch colonial state as *beamtenstaat* (bureaucratic state; Benda 1966), it is assumed that the Indies state had a strong bureaucracy. Indeed, the Indies state institutionalized modernity in the colony, and controlled society’s peace and prosperity with organizational, technical, and economic expertise. Once it was introduced, the concept of *beamtenstaat* was well accepted among scholars, and also became a point of discussion for many years.

By revisiting and criticizing the concept, Ruth McVey puts forward the concept of “bureaucratic polity,” which accentuates the interests of the elites (McVey 1982). McVey describes the nature and function of the bureaucratic polity as follows:

The bureaucracy modernizes enough to rout any traditional rivals and secure a firm grip on the state. It then, however, ceases to move in a modernizing direction... Moreover, because it is the locus of power and of wealth (through its control of licenses and permissions, secured by a carefully nurtured statism), it becomes the arena for all meaningful political action. Real politics takes place not in parliament or whatever organs may exist outside the bureaucracy, but in the government apparatus itself... Because the bureaucracy is the arena for politics, it cannot function effectively as an executive arm; it cannot be battlefield, commander, and soldier all at once. Because positions and criteria for advancement are not what they formally seem, an official's real status depends not on his formal title but on securing wealth, clients, and favor; and (quite aside from display requirements in a changing and increasingly materialistic society) this means utilizing the economic possibilities of one's position to the full. Hence the "commercialization of office" that is now a chronic Indonesian complaint (McVey 1982: 88).

This picture of the bureaucratic polity reveals the nature of the Indies state. Real politics took place in the bureaucracy, which essentially functioned to secure wealth, clients, and favor. In order to keep functioning as it did, the Indies state needed to avoid any risks and insecure factors that destabilized society.

A major threat to society's peace and prosperity was the radical political movements that started to take form from the early 1910s. After the Great War was over, the Indies state installed a police system that included a secret police division. Its main aim was to watch over the "natives" – meaning politically radical individuals, organizations, and movements – and as a matter of fact it worked relatively well.<sup>3)</sup> When the so-called Communist revolts occurred in West Sumatra and West Java in 1926 and 1927, the police captured thousands of Communists and sympathizers of the Communist Party, and interned them to a

---

3) Simultaneously, the Netherlands installed the secret police after the Great War, in particular paying attention to the rise of Communism in the country (Hijzen 2013). The impact of the War on the Indies, see Kees Van Dijk (2007).

remote part of the colony (Shiraishi 1997; 2003). Some Communist suspects were put in the trial, while many were just sent to concentration camps without trials.

The logic of securing wealth, clients, and favor contributed to the power of the Indies state. The power was utilized when top bureaucrats felt the logic was in danger. They had the right to make the final political decision, especially in connection to cases that had to do with radicalism and revolutionary. Because of the nature, the decision was not necessarily legal, in fact, it was often arbitrary. A typical case of such arbitrary decision was the case I will discuss in this article, though the case itself was quite exceptional.

### 3. DEPORTATION

deportation /,di:pɔ:ˈteɪʃən/

noun

1. the act of expelling an alien from a country; expulsion
2. the act of transporting someone from his country; banishment

[Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition]

In the Netherlands Indies, local political activism took shape and intensified in the 1910s. At the turn of the twentieth century, new political ideas reached the Indies; not only from Europe as such liberalism and nationalism, but also from the Middle East such as Islamic modernism. It was the time when the Dutch colonial policy became more liberal than in the previous era. The government introduced the so-called Ethical Policy (*Ethische Politiek*) in 1901 that promoted the welfare of the colonial subjects and modernized the society, primarily by way of proliferating secular school education. Under the new socio-political circumstances, new political ideas and discourses attracted local Eurasians, leftist activists, and Islam activists – most of which propagated through printed materials in the Malay language.

The Indies authorities dealt with radical political activism in largely three ways. First, faced by the rise of political and social movements, some of which unexpectedly turned radical and violent, the Indies authorities were baffled as they had never dealt with such matters. One easy way to treat troubling persons

was to get rid of them. In fact, as early as 1913, the Indies authorities “exiled” three local political activists from the Indies to the Netherlands. They were E.F.E. Douwes Dekker, Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, and Soewardi Soerjaningrat; they were the ones who in 1912 established the *Indische Partij* (Indies Party), the very first political organization pioneering Indonesian nationalism. The similar response continued in the Indies; for instance, the Dutch leftist Henk Sneevliet who were “exiled” to the Indies, was “exiled” again (this time) to the Netherlands in 1918; and Indonesian Communists leaders Semaoen and Darsono were expelled in 1923 and 1924 respectively. After the so-called Communist uprisings in West Java and West Sumatra in 1926 and 1927, thousands of people were interned in a remote region in the Indies. The Indies authorities considered their activities as terrorist actions (McVey 1965). These cases illustrate how the Indies authorities took care of troublesome activists; none included the so-called foreigners.<sup>4)</sup>

Second, around the middle of the 1920s, political circumstances in and out of the Indies began to change. A new political tide rose from mainland China. In 1911 the Republic of China emerged out of the ashes of the Ch'ing Dynasty. The first president of the new state was Sun Yat-sen, who had traveled Southeast Asia in the 1890s to garner financial support from local ethnic Chinese for the republican campaign. As the Kuomintang (KMT) was founded in China in 1912, dissolved in 1913 and reformed in 1919, the KMT's branches came to be established and propagated in many parts of Southeast Asia. British Malaya including the Straits Settlements had the greatest number of KMT's branches, followed by the Indies and Thailand, and elsewhere. This regional political development was closely followed and monitored by the British. From 1918 to 1933 the British intelligence monitored such China-related political activities such as the Bolshevik agents in China and Siam and their contacts with Chinese Communists (CCP) and nationalists (KMT), anti-British strikes and boycotts sponsored by the CCP and the KMT, the KMT attempts at national unification, growing CCP military strength, the KMT and the CCP infiltration in Malaya,

---

4) In the Dutch colonial context, “foreigners” mean non-Dutch and non-native Indonesian residents in the Indies.

and increasingly active Communist parties in Malaya, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma (Goscha 2000; Best 2002). All of these developments compelled the colonial powers in Southeast Asia to form an intelligence collaboration against KMT and the Comintern (the Communist International) activities (Yamamoto 2014; Foster 2010).

With this backdrop, transborder political activities became an emerging and urgent political issue in the region. Among others, the Indies government with a suzerain state Netherlands as a small power in Europe sounded earlier warnings – as early as in 1923 – to counteract against the political activities of the mainland Chinese. Nevertheless, Britain as a major colonial power in the region did not take the Dutch request for collaboration seriously, and domestically monitored and controlled the Chinese political activists (Yamamoto 2014). As the KMT political activities in its territories turned radical, it finally closed down all KMT branches in October 1925 (Yong and McKenna 1990). Without any collaborative support from the neighboring colonial powers, the Indies authorities devised an independent measure to deal with domestic political issues. From the middle of the 1920s, the Indies authorities introduced a new measure – that is, to give any Chinese from abroad a particular number when they entered the territory's port city by the sea. This numbering system allowed the authorities to track Chinese immigrants' footsteps in case they committed a crime. This procedure remained in place until 1940 when the Netherlands was occupied by the Nazis.

The third strategy emerged in the 1930s when domestic political situations intensified. In 1931 the Indies authorities introduced *persbreidel* (press curbing ordinance) as an administrative measure to restrain “wild” newspapers irrespective of language, therefore including those published in Dutch, Malay and Chinese languages. It provided the administrative power to the authorities to temporarily shut down publishers and printers. Initially *persbreidel* targeted either Dutch and Malay language newspapers that published radical contents, but later the target shifted to Chinese-owned newspapers which carried anti-Japanese sentiment or discourses in their contents. In fact, from 1936 onwards, only such newspapers – both in Chinese and in Malay – were targeted by the authorities. Due to *persbreidel*, a number of Chinese editors and journalists

stationed in Batavia, Medan, and Soerabaja were expelled from the Indies, mainly to Singapore. As far as I know, these were the first cases of deportation by *persbreidel* – thus all were in connection with their writings or publishing works (Yamamoto 2019). It was their political activities in a wider sense that rankled the Indies authorities.

However, the gang war in East Java had nothing to do with political orientations, because these gangs did not have a political motivation. Instead, they mainly aimed to expand their social and economic influences in certain communities, hoping and/or planning to plunder the forerunner's fortune. If the gangs were mainly interested in economic activities, then, why were the Indies authorities so concerned about their activities? Moreover, why did they perceive such activities as "terrorist acts"?

#### 4. GANG WARS

An incident occurred in the village of Kalibaroe, Banjoewangi residency in East Java, some 246 kilometers away from Soerabaja, the largest port city in East Java. It was a village surrounded by mountainous and forest areas, amid coffee, cocoa, and rubber plantations. These plantations attracted people from outside including laborers, merchants, and unwanted crooks.

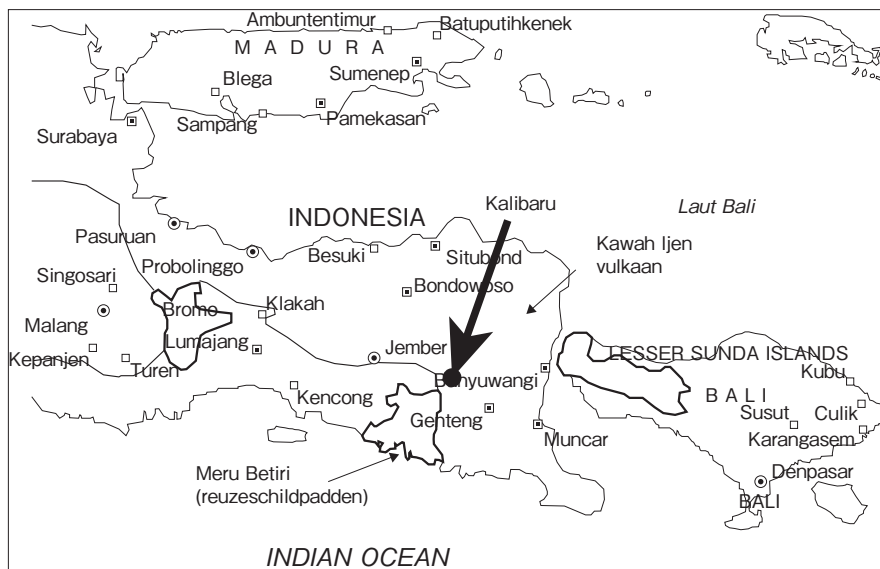
A contemporary Dutch source describes the changing socio-economic circumstances in and around Kalibaroe (presently "Kalibaru") in the 1920s and 1930s as follows:

According to the *Nieuwe Soerabaja Courant* dated September 1924, a number of Chinese ex-carpenters from one family were settled near Kalibaru (in Banyuwangi regency) as coffee growers on a piece of land of around 160 *bouws* [114 hectares]. The annual rent for the land was f3,000. Six family members formed a *kongsi*, and five of them cultivated coffee while the sixth worked as the *kongsi* agent in Surabaya. They also rented a piece of land near Kalisat, about 85 *bouws* [60 hectares], on which rubber as well as coffee was planted. [...]

As well as this *kongsi*, there are a number of small Chinese coffee growers



Figure 1



[Source: <http://www.rumahkita.info/elocationmap.htm>. Retrieved on 16 July 2020]

near Kalibaru (Fernando and Bulbeck 1992: 184).

Kalibaroe and the surrounding regions appeared to be developed from the 1920s mainly by Chinese families from outside. As the coffee, cocoa and rubber plantations were set up, stabilized, and made some profits in the 1930s, the village began to attract plenty of newcomers – including undesirable ones. It attracted among others a powerful Chinese group that was searching for a new business opportunity in the region.

In 1933, one Chinese newcomer changed the local atmosphere. In that year, a certain Chinese named Gwie Boen Liong came to the village of Kalibaroe (Mr. 1075x/1936).<sup>5)</sup> Gwie Boen Liong alias Gwie Tjwan Sing was born in Chancou, Fujian, China. He had criminal records in China, and by way of Singapore had arrived in Soerabaja in 1926. Somehow, he obtained a certificate of residence in

5) Unless otherwise mentioned, the below description is drawn from Mr. 1075x/1936.

April 1926, issued by the Head of Local Government in Soerabaja. Since 1927 he became a distinguished member of an infamous Chinese mafia named “Tjap Pik Beng” (Eighteen Heroes). According to the classified record, in East Java Gwie Boen Liong also committed various crimes. In 1927 alone he allegedly committed five offenses – real and alleged: a robbery on 9 February 1927 – for which he was not tried; violent conduct on 14 May 1927, after which he was set free due to lack of evidence; he was charged again on 5 December 1927, but was not tried; extortion on 18 May 1927, which lacked evidence; and illegal possession of firearms on 14 May 1927, for which he paid a *f*5 fine.<sup>6)</sup> Between 1929 and 1933 he lived in four different cities and committed crimes in each one. In Modjokerto he was suspected to have been involved in a homicide case of a policeman; in Loemadjang he was involved in robbery and dissensions among pig butchers; in Sidoardjo he committed extortion; and in Tanggoel he disrupted a wedding with aggressive behavior.

By 1933 Gwie Boen Liong had become the leader of Tjap Pik Bing. There was a reason for his relocation to Kalibaroe – he attempted to control the village and its economic interest. He established a secret “terrorist” association<sup>7)</sup> called “Topie Poetieh” (White Hat) consisting of 15 members under his leadership. This association conducted extortion and other activities that were disruptive to public peace,<sup>8)</sup> and started war against another Chinese gang called the Kio Ngo, which had been dominant in the village.

The origin of the hostility cited in the colonial document was unknown. But it appeared that “business” competitions between Chinese gangs had given way to local gang wars in Kalibaroe, and later on, these gang wars extended to the city of Soerabaja. Since the document mentions that both the Tjap Pik Bing and the Kio Ngo were involved in the opium trade, it is quite possible that

---

6) “Onderwerp: Inlichtingen nopens Goei Boen Liong,” Algemeene Politie Soerabaja, Afdeling Politieke inlichtingen Dienst, No. 114/P.I.D./Ch.Z., November 25, 1936 (hereafter, *Onderwerp*).

7) This is how Dutch classified documents describe the association. Dutch classified documents from 1936 onwards kept using the word “terrorist” and “terrorism” regarding Chinese gang wars in East Java.

8) “Onderwerp,” *op.cit.*

rivalry in illegal opium trafficking and selling was a factor in the conflict. Opium was a popular commodity for consumption among the laborers who toiled in the plantations due to its recreational effect. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Indies state had introduced the opium farm system, in which opium was sold by licensed retailers, and the Chinese farmers (*pachter*) operated as the middlemen. Farms demanded a series of patronage links with the indigenous and colonial officials at all levels of the governmental structure. This link established a wide range of patronage arrangements between local officials and Chinese opium farmers. Thus (by way of connections) the opium farmers had become men of influence in the indigenous communities. The situation came to be seen as a threat to the governing order and became a reason why the Indies government decided to eliminate the farm system. Starting from 1904 the government simply monopolized the opium sale in Java and Madoera, and then this new system was gradually introduced in other islands.<sup>9)</sup>

On the one hand, the abolition of the opium farm system weakened the Chinese social status in the Indies. It forced these *peranakan* Chinese to seek new channels of influence and wealth within the colonial social structure. This was the reason why the *peranakan* Chinese began to commit to the Chinese-Malay print business from the turn of the century. On the other hand, after the government monopolized opium sales, newcomer Chinese immigrants called “*Singkeh*” or “*totok*” (full-blooded) appeared to be involved in the illegal opium trade in the twentieth century. It was for this illegal business that Chinese criminal organizations often competed with each other.

In late 1933 the situation in Kalibaroë became increasingly grave. This was after the Kio Ngo gang gained a new leader, Tan Ping Mo. The background of Tan Ping Mo alias Tan Tjwie Sing was little known. He held a foreigner’s certificate card No. 1167, issued in Soerabaja on 23 July 1928, and some criminal records in East Java. After Tan Ping Mo came to Kalibaroë, the tension

---

9) Another reason to abolish opium farms was the rise of the moralist concern of the Dutch people. They raised voices to protect and develop the welfare of the indigenous people. In Java, most consumers of opium were indigenous and the Indies government blamed the Chinese to exploit them by selling opium. For the social history of opium farms, see Rush (1990).

between the Kie Ngo and the Tjap Pik Bing escalated. Skirmishes and assassinations between the two gangs continuously occurred from 1933 all the way to 1935, and even spread to the neighboring villages of Glenmore and Rogodjampi. Residents in these villages were undoubtedly terrified. The authorities referred to these gang wars as “terrorist action” (*terroristische actie*) by immigrant Chinese (*Singkeh*) but did not appear to intervene in a significant way.

In the late 1935 gang wars in Kalibaroe and Glenmore spilled into an open clash in Soerabaja, the largest city in East Java. Militant members of both gangs received shelters in hotels which their associations ran. The gang war then turned into a conflict in Soerabaja between the Thay Lie Kwan Tong Hotel and the Jang Han Kie Hotel; the former was supported by the Tjap Pik Beng gang and the latter the Kie Ngo gang.<sup>10)</sup> In newspaper reports, the conflict was described as a hotel war because militant members used these two hotels as their bases.

Local Chinese newspapers based in Soerabaja drew attention to such gang conflicts. On 19 September 1935, *Shang Po* and *Tay Kong Siang Po*, both were Soerabaja-based Chinese language newspapers, carried the same controversial article entitled “Tay Tong,” referring to the Thay Lie Kwan Tong Hotel incident. According to the official court record (*proces-verbaal*) on 23 November 1936, the author of the piece was Go Tjin Hwa, but it was Go Soe Hin who dictated the content. Go Soe Hin was an infamous gang member in Soerabaja and actively involved in the so-called “Tay Tong-Jang Han Kie” conflict (Mr. 1075x/1936). The record continues to show that the article conveyed a message, if anyone with malevolent feelings should harm “Tay Tong,” then the Tay Tong side would cut off all further negotiation with “Jang Han Kie” and take effective measures to defend against such action. It appears that the authorities had read the article as a proclamation of war,<sup>11)</sup> and that gang war was about to break out.

At this point, the police finally decided to intervene in the gang conflict because public peace and order were under serious threat. At the end of 1935, the police shut down the Tay Tong Hotel. Then a half year later on 22 June

---

10) “Onderwerp,” *op.cit.*

11) *Ibid.*

1936, the Attorney General ordered all governors and residents to pay special attention to Chinese newspapers, which had become potential targets of *persbreidel* (press restriction) (Mr. 618x/1936). In that year the police detained five gang members – Ie Wan Kiem, Go Soe Hin, Oey Tek Beng, Tjiok Ing Hie, Liem Bak Lie, and Go See Po.<sup>12)</sup> All of them were born in China and were notorious gang bosses in Soerabaja. Ie Wan Kiem was the chairman of the secret society Ho Hap, ran an allegedly gambling club Ik Bin Siet Giap Sia, and member of the Kie Ngo group, in which another gangster Oey Tek Beng was also a member. Ie Wan Kiem and Liem Bak Lie were members of Giok Jong Kong Hwee, while Go Soe Hin and Go See Bok were affiliated with the Yang Liong Kong Hwee group. All of them – Ho Hap, Kie Ngo, Giok Jong Kong Hwee, and Yang Liong Kong Hwee – were considered criminal associations involving in gambling operations, extortion, violent brawls, and murders. In the eye of the authorities, the actions of the Chinese gangsters had intimidated and terrorized not only the Chinese population, but also the general public in Soerabaja.<sup>13)</sup>

Based on the developing and urgent situations, on 26 November 1936, the Resident of Soerabaja requested the Governor of East Java to deport six Chinese to China.<sup>14)</sup> A half-year later in May 1937 the Governor-General made the final decision, stating clearly that the six Chinese actions were “terrorist acts,” and all of them were banished from the Indies (Mr. 1075x/1936).

## 5. POLITICIZATION OF TERRORISM

The Chinese gang wars brought a complex and sensitive governance problem to the Indies state. In theory, conflicts among residents are supposed to be resolved using the law. If it turned out to be a criminal case, then suspects would have been put on trial. In the case presented here, however, the authorities applied a

---

12) “Verwijdering uit Ned.Indie van eenige deelnemers aan de terroristische actie onder de Chineezzen te Soerabaja,” Resident van Soerabaja aan Gouverneur van Oost Java, No. 3009/Geheim, on November 26, 1936 (hereafter, Verwijdering).

13) “Uittreksel uit het Besluit van den Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië,” Bij de aanhaling van dit Besluit datum en nummer vermelden. May 24, 1937.

14) “Verwijdering,” *op.cit.*

different approach and did not leave the issue to the judicial body. Instead, they dealt with the problem themselves as a part of administrative matters. The odd thing about this case is that the authorities arbitrarily interpreted the Indies law. By definition, any type of gang conflict was categorized as a part of social issues, whereas terrorism or terrorist-related acts were considered political. Nevertheless, when faced with an unexpected turn of the event, the Indies authorities disregarded the social aspect and argument of the case in favor of a political solution. In other words, the Indies authorities “politicized” the Chinese gang acts – by defining them as terrorist acts – even when their actions had nothing to do with politics.

This decision should not be taken as a surprise, because it reflected the contemporary Indies changing attitude towards the Chinese in the Indies. The question is who was in charge of this “odd” decision. The point here is that power lied in the bureaucratic hierarchy. The Indies authorities tried hard to regain their power and authorities after the Communist revolts in 1926 and 1927 as mentioned above. These events haunted the Indies government like a trauma, and continued to factor in decision making. In order for the authorities to rid themselves of the trauma, they needed to rebuild their institutions and regain the confidence to govern. One way was to strengthen the police force, in particular the secret police that watched over radical political activists and their movements, as well as any radical social forces.

In 1932 a major administrative reorganization took place. In terms of developing surveillance power over the Chinese, two Bureaus for Chinese Affairs and for Japanese Affairs were merged into a new one – the Bureau for Chinese and East Asian Affairs (*Dienst der Chineesche Zaken en Oost-Aziatische Aangelegenheden*, hereafter Bureau for East Asian Affairs). The newly established bureau had to watch over not only activities of the Indies Chinese, but also political and military developments taking place in China and Japan. The bureau had the responsibility to watch the Chinese and gather information about their activity and life. It also shared information with regional authorities which were headed by the Governors. Therefore, it became the normal procedure that the Governor of East Java collected all necessary information about the Chinese gangs in the region, analyzed it, made decisions on how to

deal with them, and made proposals concerning them to the Governor-General.

Deporting foreign residents was an extraordinary practice for the Indies authorities. It could be said that it was an odd reaction to uncontrollable residents. To understand the peculiarity of Governor General's decision in 1937 to deport six Chinese gangsters from the Indies necessitates a further inquiry. In the previous section, I have reconstructed the development of the Chinese gang wars in Kalibaroe and Soerabaja. For that, I have consulted the Dutch classified colonial documents. The classified documents circulated among limited officials in both the Indies and the Netherlands, because they were deemed to contain political significant and sensitive information, although in reality, the gang wars were not at all political, but rather social and economic.

In the contemporary international context, the decision to deport contradicted the discussion in Europe about how to deal with terrorism. When the issue of Chinese gang wars drew the authorities' concern in the Indies, there was an ongoing discussion about terrorism at the League of Nations. Remarks by a Dutch delegation to the diplomatic conference revealed the Dutch position on how to deal with terrorism, which eventually affected the Indies' reaction to "international terrorism." In order to understand it, we need to take a look at the contemporary international debate on terrorism in the 1930s that developed on the platform of the League of Nations.

In the context of the European continent, the Marseilles assassination of 1934 provoked international debates on terrorism. On 9 October 1934, King Alexander I of Yugoslavia was assassinated in Marseilles by Croatian and Macedonian separatists. The Marseilles incident provoked the terrorism debate at the League of Nations' Council. Based on a proposal submitted by France, the Council decided to create a committee of experts that would prepare two conventions; one was about the prevention and punishment of terrorism, the other about an international criminal court. It was clear that the purpose of the committee was to criminalize terrorism. This was the very first attempt in history by the international community to do so. The Committee held three sessions from 1934 to 1936. In conclusion, in 1937 the Council convened a diplomatic conference called the International Conference on the Repression of Terrorism in Geneva to finalize the two draft conventions by experts. Although

the League of Nations eventually failed to functionalize the conventions due to the development of war situations in Europe, it was historically the first step by the international community to deal with terrorism.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, international criminal jurists developed the concept of “crimes constituting a common danger,” which provided the legal basis for defining international terrorism (Lewis 2014: 123). Such move was in reaction to various developments of terrorism in Europe – a string of ultra-nationalist bombings and assassinations, a number of communist attacks, and the post-war appearance of armed groups. All of these terrorisms were legally defined as criminal acts. Based on this concept, international criminal law was supposed to serve state security and jointly strengthen states against their homegrown enemies who then fled abroad. It was designed to protect state officials who were often the targets of terrorism. Interestingly, because it excluded international political movements from its definition of terrorism, it did not take either the Comintern’s international activity or KMT’s regional activities as criminal actions.

In the course of the diplomatic debate about terrorism, statements from the Dutch delegation, M. van Hamel, deserves examination. He called the attention to the international delegates about the definition of terrorism. He referred to the first draft convention which cleared two points. Firstly, the convention’s intention was to treat terrorism in penal law; and secondly, the convention should stress on the deliberate nature of terrorist acts (League of Nations 1938: 73). Moreover, on a different occasion, van Hamel emphasized his personal opinion about the sovereignty of each government to the come up with a countermeasure to terrorist acts:

a Government was free to send any foreign guilty of having committed an act of terrorism on its territory before any court which it considered to be just and properly organised. He did not see why it should be contrary to international law or courtesy to send a foreigner for trial before such an international court, if the latter appeared to be equitable (League of Nations 1938: 121).



This might not be the Dutch Government's official statement, nevertheless, it was a strong statement by the Dutch delegation to the League of Nations. When the international conference was held, the Indies government had already reached the final decision to deport the six Chinese to China. Although the international criminal law on terrorist acts had not reached its conclusion at the time, judging from the statements of the Dutch delegation, it is safe to assume that the Netherlands government was in the position to execute its sovereign power in dealing with terrorist acts committed by foreigners. This logic naturally was applied to the Dutch colony, the Indies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This is how the colonial war on terror was conceived in the Indies. It happened to be the Chinese gang wars that were threatening the local peace and order. By the time the Governor-General reached his final decision, the war situations in Asia and Europe had developed. In Asia, Japan's aggressive invasion into China became obvious day by day, whereas in the European-related context the Ethiopian crisis was deepening. Both the Netherlands government and the Indies government nervously assessed how to face developing situations in both territories. For them, the administrative powers needed to be strengthened and their judgments to be efficiently executed.

As is the case everywhere, it is the authorities that conceived and defined terrorism and/or terrorist acts. In the case discussed in this article, it was the Indies authorities that perceived terrorist acts and deal with them. Nevertheless, the oddity of the case discussed in this article is that the subject of the terrorist acts did not have any political intention and motivation in their activities, unlike the usual cases of terrorism. In this case, the charge of terrorism was utilized in order to deport foreign troublemakers. It is to be noted, moreover, that the European colonial authorities in Asia felt another war was forthcoming in the latter half of the 1930s, which might pose a very serious danger to colonial law and order. In this way, the colonial authorities substituted the police concern with the political concern, in order to maintain the colonial state sovereignty and underscore its control over its territories.

## PRIMARY SOURCE

Dutch Colonial documents: *geheime mailrapporten* (classified mail reports; in this article it is mentioned as Mr. x) from The *Nationaal Archief* (Dutch National Archives), The Hague, The Netherlands.

## REFERENCES

- Benda, Harry J. (1966) "The Pattern of Administrative Reform in the Closing Years of Dutch Rule in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 25(4): 589-605.
- Best, Anthony (2002) *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Day, Tony (2002) *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Fernando, M.R. and Bulbeck, David (eds.) (1992) *Chinese Economic Activity in Netherlands India: Selected Translations from the Dutch*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Foster, Anne L. (2010) *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Goscha, Christopher E. (2000) *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of The Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Heidhues, Mary Somers (2003) *Golddiggers, Farmers, and Traders in the "Chinese Districts" of West Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Hijzen, Constant Willem (2013) "The Perpetual Adversary: How Dutch Security Services Perceived Communism (1918-1989)," *Historical Social Research* 38(1): 166-199.
- League of Nations (1938) *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Repression of Terrorism*. Geneva (November 1st to 16th, 1937).
- Lewis, Mark (2014) *The Birth of the New Justice: The Internationalization of Crime and Punishment, 1919-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McVey, Ruth T. (1965) *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- McVey, Ruth T. (1982) "The *Beamtenstaat* in Indonesia," in Anderson, Benedict and Kahin, Audrey (eds.) *Interpreting Indonesian Politics: Thirteen Contributions to*

- the Debate, 1964-1981*. Ithaca: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project: 137-148.
- Paul, Herman (2011) *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*. London: Polity Press.
- Rush, James R. (1990) *Opium to Java: Revenue Farming and Chinese Enterprise in Colonial Indonesia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Shiraishi, Takashi (1997) "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia* 63: 1-46.
- Shiraishi, Takashi (2003) "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia," in Siegel, James T. and Kahin, Audrey R. (eds.) *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University: 47-74.
- Suryadinata, Leo (1976) *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, 1917-1942*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Twang, Peck Yang (1998) *The Chinese Business Élite in Indonesia and the Transition to Independence 1940-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yamamoto, Nobuto (2014) "Shaping the 'China Problem' in Colonial Southeast Asia," *TRaNS* 2(1): 131-153.
- Yamamoto, Nobuto (2019) *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Yong, C.F. and McKenna, R.B. (1990) *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya 1912-1949*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Van Dijk, Kees (2007) *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War 1914-1918*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.