The World Came to You:
A Portrait of Colonial Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia[1)]

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1. Introduction

This essay explores colonial cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries. It begins by revisiting how Benedict Anderson describes the late nineteenth-century world writing as the "Age of Early Globalization" in his book *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*.[3)]

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3) Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005), 233. This book beautifully describes how a globally connected world, both physically and mentally, had emerged in the late nineteenth century. Unless otherwise noted, the following descriptions of Rizal and his contemporary circumstances are based on Anderson's book.

As the subtitle suggests, this is a book about anarchism in the late nineteenth century, particular focus being paid to José Rizal (1861–1896), a national hero and the father of the Philippine nation. Born in the town of Calamba in La Laguana, Spanish Philippines, on 19 June 1861, he experienced a world undergoing drastic change, without consciously understanding, but he was lucky. At the age of 21, he boarded the steamship *Djemnah* from Manila. His journey, passing through the Suez Canal, took him to Marseille, France, on 12 June 1882. Later, he moved to Madrid, Spain, where he earned a medical degree at the Universidad Central de Madrid. Then he traveled around Europe—Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Ghent, London, and elsewhere. Everywhere he went, he met people full of energy to change society and the world, many of whom were labeled anarchists and were indeed cosmopolitan in words and deeds.

In 1887, Rizal published his first novel in Spanish, *Noli Me Tángere* (Latin for "Touch Me Not") in Berlin. The main character of the novel is Crisóstomo Ibarra, who returns to the Philippines after studying in Europe, only to find his homeland suffering under abusive Spanish colonial rule. Since it concerns the colonial situation in the Philippines, although his intended readers were not only Spanish people in the Iberian Peninsula but also the fellow Filipinos, Rizal dedicated this nationalistic novel to "A mi patria" ("To my fatherland"). Four years later, in 1891, he published his second and last novel, *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed) in Ghent, Belgium. It is the sequel to his *Noli Me Tángere*. Again, he wrote it in Spanish and addressed issues such as clerical abuses, racism against the Filipinos, and the need for political reform. The Spanish authorities worried about the influence of Rizal's two novels, resulting in his exile to Hong Kong, and later his execution by firing squad in 1896 in Manila, when he was just 35 years old.

Then, why does Rizal's journey characterize the "Age of Early Globalization" as Anderson describes? A brief explanation is necessary here. The introduction of steam-engine ships in the late eighteenth century gradually transformed commercial travel. When the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, the journey between Europe and Asia drastically shortened from months to weeks. Long-distance ship travel also became much safer than sailing vessels, which had

to stop frequently, which sometimes turned out to be unsafe.[4] When Rizal boarded the *Djemnah*, he did not have to worry about the safety of the trip to Europe; the only things that might worry him were his financial status and his future study in Spain.

When traveling by steam-engine trains in Europe, a new current of ideology was gaining momentum in Europe in the 1880s. Naturally, Rizal learned about the rising anarchist movement there as well as in the United States. Particularly, the Cuban anarchist movement captured his attention. He learned that in Cuba, the anarchist movement grew closely with the labor movement led by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist exiles who arrived in Cuba in the 1880s. Among them, the anarchist Enrique Roig San Martín's activity attracted Rizal because he founded the Workers' Center to spread the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism through his periodical *El Productor* ("The Producer"). The anarchist movement in Cuba that Rizal learned in Spain sparked his passion as a man born in the Spanish colony of the Philippines. His discussions with anarchists in Europe helped him formulate the ideas for *Noli Me Tángere*, which he expanded on and wrote during his stay in Berlin.

Rizal traveled throughout Asia and Europe thanks to infrastructural developments both at sea and on land. He communicated not only with his fellow Filipinos in Spanish and Tagalog (his native tongue) but also with friends and acquaintances in European cities in Spanish, German, French, and English. His multilingual capability was not unusual on the European continent; among intellectuals, it was considered a common asset. While studying and staying in Europe, Rizal acquired contemporary advanced medical knowledge and techniques as well as popular ideas and ideologies. In this sense, he was a cosmopolitan figure. He was not the only person from colonial Southeast Asia to enjoy a cosmopolitan atmosphere and space. There were many more to follow him from British, Dutch, and French colonies.

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4) Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 129–157; Jorma Ahvenainen, *The Far Eastern Telegraphs: The History of Telegraphic Communications between the Far East, Europe and America before the First World War* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1981).

In fact, colonial Southeast Asia itself became a cosmopolitan space since the middle of the nineteenth century. As colonial states established and penetrated the corners of their colonies, modern technologies and infrastructures were installed, and cities became Westernized as Europeans brought their families to their colonies. Arab, Chinese, and Indian diaspora communities were found in every port city and urban area. Mixed cultures, mixed blood, and pidgin languages became normal in urban settings. Both inter-region and outside trade intensified, and their volume skyrocketed. People, goods, and ideas moved across and beyond the region.

Against this backdrop, this essay proposes "cosmopolitanism in motion" as a framework for understanding this dynamic world. People in colonial settings inevitably lived within a world of colonial cosmopolitanism that emerged when "there was as yet no ugly, commercially debased 'international language'".[5] This study preliminarily portrays how this phenomenon was lived and experienced through the constant movement of people, goods, and ideas across colonial Southeast Asia and beyond. What emerges is a portrait of cosmopolitanism as a messy, contradictory, and constantly evolving phenomenon—a process in perpetual flux rather than a stable state.

2. Rethinking Cosmopolitanism in Colonial Contexts

The story of cosmopolitanism in the "modern age" begins in the twilight of the Enlightenment, in the mind of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Watching the growing commercial and intellectual interconnectedness of eighteenth-century Europe, Kant imagined a world bound not by empires or absolutist states but by universal moral principles. His 1795 essay "Toward Perpetual Peace", written in the aftermath of the French Revolution that profoundly influenced his thought, laid out this vision: a cosmopolitan order where reason and shared humanity would transcend borders.[6] It was an idealist's dream, yet one detached from the

5) Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, 5. Perhaps there is no need to explain, but this refers to English in the age of neoliberal globalization since the late twentieth century.

6) Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace", in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 311–351.

realities of power.

Then came the nineteenth century, the age of nationalism in Europe and Latin America. As the nation-state system solidified its grip on the Western imagination in the latter part of the century and spread its model worldwide through colonization, Kant's cosmopolitan vision faded into the background. For nearly two centuries, it remained dormant.

Fast forward to the 1990s. The Cold War had ended, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and liberal capitalism was sweeping across the globe. This was the era of globalization, powered by neoliberal economics that promised prosperity through free markets and open borders. Countries everywhere, willingly or otherwise, were told to "adjust" to this new global reality.[7] Capital, goods, and people moved across borders at unprecedented speed. The Internet connected distant corners of the world. Suddenly, cosmopolitanism was not just philosophy, but it turned out to be daily life.

Yet this revival was fundamentally different from Kant's vision. Where Kant had imagined a world unified by universal moral principles, the 1990s witnessed cosmopolitanism born from economic necessity and technological acceleration. Scholars noticed something crucial: the nation-state, once the ultimate authority, was losing its grip. Global problems, such as climate change, financial crises, and human rights abuses, no longer respect borders.[8] Nation-states and their global system alone could not solve them.

Intellectuals turned back to cosmopolitanism, not as an abstract ideal, but as a practical framework for navigating this interconnected world and establishing foundations for emerging global norms. Cosmopolitanism became a tool for managing the anxieties of living in such a connected world and building understanding across differences.[9] They asked new questions: How do we build understanding across differences? How do we manage the anxieties of living in

7） Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

8） David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

9） Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–2.

such a connected yet unequal world? How do we establish global norms when power remains so unevenly distributed?

This renewed cosmopolitanism was more critical than Kant's. Scholars began examining its limitations and exclusions. Who gets to be cosmopolitan? Whose mobility is celebrated, and whose is criminalized? Although the term cosmopolitanism inevitably connotes Eurocentric assumptions, critical scholars since the 1990s have attempted to transcend Eurocentrism and provide alternative conceptions of cosmopolitanism. Among others, three thinkers, Homi Bhabha, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Pheng Cheah, have offered compelling answers to a central question: how does one balance concern for the world with attention to local realities and power dynamics?

Bhabha has observed what he calls "vernacular cosmopolitanism", cosmopolitanism as it happens in everyday life. He argues that global influences do not arrive as grand ideas but through constant, subtle mixing in ordinary spaces. He calls this "cultural translation"[10]: the daily negotiations of language, food, dress, and custom that create new hybrid forms. In colonial Southeast Asia, this typically happened in port cities like Singapore, Batavia, and Saigon. These port cities turned into laboratories of cultural fusion where different languages blended into new dialects, cuisines merged to create unexpected flavors, and social practices evolved through constant contact.[11] This was cosmopolitanism from below, created and lived by ordinary people navigating diverse urban worlds.

Appiah has introduced "rooted cosmopolitanism" to challenge the notion that being global means abandoning local attachments. He argues that loyalties

10) Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", in *Text and Nation*, eds. Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer (London: Camden House, 1996), 193.

11) Aihwa Ong & Donald Nonini. eds., *Ungrounded Empires* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Eric Tagliacozzo & Wen-chin Chang. eds., *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

to family, community, and nation are not obstacles to cosmopolitanism; rather, they are its foundation. Love for one's own people can teach you to respect others.[12] This concept illuminates the paradox of anti-colonial movements in Southeast Asia: their leaders, regardless of differences in their political, intellectual, or religious orientations, were deeply rooted in their own traditions and cultures, yet they wielded "universal" ideals of freedom and justice to demand self-determination. They were cosmopolitan because they refused to abandon their roots and instead intentionally mixed multiple layers of identity to forge something new.[13]

Cheah has made perhaps the most unsettling distinction: between "cosmopolitanism of the body" and "cosmopolitanism of the spirit".[14] This framework exposes the dark underbelly of global mobility that captures the outstanding characteristics of the late twentieth century onward. "Cosmopolitanism of the body" captures the involuntary, exploitative reality of movement under coercion. In colonial Southeast Asia, Chinese coolies and Indian indentured laborers became "cosmopolitan" not by choice but by force: their bodies treated as commodities, shipped across oceans to serve colonial economic demands. They crossed borders and encountered diverse cultures, but without freedom or dignity.[15] "Cosmopolitanism of the spirit", in contrast, describes voluntary engagement with global ideas and communities. This was the cosmopolitanism of intellectuals who circulated revolutionary texts and shared anti-colonial sentiments across borders. It was the cosmopolitanism of Muslims who felt solidarity through the Pan-Islam movement, connecting to a

12） Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots", *Critical Inquiry* 23, no.3 (1997), 617–639.

13） John N. Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, the Making of the Revolution* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997); Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

14） Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006).

15） Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 157–189.

global ummah that transcended empire.[16] Spirit could travel freely, even when bodies were constrained.

Colonial cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia was always in motion, which manifested in diverse ways and led to varied consequences. The region was carved up by multiple empires—British, Dutch, French, Spanish, and American—creating a uniquely "inter-imperial" environment. Within this fragmented geography, people and ideas constantly circulated, crossing imperial borders and connecting with wider worlds.[17] Colonial powers attempted to control these flows, to monitor who moved and what ideas traveled. Yet resistance persisted; they might be marginal, peripheral, operating at small scales, but never fully extinguished.[18]

Understanding this history through the frameworks of Bhabha, Appiah, and Cheah reveals colonial Southeast Asia as more than a victim of empire. It was a space where global forces collided and blended in unexpected ways, where people navigated multiple identities and loyalties, where cosmopolitanism was simultaneously imposed and claimed, exploitative and liberating, a condition of the body and an aspiration of the spirit.

3. Contested Settings

Colonial governments had two simple goals: to make money and stay in control. For those purposes, building social infrastructures became significant, including docks, tram lines, railway tracks, and telegraph wires. These infrastructures served to modernize colonial administrative machinery and facilitate smooth

16) Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

17) Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988–1993); Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003).

18) James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

governance; however, they induced unexpected realities that planners never imagined. These same infrastructures brought new opportunities for local populations, creating new forms of connections, community, and belonging across imperial boundaries. Railways carried pilgrims to ports for their journey to Mecca, steamships brought European families to the colonies and transported labor migrants seeking better opportunities, while also sending local students abroad to study.[19)]

Colonial governments needed to confront and control these new social realities since the middle of the nineteenth century. They introduced new laws that treated people differently based on race, established residential rules where diverse groups could live, and deployed police to closely monitor people in question. The Dutch had their Government Regulations from 1854, classifying the population into Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and Natives; the British started the Straits Settlements Ordinances in 1867, similarly instituting racial hierarchies; the French introduced the Native Code in 1881, giving colonial administrative powers to punish violators without trials. Thus, racially hierarchized and divided societies were systematically established.[20)]

Despite these official social and legal divisions, people found ways to go around these invisible barriers. In major cities in Java, such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang, or on plantations in the East Coast of Sumatra, for instance, mixed-race Eurasians occupied unique positions because they could be categorized as Europeans, while simultaneously being treated as “natives”. In reality, they could move between different communities, acting as bridge-

19） Amarjit Kaur, “The Impact of Railways on the Malayan Economy, 1874–1941”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (1980): 693–710; Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indo-China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944); Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 67–89.

20） Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra’s Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

builders. They eventually blurred segregation and racial lines.[21)]

More untamable spaces were colonial cities that became cross-cultural spaces for people and goods to interact. Major cities like Batavia, Singapore, Saigon, and Rangoon began to transform drastically. The rapid expansion of urban populations, improvements in transportation and communication, and the growth of the colonial middle class created new possibilities. The great markets of Southeast Asian cities became spaces that far exceeded colonial administrative imagination. Pasar Besar in Kuala Lumpur and Pasar Senen and Pasar Baroe in Batavia became typical spaces where spatial and physical segregations dissolved because of daily economic necessity. These markets developed their own informal rules and practices, and local people unconsciously enjoyed their daily cosmopolitanism.[22)]

In sum, cosmopolitanism in colonial Southeast Asia was constantly contested between imperial control and ordinary people daily. Colonial authorities regularly cracked down on activities they regarded as politically dangerous. Meanwhile, ordinary people who did not challenge colonial

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21) Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Pamela A. Pattynama, "Secrets and Danger: Interracial Sexuality in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* and Dutch Colonial Culture around 1900", in *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, ed. Philip Holden and Richard J. Ruppel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 84–107.

22) James L. Watson, "From the Common Pot: Feasting with Equals in Chinese Society", *Anthropos* 82, no. 4/6 (1987): 389–401; Jennifer Alexander, *Trade, Traders and Trading in Rural Java* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987); Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 87–134; Carl A. Trocki, "Boundaries and Transgressions: Chinese Enterprise in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia", in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, eds. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (New York: Routledge, 1997), 61–85.

J.S. Furnivall's popular concept "plural society" emphasizes that the market was the only place where various racial people interacted in the Dutch East Netherlands. J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

authorities found ways to create connections and form new kinds of communities.

4. Urban Intellectuals

Unique breeding and blending of new thinking occurred in colonial cities. Publishing houses and schools became hubs and nerve centers for a vast intellectual network across borders. In these spaces, intellectuals and political activists deliberately expressed their thoughts and deeds more than other local people. They included journalists, writers, teachers, and activists who shared a mission to promote liberal ideas that may contribute to modernizing colonial society and sometimes challenge colonial rule and authority. This can be described as intellectual cosmopolitanism, built upon incorporating latest ideas from Europe, Japan, and other parts of the colonized world, while others developed through Islamic and Chinese scholarship.[23)]

The emergence of the publishing business and market since the late nineteenth century radically transformed colonial society. The printed world opened a new space in the colonial realm. For the first time in history, local-language newspapers and periodicals began to thrive by importing latest ideas from Europe and articulating information from within and beyond the region. Sometimes translated works, particularly contemporary popular fiction, were included. The growth of literacy in both colonial languages and local vernaculars created new audiences for these publications. Periodicals like *Bintang Hindia* (Star of the Indies, in Malay language) in Batavia and *The Straits*

23） Harry J. Benda, “Intellectual Preparations for Indonesian Independence”, in *Indonesian Nationalism Today*, ed. Harry J. Benda (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1958), 15–33; Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 78–112; John N. Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement, 1850-1903* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981); C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 93–168; Philippe M.F. Peycom, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 13–70; Christopher E. Goscha, “Widening the Colonial Encounter: Asian Connections Inside French Indochina During the Interwar Period”, *Modern Asian Studies* 43, No. 5 (2009), 1189–1228.

Chinese Magazine (in English) in Singapore became vehicles for articulating new forms of identity. They provided forums for debate about political and social reforms and cultural renewal. Furthermore, printing centers were not restricted to major cities like Batavia, Singapore, Manila, and Saigon; local cities and towns were also included when entrepreneurs invested their capital in the publication business. Thanks to the development of postal systems in the colonies, intellectuals living in peripheral areas could read periodicals and books and participate in debate forums in the written world.[24)]

The emergence of the printed world, as well as Western-style education, also contributed to fostering women intellectuals, although they were often overlooked in urban intellectual networks. Figures like Maria Walanda Maramin (1872–1924) in North Celebes[25)] and Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904) from Java, Indonesia,[26)] Khin Myo Chit (1915–1999) in Burma,[27)] and Trinidad Fernandez (1899–1998) in the Philippines[28)] used their positions as educators, writers, and social activists to promote both women's rights and national independence. Unfortunately, post-independence nation-states sometimes selectively focus on figures, contributing to national amnesia about others. The former case exemplifies Kartini, who is remembered as an Indonesian national hero and celebrated for her pioneering efforts in advocating for women's

24) Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1995); Claudine Salmon, *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia (17th-20th Centuries)* (Beijing: International Culture Publishing Corporation, 1987); Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Bumi Manusia* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1980); David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: J. Murray, 1923).

25) MPB Manus, *Maria Walanda Maramis* (Jakarta: Proyet Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejaha Nasional, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1976).

26) Joost Coté, ed., *Letters from Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist 1900-1904* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1992).

27) Ma Ma Lay, *Not Out of Hate: A Novel of Burma* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991).

28) Mina Roces, *Women, Power, and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-War Philippines* (Westport: Praeger, 1998).

education and rights, while the latter represents Maramin, whose career and existence few Indonesians remember.

The intellectual networks, particularly in the printed world, which emerged in colonial Southeast Asia were transnational and transgenerational. The printed words and ideas connected local individuals and movements to global affairs and thoughts, and vice versa. This cosmopolitan culture and these networks contributed to creating the ideological foundation for future independence movements.

5. The Power of Print Capitalism

The idea of "cosmopolitanism in motion" also makes us rethink something we often take for granted. It is about print capitalism that Anderson emphasizes in his *Imagined Communities*. He argues that print capitalism—newspapers, novels, and the print market—helped create modern "nations"; it provides the basis for readers' sense of belonging to an "imagined community" where people can "unite" with others whom one would never actually meet.[29] Once people read the same newspaper with a certain date and reports of a certain event, they began to feel connected as the same people as "Indonesians" or "Filipinos".

Here is where "cosmopolitanism in motion" adds a turn. Those same printing presses that built "national" communities also functioned as something else. Anderson signals this point in his chapter on "The Last Wave" about colonial nationalism in twentieth-century Southeast Asia.[30] But he does not develop the point fully because it diverges from his main focus, which is to examine how print-capitalism contributes to national imagination and later to nation-building. This focus obscures the simultaneous creation of transnational and cosmopolitan identities through the same media.

One can imagine the point I am trying to make here. In colonial Singapore or Batavia, a newspaper stand often arranged printed materials side by side: at a newspaper stand in colonial Singapore or Batavia, one might see a Chinese-

29） Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37–46.

30） Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 113–140.

language paper with news from Fujian, a Malay novel translated from Arabic, a Dutch newspaper with contemporary political news from Europe, and an English magazine with stories from London. Sometimes the same person even read them. Such readers might discuss the content with fellow customers. The multilingual newspaper vendors who operated these stands unconsciously served as informal "translators" and "interpreters", explaining stories from one publication to readers of another and thus facilitating cross-cultural communication.[31] Readers also enjoyed different cultures in one day: reading "national" news in the morning and feeling connected to their "nation", then enjoying a serialized novel from another culture for entertainment.

Printing technology did not just create national identities. It also made space for layered, shifting identities that moved across languages and cultures. Colonial cities were fascinating places where people carried multiple and sometimes contradictory attachments. One could be deeply rooted in one's local community, proudly "nationalist" about one's emerging country, and curious about the wider world. The printing presses made these overlapping identities possible by providing simultaneous access to multiple information networks.

The rise of vernacular publishing in colonial Southeast Asia brought unprecedented dynamics. The romanization of local languages, such as Malay, through the Van Ophuijsen spelling system, which standardized romanized orthography for the Malay language from 1901, was revolutionary.[32] Not only did it make local languages accessible to modern printing technology, but it also facilitated the standardization of languages across colonial boundaries.[33] For

31) Claudine Salmon, "The Contribution of the Chinese to the Development of Southeast Asia: A New Appraisal", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1981), 260–275.

32) Ch.A. van Ophuijsen. *Kitab Logat Melajoe: Woordenlijst voor de spelling der Maleische taal met Lantijnsch karakter* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1901); Mahdi, "The Beginnings of Reorganization of the Commissie voor de Volkslectuur (1908–1920)", *Insular Southeast Asia: Linguistic and Cultural Studies in Honour of Bernd Nothofer*, eds. Fritz Shulze & Holger Warnk (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 85–110.

33) Andries Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).
Modern printing technology required typesetters, who not only understood the printing machines but also belonged to the broader category of intellectuals, as they needed to understand manuscripts and make sentences comprehensible for readers.

instance, Malay-language publications circulated within the Dutch East Indies from the early twentieth century and also crossed colonial boundaries into British Malaya.[34] In fact, from the nineteenth century onwards, Dutch Sumatra was part of British Malaya's economic zone, and not only economic goods but people and information, including publications, frequently moved back and forth between the two territories. This tradition facilitated the formation of new kinds of linguistic and diasporic communities that transcended political divisions.

A typical example is the Mandailing diasporic communities from Sumatra to Malaya. In fact, historically, people frequently traveled back and forth between Medan on the east coast of Sumatra and Penang in the northwest Malayan Peninsula and created a kind of de facto living milieu.[35] Within this same Medan-Penang milieu, the Chinese established their communities, and therefore, in Medan, the Chinese community did not really interact with the local population in terms of nationalist politics from the 1910s onward.[36] Similarly, Chinese-language newspapers published in Singapore circulated throughout the region and contributed to raising "national" awareness among overseas Chinese from the late nineteenth century onward.[37]

6. Transnational Ideologies

Since the end of the nineteenth century, colonial Southeast Asian intellectuals,

34） Henk Maier, *We are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004).

35） Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, "Mandailing-Batak-Malay: A People Defined and Divided", in *From Palermo to Penang: A Journey into Political Anthropology*, eds. Francios Ruegg and Andrea Boscoboinik (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2020), 297–310.

36） Tan Sooi Beng, "The Lion Dances to the Fore: Articulating Chinese Identities in Penang and Medan", *Senri Ethnological Reports* 65 (2007), 63–78; Nobuto Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 176–243.

37） Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia* (St Leonards: Asian Studies Association of Australia and Allen & Unwin, 1992), 40–57; Lea E. Willams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1916* (Glencoe, III: Free Press, 1960).

or should I say Asian intellectuals in general, did not simply copy and adapt Western-originated ideologies. They blended various Western-originated ideas and localized them to create new forms of nationalism and transnational identities. For their activities and movements, they did not choose one popular or dominant ideology from either republicanism, communism, or Islam. Rather, they mixed elements from all three or more ideologies and thoughts and combined and modified them to suit local conditions. They intentionally did so because they understood that colonial governance and oppression were multifaceted and influential, and therefore their resistance needed to be creative and locally rooted.[38] This practical approach matched the local and popular needs of reactionary and/or resistance activities, whether visible or underground.

At the turn of the twentieth century, two ideological movements swept Asia.[39] They were phenomena because they were facilitated by the infrastructure of global communication and transportation. But for some reasons, they did not quite connect and stir "nationalistic" movements in colonial Southeast Asia.

Pan-Asianism

The first is Pan-Asianism. It was a vision, not an ideology in a correct sense, to promote solidarity among Asian "nations" against Western imperialism in Asia. From the turn of the twentieth century, the idea was conceived by several Japanese philosophers and politicians. Japan had been experiencing rapid modernization after the Meiji Restoration. Japan started to expand its military ambitions, which caused military confrontations with its neighbors, while colonizing Taiwan and the Korean peninsula from the 1890s. Its military victories against the Ch'ing dynasty in 1895 and the Russian empire in 1905 were received with surprise by Western powers. With this development in mind, Pan-Asianism unexpectedly proved that Asians could challenge Western dominance. The idea gained momentum among some Asian intellectuals and leaders, and in

38) John Sidel, *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 1–34.

39) Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 39–160.

return raised concerns among Western powers. Japanese philosophers such as Okakura Kakuzo (1863–1913) captured this moment by saying "Asia is one".[40] This kind of vision and slogan spread beyond Japan's borders and was shared by Asian intellectuals who were seeking for rhetoric to challenge Western civilization.

Pan-Asianism was disseminated not only through printed writings but also through personal interactions among those who traveled to Japan and met prominent Japanese intellectuals. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), while leading his revolutionary movement against the Ch'ing dynasty, spent several years in Tokyo and Yokohama, relying on Japanese patrons and organizing the local Chinese community in support of his cause.[41] Mariano Ponce (1863–1918) likewise traveled to Tokyo in search of financial assistance for the Philippine revolution, where he met Japanese intellectuals and politicians and even exchanged ideas with Sun Yat-sen.[42] Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940), a pioneer of Vietnamese nationalism, founded the revolutionary organization *Duy Tân Hội* ("Modernization Association") and initiated the *Đông Du* ("Journey to the East") political movement. He lived in Japan from 1905 to 1908 seeking support from Okuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), but without success.[43]

Notably, figures like Rizal, Ponce, Sun, and Phan all emerged from the same generation, having been born in the 1860s. During their youth, they keenly experienced a world undergoing rapid change, came to understand the systems of oppression, and devoted their lives to movements intended to fundamentally alter the power relations between the powerful and the marginalized in their

40） Okakura Kakuzo, *The Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art* (London: John Murray, 1903), 1.

41） Chun-chieh Huang, "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Pan-Asianism Revisited: Its Historical Context and Contemporary Relevance", *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia* 3, Issue 1 (2021), 69–74; Lai To Lee and Hock Guan Lee, eds. *Sun Yat-Sen, Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011).

42） Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, passim.

43） Phan Bội Châu. *Overturned Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan-Boi-Chau*. Translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); Kevin D. Pham, *The Architects of Dignity: Vietnamese Visions of Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 31–52.

respective nations.[44]

Pan-Islamism

The second and more significant movement in colonial Southeast Asia was Pan-Islamism. This grew from two key developments: the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the increasing number of pilgrims from Southeast Asia traveling to Mecca. The opening of the Suez Canal made the pilgrimage from Asia more accessible, while telegraph communications allowed for faster coordination between Islamic communities worldwide. At Mecca, Muslims from all over the world met during the hajj, and they began to forge a shared religious and cultural identity that crossed ethnic differences and colonial borders. Being awakened and enlightened by their experiences, hajjis brought novel Islamic thoughts and movements back to their hometowns, introducing such ideas while blending them with local cultures and customs in their efforts to renew their societies.[45]

Two cities became hubs for originating and spreading Pan-Islamism—Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, and Cairo, Egypt. First, in the late nineteenth century, Istanbul became a political center of Pan-Islamism, particularly under the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (reigned 1876–1909). He wielded Pan-Islamism as a diplomatic and political strategy to appeal to global Muslim communities. By asserting his role as Caliph, he sought to mobilize global Muslim public opinion to pressure European powers, often bypassing colonial governments altogether. The media played a significant role as well. Arabic, Turkish, and Persian newspapers and publications circulated from and through Istanbul, disseminating new political, social, and religious ideas to the broader Muslim public.[46]

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44) One generation later, Rash Behari Bose (1886–1945) emerged as an Indian revolutionary and spent decades in Japan supporting India's struggle for independence from Britain. Joseph McQuade. *Fugitive of Empire: Rash Behari Bose, Japan and the Indian Independence Struggle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

45) Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

46) Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford:

This Ottoman diplomatic strategy attracted attention from a small sultanate in Aceh, at the northern tip of Sumatra. Its embrace of Pan-Islamism represented an unprecedented development that would be unimaginable in the modern world of nation-states. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Aceh became an epicenter of the Pan-Islamic movement. The Aceh sultanate faced Dutch expansion into its territory, and the Aceh-Dutch War erupted in 1873, continuing for thirty years until Dutch control was finally established in 1903. This three-decade-long resistance became a symbol of Islamic defiance against European colonialism, attracting support from Muslim communities across the region and beyond.[47)]

Before the war broke out, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Acehnese Sultan Ibrahim Mansur Syah (died 1870) had been trying to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Caliphate. He was desperately looking for recognition and support for Aceh's independence.[48)] In return, the Pan-Islamic program by Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) strengthened its ties with Aceh's Muslims. Besides moral support, the Sultan's agents supplied and distributed weapons, money, and propaganda materials for the Acehnese resistance against the Dutch.

Second, in connection to colonial Southeast Asia, Cairo was more important because it emerged as a center of the Islamic reformist movement, serving a dual role as both an intellectual hub and a publication center. Unlike the Pan-Islamism of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Istanbul, which focused on political unity to defend the empire, the Cairo school emphasized internal reform (*Islah*). They argued that Muslims first needed to modernize their

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Clarendon Press, 1990); Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

47） Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979); Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847* (London: Curzon Press, 1983).

48） Teuku Ibrahim Alfian, "Aceh and the Holy War (Perang Sabil)", in *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem*, ed. Anthony Reid (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 109–120.

educational systems and purge corrupting customs to regain power and independence from the West. The leading and most influential Islamic reformers were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905).

Interestingly, under the British protectorate (1882–1956), Cairo enjoyed relative intellectual freedom, which allowed a thriving Arabic press to flourish. This made Cairo the engine for disseminating Pan-Islamic ideas. Arabic newspapers and periodicals were smuggled or mailed across the Muslim world, from Beirut and Baghdad to Bombay and Singapore and beyond, creating a widely interconnected reading public. Among these publications, *Al-Manar* (The Lighthouse) became an essential vehicle for spreading reformist and Pan-Islamic thought. These Arabic publications facilitated Pan-Islamic dialogue among intellectuals from across the globe, engaging them in a shared, transborder conversation about the future of the *Umma* (the global Muslim community).[49)]

Colonial Southeast Asia witnessed a similar development in disseminating Islamic reformist thought through periodicals. In Singapore, Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Syed Shaykh al-Hadi launched the periodical *Al-Imam* (The Imam, 1906–1908). This was the first Malay-language publication to carry Islamic reformist ideas and became a hub of intellectual and political discourse. The editors introduced new vocabulary and standardized forms of address and argument for these dialogues. Although *Al-Imam* existed for only a short period, similar periodicals emerged in the 1910s and 1920s, such as *Al-Munir* (The Illuminator, 1911–1916) and *Saudara* (Brother, 1928–1941) in Penang, British Malaya, and *Neraca* (The Balance, 1916–1931) in Padang, West Sumatra, the Dutch East Indies. These periodicals functioned as the intellectual bridge that transported the ideas of Islamic modernism from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.[50)]

There was a hidden network that made these relations possible. These networks were built and managed by Arab Hadramis, merchant communities originally from Yemen and the Hejaz. Hadrami traders had a long history of

49) Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

50) William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973).

settling in ports, particularly in Sumatra, Java, and Malaya. They operated traditional maritime trade across the Indian Ocean and transmitted Islamic ideas to various parts of Asia. At the same time, many Hadramis were respected Islamic scholars. They provided religious education and often gave religious opinions.[51)]

This story shows how ideas and people were constantly in motion. Religious pilgrimage channeled for political resistance; trade relationships provided the basis for networks for articulating revolutionary thoughts. Thus, pan-Islamism in colonial Southeast Asia adapted ideas from the Arabic world, transforming them to promote global Islamic identity and local resistance to colonial rule.

7. Global Reading List

The influence of cosmopolitan intellectuals also came from what I call the "global reading list". Here, this refers to a collection of contemporary revolutionary publications and ideas that fundamentally changed how they understood political change. The reading list included political philosophy, history, and literature not only from Europe and the United States but from Asia and the Middle East. Some were read in their original languages; others were translated into languages that local intellectuals felt comfortable reading. And of course, local and European newspapers also carried information about what was happening in the contemporary world and current ideas. The circulation of this kind of literature across colonial Southeast Asia provided an intellectual infrastructure that fostered cosmopolitan awareness and helped develop anti-colonial movements.[52)]

There is no doubt that one of the most influential ideas was Marxism from

51） Ulrike Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography", in *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, eds. Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 109–142.

52） Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 325–365; Sebastian Conrad, *Globalization and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the late nineteenth century. Marxism became significantly influential among the colonized intellectuals in the twentieth century. The 1917 Russian Revolution eventually shook and changed the world. Overthrowing the empire became a reality, and Marxist ideas proved it possible. Marxism offered a new way of understanding colonial exploitation as a class struggle between the colonizers and the colonized, not simply as racism.

The Dutch East Indies was the first colony in the region that saw the rise of Communism. After being exiled from the Netherlands, Henk Sneevliet (1883–1942) came to Surabaya and started to incite and organize local railway and factory workers. In 1914, he founded the Indies Social Democratic Association, the first communist political organization in Asia. He found and educated local youth, particularly Semaoen (1899–1971) and Darsono (1897–1976), who later became the founders of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1920. It is to be noted that the Indonesian Communist Party did not originate from the Russian Revolution, but from the Communist Party of the Netherlands.[53)]

After the Communist International (Comintern) was established in 1919 in Moscow, it started to send its agents to Asia and helped establish formal organizations for promoting Marxist ideology. As a result, local Communist Parties began to be organized in Japan (1921), China (1921), Singapore and India (1925), Siam, Malaya, and Vietnam (1930).[54)]

Local communist leaders and activists adopted Marxist ideology by adding local flavors. The journey of Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969) illustrates how Asian intellectuals blended global ideas with local realities. At the age of twenty-one, he left Vietnam as a kitchen helper on a French merchant steamer, the Amiral de Latouche-Tréville, traveling around the world between 1911 and 1917. From 1919, he lived in France and showed his interest in politics, particularly attracted by socialist and communist ideas. In 1920, when the French Communist Party

53) Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1965).

54) About the rise and spread of underground revolutionary activities in the first three decades in Asia, Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021).

was established, he joined as a founding member. In 1923, he left Paris for Moscow and was employed by the Comintern. As a Comintern agent using many different passports and names, he traveled to Canton, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Shantou, and many other cities. In 1930, he finally managed to establish the Communist Party of Vietnam in Hong Kong. He believed and argued that the struggle for national liberation should combine with the class struggle of peasants and workers against both foreign capitalists and wealthy local allies. Thus, he synthesized nationalism and communism as a model for anti-colonial movements, and his thoughts influenced many fellow Asian communists.[55)]

In colonial Indonesia, two distinguished intellectuals, Tan Malaka (1897–1949) and Soekarno (1901–1970),[56)] were deeply engaged with Marxism in their own ways. Tan Malaka is arguably one of the most ardent revolutionary figures in Indonesian history, who was once a leader of the Indonesian Communist Party and later became an advocate for a revolutionary path to independence through both his words and deeds. Educated in Dutch schools in Sumatra, in 1913, he traveled to the Netherlands to further his studies in Amsterdam and Leiden. During his stay there, the Russian Revolution took place, and afterward, he swiftly leaned toward socialism and communism. In 1919, he returned to the Dutch East Indies, and soon after began to engage in the communist movement in Java. But in 1923, he was exiled from the Indies and spent more than two decades overseas, first as an agent of the Comintern, then as an independent communist fighter. Despite inter-imperial surveillance and multiple captures, with the help of his acquaintances and local individual supporters, he always

55） William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982); David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995).

56） A note on spelling: Throughout the main text, I use “Soekarno”, the original Dutch-influenced spelling used during the colonial period. However, the secondary sources cited use “Sukarno”, which reflects the post-independence Indonesian spelling convention. Both spellings refer to the same individual. The Indonesian spelling “oe” changed to “u” in 1947 with the introduction of the Republican Spelling System (also known as the Soewandi Spelling System), which replaced the Dutch-based Van Ophuijsen System.

succeeded in escaping from jails and kept moving around Asia, even writing several highly influential books and pamphlets in Malay. He sought to liberate Indonesia from both Dutch colonial rule and capitalist exploitation. Among other works, his seminal book *Madilog: Materialism, Dialektika, dan Logika* (a synthesis of materialism, dialectics, and logic, written under his pen name "Iljas Hussein") compiled in 1943—during the Japanese military occupation, when he secretly returned to Java and engaged in clandestine activities—demonstrates an Indonesian version of Marxism.[57)]

Like Tan Malaka, Soekarno also attended Dutch-style schools in the Indies and, in 1926, graduated from the Bandung Institute of Technology with an engineering degree. What made him different from Ho Chi Minh and Tan Malaka was the fact that he never studied abroad. During his college years, in 1925, he established the General Study Club, which discussed the idea of an independent Indonesia and later became the Indonesian National Party in 1927. In 1926, he wrote an essay, "Nasionalisme, Islamisme, dan Marxisme" ("Nationalism, Islamism, and Marxism"), which demonstrates his early ideas for unifying nationalist, Islamic, and communist ideologies for an independent Indonesia.[58)] He was a brilliant agitator who was able to mobilize masses for his rallies in Java, and because of this, he was arrested in 1930. In his seminal

57) Harry A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka, Strijder voor Indonesië's Vrijheid: Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976); John Ingleson, *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement 1927-1934* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979).

Tan Malaka authored many books and manuscripts both in Dutch and Malay (Indonesian). *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (in Dutch, "Towards the Republic of Indonesia", 1924), *Massa Actie* (in Malay, "Mass Action", 1926), and *Madilog* (in Malay, 1943) are considered as his major works.

Meanwhile, the very first book about Marxism in the Malay language is Semaoen's *Hikajat Kadiroen* (Semarang: PKI Semarang, 1921) based on his serial in daily *Sinar Djawa* (Rays of Java) and *Sinar Hindia* (Rays of the Indies) from 1918 to 1919. Semaoen was the first chairperson of the Indonesian Communist Party, as it was established in May 1920.

58) Soekarno, "Nasionalisme, Islamisme, dan Marxisme", in Soekarno, *Dibawah Bendara Revolusi*, Djilid Pertama, Tjetakan Kedua (Jakarta: Panitya Penerbit Dibawah Bendera Revolusi, 1963), 1–22.

defense trial speech “Indonesia Menggugat” (Indonesia Accuses) in 1931, he introduced his concept of “marhaen” to describe “ordinary people” in Indonesia. It emphasized the struggle of the common people against all forms of oppression, whether colonial, capitalist, or feudal. Soekarno combined various and different ideological traditions to create a new form of anti-colonial thought, which was common among Southeast Asian intellectuals.[59)]

It is difficult to find a reading list of what any Southeast Asian nationalist or activist has ever read. Anderson reveals in his *Under Three Flags* that Rizal’s case is exceptional because his personal library catalogue, if not complete, remains. From it, one can determine how avid a reader is. However, there is another way to discover what kinds of books nationalist leaders read in their younger days: by carefully reading their articles and books. In this respect, Soekarno’s essay “Nasionalisme, Islamisme, dan Marxisme” provides good insights into what he had read before he conceived it. In his essay, he mentions the names of major thinkers and activists concerning nationalism, Islamism, and Marxism from West to East, as well as his fellow nationalists and communists. His essay explains the three ideologies in order. In the nationalism section, he mentions Ernest Renan, Karl Kautsky, Karl Radek, Otto Bauer, Gandhi, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, T.L. Vaswani, and Sun Yat-sen. The Islamism section includes Sheikh Mohammad Abduh, Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Amir Muawiyah, Urabi Pasha, Mustafa Kamil, Mohammad Farid Bey, Ali Pasha, Ahmed Bey Agayeff, Mohammad Ali, and Shaukat Ali. For Marxism, he refers to Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Ferdinand Lassalle, Adolphe Blanqui, Sismondi, Thompson, and H.G. Wells.[60)] The names Soekarno mentions demonstrate how extensively he had read in each ideology and how he combined them for his own thinking.

From Soekarno’s reading, we know that the global reading list extended far beyond Marxist literature. It included works on democracy, nationalism, and anti-colonial resistance from around the world. José Rizal’s two novels, *Noli Me*

59） Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence*; J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

60） Soekarno, “Nasionalisme, Islamisme, dan Marxisme”.

Tángere and *El Filibusterismo*, originally written in Spanish, were translated into English and other languages and consumed by local intellectuals.[61] Sun Yat-sen's writings on republicanism and nationalism were widely read among Chinese communities as well as by indigenous intellectuals.[62] The Irish struggle for independence provided a model for Catholic intellectuals in the Philippines.[63] The Indian independence movement also inspired Southeast Asian intellectuals. The writings and ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore influenced Buddhist movements in Burma, nationalist struggles in 1930s Indonesia, and Indian diaspora communities across Southeast Asia.[64]

The global circulation of ideas inspired local intellectuals who actively blended different ideologies and ideas to fit local political and cultural realities and conditions. Local intellectuals were creative synthesizers, energetic transformers who adapted global concepts to their specific contexts. This synthesis became possible because of the "Age of Early Globalization", which brought improvements in transportation and communication that connected colonial Southeast Asia to the wider world.[65]

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61) Michigan Library Online Exhibit, "Rizal's Noli and Fili" [https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/translation-memory/rizals-noli-and-fili]. (accessed on 20 September 2025). It seems that Soekarno did not read Rizal when he authored his essay, although at least the Dutch translation of *Noli Me Tángere* was already available from the 1910s.

62) Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1968).

63) Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977); David R. Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Michigan Library Online Exhibit, "Rizal's Noli and Fili"; Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

64) Ainslie T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990).

65) Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial*

8. Conclusion

This essay on “cosmopolitanism in motion” in colonial Southeast Asia reveals a profound historical paradox. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the very infrastructure designed to serve imperial control has become the fertile ground for new forms of cross-cultural connection and resistance. Under such conditions, colonial cosmopolitanism manifested in the daily interactions of merchants in bustling markets, the shared journeys of pilgrims bound for Mecca, the clandestine networks of revolutionary intellectuals, and the daily consumption of ideas and information through newspapers and books. Globalization and resistance operated symbiotically during the colonial period, as people creatively appropriated the very tools of oppression. The same networks that facilitated imperial trade also carried revolutionary ideas and strengthened transnational bonds of solidarity. Ideas and identities were indeed porous.

This study, while preliminary and intentionally leaving out many specific examples, also reveals that cosmopolitanism is fundamentally a contested terrain. It was forged organically from below through the creative responses of ordinary people alongside local cosmopolitan intellectuals. The experience of colonial Southeast Asia demonstrates that diverse communities possess a remarkable capacity to create inclusive, flexible, and complex forms of belonging daily. This capacity emerged precisely because cosmopolitanism was constantly in motion. Colonial cosmopolitanism was dynamic, adaptive, and resistant to the rigid boundaries that colonial authorities sought to impose.

Finally, we must return to Benedict Anderson to conclude this essay. While

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Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

There was, of course, the other side of the story—colonial and intra-imperial surveillance systems—which this essay does not explore in depth. On this point, see for instance, Nobuto Yamamoto, “Shaping the ‘China Problem’ in Colonial Southeast Asia”, *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 2, no. 1 (2014), 131-153; Takashi Shiraishi, *The Phantom World of Digul: Policing as Politics in Colonial Indonesia, 1926-1941* (Singapore: NUS Press and Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2021), 1-28.

writing *Under Three Flags*, he began working on the life story of a Chinese Indonesian writer named Kwee Thiam Tjing (1900–1974), one of Indonesia's greatest writers. As part of this research, he contributed an essay titled "Colonial Cosmopolitanism" to an edited academic volume. By describing and analyzing Kwee's life and writings, Anderson identifies Kwee as a colonial cosmopolitan. Despite spending most of his life within the boundaries of the Dutch East Indies and later Indonesia, Kwee's writings and actions reveal him to be profoundly cosmopolitan. Anderson demonstrates how someone could become a citizen of the world—not in the Kantian sense of abstract universal principles, but through concrete engagement with the ideas, goods, and people that flowed through colonial cities—without ever leaving "home".[66)]

Instead, in colonial cities like Singapore or Batavia or Saigon, the world came to you—just as the "Age of Early Globalization" arrived without warning and swept you into its currents. New ideas arrived daily in newspapers. Goods flowed in from every corner of the globe. People from distant lands filled your streets. Whether you realize it or not, this constant circulation transformed you. You became cosmopolitan simply by living in these colonial cities, by participating in their daily rhythms, by being swept up in their relentless motion. Some people even became cosmopolitan—worldly in outlook—while concurrently embracing fervent nationalism; they were deeply devoted to a nation that existed only in concept under colonial domination. This does not mean, however, that everyone in colonial cities could become cosmopolitan in the same way. It depended on who you were, what capacities you possessed, and what circumstances shaped your upbringing. In other words, colonial cosmopolitanism manifested in various levels and forms at the individual level. That diversity is what made it so fascinating.

66) Benedict Anderson, "Colonial Cosmopolitanism", in *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World*, ed. Zawari Ibrahim (Petaling Jaya: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia and Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2012), 371–387.

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