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**'The Eurasian Question' : the colonial position and postcolonial options of colonial mixed ancestry groups from British India, Dutch East Indies and French Indochina compared**

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# 14 Discussion and conclusion

## 14.1 Introduction

This book was about how Eurasians made their choices. The main question this book sought to answer was: What were the margins within which the Eurasians made their choices to stay or leave the former colonies of British India, the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina and why did these margins differ across the three contexts? In this book, I analysed the factors that determined these margins, and the choices the Eurasians made. Based on extensive archival research in several countries, I compared the colonial position of Eurasians in the three colonies and the options for Eurasians before and after decolonisation to understand why the margins, within which they made their choices, differed between the colonies.

Debates on the right labels and terms for ‘Eurasians’ occurred frequently while I was carrying out my research: What is the correct label? Who is an Eurasian? Who self-defined as such? It clearly is a controversial issue now, as it was at the time when the ‘Eurasian Question’ was at the centre of debates. The answers to these questions also determined the size of the group. Eurasians could pass themselves off as European or as indigenous depending on their skin colour, class, religion and education. In the period covered in this book, people repeatedly self-defined, or were re-defined by others. This process of repeated redefinition became important at the moment of decolonisation when the margins within which the Eurasians chose between their Asian and European ancestry shifted. Simultaneously, the labels used for people of mixed ancestry changed as well as the number of people who were defined as Eurasians. People were granted or claimed rights depending on how they were defined or how they defined themselves.

This chapter summarises the sub-conclusions of the various chapters. It starts with general remarks regarding the advantage of the comparative perspective offered.

## 14.2 The comparative perspective

The comparative approach of this study has highlighted unique characteristics of each colony in settling the Eurasian Question, as well as striking and unexpected connections and similarities between the colonies. In contrast to comparative works on colonialism and decolonisation, such as Elizabeth Buettner’s inspirational study *Europe after empire*, I focused on the consequences of decolonisation for the Eurasians

specifically.<sup>1</sup> The process of community formation of Eurasians was described in earlier studies for the three Eurasian groups separately, as discussed at length in the beginning of this book. My study adds to this literature via my comparative approach which resulted in a common picture of 1) the ways colonising countries attempted to learn from each other in designing specific policies for Eurasians; 2) how minorities belonging to a particular ruling system coped with a dramatic power transition (decolonisation); and 3) how newly independent states dealt with an in-between minority associated with the former colonisers.

Colonial authorities considered the three Asian colonies discussed here as the crown jewels of their colonial project. In the other European colonies in Asia, a Eurasian Question was defined in a similar way. Eurasian groups did emerge there and they emancipated like the Eurasians described in this book did. Eurasians were in touch with each other throughout Asia. In the French, British and Dutch Caribbean there were no mixed ancestry groups who self-identified or emancipated, or were labelled in a similar manner as the Eurasians were. In French Algeria mixing was uncommon, denied and hidden. In the other African colonies, mixed relationships did lead to a small and recognised Eurafrican population. The European colonisers in some of the colonies in Africa focused on 'saving' the children born from mixed relations by removing them from their mothers, and their countries of birth. In short, mixed relationships were common in almost all colonial settings but only in the Asian colonies did a Eurasian Question become rather prominent.

The comparative approach taken in this book showed how this Eurasian Question developed along similar lines in all three colonies. The issue became more prominent after the arrival of larger numbers of European women in all three colonies. The problem came to be seen as urgent when the Eurasian population was hit hard by the interwar economic crisis and increased competition from the indigenous population on the labour market. Authorities in all three colonies looked at each other for inspiration and guidance. Colonial civil servants travelled between the colonies, and ideas were exchanged at colonial exhibitions. An idea of a common 'Eurasian Question', which was related to a shared, but vague definition of the Eurasian group, developed and strengthened because of these connections.

What this book especially made clear was that the positive strategy of emancipation through self-representation that the Eurasians started in the late colonial period to a certain extent backfired, and this determined the postcolonial possibilities. This emancipation paradox describes the process in which Eurasians emancipated, demanded rights and became more visible as a group, and because of that were also more discriminated against. The emancipation paradox occurred in all three colonial settings. How it differed per colony, is highlighted in the sections below. In the last section, the emancipation paradox is addressed in more detail.

### 14.3 The heuristic framework revisited

In the introduction of this book, I presented a heuristic framework with twelve factors, which might have shaped the context in which the Eurasians made choices. For

the purpose of clarity, Table 2 is repeated here. The twelve factors listed below defined the framework in which the Eurasians made their choices at the individual and collective level. This framework was based on a large number of publications, which were discussed in the introduction to this book. My comparative research built on this literature. I took – in contrast to much of the existing literature – an explicit longitudinal approach and included both the period before and after decolonisation. This longer timespan enabled me to present a complete picture, and to identify the emancipation paradox, and its consequences for the possibilities of Eurasians.

TABLE 2 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED EURASIANS' CHOICES

<i>Personal factors</i>	<i>Legal factors</i>	<i>Structural factors</i>
1. Class (economic status)	1. Colonial legal status and ethnicity	1. Socio-historical background, process and length of colonisation
2. Age	2. Bureaucracy: accessibility of citizenship and other governmental regulations.	2. The decolonisation process and aftermath (unrest, rumours, chaos, discrimination by new powers)
3. Education		3. Economic situation/future prospects in mother country and the former colony
4. Religion		4. Disappearance of social infrastructure/social network including familial ties
5. Gender and marital status		5. Geo-political situation e.g. the Cold War

This book adds to the debate on the function and use of racial hierarchies in (post) colonial society. The colonial legal status of Eurasians was key to the position of Eurasians in the colonial hierarchy. This status was interacting with the level of violence involving Eurasians during the decolonisation processes in all three colonies. It was the most important explanatory factor when it comes to the framework in which Eurasians made their choices. Eurasians were heavily targeted in the violence accompanying decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies and Indochina, and as a result they all wanted to leave. Eurasians were not so much targeted in India during partition, and therefore most Anglo-Indians initially stayed. Anglo-Indians had secured postcolonial legal privileges. This leads to the observation that Eurasians were only targeted in places where they had no legal safeguards or where their safeguards were not respected (as was the case in French Indochina and in the Dutch East Indies).

#### *The historical context*

The Eurasian group came into existence, as described in chapter 2, as a result of migrations from Europe to the colonies in Asia, and the relationships between European men and indigenous women. In British India, mixed relationships were common from the start of the colonial project. However, in the middle of the nineteenth

century, the British implemented anti-miscegenation laws. Mixed relationships were as a result seldom legalised via marriage, and Eurasians were excluded from the British legal system as well as from the Indian caste system. The Eurasian population was potentially large in British India, depending on the definition. The Dutch East Indies was also – like British India – an old colony, and mixed relationships were as common as in British India. These relationships were condoned, much to the dismay of the British, when they took possession of the Dutch East Indies for a brief period at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The mixed population was large and important to the Dutch colonial project. The Dutch felt responsible towards the Indo-European population and framed this responsibility in terms of debt. In French Indochina, the Eurasian community was smaller and newer. This study showed how French authorities copied their ‘Eurasian’ policies from the British and the Dutch.

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, colonial authorities in all three colonies feared that Eurasians would undermine colonialism. In all three cases, the composition of colonial populations started to change in the second half of the nineteenth century. This process started earlier in British India, but it was a similar process in the other two colonies. White European women, who started to arrive in larger numbers towards the end of the nineteenth century, were expected to live up to the idea of superiority of the European culture. The women arrived in the period of *Modern Imperialism* when ideas regarding the *Ethische Politiek* in the Dutch East Indies, the *White Man’s Burden* in British India and *la Mission Civilisatrice* in French Indochina reshaped colonialism. The Dutch version of modern imperialism was less ideological than its Indochinese and British Indian counterparts. In the French view the colonised people would eventually be able to become ‘French’ once they had ‘evolved’ to a higher stage of civilisation. In the other settings, this was seen as less of an option. In all three cases authorities struggled with defining the group both before and after decolonisation. Authorities needed the Eurasians for their colonial project, as intermediates between Europeans and indigenous people. Eurasians tried to be as European as possible but never attained European status. This ambivalent situation led to inclusion and exclusion at the same time; a positive image of Eurasians as loyal colonial subjects was created, as well as a negative image as potential traitors. This in-between position gave the Eurasians a privileged position because they could make demands in return for their loyalty to the colonisers.

#### *The legal position*

Western colonial authorities developed similar legal categories in which they subsumed the Eurasians, as described in chapter 3. In Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, Eurasians belonged to the legal European category as long as they were recognised by their European fathers, whereas in British India, legal recognition outside marriage was not an option. In all three colonies, Eurasian women could acquire European citizenship via marriage to a European man. Anglo-Indians were sometimes regarded as natives, sometimes as Europeans. There was no formal legal Eurasian category in any of the three colonies. Furthermore, in all three cases, European authorities increasingly worried about the potential revolutionary power of Eurasians.

As a result, they developed legislation to limit their possibilities to obtain an influential (usually political) position. The policy towards Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies was rather lenient in comparison to British India. In general, the status of the Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies was better than that of the Anglo-Indians in British India. The Europeanisation movement – a common development in all three Asian colonies – worsened the position of Eurasians. It started later in the Dutch East Indies and Indochina than in British India. The ‘young’ colony of Indochina followed a more inclusive policy there than those of the Dutch East Indies and British India. Fears about depopulation in France meant that the French wanted to raise as many abandoned Eurasian children as possible as ‘good’ French citizens.

The legal position was not only related to the level of violence involving Eurasians during the decolonisation processes but also in another way an (indirect) motive to leave or in a rare case to stay. Among those likely to stay were women who lost their European citizenship because of their marriage with indigenous men. The laws which regulated the legal position of Eurasians in the colonies, formed the basis for negotiations during the Round Table Conferences before formal decolonisation. They were influencing the postcolonial legal position of the Eurasians.

*The socio-economic position, changes in the discourse and saving the children*

Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies could reach a higher social position than Anglo-Indians in British India, as described in chapters 4 to 6. According to Indo-Europeans, the Anglo-Indians had a much harder time under British colonial rule than they themselves had under Dutch rule. Indo-Europeans were considered to have fewer problems than the *Métis* in French Indochina and the Anglo-Indians in British India. Acquiring formal European citizenship became an ideal because it offered the best opportunities for social mobility in the colonies.

At the end of the nineteenth century, European colonisers became increasingly concerned about the potential threat of Eurasians. Eurasian children were especially seen as at risk and as a threat. Authorities pressed European fathers to recognise their Eurasian children. False recognitions occurred in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina, and these led to debates about who was an Eurasian and who was not. In all three colonies, an educational stay in the mother country helped one to become more ‘European’. A European style-education at boarding schools at the hill stations was considered the best alternative if a stay in Europe was not an option.

One of the key findings of my study is the striking similarity between the systems that were set up in all three colonies to save the Eurasian children. Colonial authorities in all three colonies set up orphanages and boarding schools to raise Eurasian children in a European environment. In French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, colonial authorities offered Eurasian boys a military training hoping to ensure their loyalty to the colonial state. The institutions that were created were usually located at a higher altitude, where the temperature was cooler, and which were far removed from the assumed negative influences of the lower plains. The children were removed to a semi-European environment: it was the closest they could get to European countries,

without actually leaving the colony. It was a policy which strongly set the children apart from others.

In all three colonies, Eurasian children were removed from their mothers, but only in Indochina this was a centralised governmental affair. The differences between the three colonies were most clearly reflected in the similar education projects they developed. White paupers living in the large cities were seen as a problem in all three colonies because they could undermine the colonial project. The colonisers could not claim to bring civilisation if part of their 'own' group lived in dire straits. The Eurasians were included in the definition of the white pauper problem. They were seen as the colonisers problem. Impoverished Eurasian children did not reflect well on the colonisers status. White pauper children and Eurasian children were both removed from their families and brought up in boarding schools. In the British case the schooling system developed early and expanded rapidly. This schooling became a right of the Eurasian population and continued after decolonisation. It was part of the early British preparation for independence. In the French case, the system developed late, but it was institutionalised rapidly. Children were sometimes removed by force from their families. *Métis* school children were almost all 'repatriated' to France shortly before and after decolonisation. The Dutch East Indies held the middle ground. The Dutch developed the schooling system late in the colonial period. Dutch authorities did so in an informal way and never as fully as it was done in British India. The Eurasians tried to hold on to their right to education in Dutch after decolonisation but it never became an established right, as occurred in India. Overall, the policies for Eurasian children were central to defining the Eurasians as a specific group.

#### *Eurasian emancipation*

From the early twentieth century onwards, Eurasians increasingly self-organised as a separate group, especially in the Dutch East Indies and British India, as described in chapter 7. Rather strong transnational links developed between the colonies because the French as 'young' colonisers wanted to learn from the policies in neighbouring colonies. One of the most interesting things to come out of this research is that not only the policy makers but also the Eurasian groups in the colonies increasingly looked at each other across borders. In part their activities were a response to the British preparations for independence. The Eurasians in British India organised, claimed and were granted separate rights early on. The British authorities started to prepare for India's independence before the Second World War and the well-organised Anglo-Indians managed to get elaborate postcolonial guarantees. The personal connections between the leaders of the Anglo-Indian Association and the leaders of independent India helped to ensure the continuation of colonial privileges after independence. In Indochina, the Eurasian population was smaller because colonisation was recent. As a result, the *Métis* had little time to organise and claim rights. Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies also received only limited rights. The Dutch started to prepare late and half-heartedly for independence, and the Eurasians managed to guarantee few postcolonial rights.

In all cases, Eurasian organisations sought to safeguard rights and privileges before

independence. Part of the Eurasian group claimed a joint identity as Eurasians regardless of their countries of birth. Eurasians arranged gatherings and travelled between the colonies. My study showed that in the 1930s, they rather strikingly claimed New Guinea as the homeland and self-identified as a 'race'. In order to achieve their goal of getting a separate homeland, they compared themselves to the Jews, who were also without a homeland. They even appealed to the League of Nations to endorse their rights as a separate people. It was to no avail. After Indonesia's independence, a small group of Eurasians from the Dutch East Indies tried to put these ideas into practice, and moved to New Guinea, which was still a Dutch colony at the time. The endeavour failed, and most of these Eurasians left for the Netherlands and other destinations outside Indonesia after a few years.

In British India, the Eurasian organisational infrastructure included schools, job reservations, railroad colonies and institute dances, as well as strong lobby organisations, and their publications. Because many of the Eurasians stayed after India's independence, this infrastructure eroded only slowly. In the Dutch East Indies, the Eurasian organisational infrastructure did not develop as strongly, as Eurasians were not separated from Europeans as much as in British India. Their organisations eroded rapidly when many of the Europeans and Eurasians left after independence. This erosion stimulated those who had not yet left, to depart as well. In French Indochina, there was even less of a separate Eurasian infrastructure than in the Dutch East Indies, so its disappearance was not that important as a motive for leaving, as it was in the two other cases.

#### *Chaos, decolonisation and the 'pull' of the mother country*

After the Second World War, thousands of Eurasians left the (former) colonies with the Europeans, as described in chapters 8 and 9. In Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, Eurasian emancipation was halted during Japanese occupation when many Eurasians found that it was better to be Asian than European. In all three settings, the Eurasians redefined themselves during the war and denied their 'Europeanness'. In the Dutch East Indies and in French Indochina, Eurasians and Europeans were interned during the Japanese occupation and again after the Japanese capitulation. Violence in the Dutch East Indies and Indochina was an important reason to leave. In the British case, there was no Japanese occupation and there was no violent war of independence. The decolonisation of British India was however followed by the partition of India and the massive relocations of Hindus to India and Muslims to Pakistan. The new regime in India acted less aggressively towards the Anglo-Indians than the new regimes in Indonesia and Indochina did towards Indo-Europeans and *Métis*. The partition of India did lead to the division of the British Indian Army, the Royal Indian Navy, the Indian Civil Service, and the railways (all sectors in which Anglo-Indians mostly worked). Furthermore, the partition caused the displacement of 14 million people and the death of an estimated several hundred thousand to two million people. This violence and displacement, of course, also affected the Anglo-Indians.

Options to leave were restricted for the Eurasians because Australia, Canada and South-Africa had colour bars or white policies, and the us had quotas. Anglo-Indi-

ans could not leave for the UK because they did not have British citizenship after a change in British citizenship law in 1948. When their preferential rights expired in the 1960s, many left after all, mostly to the UK, but also to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, where restrictions had been lifted in the meantime.

In British India, most Anglo-Indians initially stayed because of constitutional safeguards. Both the Dutch and the British governments were reluctant to admit people of mixed ancestry because of housing shortages and the fear of a return to pre-war unemployment. They also claimed that 'Eastern' people would not fit in. Via newspapers and personal contacts the Eurasians knew about the situation in the mother countries. They knew that hundreds of thousands of people were leaving the UK and the Netherlands via assisted passage schemes to mostly Australia and Canada. They knew about housing shortages and rationing, and they knew about the weather and the lukewarm welcome some had received. Eurasian organisations in India and Indonesia also actively discouraged their departure. In both the Dutch and French cases, some Eurasian people regretted their decision to move to the mother country and wanted to return to the former colony. They felt discriminated against.

An important difference between the Dutch and British Eurasians were the privileges that Anglo-Indians secured during the series of Round Table Conferences in 1931. Not only were jobs for Anglo-Indians guaranteed but also other rights such as representation in Parliament and provincial legislatures, and educational grants for education in English were assured. Anglo-Indians automatically became Indian citizens when independence was declared and thus they did not have to make a choice like the Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies case had to do. In the Dutch case, Indo-Europeans were traumatised by their experiences during the Japanese occupation and the *Bersiap*. Therefore, the urge to leave was stronger than in the British case. At the Round Table Conference of 1949 the conditions for the independence of Indonesia were negotiated. Both sides made a large number of promises, but in the 1950s, the Indonesian government unilaterally broke them, whereas in India they remained in place after Independence. The regulations of the French government to grant the *Métis* French citizenship (and therefore admission to France) were more generous and written proof of European ancestry was not required.

Overall, the quality of legal safeguards provided for Eurasians contributed to the level of violence that Eurasians experienced. Therefore, it is not either the legal factor or the threat of violence that affected Eurasians' decision but rather how one affected the other. The legal safeguards preceded and in many ways dictated the threat of violence. These differences and how Eurasians were treated provide some insightful clues as to how these newly independent regimes would develop in subsequent years. In India, where Anglo-Indians remained in large numbers and encountered little violence, democracy remained intact and a functioning and relatively fair legal system developed. In Indonesia, from where the vast majority of Eurasians departed, an authoritarian regime with a questionable legal system emerged. In Vietnam, where most of those who identified as *Métis* left, the country became more chaotic (and in the north, more authoritarian) as civil war spread.

### *The position of the Eurasians after independence*

In all three former colonial contexts, circumstances deteriorated for Eurasians after Independence, as described in the chapters 10 to 13. In Indonesia and Vietnam this development started in the mid-1950s, while in India it started only in the 1960s. For the Indo-Europeans who had stayed in Indonesia, circumstances quickly worsened. Thousands wanted to leave after all, but they were largely unable to do so because of the restrictions put into place by Dutch authorities. In India – as said – the Anglo-Indians had been recognised as a minority and they kept privileges until the 1960s. From Vietnam, the small Eurasian group repatriated to France had less hurdles to overcome.

After the Indonesians cancelled the agreements of the Round Table Conference, anti-Dutch sentiments intensified and many Indo-Europeans wanted to leave after all. The Dutch government was initially unwilling to help them, but after severe public pressure it did set up an assisted passage scheme. A similar assisted passage scheme was introduced in the British case, but it was used less than in the Dutch case because the necessity to leave India was not felt as urgently and permission was difficult to attain. The French postcolonial policy regarding *Métis* was rather inclusive, in comparison with the aloof attitude of both the Dutch and British authorities.

In the former British and Dutch colony, the people of mixed ancestry who stayed behind were usually too old or too poor to leave. In all three contexts, there were some indications of discrimination against those who stayed, especially in the first years after decolonisation. Anglo-Indians in recent years became preferred employees, because of their English language skills. Also in Indonesia, Indo-Europeans currently have a more positive image and receive preferential treatment in the media and entertainment business. In Indochina, very few *Métis* people stayed and, as in the other cases, sharp edges wore off with time.

#### 14.4 The emancipation paradox

As this study showed, being Eurasian could take various forms, but the Eurasian group in all three colonies followed similar steps in terms of the demarcation of the group, their emancipation and their accrual of rights via organisations. The Eurasian ‘child’ policies lay at the basis of this emancipation and enforced it. Eurasian self-representations led to more claims for rights and more visibility, but also to more discrimination: the emancipation paradox, as defined above. The introduction of the emancipation paradox – which so far has been seldom studied – as an explanation for the construction of the framework in which the Eurasians made their choices, is the main theoretical contribution this study makes. The positive process of emancipation in the sense of lobbying for rights equal to the Europeans led to the negative process of discrimination because of their enhanced visibility. That did not only happen in the eyes of the European authorities but also in the perspective of the indigenous people, who through their own emancipation became competitors on the labour market. The development of the legal position of Eurasians in the colonial hierarchy also interacted

with this paradox. The connections between the colonies strengthened the formation of the Eurasian group in all three colonies. The emancipation paradox determined the place of Eurasians in postcolonial society and their postcolonial possibilities. This position was characterised by the continued redefinition, hybridity and feelings of deprivation. In particular, this gained prominence at the moment of decolonisation when Eurasians in all three colonies had to find a place in a new constellation.

In British India, the emancipation paradox was the most explicit. There, Eurasians formed their own representative groups early. They organised, claimed and gained rights. This strategy later backfired, however. On the one hand, they became a group that was separated further from the British, and had therefore less opportunities to migrate to the UK after independence. On the other hand, the strictly demarcated place of Anglo-Indians in the colony with few possibilities for upward mobility led to elaborate constitutional rights in the immediate postcolonial years. In French Indochina, Eurasians started to demand rights late. They received few separate rights, were set less apart from the colonisers, and the majority of the group could migrate to France. In the Dutch East Indies, Eurasians organised and demanded access to certain rights later than in British India. After they had organised themselves, they received fewer rights than their counterparts in British India. A larger number could still migrate after decolonisation. In short, the Eurasians from British India who emancipated most and at an early stage mainly stayed, while the Eurasians from French Indochina only emancipated late and left in large numbers.

The margins within which Eurasians made their choice between staying in the former colony or leaving were determined by the factors described above. Violence, decreasing economic opportunities and the crumbling organisational infrastructure were reasons to leave. Those who stayed were too old, had no money, no European citizenship, and no contacts. The rights the Eurasians had and received after the conditions of independence were agreed upon resulted from the emancipation paradox. The strength of the paradox as an explanatory factor could be tested by looking at other former colonies in Asia such as Hong Kong and Malaya, where there were also Eurasians communities, as well as at settings in which no similar emancipatory trajectory developed. It emphasises the need for more comparative colonial and postcolonial research. My thesis was mainly based on governmental archives. Future research could take the emic perspective as a starting point and use ego-documents, interviews and other personal sources. Future research could also look more closely at how the indigenous population saw the Eurasians, and how their emancipation from the position of a former colonised people was related to the emancipation of the Eurasians.