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Abstract

Outside of the dominant frame depicting World War II as a showdown between the Allied and Axis powers, the war also represented a critical juncture in the global battle between empire and nation. In Asia, the war allowed a "semi-colonial" China to successfully reclaim its sovereignty from both its allies and enemies and compelled the Dutch to forfeit colonial rule in Indonesia and its prestige as a regional power. Moving beyond conventional dichotomies and great-power bias, this paper analyses two portentous wartime controversies between China and the Netherlands, whose common goals as allies did not prevent clashes over diametrically opposed national pursuits. In exposing the conflicting nature of their respective nationalisms, these disputes elucidate the interplay of war, nationalism, and imperialism in East Asia as well as China's changing place in the emergent post-war regional and global orders. The Dutch refusal to accept these shifting realities and underlying notions of national self-determination presaged the traumatic trajectory of Indonesia's decolonisation.

KEYWORDS
China, imperialism, nationhood, the Netherlands, World War II

1 | INTRODUCTION

War makes nations, much as it unmakes them. In a public lecture commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, historian Ethan Mark observed that fighting the Axis Powers was only "half the battle" of World War II for those colonised peoples of the world who did not have their "own" nation (Mark, 2020b). This important insight suggests we must transcend static dichotomies between Allied and Axis powers and between aggressor and defender states and shift our attention from the main powers to "lesser" states and nations if we are to gain a fuller understanding of how World War II shaped and reshaped national destinies.

This article explores the strenuous relationship between China and the Netherlands during World War II through a lens of opposing nationalisms. This case was chosen for three reasons. First, examining the wartime dealings and tensions between two allied states with diametrically opposed regional interests shines a light beyond the conventional divides between Allied and Axis powers so as to reveal the intricate interplay of war, nationalism, and imperialism in East Asia. Second, exploring China's dealings with smaller countries and their colonies brings to the fore changes in China's foreign relations and shifts in the regional power balance that tend to go unnoticed in studies focusing on the major powers. Lastly, this relatively unknown case addresses long-standing gaps in the historiographies of both nations, offering fresh insights into Chinese nation-building attempts during the underexplored republican era and into the final throes of Dutch imperialism in Asia.

The following sections first review the literature on Chinese nationalism and Dutch imperialism in Asia and consider how these opposing nationalisms informed the relationship between China and the Netherlands in the decades leading up to World War II. The analysis then turns to two wartime controversies between the two allies: the status of ethnic Chinese in the Dutch East Indies and the treatment of Chinese seamen working on Dutch sea vessels. These cases illustrate how both sides perceived their wartime mutual dealings as a zero-sum contest of irreconcilable national pursuits. The collapse of the collective treaty system in China, prompted by new fissures between the imperialist powers that were opened by the war, allowed the Chinese government to deal with smaller regional powers like the Netherlands more assertively and effectively than before. The loss of prestige for the Dutch resulting from this reversal of the scales added to the deep wounds of the war that would drive Dutch post-war attempts to restore colonial rule in Indonesia.

2 | CHINESE ANTI-IMPERIALIST NATIONALISM

Although China was never a colony in the formal sense, Chinese nationalism in the early 20th century was predominantly anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist in nature. It is important not to equate this anti-imperialist national agenda with the Marxist-Leninist pursuits of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Not only did the former predate the latter by several decades, but different strands of Chinese revolutionary nationalism continued to co-exist and compete in subsequent periods (Friedman, 2008; Unger, 1996). Before Mao Zedong imported the Leninist concept of "semi-colony" into CCP parlance (Yang, 2019), there had already been a long tradition of Chinese revolutionaries and reformers who had sought to "save" the nation and rid it of what Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Chinese Republic, had called its "hypo-colony" status: "the colony of every nation that has made treaties with her" (Sun, 1938 [1927]: 38–9). Mao himself traced this revolutionary lineage back to the reforms of the 1890s, the revolution of 1911, and the May Fourth movement of 1919 (Mao, 1994 [1939]). But it was Chiang's Nationalist government, inaugurated at Nanjing in 1927, that first took up the baton of national revolution, until in 1949 it was forced to hand it over to its long-time rival.

In line with Sun Yat-sen's doctrine, Chiang advocated a sovereignty-centred, anti-imperialist brand of state nationalism aimed at national independence and self-determination, and equality among nations (Chiang, 1947; Zhao, 2004: 26–7, 49). In his defiant book *China's Destiny*, which was first published in March 1943 to mark the anniversary of Sun's death, Chiang noted that China had suffered "most and longest from foreign oppression," and

that "her demand for freedom and equality" was the most urgent (Chiang, 1947: 231). As early as 1932, the leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party (or Guomindang; GMD) had envisaged a "new China" that would arise from a second world war to stand on a par with the other great powers (Tsui, 2018, 115). Identifying imperialism as the principal cause of World War II, Chiang mused that "the end of the Second World War … must be the end of imperialism" and that "freedom for Asiatic peoples and equality for Asiatic states" was a precondition for "lasting world peace" (Chiang, 1947: 231–2). While these views were widely shared among GMD officialdom (e.g., Sun, 1944: 232), publication of the book amidst the Allied war effort nevertheless caused resentment in Western diplomatic quarters, as Chiang did not mince his words in denouncing the imperialist conduct of his Western allies, effectively equating this to Japanese imperialism.[1]

The Nationalists pursued their anti-imperialist agenda with remarkable success during the wartime period. Not only did Chiang's government emerge victorious from the war and reclaim several lost territories, it also succeeded in restoring national tariff autonomy, terminating Boxer indemnity payments, and abolishing the "unequal" treaties with Western imperial powers that it had inherited from the Qing. Claiming a spot among the "Big Five" in the post-war global order, China had transformed from a playground of the major powers into a great power in its own right (Kirby, 1997: 433–6). Despite these extraordinary accomplishments, China's diplomatic history has remained relatively understudied, emerging only recently from the "hole" that the Cold War created in the historiography of modern China (Mitter, 2013: 11). As a result, Kirby's (1997: 436) call for the "standard text on the diplomatic history of 20th-century China" has not yet been answered. Key works of Chinese nationalism have likewise paid little attention to Nationalist statecraft during World War II, as they have long focused on CCP-led programmes of revolutionary nationalism (e.g., Selden, 1995; Zhao, 2004), although this has begun to change with the recent arrival of work exploring the GMD's "unique brand of nationalism" and the challenges that confronted the Nationalist government in reconciling its anti-imperialist agenda with its growing involvement in an international system led by Western imperial powers (Tsui, 2018: 8–9, 20, 228).

In recent scholarship on China's World War II experience, meanwhile, there is a trend of focusing on subnational conditions and consequences of the war, investigating its bottom-up transformation of Chinese society and politics (Mitter, 2010: 87; Van de Ven et al., 2015). Few scholars have placed these events in a wider, global context. Notable exceptions include Robert Bickers, who placed his research on the British presence in China in the context of colonial culture and settler societies elsewhere (Bickers, 1999: 9), and James Hevia, who challenged the limitations of "China-centred approaches" by bringing "imperialism and colonialism back into the discussion of China's modernities" (Hevia, 2003: 11, 14). Another exception is Jianlang Wang, one of the few PRC scholars to date to have probed into the successful efforts of the Nationalist government to end the unequal treaties (Wang, 2016).

A common feature of studies of China's 20th-century statecraft, however, is that they deal almost exclusively with China's relations with the major Western powers. This is problematic for two reasons. First, focusing exclusively on the major powers and their continual attempts to shape China's destiny is bound to produce an incomplete understanding of the multi-faceted and multi-layered efforts, challenges, and achievements of the Nationalist government in its dealings with the 23 states (including 14 original treaty powers) represented in China's wartime capital (Chang & Zhou, 2017: 589–92). Second, a singular focus on the great powers not only neglects the qualitative transformation of China's relations with "lesser" powers during this critical period, but also limits our understanding of World War II's global legacies by obfuscating the implications of this transformation for the trajectory of nationalist movements in the region and the shaping of the post-war regional and global orders.

3 | DUTCH IMPERIALIST NATIONALISM

The nature of modern Dutch imperialism has long been a topic of debate, particularly among Dutch historians (Locher-Scholten, 1994; Wesseling, 1997). The debate was initially over how *imperialist* Dutch imperialism was, given its allegedly non-expansionist, non-violent, and strictly commercial purposes and manifestations. Some argued that

Dutch overseas conduct during the 19th and 20th centuries was "neutralist," and only mildly or "reluctantly" imperialist, and that it differed from that of the other European powers to such a degree that it did not fit the concept of modern imperialism. This interpretation has subsequently been challenged, shifting the debate to the question of how *Dutch* Dutch imperialism was, given the myriad peripheral, non-state, and non-Dutch actors historically involved in its empire (Koekkoek et al., 2017). Notions of Dutch imperial exceptionalism nevertheless persist, and continue to be disputed by those questioning the value of "nationalist" history (Legêne, 2017).

Despite these differences, most historians agree that from the 18th century onwards the Dutch no longer pursued an active geopolitical agenda (Raben, 2015). This view draws support from theories of international relations concerning the behaviour of small states as "structure-takers." According to these theories, major powers have the inherent capacity to make (or break) international structures, whereas smaller states are constrained in their policy options by the prevailing structures and the imperatives of dominant actors (Jesse & Dreyer, 2016; Reiter, 1996). This structural dependence is supposed to translate into a particular set of behavioural traits of the small state, including a preference for commercialist, neutralist, and legalist policies. Applying these theories to a small maritime nation lacking an inherent capacity to secure its vast overseas possessions against external threats, several historians have suggested that, from the 18th century onward, the Netherlands embraced neutralist foreign policies that were characterised by arms-length relations with the great powers, a liberal trade agenda, and strong support for international law (Hellema, 2005; Voorhoeve, 1979).

Although 1914 is widely seen as the cut-off date of Dutch colonial expansion, most historians agree that the nationalist ideologies and related notions of civilisational and cultural superiority that had underpinned ethnic segregationist policies in the colonies continued to inform Dutch colonial and foreign policies beyond that date (Locher-Scholten, 1994; Hutchinson, 2017: 99). These notions corresponded with what Kolstø (2019: 40) has termed the "ethnocratic" variety of imperialist nationalism, which reflects the idea that the imperial state should be "controlled by a specific nation or ethnic group, without combining this with any desire to spread their national culture to the entire population of the state." The persistent currency of such notions in the pre-war period explains the remarkable successes during the mid-1930s of the Indonesian branch of the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB), whose ultra-nationalist imperial agenda and hard-line stance against Indonesian nationalism drew strong support within the Dutch East Indies colonial community (Mark, 2020a).

In May 1940, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, leading Queen Wilhelmina to flee her homeland and establish a government in exile in London. Less than 2 years later, following the Allies' defeat in the Java Sea, Japanese forces occupied the Dutch East Indies. Historians have subsequently tied this deeply traumatic and humiliating wartime experience of dual defeat and dual occupation to the post-war colonial conflict in Indonesia (1947–1948) and the Dutch fixation on restoring their colonial empire in Asia at any cost (Wesseling, 1997: 120; Hutchinson, 2017: 111–2). Promises made by Wilhelmina in December 1942 to revise the colonial relationship and grant self-government to the Indonesian people were not made good after the war until the newly formed United Nations forced the Dutch to accept Indonesian independence and transfer sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia in 1949.

Dutch historical dealings with China have barely featured in scholarly debates about imperialism. This is puzzling in view of the complex and controversial role the overseas Chinese played in the sustenance of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia and the growing concern of the Chinese state with the wellbeing of overseas Chinese from the early 20th century onward. While there is no lack of scholarship on the overseas Chinese in Indonesia and their position in the Dutch colonial system, few of these studies consider the impact of Chinese nationalism on Dutch imperial policies and on China's diplomacy, and most conclude their analysis before the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies (see, e.g., Suryadinata, 1981; Tjiook-Liem, 2009).

Exceptions are few and far between. Reflecting then prevailing views on Dutch imperialism, Van Dongen's pioneering 1966 study argued that inherent neutralist tendencies served as a brake on Dutch imperialist designs in China. Thirty years later, Van der Putten (1996) challenged this view based on case studies of a currency dispute in the context of the Boxer indemnity and the trade in indentured labour between China and the Dutch East Indies. Both cases revealed that the nominally neutralist policies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries did little to hold

the Dutch back from systematically and deliberately exploiting China's weaknesses whenever this served their interests, typically by operating hand in glove with other foreign powers and foreign businesses in China.

Elsewhere I have detailed how Indonesia defined and continued to define modern Sino-Dutch relations even after Indonesia's formal independence in 1949 (Chang, 2019). A major bone of contention throughout the first half of the 20th century was the system of racial segregation and racial hierarchy that underpinned Dutch colonial rule in the East Indies, in which the ethnic Chinese (known as "foreign Orientals") occupied the middle position, ranked below the "Europeans" (which, since 1899, also included ethnic Japanese), but above the indigenous "*Inlanders*" (Willmott, 1961: 24). In addition to technical and budgetary constraints, Dutch policies were informed by fears that giving the Chinese equal legal status to "Europeans" might fan the flames of Indonesian nationalism (Vandenbosch, 1942: 365–6). Efforts by Chinese organisations and the Chinese state towards obtaining equal treatment were perceived by the Dutch colonial state as subversive and as undue interference in its internal affairs. As Nanjing's pursuit of international recognition intensified and Dutch power in the East waned, the controversy increasingly complicated their mutual ties.

To conclude this review, Dutch imperialist conduct in Asia did not set itself apart from that of the other powers by its intrinsic aims, but it did have some distinct features, three of which inform the ensuing analysis. First, as the largest and most important of the Netherlands' colonial "possessions," and the only one remaining in Asia, Indonesia was an indispensable symbol of the long-standing Dutch presence in the region and of their (fragile) prestige as a global power. Second, the profound imbalance between the vast geographical extent of the Dutch empire and its relative politico-military weakness resulted in a dominant emphasis in Dutch policy thinking on law and legality, both in terms of administering and controlling the colonial order internally and in seeking to protect it from (perceived) external threats through treaties and conventions. Third, one such major threat, often overlooked by scholars, was the large presence and growing dissatisfaction of the 1.2 million overseas Chinese in Indonesia—more than five times the number of "Europeans" in 1930—and the unprecedented levels of attention and concern over their fate emanating from nationalist China.

4 | SINO-DUTCH RELATIONS AND THE TREATY SYSTEM

Imperialism in China was institutionalised through a framework of interlocking arrangements and privileges set forth in a series of bilateral and plurilateral treaties concluded between the Qing Empire and the Western powers during the second half of the 19th century. The scope of these treaties was typically limited to specific geographies or domains: foreign trade and residency, customs, property protection, jurisdiction, navigation and stationing of foreign ships, proselytising, etc. While its fragmented nature and the multiple, competing beneficiaries of its complex agreements involving 19 treaty powers set this system apart from the more comprehensive and unitary imperial settings elsewhere (Hevia, 2003: 20; Breuilly, 2017: 21), imperialism in China was nevertheless based on a formal framework of treaty rights that had to be legally abrogated for China to achieve the desired "national emancipation."

The formal legal basis for Dutch participation in this system derived from the 1863 Sino-Dutch Treaty of Tianjin.[2] This instrument was modelled on similar treaties imposed on the Qing Empire by Britain, the United States and France in the aftermath of the Second Opium War. Article 15 of the Sino-Dutch treaty contained the most-favoured-nation clause, allowing the Dutch to automatically enjoy concessions made by China to other powers and thus to limit the treaty's provisions to issues that required an explicit legal basis. One such issue was extraterritoriality, a unilateral privilege—or "imperial tool," according to Kayaoğlu (2010)—that allowed foreign consular courts to claim exclusive jurisdiction over legal cases involving foreign citizens in China's treaty ports, thus effectively according them immunity from Chinese laws. Following the enactment of relevant statutes in 1871, the Dutch established consular courts in several of China's treaty ports for the adjudication of legal cases involving Dutch nationals (Ferguson, 1925: 153–5). Relying on the most-favoured-nation clause, the Dutch also joined the practice of appointing consular officers as observers and de facto co-judges to Chinese courts (Fishel, 1952: 18–25; Ferguson, 1925: 238–9). Moreover, the Dutch took an active stake in the management of the international

settlements at Shanghai and Xiamen through direct representation both on the executive municipal councils and on the supervising consular bodies (Ferguson, 1925: 179–90; Chang, 2019: 224–6).

Another important treaty in the Sino-Dutch relationship was the Boxer Protocol of 1901. Although it had not been a member of the Eight-Nation Alliance that had ended the Boxers' siege of the legation quarter, the Netherlands joined the subsequent peace negotiations to claim compensation for damages inflicted on the Dutch legation and for the precautionary deployment of three Dutch warships. Apart from providing the Dutch a fractional share in China's massive war reparations, the Boxer Protocol provided the basis for Dutch participation in the joint administration of the legation quarter in Beijing, the extension of the Dutch diplomatic compound, and the establishment of a permanent legation guard, which functioned until 1923.

As previous works have shown (Chang, 2019; Van der Putten, 1996; Van Dongen, 1966), participation in this system of collective imperialism offered the Dutch several benefits that they would not have enjoyed had they acted alone. In other words, its carefully maintained "neutral" foreign policy did not in fact preclude the Netherlands from systematically encroaching on China's sovereign rights, provided that it operated within the system and did not upset the major powers. Nor were the Dutch merely passive stakeholders—they had an active stake in the international settlements in several treaty ports, as already mentioned, and other examples can be found in the diplomatic sphere. Between 1923 and 1931, the foreign diplomatic body in Beijing was presided over by a Dutch senior minister, who showed great skill in leveraging the diplomatic body not only to serve the collective interests of the treaty powers but also to gain specific Dutch benefits. In some instances, he was able to secure concessions that surpassed those of the major powers (Oudendyk, 1939, Chang, 2019: 452).

A final instrument defining modern Sino-Dutch relations was the Consular Convention of 1911.[3] Although not an "unequal treaty" in the sense of granting the Dutch special rights in China, it was nonetheless considered a source of inequality by successive Chinese governments due to its role in sustaining the unequal treatment of ethnic Chinese in the Dutch empire. Since the 1890s, the Qing court had sought a consular presence in the Dutch East Indies in view of the fast-growing Chinese communities there (Tjiook-Liem, 2009: 457). The Dutch government initially resisted these requests, fearing that Chinese imperial consuls would not confine their interest to Chinese contract workers and other temporary sojourners (known as Totoks) but extend it to the much larger group of locally born Peranakan Chinese. Seeking a legal basis to prevent such interference, the Dutch introduced a new nationality law in 1910, which provided that those born in the Dutch East Indies of parents domiciled there were Dutch subjects, even if not Dutch citizens. This introduction of the birthright principle (or *jus soli*) was applied exclusively in Indonesia and deviated from Dutch legal tradition, which favoured the bloodline or *jus sanguinis* principle (Tjiook-Liem, 2009: 429). The Qing government, alarmed by the prospect of forced re-naturalisation of what it saw as its overseas subjects and encouraged by public opinion and calls from organisations of overseas Chinese, responded with legislation of its own. The first Chinese nationality law, drawn up in record time and promulgated even before the Dutch law was enacted, reflected the principle of *jus sanguinis* in its most extreme form. It effectively claimed all Peranakan Chinese as its subjects, including second- or third-generation Chinese immigrants who had little or no connection with China, did not speak Chinese, and often had Indonesian mothers and grandmothers (Willmott, 1961: 16; Suryadinata, 2002: 170–1; Dan, 2009, 10). As the price for finally obtaining a consular presence in Indonesia, however, the Qing had to accept that the Peranakans were excluded from its consuls' formal jurisdiction. Thus, without challenging dual nationality as such, the Consular Convention of 1911 provided that consular protection could only be extended to those Chinese nationals who were not considered Dutch subjects under Dutch law (Tjiook-Liem, 2009: 523–4). The fact that this did little to stop Chinese consuls from engaging with the Peranakan Chinese in practice is an example of the how the Dutch set themselves apart from the other powers in embracing legal fictions to sustain colonial rule.

The treaty system began to show its first signs of decay with World War I, which split the coalition of Western imperialist powers into two rival camps and deprived the Central Powers of their extraterritorial rights in China (Fishel, 1952). This was followed by Moscow's renunciation, after the October Revolution, of the imperialist privileges held by the former Czarist regime in China. The establishment of the Nationalist government in Nanjing placed

further pressure on the system. In line with this general trend, Sino-Dutch relations during the Nanjing Decade (1928–1937) saw several readjustments. In December 1928, the Dutch government gave up its right to interfere in Chinese custom duties, thus confirming China's national tariff autonomy.[4] In February 1930, the Dutch consul general at Shanghai ended Dutch involvement in Chinese court proceedings in the Shanghai International Settlement.[5] In April 1931, a treaty was signed providing for the automatic termination of Dutch consular jurisdiction in China simultaneously with (and under terms identical to) any future step to that end by the major powers.[6] Lastly, in April 1933, the Dutch government remitted its share in China's remaining Boxer debt, converting it into what today would be called "tied aid" in the scientific, educational and cultural domains.[7] In each of these cases the Dutch diplomats, negotiating from a position of relative strength and in concert with other powers, were largely able to dictate the terms of the new agreements (Chang, 2019: 131).

Like elsewhere in Asia (Hutchinson, 2017: 102), the real turning point came with World War II. The war opened two new fissures among the members of the diplomatic body in China. The first was a division between the Axis and Allied treaty powers, which entered into a competition over China's fate (Fishel, 1952; Wang, 2016). After China's formal war declaration in December 1941, a propaganda battle broke out between the two blocs over which would be the first to abrogate their special rights in that part of China that it formally recognised: "Free China," with its wartime headquarters in Chongqing, recognised by the Allies, versus occupied China and the collaborationist regime in Nanjing, recognised by the Axis powers. A second fissure, and de facto hierarchy, was that between Allied powers which were capable of offering real support to China's war effort, and those which were not. The Dutch rejection of Japanese demands for Indonesian oil and subsequent participation in the "ABCD" front (between the Americans, British, Chinese, and Dutch), even before a formal alliance took shape, initially gave Wilhelmina's government a presence in interallied structures and a corresponding degree of prestige. After the collapse of the Dutch defence of Indonesia in the spring of 1942, however, the ABCD front made way for the more durable coalition of the "Big Four" Allies (and future United Nations veto powers). Thus, while the Chinese found themselves represented on prestigious Allied summits discussing the post-war reconstruction of Asia, the Dutch became increasingly marginalised in terms of their contribution to the Allied war effort, their involvement in regional affairs, and their diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis China. Though formally an ally, the Netherlands had little to offer to Chongqing except symbolic and propagandistic support.

For practical purposes, the collapse of the treaty system was the result of China's coastal ports coming under Japanese occupation, causing the foreign councils and courts to dissolve. In formal-legal terms, Western imperialism in China ended as the Allies replaced the old, unequal treaties with new, "equal" ones. In January 1943, the United States and Britain abrogated their extraterritorial rights and signed new treaties with China in a symbolic gesture aimed to boost China's international status and compensate for the lack of critical supplies provided to their Eastern ally (Wang, 2016: 69–70; Van de Ven, 2017: 174–5). This move was followed in succession by the other Allied states holding treaty relations with China, including the Dutch, who were shocked to have been left out from the American–British initiative. Thus, the geopolitical realities of World War II prompted the treaty powers to hastily, albeit reluctantly, abrogate their special privileges in China, 100 years after the first unequal treaty. If the Opium Wars had turned China into a "semi-colony" of a concert of treaty powers, World War II thus signified the country's "de-semi-colonisation" and the birth of a legally sovereign Chinese state.

5 | ETHNIC CHINESE IN INDONESIA

The first wartime controversy in Sino-Dutch relations concerned the abolition of Dutch extraterritorial rights in China. As shown elsewhere in detail, the negotiations for this unilateral abrogation were unexpectedly arduous and lengthy, lasting almost three full years (Chang, 2019).[8] At stake in this dispute was not the sovereignty or integrity of the Chinese homeland, but the position of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. While the Dutch were ready to follow the precedent set by the Americans and British in surrendering their special rights in China and placing their bilateral

ties on an equal and reciprocal footing, they were *not* ready to adjust the pre-war status quo of Indonesia's segregated colonial society and legally equate the Chinese with the Europeans, which was what Chongqing essentially demanded. The Chinese resented that in this system of segregation they maintained a special position as "foreign Orientals," a category which no longer included most other Asians. Materially, the position of the overseas Chinese in Indonesia had improved considerably during the decades before the war, which saw the statutory limitations on their mobility, schooling, and judicial protection gradually being lifted (Tjiook-Liem, 2009: 630). By the 1930s, aside from remaining grievances concerning the provision of education, criminal procedure was the only area in which the Chinese were still treated on a par with the indigenous population (Vandenbosch, 1942: 365). But these issues were largely theoretical now that Indonesia was under Japanese occupation. Rather than pursuing actual change on the ground, the Chongqing government, emboldened by its newly won prestige as a major Allied power, viewed the one-to-one negotiations as an opportunity to put pressure on a smaller power and take a principled stance.

Chinese demands for change were reflected in three desiderata. First, Chongqing wanted a treaty provision allowing for consular protection of all ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, thus including the Peranakan Chinese who enjoyed dual nationality as a result of overlapping Dutch and Chinese claims. A second requirement, introduced later in the negotiations, was that Chinese nationals be granted the right to travel, reside, and carry on commerce throughout Dutch territories on terms identical to those of nationals of third countries. Lastly, Chongqing sought the removal of the immigration quota that the Dutch colonial administration had introduced in 1934, which in practice affected only Chinese immigrants.

In the final days of 1942, the two sides agreed that the negotiations would take place in London, indicating that they formally treated the matter as a Chinese initiative. This put the Chinese at a practical disadvantage because their lead negotiator in London, Ambassador Jin Wensi (whose English sobriquet was Wunsz King), had to consult Chongqing on all topics of discussion, although the time lag did also grant him some tactical space in formulating (tentative) positions. From the start of the negotiations, Jin pushed for a revision of the existing consular arrangement, citing the Sino-American and Sino-British treaties of January 1943, which contained reciprocal clauses on consular representation. The Dutch team, led on behalf of Foreign Minister Eelco van Kleffens by the acting secretary-general, Willem van Bylandt, countered that in this case there was no need for such a *reciprocal* clause because, contrary to the US and British cases, there was already a legal basis for Chinese consular representation in Dutch territory pursuant to the 1911 Consular Convention. The fact that Chongqing was challenging this pre-existing arrangement revived deep-seated fears of Chinese expansionist designs in Southeast Asia among some Dutch officials, including the Dutch ambassador in Chongqing, Antonius Lovink, who as Chinese counterintelligence chief in Indonesia's pre-war colonial administration had extensive experience dealing with Chinese "subversion."[9]

The dispute caused the negotiations to break down for several months, until the Dutch in July 1943 eventually agreed to model the new treaty as closely as possible on the American and British precedents. This apparent concession did not imply that the Dutch were ready to surrender their position; rather, the thinking was that as long as the new treaty text did not contravene the 1911 framework, the latter would remain in place and nothing would change in practice—a view that the Chinese government was to challenge. The decision to follow the American and British example also settled the second issue. The final wording of the clause on the right of travel and residency in each other's territories essentially amounted to a compromise between their respective initial positions that again left room for conflicting interpretations and for both sides to support their claims. This represented a win for the Chinese side, particularly when compared to the pre-war situation, when what the Dutch willed was routinely done. The flipside, however, was that the agreed course of procedure for the third issue favoured the Dutch position. As the American and British precedents did not touch on the issue of immigration, there was no reason why the Dutch would accept any provisions on the matter. The Dutch persisted and eventually won this battle, but only after several tense exchanges in London and Chongqing which at one point saw the Chinese side threatening to issue a public statement indicating its discontent about the status quo and the Dutch side threatening to refrain from concluding a new treaty altogether.

A close inspection of the diplomatic records warrants a number of observations. The first is that these bilateral negotiations were characterised by extraordinary levels of mutual distrust and frustration, fuelled by reciprocal accusations of impertinence and arrogant behaviour. Ambassador Lovink delivered several demarches at the Chinese foreign ministry, complaining about statements in the state-censored Chinese press that he considered to be "insulting" and "smearing" Dutch colonial politics in Indonesia. Protestations by China's acting foreign minister, Wu Guozhen, that his countrymen were merely seeking the lawful recognition of their equal rights, both at home and abroad, were pushed aside as expressions of ethnonational, expansionist tendencies, as the following excerpt from a letter to the foreign ministry in London demonstrates:

> [These protestations are] recurring symptoms of the traditional Chinese perception of countries like the Dutch East Indies, which geographically form part of those southern regions that the Chinese call *Nanyang*, and of the role that Chinese immigrants have played there. Because of the general Chinese superiority complex, these countries and their populations are instinctively regarded as backward, while the influence of Chinese "settlers" are perceived as lofty civilizing labour; all Chinese in these regions are "outposts" of the Chinese homeland, and continue to be so perceived, in spite of our nationality laws. Measures on our part to enforce our nationality laws, or to contain political activity among Chinese subjects within our state and lawful territories, are perceived as cruel and inhuman oppression.[10]

A related observation is that both sides perceived the issue increasingly in zero-sum terms. Like Japan several decades before it, China's pursuit of "equality" was informed primarily not by pragmatic concerns or idealist causes but by a desire to secure and assert great-power status (Shimazu, 1998: 2–5, 112–5; Tsui, 2018, 228). Again echoing Japan, an underlying sense of insecurity and hurt national pride made Chongqing at once dismissive of and highly sensitive to external opposition, even more so in its dealings with "lesser" powers (cf. Shimazu, 1998: 2, 172, 184, 187).[11] In its thirst for great-power status, the Nationalist government appeared indifferent to the demands of smaller states and incapable of considering Dutch concerns on their own terms. Reports from Chongqing revealed that Chiang Kai-shek had personally expressed his irritation over Dutch intransigence, encouraging Chinese officials to hold up Dutch routine requests in response.[12] The Dutch diplomats, in turn, were indignant about Chongqing's new assertiveness, and its failure, emboldened by encouragement from Washington, to recognise what the Dutch continued to see as their "special role" in the Far East.[13] Such representations framed a rising and emancipating China in direct opposition to the declining Dutch colonial state. A report by Lovink on the celebrations of the second United Nations Day in June 1943 clearly captured this sentiment:

> Whereas last year there were still clear signs of the existence of the ABCD front, this time around, the celebration completely focused on China and the three major powers, or the "Big Four" … Since the outbreak of the Pacific War so much praise has been heaped upon China that it actually has begun to perceive itself and act like one of the Big Four. Scarce attention is being reserved for the "smaller" [states], which are treated with an annoying condescension, coupled with a lack of good manners.[14]

Two years later, when the treaty negotiations reached their lowest point, Lovink once again vented his frustration over the Chinese attitude and the (perceived) reversal of the power balance between the two countries:

> I see in the impertinent behaviour of the [Chinese] Foreign Minister evidence of the blatant envy on the part of the Chinese for a "small" power sticking to its guns, which resulted in a loss of face of the "big" power and last-ditch attempts to get the maximum out of the negotiations through intimidation.[15]

As these reports make clear, the Dutch ambassador saw the Chinese desiderata as part of a wider, predetermined plan of the Chongqing government to use its new status and popular ideas of racial equality to establish a dominant position in Asia.[16] According to this view, China was exploiting the vacuum left by Japan's failure to build a Greater East Asia Prosperity Sphere to assert regional leadership and create its own sphere of influence, through the deployment of consuls, instead of soldiers, and by mobilising its overseas "nationals."[17] To hardliners like Lovink, these "imperial designs" represented a direct threat to Dutch plans for re-establishing a presence in Indonesia after the war. Alarmed by the constant stream of reports from Chongqing, the Dutch minister of colonies, Van Mook, urged the foreign ministry to alert the British and American governments to the dangers of this revival of the "old Chinese penetration politics."[18] Van Bylandt agreed to discuss these concerns with the Foreign Office but was reluctant to confide them to the State Department, given its "partially artificial pro-Chinese stance." He was soon vindicated in this caution when Stanley Hornbeck, head of the Far Eastern Division, told a Dutch diplomat that his government was too "critical" of China and would do well not to antagonise Chongqing, regardless of any Chinese mobilisation politics.[19] Whitehall appeared more receptive to the Dutch concerns but considered that China's post-war position would be too weak for Chongqing's regional politics to present a threat, and suggested that a "firm" stance would do for now.[20] Although their views on the matter were substantially the same, the British position thus reflected greater realism, foresight, and self-confidence than that of the Dutch. To Van Bylandt's repeated inquiries as to whether the issue of dual nationality had arisen in the Sino-British treaty negotiations, Ashley Clarke, head of the Far Eastern Department, responded that when an initial proposal for a provision on the matter had met with Chinese reservations, London simply proceeded to "place on record" their position through a unilateral note.[21]

These tentative inquiries made it clear to the Dutch that their principal allies did not support their views on China. This growing isolation reinforced the Dutch perception of the urgency of safeguarding the formal-legal status quo in Indonesia through the new treaty, thus further clouding their judgement of the shifting political realities. Politically, the Dutch would gain nothing from the new treaty, which was eventually signed in May 1945, and certainly not the good will initially anticipated. In practical terms, the treaty undermined the Dutch position after the war. While the Dutch government believed that the framework of the 1911 Consular Convention had survived unscathed, the Chinese government claimed that the new treaty had supplanted this framework, prompting a reprise of the wartime dispute.[22] Meanwhile, following their return to Indonesia in 1946, the Chinese consuls simply continued to engage in the affairs of the Peranakan Chinese, as they had done prior to the war in spite of the agreement of 1911 (Willmott, 1961: 33; Chang, 2019: 258).

Over time, the impact of Lovink's alarmist reports in London gradually waned. But to Dutch hardliners, many of whom would go on to play important roles in Dutch post-war colonial politics, the episode signified a third, symbolic defeat for the Dutch: having first lost their national homeland to the Nazis and their Asian crown colony to Japan, they were now being deprived of what was left of their regional prestige by China, a "semi-colony" known until not long before as the "sick man" of Asia.

6 | CHINESE SEAMEN ON DUTCH VESSELS

The second controversy in the wartime relations between the Netherlands and China involved discrimination against Chinese seamen working on Dutch sea vessels. Although seemingly a minor issue at a time of unprecedented global calamity, it became increasingly salient in their bilateral dealings from 1942 onwards.[23] On the Dutch side, this was because merchant vessels, numbering around 570, were essentially all that the Dutch had left to contribute to the Allied war effort following their defeat in Indonesia (de Jong, 1979: 758–9). In other words, what was left of Dutch prestige as an Ally and regional power was tied to these ships. At the same time, the issue loomed large on the agenda of the Chongqing government, which had been making a point of protecting its nationals abroad and seeking structural change and now sought to capitalise on its heightened prestige to secure better conditions for the 1200 Chinese seamen on Dutch vessels. The stakes were therefore high for both sides.

Most of the Chinese seamen on Allied ships were low-skilled laborers, based in the lower parts of the ship near or inside the engine rooms—places that were particularly vulnerable during enemy torpedo attacks. Aside from their dangerous and appalling working conditions, Chinese seamen also suffered from racial discrimination and outright abuse. With pay scales varying according to race and nationality, their wages were substantially lower than those of their European and Australian colleagues, and often they were excluded from special war compensations. Sometimes they were forced to work after their contracts had expired, while payment of wages took place months in arrears, if at all (Cottle, 2003: 136; Van der Horst, 2004: 92).

In early 1942, at the height of the Japanese offensive in the Pacific, Chinese crews on several Allied ships, including a number of Dutch ships, went on strike, demanding payment of wages owed, higher pay, and better working conditions. The Dutch authorities responded by detaining the workers who refused to return to sea. In several instances, violent clashes erupted between the Chinese detainees and the Dutch guards. In one particularly tragic case, involving the detainment of more than 400 seamen in Curaçao, a scuffle broke out and left 15 Chinese dead and another 40 wounded.[24]

In May 1942, the Chinese minister (soon to be ambassador), Jin Wensi, issued two strongly worded diplomatic protests to the Dutch foreign ministry, demanding compensation for the victims, punishment of the officers involved, and assurances that there would be no similar incidents in future.[25] Moreover, the Chongqing government used these incidents in the ongoing bilateral negotiations on the seamen's working conditions to back up demands for wage rises and equal treatment of Chinese and European workers.[26] The action offended the Dutch, who considered it "utterly impertinent" that an ally should present such demands in wartime.[27] The Chinese, on the other hand, found it unacceptable that violent means had been employed against Chinese seamen, despite their "vital and useful contribution" to the Allied cause, and warned that disagreements of this kind would allow the common enemy to "exploit such incidents by attributing their real cause to the existence of racial prejudices."[28] The dispute gave rise to acerbic exchanges, culminating at one point in Secretary General Van Bylandt referring to the Chinese seamen as "those damned nuisances."[29] During the same meeting, the Dutch diplomat tried, unsuccessfully, to have Jin Wensi withdraw his protest note, prompting the latter to observe, "so you are telling me to do this and that."[30]

Once again, the matter caused indignation and irritation among the highest echelons of the Chinese government. This became clear during an audience of Lovink's predecessor, baron Casper van Breugel Douglas, at the foreign ministry in Chongqing in July 1942, which was attended by Li Weiguo, director of general affairs of the foreign ministry and personal representative of Chiang Kai-shek.[31] During the meeting, the vice minister of foreign affairs, Fu Bingchang, did not mince his words in expressing the Chinese grievances, paraphrased in a Dutch diplomat's report as "a prevailing sentiment in Chinese government and party circles that Chinese are treated as inferior creatures and that the moment had arrived that the equality of the Chinese race be recognized."[32] With such strong sentiments at play, there was little room for compromise, as indicated by Jin Wensi to Van Bylandt during a meeting around the same time in London:

> The fact remains that there are so many Chinese killed and wounded, not only in Curaçao but also at Fremantle and Alexandria. My government and the whole nation have taken a most serious view of these incidents. I have also been doing my best to keep a pleasant atmosphere, but you see the whole thing is so unpleasant.[33]

7 | CONCLUSION

At the heart of the two disputes analysed in this article were the mutually incompatible nationalisms of a waning imperial power and an emerging, post-"colonial" nation-state. In both cases, it was the war and the sudden alliance of two unlikely partners that unlocked these pre-existing tensions and brought them to a head. As such, the

cases are emblematic of the new fissures that World War II opened up and the new pressures it generated. A number of observations illustrate this close relationship between war and "imperial collapse" (Hutchinson, 2017: 107, 110–12).

The first concerns institutional change. One of the major consequences of the war's global reach was that it caused the pre-war concert of Western treaty powers, previously united in their dealings with China through the system of extraterritoriality, to be split into two opposed camps, one of which was joined by China itself. Although China's influence within the Allied coalition remained limited compared to the major Allies, these events did signify a real change in the balance of power, one that materialised most clearly in China's dealings with "lesser" powers. This recalibration meant that the Chinese no longer had to accept that foreign states unilaterally dictated the terms of their dealings or secured favourable outcomes at their expense. On the contrary, the war allowed the Nationalist government to articulate and pursue its interests vis-à-vis smaller states far more persistently and effectively than before. In these dealings, Chongqing had more room to pursue its nation-building goals without compromising China's involvement in the international system and relations with the major powers (Tsui, 2018, 228). As to the Sino-Dutch relationship, this signified a reversal of the scales, both real and perceived. Whereas before the war the Dutch had been used to getting their way in China, courtesy of the treaty system, by the end of this period they found themselves unable to dictate even the terms of a symbolic, unilateral gesture. The Dutch tried, unsuccessfully, to resist or mitigate the structural changes caused by the war and their relegation to "small-power" status. This explains, for example, why the Dutch Foreign Minister, in a critical letter in *The Times* in May 1944, initially opposed the plans for the organisation of the United Nations and particularly the idea of a veto right for major powers, until it became clear soon afterwards that the Dutch had no choice but to accept and embrace the new order (de Jong, 1979: 658–60; Hellema, 2005: 118–19).

This leads to another observation. Despite the clear contours of the newly emerging global structures and institutions, the Dutch were far from ready to subscribe to the ideas of anti-colonialism and national self-determination that underpinned them. If anything, the painful experience of dual defeat during the earlier stages of the war, coupled with the perceived third, diplomatic "defeat" described above, reinforced Dutch ambitions of restoring colonial rule in Indonesia. Like Britain and France—the last of the Allies to relinquish extraterritoriality in China—the Netherlands paid lip service to the idea of national self-determination of all people while concealing a persistent clinging to empire inconsistent with US preferences (Breuilly, 2017: 11). These findings suggest that the subsequent Dutch colonial war in Indonesia can be more fully understood by taking into account the Dutch experience in the region during World War II. A further implication is the discrediting of claims in the more recent literature that notions of racial equality or Chinese legal reforms were foremost considerations in the decision of the Allies to abolish extraterritoriality in China (Kayaoğlu, 2010: 150, 185–9). At no point were such considerations a driving force in the complex and lengthy negotiations between the Netherlands and China. Rather, the decision to end extraterritoriality was the result of a breakdown of the imperialist institutions in China, precipitated by the war and the interallied competition prompted by it, combined with a new momentum in Chinese state-building pursuits and evolving American visions of the future international order. The Dutch, unwilling to promise full racial equality in its main colony, resorted to legal fictions in the hope of avoiding change.

While major wars may catalyse processes of the reordering of global power, they do not have the same effect on the ideas on which such orders are founded (Hutchinson, 2017: 195). In exploring these contradictions from a standpoint of conflicting nationalisms, this study has brought together distinct historiographies into a single frame to shed new light on the global legacies of World War II. The concept of competing nationalisms has proven more instructive a frame of analysis than an empire/nation dichotomy, as it allows for particularistic aspects of nationalisms and acknowledges that "anti-imperialist" nationalism in itself may encompass imperial tendencies in making counterdemands and applying counterpressure (Hutchinson, 2017: 120, 123). Such tendencies were reflected, for example, in Chinese attempts to secure and enforce the perpetual allegiance of its overseas subjects through nationality laws (Vandenbosch, 1942: 354; Dan, 2009: 17). The analysis suggests that to assess World War II and its continuing legacies in Asia we need to move beyond conventional divides and dichotomies, and delve deeper into the

myriad of substantive links across imperial and colonial states, including smaller ones. One needs to look to China to understand Dutch colonial conduct and plans for Indonesia, and to look at China's dealings with smaller states to appreciate its wartime transformation and achievements. China was never a colony and the Dutch did not seek colonial control there. Nonetheless, their structurally opposed nationalist drives proved more powerful than nominal ties of alliance. While discriminating against ethnic Chinese was not an end goal for the Dutch colonial administrators in Indonesia, it nevertheless occurred deliberately and purposefully, as part of broader ethnonationalist agenda aimed at preserving a dominant position in Indonesia in the post-war system. As the Dutch were to find out, this was rendered impossible by the structural changes prompted by the war, reflected in China's new-found position and heightened prestige.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Lovink to Kleffens, February 6, 1945 (Dutch National Archives [DNA] 2.05.80/227).

[2] Treaty dated October 6, 1863, Dutch official gazette, *Staatsblad*, no. 119 (1865).

[3] Treaty dated May 8, 1911, *Staatsblad*, no. 280 (1911).

[4] Treaty dated December 19, 1928, *Staatsblad*, no. 322 (1930).

[5] Agreement dated February 17, 1930 between Brazil, Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, and China, *UK* Treaty Series, no. 20 (1930); US Executive Agreement Series, no. 37 (1932), no. 362.

[6] Treaty dated April 24, 1931, *Staatsblad*, no. 522 (1931).

[7] Diplomatic notes exchanged on April 4, 1933. See DNA 2.05.90/307; Taiwan National Archives Administration, Taipei, 0020/331.3/0001.

[8] This section draws from this earlier study and from additional primary sources. For Dutch official archives concerning the treaty negotiations, see the Dutch National Archives (DNA) 2.05.80/1098 and 2.05.90/804. For the Chinese position, I have additionally relied on the private archives of Ambassador Jin Wensi, preserved in the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford (HIA), 68,042, Jin Wensi Papers. See Chang (2019: 229–52) for detailed additional references.

[9] For example, Lovink to Kleffens, April 26, 1943, May 30, 1945 and July 16, 1945 (DNA 2.05.80/227).

[10] Lovink to Kleffens, August 24, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1098) and January 29, 1946 (DNA 2.05.90/117).

[11] Comparisons with Japan's regional aims and policies were frequently made by Dutch officials. See, for example, notes 17 and 18 below.

[12] Lovink to Kleffens, August 16, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1098).

[13] Lovink to Kleffens, June 17, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/762).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Lovink to Kleffens, April 18 and 19, 1945 (DNA 2.05.80/1098).

[16] Lovink to Kleffens, July 15, 1945 (DNA 2.05.80/227).

[17] Lovink to Kleffens, April 26 and August 24, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1106).

[18] Van Mook to Kleffens, November 16, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1106).

[19] Kleffens to Loudon, November 24, 1943; Loudon to Kleffens, December 21, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1106).

[20] Michiels van Verduynen to Kleffens, December 4, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1106).

[21] Clarke to Bylandt, September 3 and November 11, 1943 (DNA 2.05.80/1098).

[22] See, for example, Waijiaobu to Dutch embassy, May 11, 1946 and August 20, 1948; Jiang Jiadong to Elink Schuurman, November 17, 1947 and October 14, 1948 (DNA 2.05.52/309). See also Chang, 2019: 257–60.

[23] For complete diplomatic correspondence and Dutch internal reports on this issue, see DNA 2.05.80/4014 and 4027. For minutes of bilateral meetings and Chinese internal notes, see HIA, 68042, Jin Wensi Papers.

[24] Major incidents took place on March 7, 1942, at Fremantle, Australia, on March 31, 1942 at Alexandria, Egypt, and in early April 1942 in Curaçao. See DNA 2.05.80/4027 and 2.10.45/263; Jin Wensi Papers, interviews 199–209. On the Curaçao case, see also Van der Horst (2004: 92–3).

[25] Jin to Kleffens, July 17, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4027); Jin Wensi Papers, interviews 199, 204.

[26] Jin Wensi Papers, interview 200.

[27] Bylandt to Breugel Douglas, August 20, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4027).

[28] Jin Wensi to Michiels, July 17, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4027); Jin Wensi Papers, interview 199.

[29] At the end of the conversation, in an awkward attempt to make up for this indiscretion, Van Bylandt told Jin that he was taking his wife for lunch in a Chinese restaurant that day, which "showed that he had no ill-feelings towards the Chinese." Jin Wensi Papers, interview 204.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Breugel to Kleffens, July 24, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4014).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Jin Wensi Papers, interview 204.

[34] Bylandt to Jin Wensi, July 30, 1942; Jin Wensi Papers, interviews 199, 208, 232; Jin Wensi to Bylandt, August 19, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4014); Breugel to Kleffens (DNA 2.05.80/227).

[35] Kerstens to Kleffens, November 13, 1942; Breugel to Kleffens, June 8, 1942 (DNA 2.05.80/4014).

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