Nobuto Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901–1942*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019, ix + 294 pp., ISBN: 9789004362543, price: EUR 136.00 / USD 164.00 (hardback).

With Queen Wilhelmina's annual Royal Oration of 1901, the Dutch government announced a new colonial policy, the so-called Ethical Policy. In this policy, the poverty among the Javanese was officially acknowledged, although it was described euphemistically as 'declining welfare.' A new political, social, and economic environment for indigenous intellectuals was created. Meanwhile, the policy also marked a period of 'national awakening' for Chinese-Indonesian communities, when opportunities for organizational and mobilizational politics increased, notably in Java.

During this 'age in motion', this liberal wind strengthened the foundations of communication in colonial Indonesia and promoted the growth of the printing industry. Through the press and political meetings, numerous organizations provided an essential space for expressing, exchanging, and disseminating ideas. It also provided momentum for the proliferation of critical papers, which were accused of being radical by the colonial authorities, such as *Sin Po* and *Medan Prijaji*. These outlets often criticized all forms of discrimination experienced by 'people of color'. They also encouraged self-governance for the *Bumiputera* (Indigenous People) of Indonesia.

This change of political circumstances yielded an intimate intermingling between the liberal notions of press freedom and the colonial obsession with 'tranquility and order' (*rust en orde*). In the book here under review, Nobuto Yamamoto highlights this period as the age of press monitoring amidst an era of political movements. He shows how colonial anxiety paved the way for the introduction of the two principal kinds of censorship, *persdelict* (press offence) and *persbreidel* (press restriction) as tools to grasp, control, and shape public opinion, as well as the reinforce the legitimacy of authorities.

By utilizing a variety of confidential colonial documents, such as the *mail-rapporten* (mail reports) and archives of the former Ministry of Colonies, which contain rich translations from local-language periodicals and newspapers from the colonial era, Nobuto reveals how those forms of censorship worked. He investigates the different approaches of newspapers to respond to the censorship and the ways they were forced to adjust to the colonial state, which became more conservative. For Nobuto, censorship can be described as a political institution that brings about explicit cultural and political expressions. It principally comprises a control mechanism over what is permitted and/or desired to be exposed, and what is not.

One crucial lynchpin of this book is the transnational aspect. Nobuto examines how domestic security threats and international politics influenced censorship and how newspapers accustomed to each of these transitions. *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia* demonstrates that after Lenin gained control over Russia in 1917, the German Emperor Wilhelm II relinquished power in 1918, and the economic depression hit colonial Indonesia in the early 1920s, the colonial government became more defensive and more conservative. These domestic and international circumstances inevitably affected press censorship in colonial Indonesia.

Although the development of the printing industry unavoidably generated great anxiety for the Indies government, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia* argues that the Indies censorship also facilitated the development of print culture in colonial Indonesia, particularly of Malay-language publications. Meanwhile, around the same time, Chinese-Malay newspapers proliferated not only as a medium for commercial news, but also began to cover social and legal affairs as well as political events. They initiated their own platform for contested ideas and created the necessary public sphere for an emerging nation.

Moreover, the spread of Communist ideas, Chinese transnational activism, the Great Depression, women's emancipation, the discourse of political self-determination, and rapid penetrations of Chinese and Japanese immigrants into the Indies also stimulated and facilitated the search for an Indies identity. This situation contributed to the pressures on political activists in colonial Indonesia, which culminated in the institutionalization of administrative action to regulate the press and punish many progressive activists.

Sin Po, the most widely circulated Chinese-Malay newspaper in the Indies, for instance, got reprimanded and punished several times due to its publication of numerous anti-Japanese pieces. Furthermore, radical nationalists such as Semaoen and Tan Malaka were exiled to Europe, while Chinese activists who had connections with Kuomintang were deported to China. In other words, Dutch politics turned hardline. Freedom of expression and freedom of association were severely restricted, and the Indies subsequently became a 'police-state' in the 1930s.

During this period, political censorship against the press shifted its primary target from the Indonesian nationalists to the Chinese, following Japan's aggression in mainland China. Because of their strong anti-Japanese sentiment, the Chinese in colonial Indonesia became visible in international affairs. Even though the Indies Chinese community may have been relatively small, they had a loud voice and carried out vigorous action. The Japanese authorities were displeased by their relentless criticism, insults, and calls for a boycott of Japanese products.

The colonial state regarded their actions as a risk and decided to use the momentum to introduce Press Curbing Ordinance (*persbreidelordonnantie*) in 1931. Any newspaper which published anti-Japanese or otherwise offensive articles to the colonial authorities was charged with *persbreidel*. A number of Chinese newspapers in both Chinese and Malay became frequent targets of this *persbreidel* action, with more than 80 cases of newspaper closures (many of them Chinese-owned) since the introduction of the ordinance.

Nobuto ends his fascinating book with the advent of the Japanese military regime in 1942, which ushered in a new era of censorship in Indonesia. All Chinese-Indonesian publications were shut down, except for *Hong Po*, which was allowed to operate due to its pro-Japanese attitude from the colonial times. Many progressive Chinese journalists and writers who had been vocal critics of Japan's invasion in China found themselves arrested, tortured, or intimidated. Meanwhile, the other publishing businesses were put under tight surveillance with no room for criticism at all. The print culture that journalists and writers enjoyed during the colonial days, albeit with its fair share of problems, had ended.

Censorship in Colonial Indonesia will be a valuable resource for future scholars, especially for anyone interested in the history of colonial Indonesia as a surveillance state, or the history of the press in Indonesia. I certainly hope this book will stimulate the rise of other works on related topics.

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