CHAPTER II
A new century, a new elan

In 1898 the sudden demise of Spain as a Colonial Power and the parallel that could be drawn with the position of the Netherlands as a weak European state with a large Asian colony does not appear to have worried many at the time. There was a feeling that what had happened to Spain could never happen to the Netherlands. Spain had mismanaged its colonies and had been confronted with widespread popular unrest. This was what had brought about the downfall; not the war with the United States. It was argued with a certain degree of persistence that the situation in the Netherlands Indies was different. In Java, remaining silent about the difficulties the Dutch experienced in other quarters of the Archipelago, a military observer had remarked at the time, ‘we can trust the native population and their heads to be so devoted to us that even in times of war there is no fear of danger’. Though his observation did not exactly ring true and not everybody was so confident about the pro-Dutch sentiments of the Javanese, ‘Remember the Philippines’ became a slogan of the critics of colonial policy warning Batavia and The Hague not to alienate the local population by their policies and instructions. People’s loyalty, their contentment with colonial rule, was the key element to assure the continued presence of Holland in the Netherlands Indies, at least of equal importance to the strength of its colonial army and Navy, which had the task of repelling a foreign invasion (Egbert 1902:8; Visser 1913:6). It would also pre-empt any invasion of the colony under the pretext that the Dutch had ceded their right to rule because they had neglected the interests of the population.

To contemporary politicians and statesmen around the turn of the century, such reflections may well have been an incentive equally important as moral considerations to embark upon what is dubbed the Ethical Policy, defined by E.B. Locher-Scholten (1981:112, 176-218) as ‘an active pursuit of the development of land and people of the Indian Archipelago, under Dutch rule and according to a Western model’. They stressed that the best way to assure the loyalty of the population was by demonstrating that Dutch rule was benevolent, and that the Dutch had the interests of the people at heart. It was to

1 De Locomotief, 3-10-1898; Bootsma 1986:122, note 18.
Modern articles of clothing as trade mark of a Chinese firm in Kudus selling European and ‘native cigars and cigarettes’ (Javasche Courant 1914, Trade mark 7075).

remain Dutch government policy in the decades to come, resulting in an attitude towards Indonesian nationalism which many laymen thought was too lenient. In the Dutch parliament in February 1918 Th.B. Pleyte explained that one of the prerequisites for holding on to the Netherlands Indies as a Dutch colonial possession was an ‘unselfish domestic policy’ preparing the population for self-government. This attitude was given substance by expanding educational opportunities, by launching various projects to improve welfare and prosperity, and by allowing a modest degree of political emancipation and a certain say in administering local affairs; though with respect to the last