

Publication Trends in International Indonesian Studies: The Asia-Pacific Region as New Gravitation Centre

Research >
Southeast Asia

It is the fate of almost every Indonesianist who carries out historical research that he or she must possess some modicum of skill in reading Dutch-language material. The reason is simple: until the 1940s/1950s, almost all publications concerning the former Dutch colony were published in the language of the colonizer. It may even be said that the Netherlands enjoyed a factual research monopoly in Indonesian Studies. Such power over the production of knowledge and 'knowing the world', as postcolonial studies has witnessed, enabled and, in many ways, determined the colonial endeavour. It is, therefore, not surprising that foreign research concerning Indonesia has always been a matter of strategic importance, not only for Indonesian scholars, but also for the political elite of the Republic of Indonesia. Over the last fifty years, how has the situation changed? Does the Netherlands (here read, intellectualism and academic institutions) still dominate in the field of research on Indonesia? Or has their position shifted from centre?

By Arndt Graf

This analysis surveys some basic quantitative trends in international Indonesian Studies in the 1990s. The source material is taken from *Excerpta Indonesica*, the bibliographical periodical published twice a year at the KITLV in Leiden (the Netherlands). *Excerpta Indonesica* provides a unique source in that it renders annotated citations of

'almost all'* research contributions (mostly articles) in journals and readers published on Indonesia. The disciplines covered are mainly from the humanities and social sciences, although certain other disciplines also appear (geography, medicine, etc.). The claimed scope is worldwide, although certain countries and journals are more favoured than are others. This is traditionally true for articles published in the Netherlands,

since they naturally find their way more easily into the holdings of the KITLV library, which constitutes the material basis for *Excerpta Indonesica*. The inclusion/exclusion policy of *Excerpta Indonesica* is often problematized in the field, since this bibliographical journal exerts an important gatekeeping function in the dissemination and, hence, the production of knowledge in Indonesian Studies. This makes it all the more interesting to look at the representation of international Indonesian Studies in this influential journal.

Excerpta Indonesica has rendered an additional service, important for the purpose of the present study, in every edition since the early 1990s: the

introduction typically includes general statistics indicating the numbers of contributions on Indonesia listed according to country of publication. Such a helpful indication suggests what the net balance of publications in journals, readers, and so on, would be. Since the production of these publications is usually linked to centres of Indonesian Studies, this also tells us something about the international drawing power and importance of the various national centres of Indonesian Studies. On the other hand, it also betrays a certain bias, disfavours small countries with few researchers as well as less publicized publication opportunities for an international audience.

The analysis of the aggregate numbers of the 1990s shows in which regions and countries the most publications on Indonesia appeared. Some interesting results should be highlighted. The ranking of Indonesia in first place (representing about a third of world publications) demonstrates that the enormous investments in the education sector since independence (1945) have drastically shifted the balance in the production of knowledge concerning Indonesia to the former Dutch colo-

onial power itself. In other words, increasingly more Indonesians are writing their own story, on their own terms, thus forcing the international community of scholars to shift not only their assumptions concerning what is or is not a viable 'primary source', but also its requirements concerning language acquisition. It is no longer possible to carry out viable research concerning Indonesia without possessing the ability to read, write, and speak in Bahasa Indonesia.

In this context, it is interesting to see that the Netherlands, as the former colonial power, has lost most of its overwhelming global predominance in Indonesian Studies that lasted at least up until the 1950s. If we only count the statistics available for the 1990's via *Excerpta Indonesica*, less than 20 per cent of all published articles now appear in the Netherlands. Given the ongoing cuts in Indonesian Studies in the Netherlands, this percentage will probably further shrink. On the other hand, the Netherlands is still the most important place for Indonesianist publications in Europe (about 50 per cent). This regional prominence might continue for quite some time, even if other less well-represented European coun-

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* For a more detailed discussion cf. A. Graf, 'Der deutsche Beitrag zur internationalen Indonesistik in den 1990er Jahren: ein Blick auf die Repräsentation in *Excerpta Indonesica*', *Asien*, January 2003.

tries expand Indonesian Studies in the future.

Europe in general has lost its former central position in Indonesian Studies. Enjoying, today, about 38 per cent of global publication, its share might continue to shrink in the future, eventually reaching a third or less. This development might lead to a new wave of international cooperation between Europe and the other centres of Indonesian Studies in Asia-Pacific and North America.

The leading market for Indonesian Studies is now in the Asia-Pacific countries, including Australia. This country alone, which has about the population size of the metropolitan area of Jakarta, is producing as much Indonesianist output as the entire US. An interesting result, on the other hand, is the low turn out of ASEAN countries. If this reflects not just *Excerpta Indonesica's* bias, but, rather, a lack of Indonesianist centres in, say, Thailand or the Philippines, one could expect to see more efforts put into Indonesian Studies in these countries in the future.

The United States, despite their role as the only remaining superpower in many other fields, do not play a central role in publications on Indonesia, the world's most populous Islamic country.

In fact, American contributions constituted less than 10 per cent of the world output in the 1990s. The question is whether these numbers reflect a general lack of interest in Indonesia and Indonesian Studies in the USA and whether this, if unchanged, might have serious long-term consequences for American-Indonesian relations. ◀

Reference

- *Excerpta Indonesica*, Leiden: KITLV Press (1970-)

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