

Foreword

This book grew out of another one: *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*. Writing it made me realise how much international developments in the Pacific in the previous decades had shaped Dutch anxieties about the Netherlands being able to hold on to its colony in the East. The conduct of the mighty colonial powers of those days, quarrelling over acquiring new territory and trying to expand their spheres of influence, made the Dutch position in what the Dutch considered their colony and their sphere of influence in Southeast Asia appear far from safe. The feeling was that the powers were dividing up the Pacific and a large part of Asia amongst themselves and that the Netherlands Indies could well fall prey to an unscrupulous nation stopping at nothing to satisfy its territorial appetite. The Netherlands was a weak country, without a strong army and navy. It would be unable to repel an invasion of the Netherlands Indies or prevent other countries from establishing footholds in those parts of the archipelago where Dutch control was weak or non-existent. The data collected to sketch the background of these Dutch anxieties, which for reasons of space could not be dealt with in detail, forms the basis from which the present study about the rivalries between the powers in Asia and the Western Pacific between 1870 and 1914 grew. The year 1870 was selected as the starting point because of the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869 and the birth of the German Empire in January 1871, when Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, was crowned Emperor of Germany.

In the three decades that followed, Great Britain and Germany quarrelled over New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, Fiji and Samoa. France and Great Britain competed over control of continental Southeast Asia and became involved in a series of diplomatic conflicts about establishing protectorates in island groups in the South Pacific and actually annexing some of them. The United States became entangled in the dispute over Samoa and annexed the Philippines and Hawaii, while Japan became a power in its own right. By 1900, a possible disintegration of China and the efforts of the powers to gain as much as they could from China's weakness or to prevent contenders from doing so had added a new dimension to the rivalries between the powers in the Pacific. Clashing foreign economic and political interests in China made for speculation about a great war that might erupt at any moment; a war on an unprecedented scale involving, as it would, most if not all of the powerful nations of the day. There was no such confrontation, but the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 allowed

Japan to take possession of South Manchuria and Korea and added to the suspicion that Japan was aiming at naval supremacy in the Pacific. Japan building a strong navy, and the retreat from Asian waters of the British fleet, needed in Europe to face the German danger in the North Sea, was viewed with anxiety not only in the Netherlands Indies but also in Australia and New Zealand. Japan's growing military might also prompted a naval race between the United States and Japan. Americans came to consider Japan a threat to recently acquired Hawaii and the Philippines, and even did not preclude a Japanese invasion of America's unprotected west coast.

This study focuses on the Western Pacific and the Far East, but the relations between Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia, suspicious of each other's intentions in Afghanistan and Persia, both countries bordering on India, also had to be taken into account. India was Great Britain's most valued colonial possession and loomed large in British strategic and commercial considerations on how to proceed in China and Southeast Asia. For Russians, the western and northern border of Afghanistan were regions where it could, when necessary, put pressure on the British and thus pin down British troops in India that might otherwise be deployed elsewhere. In this way, Central and East Asia became interwoven as one theatre where the strategic game was played and moves and countermoves were contemplated.

Writing about the past means a lot of sitting in libraries and archives. My thanks goes to their staff, but there is one person I want to thank in particular: Dr G.P. Rouffaer, adjunct secretary of the KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) between 1898 and 1909. He is long dead, but we owe it in part to him that the KITLV has such a fantastic collection of books – not only its renowned collection on Indonesia, but also on the rest of Asia and the Western Pacific. Rouffaer's broad-minded, liberal acquisition policy was not always understood by those in charge, who refused to spend money on books that they believed did not fit into the collection, but Rouffaer usually found ways to ensure that the books which he found worthwhile ended up in the KITLV collection. Many of those books I used for this study. People like Rouffaer deserve to be remembered. Without them, many libraries would not be what they are now.

Current librarians will immediately recognise Rouffaer's predicament. In recent decades, for reasons of money and available space, acquisition criteria have become increasingly narrow. Both academic and public libraries are threatened with closure or drastic financial cuts. Among

the victims is the KITLV Library. It has been incorporated in the Leiden University Library and does not exist anymore as an independent institution. This unfortunate event is an additional reason to thank those who were always ready to help me and other visitors of the reading room: Rini Hogewoning, Josephine Schrama, Sven Aalten, Nico van Rooijen and Alfred Schipper.

