In 1949 the Netherlands transferred the sovereignty over the Dutch East Indies to the Republic of Indonesia. It took the two countries more than a quarter century to redefine their cultural relations in a list of Joint Recommendations, including the transfer of cultural objects and the exchange of archives. A number of objects and archives were actually transferred and the cooperation between heritage institutions in both countries was intensified. The Joint Recommendations have always been considered a good example for former colonisers and former colonised to modernise their cultural relations. The creation and the implementation of the Joint Recommendations have scarcely been the subject of academic research. A footnote in Isn’t it all culture - Culture and Dutch development policy in the post-colonial period by Susan Legêne and Els Postel-Coster (2000: 359) has been the inducement to take them up for research. The two Dutch authors pointed to the question of the whereabouts of the kris (dagger) taken from Indonesia’s national hero Diponegoro by the Dutch in 1830 and still wanted by the Indonesian authorities.

I will describe the creation and the implementation of the Joint Recommendations. How were cultural goods and archives part of the negotiations for the redefining of the cultural relations after the transfer of sovereignty in 1949? What arguments were used with respect to the location of the objects at the time? Were the Joint Recommendations, which the two countries finally agreed upon, based in ethical or in legal principles? And why did Indonesia, after the initial transfer of cultural objects, later on never claim other objects from the Netherlands? The research is based upon mostly Dutch archives, including internal reports of Dutch delegation members, and literature-study.