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Translating China : Henri Borel (1869-1933)

Heijns, A.J.

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Author: Heijns, A.J.

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Biographical Note

Henri Borel (1869-1933), born in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, was a writer, sinologist, translator and poet. He studied Hokkien Chinese at Leiden University, the Netherlands, and in Xiamen, China (1888-1894). Thereupon he was appointed Chinese Interpreter (later: Advisor for Chinese Affairs) in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) (1894-1916). His career was one of ups and downs: in his quest for justice, Borel exposed scandals which led to transfers and (sick) leaves. Eventually, Borel returned to the Netherlands early 1913, and received honorable discharge on grounds of physical disability in 1916. That same year, Borel took up the appointment of Editor of the Drama and Literature section of *The Fatherland* (Het Vaderland). In 1920, Borel made his last trip to the East, during which he wrote weekly travel letters for publication in *The Fatherland*. Borel wrote prolifically throughout the forty years that he was active. He became known for his critical articles in newspapers and magazines, and novels such as *The Young Boy* (Het Jongetje) and *A Dream* (Een droom). Yet, he was most appreciated for his work on China and his translations of Chinese literature, in particular *Wisdom and Beauty from China* (Wijsheid en schoonheid uit China), *Chinese Philosophy Annotated for Non-sinologists* (Chinese filosofie, toegelicht voor niet-sinologen), *Daybreak in the East* (Het daghet in den Oosten) and *The Spirit of China* (De geest van China). Borel was almost 64, when he died in The Hague in 1933.

Biographical Timeline

1869	Born in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, on 23 November
1888	Studied Hokkien Chinese in Leiden, the Netherlands, for four years
1892	Studied Hokkien Chinese in Xiamen, China, for two years
1894	Appointed as Chinese Interpreter in Riau, Dutch East Indies
1895	Published <i>Wisdom and Beauty from China</i>
1896	Transferred to Makassar, Dutch East Indies. Published volume I <i>Confucius</i> in the series <i>Chinese Philosophy Annotated for Non-Sinologists</i>
1897	Published volume II <i>Laozi</i> in the series <i>Chinese Philosophy Annotated for Non-Sinologists</i> , and <i>Guanyin: A Book of the Gods and the Hell</i> .
1898	Transferred to Surabaya, Dutch East Indies.
1899	Went on sick leave and returned to the Netherlands.
1900	Published <i>The Chinese in the Dutch East Indies</i>
1903	Reappointed in Riau, Dutch East Indies
1904	Went on sick leave and returned to the Netherlands
1905	Appointed Official for Chinese Affairs in Semarang, Dutch East Indies. Published <i>Wisdom and Beauty from the Indies</i>
1908	Transferred to Pontianak, Dutch East Indies
1909	Transferred to Surabaya, Dutch East Indies. Studied Mandarin Chinese in Beijing, China, in September 1909 for four months
1910	Published <i>Daybreak in the East</i>
1912	Transferred to Makassar, Dutch East Indies
1913	Went on leave to the Netherlands
1916	Received honorable discharge due to physical disability. Appointed Editor of the Drama and Literature section of <i>The Fatherland</i> . Published <i>The Spirit of China</i>
1920	Traveled to Asia (Dutch East Indies and China)
1922	Published <i>The Beautiful Island, a Second Book of Wisdom and Beauty from China</i>
1925(6?)	Published <i>Of Life and Death</i>
1931	Published volume III <i>Mencius, People's Tribune of China</i> in the series <i>Chinese Philosophy Annotated for Non-Sinologists</i>
1933	Died in The Hague, the Netherlands on 31 August

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Earlier versions of (part of) some chapters have been presented at conferences, and I am grateful for the feedback I received in these settings:

Chapter 2: 'Moving beyond: The Translator as Poet', at the *Fifth International Conference on Translation and Cross-Culture*, Taipei (15 November 2014), and published in *Cross-cultural Studies* (2:1), 2015. 'On the Translation and Transfer of Culture—a case study of Henri Borel's *Wisdom and Beauty from China*', at *Found in Translation: the International Conference on Translation and Multiculturalism*, Kuala Lumpur (23-25 July 2010). 'A Probe into the Process of Converting the Orient: Translating Chinese Hell', at the *8th Annual Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Hong Kong (ASAHK)*, Hong Kong (8-9 March 2013). 'Henri Borel (1869-1933). 'Translations from Chinese into Dutch', at the *First Young Researchers' Conference on Chinese Translation Studies: a New Look at Historical and Cultural Contexts*, Hong Kong (23-25 June 2004).

Chapter 5: 'The Translation of Culture in Travel Writing—a case study of Henri Borel's *The New China*', at the *FIT Sixth Asian Forum: Translation and Intercultural Communication: Past Present and Future*, Macao (6-8 November 2010).

Chapter 7: 'The Translator as Actor: Performing Chinese Stories on a Dutch Stage', at the *Colloquium Performativity and Translation*, Hong Kong (9-10 January 2014). 'Western Perception of Chinese Culture: A Case Study of Chinese-Dutch Translation, at the *1st East & West Conference on Translation Studies—Translation History Matters*, Zhuhai (26-27 September 2013). 'Henri Borel's Dutch Translation of the *Mencius*', at the *XVIII FIT World Congress: Translation and Cultural Diversity*, Shanghai (4-7 August 2008).

Section 7.1, '*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*' was adapted in Dutch as 'Wonderlijke Chinese Verhalen, indirect vertaald' (Relay Translations of Strange Chinese Stories) and published in *Filter* (22:4), 2015.

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Audrey Heijns

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Conventions

This thesis draws on materials in Dutch, Chinese, French and German. Since it is written in English, there are many instances of translation. These are mine unless otherwise indicated. Translations of quotes to support an argument will appear in English without the source text. For examples of sentences in translation by Henri Borel and other translators, the source text and target text(s), with English rendering in brackets are provided where the target text is in another language. For titles of books, articles, newspapers, journals and magazines in other languages than English, the English translation is used, with the original title in brackets at first mention. Titles of the relevant newspapers and magazines can be found in the list of works cited.

For readability I have modified the romanization of Chinese concepts into Hanyu Pinyin. In the late nineteenth century, there was not yet a unified system of alphabetizing Chinese. In the beginning, Borel used the Dutch romanization based on Hokkien pronunciation. Later Borel studied Mandarin and started using romanization based on the Northern pronunciation, and sometimes he would provide both romanizations.

The authors of many early reviews and articles from Dutch newspapers and magazines cited in this thesis are unidentified. They are listed as 'anonymous' in chronological order of appearance of the article in works cited. Many of them are available in the online resources of DBNL (www.dbnl.org) and Delpher (www.delpher.nl). DBNL, short for Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren, is the Digital Library for Dutch Literature. This website lists Dutch authors with short biographies and bibliographies, whose works are mostly directly accessible. Delpher is the online resource provided by the Royal Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) and contains scans of newspapers and magazines, which are fully searchable.

The material from the Borel Archives of the Literary Museum, the National Archives in The Hague and the Special Collection of the University of Amsterdam are referred to in the footnotes. The footnote includes the location of the source in English: LM (Literary Museum), NA (National Archives) and UVA (Special Collection of University of Amsterdam), and the relevant citation in Dutch.

For place names in Indonesia, I use the current English spelling.



Borel in China dressed as a Mandarin.
Courtesy of the Literary Museum, The Hague, the Netherlands.



Borel with his children in Pontianak, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), 1908.
Courtesy of the Literary Museum, The Hague, the Netherlands.



Henri Borel, Frederik van Eeden and Lodewijk van Deyssel.
 'Frederik van Eeden seventieth birthday' (Frederik van Eeden zeventigste verjaardag) in the *Leeuwarder Newspaper* (Leeuwarder Courant). Leeuwarden, 05-04-1930. Accessed on Delpher on 02-11-2015, <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010604882:mpeg21:a0169>.



'The Passing of Henri Borel' (Henri Borel Overleden) by W. H. Ten Hoet Parson in *The Chronicle* (De Kroniek) (19:9). 1933, p. 133. Accessed on Delpher on 02-11-2015, <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=dts:2504009:mpeg21>.