# Translating China : Henri Borel (1869-1933)

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# PART I: DISCOVERING CHINA (1888–1894)

## Chapter 1: Preconceptions

This chapter looks into Borel's early development and his study period at Leiden University in 1888-1892. What Borel learned about China at this stage was from his teacher, classroom material and any (other) books that were available. Hence the image that he formed was through the eyes of other writers, who in their own way translated China. This was, as Borel discovered later, when he arrived in China in 1892, different from his. As he wrote in his review of the book *Alone in China* by American journalist Julian Ralph (1853-1903):

> When I went to China, I did not have high expectations of what I was about to see, based on the various books about the country and its people that I had read.[1]

Hence, it is important to know what Borel read and learned about China before he went to China. It is unlikely that Borel started reading books about China before he commenced his studies of Chinese at Leiden University in 1888. So this preconception of China must have been built on the ideas, which he formed during his study period of four years at Leiden University from 1888-1892. The first section 1.1, 'Before Going to Leiden' will probe into possible reasons why Borel took the entrance examination to study Chinese at Leiden University. Subsequently, 1.2, 'From Dislike to Fascination' investigates how he initially dislikes the program and how it is not until his third year that he finally gets interested in Chinese. Borel develops an interest and starts translating Chinese poetry for himself, as is shown in 1.3, 'Prelude to Publications.' Finally, the last section goes in more detail as to how Borel formed a view of China in 1.4, 'Perceptions of China.'

### 1.1 Before Leiden

There is no indication that Borel was motivated early on to study Chinese, neither for the entrance examination nor at the actual start of his studies. In 1888, Borel was in his final year of the HBS (Hogere Burgerschool) secondary school in Roermond, after he had been expelled in the second year of the HBS in The Hague before.[2] Borel blames an inexperienced young teacher for instigating rebellious behavior among the boys, of which Borel is eventually the victim.[3] As a result, his father arranges for him to go to his relatives in Goes

[1] Borel 1898c, p. 249.

[2] This school type was specifically designed to educate children for a commercial career.

[3] See Borel's article 'Memories of the HBS in The Hague' of 7 February 1925 in *The Women Chronicle of The Hague* (De Haagsche Vrouwenkroniek). As his novel *The Young Boy* (Het jongetje) is said to be autobiographical, the description there can be considered for what happened. The sensitive 14-year old protagonist, who is in love with a girl from the neighborhood, is neglecting his schoolwork and being rebellious at school. One day he and three others are punished for causing uproar in class, they have to return to school on Saturday to write lines as punishment. During detention they sneak out the classroom and lock up the teacher. The principal demands a confession from the culprit who locked the door and when no one comes forward, decides to expel one of the four rebels as a deterrent to others. The protagonist feels wrongly accused but does not want to betray his fellow student.

and attend secondary school there. After one year, he is allowed to return home, which in the meantime had moved to Roermond, because his father is now stationed there.

While Borel was still attending the HBS, he read an announcement in the *Daily Newspaper of the State* (Nederlandsche Staatscourant) of 21 January 1888 in which the government was recruiting three candidates to be trained as Chinese interpreters for the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies. They were looking for people under the age of twenty and preferably graduated from the HBS. On offer were four years training in the Chinese language, a monthly stipend of fifty guilders and study in China for one year. The condition was that they had to take an exam, and if successful they had to sign a contract to serve in the Dutch East Indies for minimally five years upon completion of their training.

At the time that Borel read about the examination in 1888, he had not yet graduated from the HBS. The reason that he decided to take the examination, as he explained in his article 'Memories of the HBS in The Hague' was:

> I just wanted to spend a few days in The Hague, no other reason! I had no idea that I was going to pass the examination, the thought never entered my mind because there were about sixty candidates—there was even a preference for those who had already graduated from the HBS!—and only three places.[4]

Although it does sound reasonable that Borel just 'wanted to spend a few days in The Hague,' after all he had spent his childhood there, it does also seem possible that Borel was inspired by his father George Frederik Willem Borel (1837–1907), who was sent to the Dutch East Indies twice as part of military expeditions. There is a mixture of adventure, success, and controversy that can be detected in the experiences of George Borel. For his role in what is known as the 'Banjarmasin War', which was successful for the Dutch, Borel's father was awarded the 'cross of honor for his courage, good sense and loyalty'. After joining the Dutch army in 1852, George Borel went on his first trip to Banjarmasin in 1859 to help restore control over Tabalong and Balangan. The war was the result of years of internal disputes about the succession of the old Sultan. This caused tensions in the region and in April 1859 a rebellion broke out. The Dutch called in military reinforcements, and eventually after months of fighting, by the end of 1859, the Dutch declared direct colonial rule. Hostilities continued for some time but decreased by 1863.[5] George Borel was allowed to return to the Netherlands on 30 April 1863 at his own request.

The experience of George Borel's second trip to the East Indies in late 1873 instilled pride in Henri Borel. In an article called 'Henri Borel at Sixty' (Henri Borel zestig jaar) published in 1929, in which he looks back on his career, Borel wrote:

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[4] Borel 7 February 1925.
[5] Ricklefs 2001, p. 180.

> One more thing I wanted to say is that I believe that I must have inherited my critical mind from my late father, General G. W. F. Borel. At a time when he was still only captain of the artillery, in 1877,[6] he wrote the critical work *Our Settlement in Aceh* (Onze vestiging in Atjeh), in which he sharply condemned the policy and tactics of General van Swieten, which at that time caused quite a stir in military and colonial circles. It was a daring deed unheard of back then that a captain had the nerve to criticize so sharply but so straightforwardly the general whom he had served in Aceh. As a result, he suffered a lot but also made many friends. Therefore I would like to conclude in memory of the courageous critic my father was, from whom I also inherited my love and my talent for music.[7]

The reason why George Borel wrote *Our Settlement in Aceh* is that he disagreed with the way his superior General Jan van Swieten (1807–1888) led the second expedition. According to George Borel, van Swieten declared the war won in 1874, when the Sultan's palace was claimed captured. The Acehnese, however, had never surrendered and therefore armed resistance and skirmishes continued in the region for years. Not until 1913 did their resistance finally fade out and was the war declared over, but the murder of Europeans still occasionally occurred until the end of Dutch colonial rule.[8] Of course, the Dutch had also committed war crimes in that final war in which many civilians were murdered.[9]

Although *Our Settlement in Aceh* was written in 1874, the book was not published until 1878, because George Borel was hoping that in the meantime the situation in Aceh would have improved. In *The Guide* (De Gids) of February 1879, military expert P. G. Booms (1822–1897) published a long book review with extensive comments on the contents of *Our Settlement in Aceh*. Although he finds fault with George Borel's summary of the first expedition, Booms does praise his clear, straightforward and well written report of the second expedition, which was after all the main focus. Booms admires George Borel for his courage and his contribution to history:

> He has not spared General Van Swieten. That required major moral courage, because captain Borel stood up against a general of great reputation. It must have been painful because the General was also his superior, whose commands he had followed in Aceh. To fulfil such a painful task he must have found strength in his conviction of the justification of his views and the keen awareness of the positive impact this would bring about. His book clearly conveys his conviction; whether we share his views is clear from the above; but to serve a direct purpose it is somewhat late. Meanwhile it is an important contribution to the history of our war on the northern coast of Sumatra.[10]

Booms to a great extent agrees with Borel about what went wrong in Aceh, but in his view it

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[6] Borel must have made a mistake, according to the library catalogue *Our Settlement in Aceh* was first published in 1878.

[7] Borel 24 November 1929.

[8] Bakker 1993, pp. 53-82.

[9] As the biography of the late Prime Minister Hendrikus Colijn (1869-1944) reveals, Colijn himself participated in and was co-responsible for killings. See article 'War about Colijn' (Oorlog om Colijn) by Jan Blokker in the *People's Daily* (Volkskrant) of 1 May 1998. There was an estimated loss of 100,000 lives (including troops, civilians and slaves).

[10] Booms 1879.

was not only van Swieten who should bear the blame, but ultimately the government that had appointed van Swieten in the first place and agreed to the retreat of van Swieten. In response van Swieten wrote *The Truth about our Settlement in Aceh* (De Waarheid over onze vestiging in Atjeh) to lash out at Borel and others involved, which prompted George Borel to defend himself in *Fallacies are not the Truth* (Drogredenen zijn geen waarheid) (1880). Others who were implicated also engaged in the polemics.[11]

Henri Borel was only four years old when his father went to fight in the Aceh war and six when he came back. By the time the books were published and his father engaged in the polemics, Borel turned eleven. It seems likely that Henri Borel was conscious of the experience of his father, in terms of the causes and consequences of criticizing others and engaging in polemics. In a later article about his father, Borel writes about his awe and fear of his father when he was a young boy. He recalls that he too had the ambition to join the military forces, but is glad in retrospect he could not because of myopia.[12] From the stories that his father brought home from the Dutch East Indies, Henri Borel must have formed some idea of the complex colonial society. And from the critical stand his father took, Borel must have learned not to fear confronting superiors. It seems fair to say that all of it influenced Borel and his decision to take the examination and study Chinese with the prospect of being appointed in the Dutch East Indies.

Borel had not expected to pass the examination, given the fact that many of those on the examination board turned out to be his former teachers at the HBS in The Hague, from which he had been expelled. Borel claims it was luck, linguistic skills and his knowledge of the Dutch literary scene which he shared with examiner Jan ten Brink (1834–1901), a Dutch writer and professor in Dutch literature at Leiden University, that led to his success.[13] The three other candidates, who passed the examination, included J. Lodewijk J. F. Ezerman (1869-1949), Bertus A. J. van Wettum (1870-1914), and Ed. R. Goteling Vinnis (1868-1894), who apparently withdrew from training early in the course.[14]

Without finishing the HBS, in 1888 Borel started Chinese studies with Gustaaf Schlegel (1840-1903), Professor of Chinese at Leiden. According to Joosten, on 28 August 1888 'Borel had his name removed from the municipal register at Roermond to become registered at Leiden.'[15] Although his diaries indicate that Borel was more preoccupied with literature, music and the fine arts, there are also entries about his studies.

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[11] See for instance 'The literary war on Aceh' (De boekenstrijd over Atjeh) in the *General Commerce Paper* of 11 December 1880. Accessed on Delpher on 03-11-2015, http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010104617:mpeg21:a0001

[12] LM. Borel, 'Parade', *The Women Chronicle of The Hague*. Date unknown.

[13] Borel 7 February 1925.

[14] Joosten 1980, p. 11.

[15] Joosten 1980, p. 10.

### 1.2 From Dislike to Fascination

Motivation to study Chinese is still lacking in Borel's first two years at Leiden University. This is not only the result of his other activities, but also of the pressure of his teacher. When Borel started studying Chinese at Leiden University in 1888, it was about a decade after Schlegel held his inaugural lecture 'On the importance of the study of the Chinese language' (Over het belang der Chineesche der Chineesche taalstudie). In this lecture, Schlegel particularly stresses how knowledge of the language helps to understand the people:

> It is not without reason that it is said: 'Language represents the whole nation.' Those who learn the language of the people, will have learned their religious and social customs and prejudices, their character, development and inclinations. For a country like the Netherlands with a few hundred thousand of industrious Chinese nationals in its overseas territories, knowledge of the Chinese language is indispensable. Many difficulties, uprisings and indeed wars could have been avoided if only the colonial administration in the Dutch Indies had received insights from Dutch people who knew the Chinese.[16]

The reason for Schlegel to emphasize this was that the Dutch expansion of the Outer Provinces (Buitengewesten) was considered to require stricter government over the Chinese, who played an important role in the colonial economy.[17] At the time Dutch colonial government in the Dutch East Indies was headed by a Governor-General (Gouverneur-Generaal) who worked jointly with an advisory board called the Indies Council (Raad van Indië) and four departments: Home Affairs (Binnenlands Bestuur), Education, Religion and Industry (Onderwijs, Eredienst en Nijverheid), Public Works and Finance (Burgerlijke Openwerken en Financiën), and Justice (Justitie), while the Ministry of Colonies in The Hague was responsible for the overall colonial policy and strategy. The Dutch East Indies comprising of Java and Outlying Islands was divided into residencies each of which was headed by a Resident (Resident), Assistant Resident (Assistent Resident) and District Officer (Controleur). Colonial government was dualist, meaning that European officials worked together with local people. Officially three groups of people were identified: Europeans (Europeanen), Locals (inlanders), and Foreign Orientals (Vreemde Oosterlingen).[18] Within a residency all European, local officials and chiefs of Foreign Orientals, including those of the Chinese, Arab and other ethnic groups, if any, were subordinate to the Resident.[19] The Chief of the Kong Koan (*gongguan* 公館), or the Chinese Council had the quasi-military title of Captain (Kapitein) dating back to 1619, when the first Chinese Captain of Batavia was appointed.[20]

The Chinese, who had settled in the Dutch East Indies before the Dutch arrived, handled many matters through the Chinese Council for about two hundred years. Officers of the Chinese Council carried out various administrative tasks including the maintenance of

[16] Schlegel 1877b, p. 21.
[17] Blussé 2008, pp. 146-150.
[18] Anrooij 2009, p. 157.
[19] Ibid, p. 18.
[20] Lohanda 2002, p. 31.

bridges and roads, temples and graveyards, judicial assistance in family and financial disputes, registration of marriages and divorces.[21] Towards the end of the 1840s, however, the Dutch started to increasingly become involved in the social and economic life of their colonial subjects, as the increasing number of fraud cases and bankruptcies among the Chinese made the Dutch authorities suspicious of the Chinese Officers, and so the duties of the latter were reduced to minor tasks such as the registration of marriages and divorces and minor financial disputes.[22] At the same time, however, the Dutch realized that they did not have the expertise to deal with the Chinese. They needed experts who could communicate in Chinese, offer advice about the Chinese communities in North-Java, the Riau-archipelago, Banka and Billiton, North Sumatra and West-Borneo, and who could at the same time help spread word of the implementation of any new regulations. The Dutch had relied on help from British missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857), who in 1816 had joined the London Missionary's station in Malacca, present-day Malaysia, which was under British rule at the time. In 1821 he went to Batavia to run the Java mission, which included distributing tracts (some of which he translated into Chinese) and preaching sermons (some of which he held in Malay).[23] He worked there until 1842 when he left for Shanghai.

The newspaper *General Commerce Paper* (Algemeen Handelsblad) of 7 December 1854, under 'National News, House of Representatives, States-General of the Netherlands' (Binnenland. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal.), notes the need for Dutch experts in Chinese and Japanese.

> There is no other nation that has as many Chinese subjects as ours, and yet there is not a single Dutch person who knows Chinese. We also maintain relations with Japan and yet no one knows Japanese. In Paris, St. Petersburg etc, Chinese and Japanese are taught but not in Leiden. Yet it would be possible to fill such a Chair, because Mr. Hoffmann [see below] is fluent in both and his erudition matches his modesty. The undersigned urgently requests the establishment of a Chair for Chinese and Japanese at Leiden.[24]

This shows that there was awareness among the Dutch of the need for the study of Chinese and Japanese and also an awareness that some other countries in Europe had already set up their programs. In France, as Schlegel explains, Jean-Pierre Abel Rémusat (1788-1832) was appointed professor of Chinese Language at the Collège de France in 1814, while he says that in Berlin Dr. Wilhelm Schott (1802-1889) has occupied the Chair of Chinese since 1838.[25]

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[21] Chen 2004, p. 61.
[22] Chen 2004, pp. 71-72.
[23] More on this in the 'Missionary Chronicle for July 1826', see pp. 309-310 of *The Evangelical Magazine and the Missionary Chronicle*, accessed on 03-11-2015, http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah6lsf;view=1up;seq=331
[24] Anonymous 7 December 1854.
[25] Schlegel 1877b, pp. 7-8.

As early as 1855, the colonial administration had sent two young men to Canton to be trained as Chinese interpreters. The problem was that what they learned was '*guanhua*' (官話), the language spoken at the Chinese court and in North China, which was very different from the dialect spoken among the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies. To be able to work with the latter, the students had to learn Hokkien, the language of the Southern region of Fujian.[26] Since many of the overseas Chinese came from that region, Hokkien was one of the most common Chinese languages spoken among Chinese migrants. This is also explained by Schlegel in the introduction to his bulky *Dutch-Chinese Dictionary with the Transcription of Chinese Characters in the Tsiang-Tsiu Dialect* (Nederlandsch-Chineesch Woordenboek met de Transcriptie der Chineesche Karakters in the Tsiang-Tsiu Dialekt), which was used in class at Leiden University.

Tuition in Japanese and Chinese in the Netherlands was officially started under J. J. Hoffmann (1805-1878) in the 1850s,[27] although Schlegel had already started his studies in November 1849, at his personal request, because he knew Hoffmann as a friend of his father's.[28] Upon receiving the title of Professor of Japanese and Chinese at Leiden University on 21 March 1855, Hoffmann decided to recruit new students from secondary schools. Later, because of his network and reputation, some would come to Hoffmann directly. Most of the students studied three to four years before Hoffmann declared them ready to go to China, which effectively meant that they would receive an appointment of Chinese interpreter in the Dutch East Indies. However, prior to reporting for duty, the students would spend one year (or more) in China to continue the study Hokkien and/or learn Cantonese or Hakka for operating in certain areas in the Dutch Indies.

Although studying Chinese was primarily to fulfill the need for Chinese interpreters in the Dutch East Indies, many also made important contributions to Dutch sinology, mainly in French or English. For example: Schlegel wrote on Chinese games, prostitution, astronomy and comparative linguistics, J. J. C. Francken (1838-1864) and de Grijs compiled the Chinese-Dutch Dictionary of the Emoi Dialect which was published in Batavia in 1882, while J. J. M. de Groot (1854-1921), who succeeded Schlegel in 1903, published his magnum opus *The Religious System of China* in six volumes (1892–1910). The majority of the students were appointed in the Dutch East Indies and although some of them later on pursued different careers,[29] many wrote on aspects of Chinese culture and published essays in periodicals

[26] As John DeFrancis points out: 'To call Chinese a single language composed of dialects with varying degrees of difference is to mislead by minimizing disparities that according to Chao are as great as those between English and Dutch. To call Chinese a family of languages is to suggest extralinguistic differences that in fact do not exist and to overlook the unique linguistic situation that exists in China.' DeFrancis 1984, p. 56.

[27] A detailed study on the training of Chinese interpreters, see Kuiper 2016.

[28] Even his parents were not informed. See Schlegel 1877b, p. 12.

[29] In 'Letters to the Editor' (Ingezonden stukken) the *Java Post* of 23 November 1882, interpreter J. J. Roelofs (1851?-1885) points out in his letter to the editor, that the crucial difference between a Resident and a Chinese interpreter is that the latter is more educated and learned. As proof he refers to three sinologists who became professor, secretary and president. Roelofs does not mention names in his letter, but they are most likely:

printed in the East Indies.[30]

By the time that Borel started studying Chinese, Schlegel would recruit new students from secondary school. From his diary and the letters, it appears that Borel traveled back and forth between The Hague and Leiden, between his friends, studies, music and the fine arts. Besides his fellow students Ezerman and van Wettum, his close friends included the artist and designer Johan Thorn Prikker (1868-1932), writer and psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932) and teacher and musician B. J. F. Varenhorst (1858-1930).[31]

Not until the third year into his studies, does Borel make mention of Chinese in his diary. During the first two years, there is merely frequent reference/indication of his suffering during his studies of Chinese under Schlegel. This is also reflected in the study results, which according to Schlegel were poor in the first year.[32] Borel's state of mind can for instance be seen from a letter dated 20 May 1889, written by van Eeden, who shows understanding for Borel about his depression and advises him not to be influenced by the people around him.[33] He in particularly warns against Schlegel.

> I think I know in what state of mind, what 'Sturm und Drang' you find yourself in, at the moment. I remember going through something similar, even though that happened to me more than ten years ago. It is the so-called Byron period, the Weltschmerz, the Werther period, the black period, as Beets described it. It is no wonder that you are deep into it because of how much pain you have been suffering and the rather unfortunate influence of the cynical and weak figures such as Schlegel and E.[34] But thank God you are stronger than those two and your healthy will of life will rise above all.
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> Therefore I must stress explicitly: Do not fall for all that pseudo and sinister [behavior], do not let the cynicism of your stupid professor lead you off track. Such 'verneinende Geister' [German for 'negative minds'] we all come across, but only if you fear them will they pose a risk. You must not think that just because you cannot corner the Devil it means he is right. There are a lot of things you are unable to reason your way toward now, but which you can sense from an unerring instinct.[35]

It seems unlikely that van Eeden knew Schlegel personally and therefore these comments are based on what he heard from others, mostly Borel. Van Eeden's biographer claims the

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Professor at Leiden University Gustaaf Schlegel, Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Religion and Industry Willem Pieter Groeneveldt (1841-1915), and President of the Orphan Chamber (Weeskamer) Johannes Eduard Albrecht (1838-1890). Accessed on Delpher on 03-11-2015, http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010488492:mpeg21:a0024

[30] Idema 1995, pp. 92-93. See also entries in Henri Cordier's *Bibliotheca Sinica*.

[31] In the obituary in *The Fatherland* of 3 May 1930, Borel explains that it so happened that Varenhorst was the teacher at the HBS in The Hague from which he was expelled. They met again when Borel was studying Chinese in Leiden.

[32] Mention of this is made in the document when van Wettum, Ezerman and Borel request extension of study in Xiamen.

[33] In Fontijn's *Discord: the Life of Frederik van Eeden until 1901*, there is a section 'A Sentimental Friendship' (Een dwepende vriendschap) describing the relationship between van Eeden and Borel which started in 1889: 'Together with his fellow student, his friend Lodewijk J. F. Ezerman, Borel wrote a letter to van Eeden. This was the beginning of a friendship that would last—intermittently—until the death of van Eeden.' See Fontijn 1999, p. 266.

[34] Most likely 'E' is Ezerman, him being around regularly and mentioned in one go with Schlegel.

[35] Van Eeden 1933, pp. 18-19.

relation between van Eeden and Borel was unequal, it was built on Borel's admiration for van Eeden and the satisfaction van Eeden derived from playing the role of an educator.[36] But as Joosten writes, their friendship was for life, and only in the early years was van Eeden in terms of the arts 'the mental guide and counselor' to Borel.[37]

For his personal perception, Borel writes negatively about Schlegel in his diary on 19 December 1891:

> And if I look among my friends, i.e. those with and around me—van Wettum, Prikker, Ezerman, Varenhorst, van Eeden—then it is only van Eeden whom I trust. (…) Van Wettum and Ezerman—people I owe much, oh so much—are afraid and cringing and weakish to Schlegel who is a bad person.—And Varenhorst fears the church.[38]

Despite the pressure by Schlegel, Borel does not give up on his studies, and from the few entries in his diary, a transition from a dislike of Chinese to a fascination for the script can be detected. This is not surprising given the fact that in the early stage of the study of Chinese, the focus is on memorizing characters and vocabulary by themselves, while in the advanced stage the student is equipped with the skills to read more complex texts. The earliest of Borel's diary entries that mention Chinese is dated 20 December 1890:

> I promised Mother, who perhaps can sense it now, that I will from now on live a calm and regular life, and I shall therefore also start learning some of that hateful Chinese because noble motives force me ever so gently.

It is with reluctance that Borel spends time to study Chinese, and not until about six months later is there a positive note on Chinese. On 22 July 1891, Borel writes about a Grimm story that they read in class. It is not clear if he is working on a translation himself or if they are reading an existing Chinese version of the tale in class:

> Oh yes something else. I have really, really worked on my Chinese with Putam.[39] Oh that lovely fairy tale by Grimm 'The Willow-Wren and the Bear' translated into Chinese.

This is followed by the Chinese characters of the Grimm story, *xiong yu qiaofuniao* 熊與巧婦鳥 written vertically, meaning 'The bear and the wren'. Next is a description of his daily schedule on 2 January 1892 which indicates a change:

[36] Fontijn 1999, p. 270. 'The relationship between the two built on fanatical admiration of Borel and pedagogical eros of Frederik was unequal.'
[37] Joosten 1980, p. 14.
[38] Joosten 1980, p. 38.
[39] Putam is the Chinese name of van Wettum. See Kuiper 2016, p. 288.

> I get up at about twelve, have breakfast while reading a newspaper or a novel for a while. At half past one, I am in the university library studying the Chinese [*Shenglun*] 聖論 and [*Daqing lüli*] 大清律例 , i.e. the Sacred Edict of Emperor Kangxi and the Great Qing Legal Code.[40] When I am working at it, I am totally absorbed, it is so fascinating to work my way through all these strokes that I quite enjoy it. I sit there till three thirty. Then I go for a walk and return home to play the piano. I have dinner at five thirty. Sometimes I go out and read the newspaper and *The Amsterdammer* (De Amsterdammer) at Café Neuf but not very often. Back home. Make tea. Work on Plato and review the Chinese I did in the afternoon. Then I spend my time playing the piano, doing the Plato translation, and reading books (which nowadays include other works by Plato, Shelley and Milton). By three, sometimes three thirty I go to bed.

From this description we can see how Borel has developed an interest in his studies, although in comparison with his other activities Chinese still does not occupy the major part of his time, only two hours in the afternoon and for a stint in the evening. On 9 January 1892, Borel describes his room, noting that on top of a chair beside the piano he has his piano books, works of Plato and a copy of the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經).[41] On 29 February 1892, he writes that he is reading Confucius and the Chinese Classics.[42] A last entry about his studies in his final year before leaving for China was written on 23 March 1892, in which he gives a translation of a poem from *Wonders Old and New* (*Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀), a collection of Chinese fiction from the Ming Dynasty which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Based on the above, it is fair to say that Borel was reading quite a broad range of Chinese works, from the Confucian classics and ancient poetry (*Book of Songs*), to popular fiction (*Wonders Old and New*) and official works (*Sacred Edict of Emperor Kangxi* and the *Great Qing Legal Code*) in preparation of his appointment in the Dutch Indies. In addition to these, the students also studied and used the afore-mentioned dictionary of Hokkien compiled by Schlegel.

The dictionary, as Schlegel explains, is not meant to help Chinese people learn Dutch but rather to facilitate those who have to translate from Dutch into Chinese. Listing entries according to Dutch words, it offers Chinese rendering(s) with pronunciation in Hokkien and example sentences of how to use the word(s). Many examples are taken from documents, such as contracts used in the Dutch East Indies, literary texts, including the *Book of Songs* and *Wonders Old and New,* and the *Kangxi Dictionary* (*Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典). This Chinese dictionary was named after the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722) and published in 1716. It was still widely in use in the nineteenth century. Besides definitions and sentences, Schlegel also gives direct advice to the user of his dictionary, which is revealing of his Eurocentric view of the Chinese and his pedagogy that must have influenced his students.

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[40] A Dutch translation was available: *The criminal code Da Qing lüli* 大清律例 *translated from the Chinese and annotated by C. F. M. de Grijs, Xiamen 1863* (Het Strafwetboek Tai-tsing-loet-lee, uit het Chineesch vertaald en met aanteekeningen voorzien door C. F. M. de Grijs, Amoy 1863).

[41] LM. Diary of Borel 9 January 1892.

[42] LM. Diary of Borel 29 February 1892.

An example is the entry 'Recht', which means 'justice', 'law', 'right' depending on the context. This entry in volume III covers four pages (577-580) and gives a range of meanings, expressions and examples for the term in Chinese. Half-way through the entry Schlegel informs the user:

> The abstract notion of 'recht' is not so clear to the Chinese mind as to the Western mind, which transforms abstractions into concreta as a result of his mythological education.[43]

The notion that there is a difference between Chinese and Western understanding of 'recht' shows that Schlegel is warning of difficulties with the Chinese rendering, when it comes to justice or rights. To solve the problem, Schlegel then gives examples from the Bible (he does not indicate which translation).

All of this teaching material was typical for students who took lessons with Schlegel, the scholar famous for saying:

> Throw your Chinese grammar book into the fire. Read, read, read—translate, translate, translate Chinese authors until you think in the same vein as the Chinese.[44]

Such was Schlegel's pedagogical approach, and it is not surprising that Borel was reading and translating Chinese works, also after he finished his studies in Leiden. We will see later on how he sets about publishing his translations of some of the most important literary works of China, including the Confucian classics known as the *Four Books* comprising *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) and *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), and the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the Daoist work *Daodejing* (道德經), and popular fiction from the above mentioned *Wonders Old and New*. But in this early period, he is only doing translations for himself, such as the inclusion of a translation of a poem in his diary which will be discussed in the next section.

### 1.3 A Prelude to Future Publications

During the years in Leiden, Borel is working on various texts but not yet publishing. He maintains regular correspondence with his friends and keeps a diary. He is an avid reader, he writes some poems and is working on translations. Some of his sonnets are published in the literary magazine *Of Now and Later* (Van Nu en Straks) in 1893. They are dark and sad, and not about China. They may actually reflect the 'dark times' of 1888 and 1889 he went

[43] Schlegel 1884-1890, vol. III, pp. 578-579. As James St. André writes the British also had doubts about the Chinese concept of justice and he argues that George Staunton was unable to dispel this idea with his translation of the *Great Qing Legal Code*. See 'But do they have a notion of Justice?' *Staunton's 1810 Translation of the Great Qing Code*. In *The Translator* (10:1). 2004, pp. 1-31.

[44] Schlegel 1892, p. 48. Legge in his book review of Schlegel's *La stèle funéraire du Téghin Giogh et ses copistes et traducteurs Chinois, Russes et Allemands*, however, doubts whether people will accept his advice in full about discarding grammar books. See Legge 1893, p. 403.

through, as mentioned above in the letter by van Eeden. The sonnets in his diary of July 1891 were published much later in slightly edited versions in *The Guide* in 1895. There are more poems in *The Guide* of 1894, which are also from the same period as the collection *Soul Shimmers* (Ziele-schemering) which was never published.[45] These poems are lyrics about a girl and laments about fatigue.

As cited above, Borel is reading works by Plato, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) and John Milton (1608-1674) which have an influence on his own writing, as the next chapter will show. Borel also has an interest in Buddhism and translates excerpts from Spence Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism*, e.g. the diary entry of 15 March 1892 explains:

> It is also for Prikker who is very much interested but is not at ease reading in English. Currently there is a great urge for Buddhist religion. Likewise [Lodewijk] van Deyssel [pen name of Karel Joan Lodewijk Alberdingk Thijm 1864-1952] was enquiring with van Eeden about a good Work about it. But van Eeden did not know until I introduced this to him.[46]

Borel shared his interest in Buddhism with Frederik van Eeden, who had already published an article entitled 'Buddha' in *The New Guide* (De Nieuwe Gids) in 1889. Although Borel is not yet publishing on China in this period, he is translating some literary works. One that he includes in his diary is a poem from a Chinese novella from the afore-mentioned collection *Wonders Old and New.* The inclusion of this poem in his diary on 23 March 1892 is an indication of Borel's interest in Chinese literature, and a prelude to his publication of Dutch translations of Chinese works (even though it will take another thirty years before Borel finally publishes translations of stories from *Wonders Old and New*; see Chapter 7).

Borel's interest in texts from *Wonders Old and New* is undoubtedly caused by the fact that Schlegel used the novellas as teaching material.[47] *Wonders Old and New* is an anthology of forty Chinese novellas, compiled from collections by writers Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) and Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644). The anthology was very popular during the Qing dynasty and almost all nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western translations are based on it.[48] Until about the mid-1920s, the authorship of the stories making up the *Wonders Old and New* was unknown and translators, including Borel, rendered the stories as anonymous. In 1877, Schlegel himself had published 'Le vendeur-d'huile qui seul possède la reine-de-beauté, ou splendeurs et misères des courtisanes chinoises', a French translation of the story 'The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan' (*Maiyoulang du zhan huakui* 賣油郎獨占花魁) (hereinafter: 'The Oil Vendor'). The story is

[45] Poems can be found in *The Guide* of 1894 and 1895 online at DBNL both with the footnote 'From the unpublished collection *Soul Shimmers*.'
[46] Joosten 1980, p. 43.
[47] For more details about the study of authorship of *Wonders Old and New*, see the article by Paul Pelliot 'Le Kin Kou Ki Kouan' in *T'oung Pao* (24). 1925-26, pp. 54-60. See also Arthur Waley's 'Notes on the History of Chinese Popular Literature' in *T'oung Pao* (28). 1931, pp. 346-354.
[48] Idema and Haft 1997, p. 217.

about a girl from a destitute family who is sold to work as a courtesan. Eventually she attempts to buy herself out in marriage, but encounters rejection by her Madam to release her.

The importance of such literary texts, as Schlegel explains in the preface to 'The Oil Vendor', is that the novellas are revealing of the social customs of the Chinese people during different eras, more than any other detailed description could.[49] According to a study by H. T. Zurndorfer who looked at it from a sociological point of view, it was Schlegel's interest in prostitution that led him to study and publish this text. She refers to Maurice Freedman, who had interpreted Schlegel's (as well as de Groot's) work as 'participant observation of social anthropology before it was invented'.[50]

Not all of Schlegel's students were convinced of the purpose of reading 'The Oil Vendor' in class. According to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky de Groot complained about the pedagogical methods of Schlegel and wrote in contempt about the 'educational system à la Schlegel', which he says 'seems to be intended for rear loafers.'[51] Among his complaints was the reading material:

> Why make us crawl our way through a vulgar erotic story from the *Jingu qiguan* [Wonders Old and New] written in broad Peking dialect, not even in reasonably literary Chinese?[52]

De Groot clearly fails to see the use of reading *Wonders Old and New*. Schlegel, however, detects similarities with European literary works at the time and makes great effort to introduce this Chinese text. He compares the fate of the Chinese courtesan with that of Dutch protagonist Klaasje Zevenster in the novel *The Vicissitudes of Klaasje Zevenster* (De lotgevallen van Klaasje Zevenster) (1865) by Jacob van Lennep (1802–1868) and French protagonist Marguérite Gautier in the novel *The Lady of the Camellias* (La Dame aux Camélias) by Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870). Schlegel chooses a subtitle for his translation based on Honoré de Balzac's (1799–1850) *The Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans* (Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes) which was published in four parts from 1838 to 1847. Schlegel concludes that the difference is that:

> In China, the boudoir of literate courtesans is slowly progressing to a higher level of society where the separation of women is banned, in order to give them a place in society.[53]

However, ten Brink criticizes Schlegel for making these comparisons, albeit in awe of Schlegel's knowledge of Chinese. According to ten Brink, the situation of these courtesans is

[49] Schlegel 1877a, p. VI.
[50] Zurndorfer 1989, p. 28.
[51] Werblowsky 2002, p. 17.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Schlegel 1877a, p. IV.

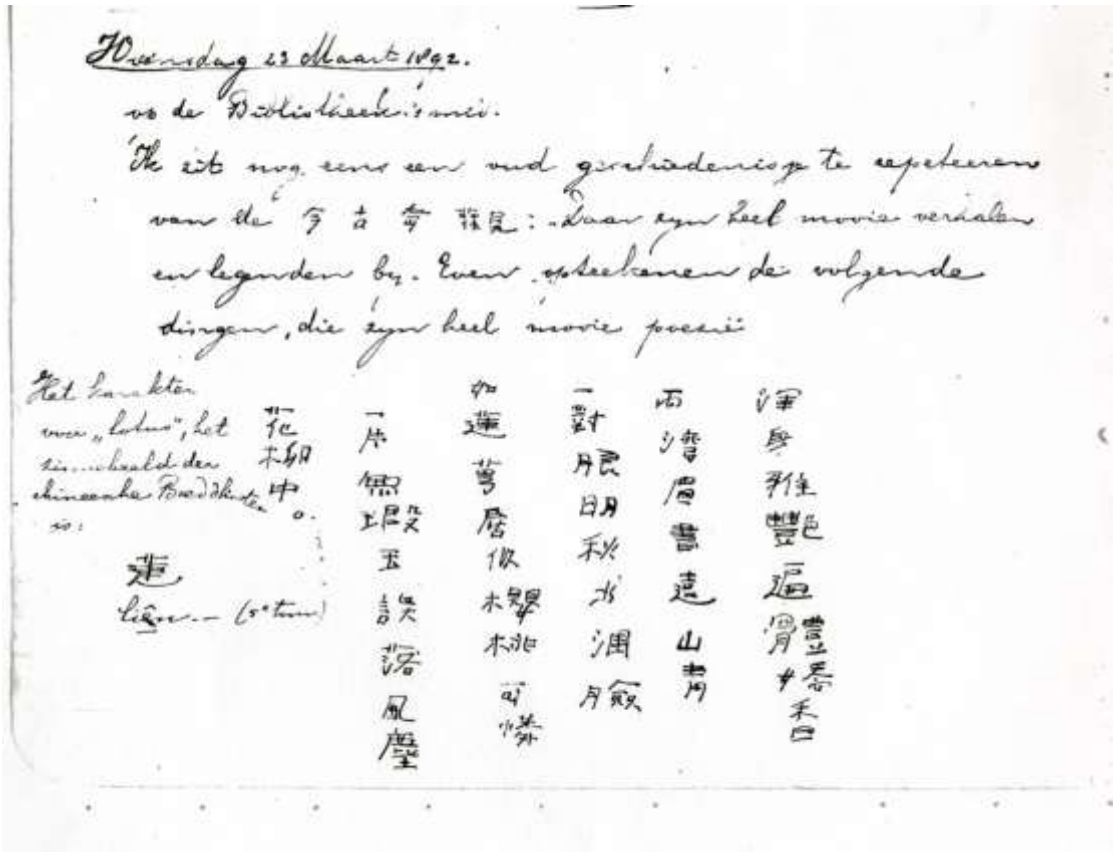
not the same.[54]

The fact that Borel copies a Chinese poem from one of the stories from *Wonders Old and New*, in his diary on 23 March 1892, shows that he appreciates the work. The poem is from the story 'Du Shiniang drowns her jewel box in anger' (*Du Shiniang nu chen baibaoxiang* 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱). This story again is about a courtesan who falls in love with one of her customers. The couple gets married, but for fear of his father the customer succumbs to another man's offer to buy her. When the girl hears about the deal, she jumps into a river and drowns while clinging to her jewel box. The story was probably adapted from a classical tale 'The Courtesan's Jewel Box' that Song Maocheng 宋楙澄 (1569-1620) wrote a decade earlier than Feng Menglong.[55] As both were writing at a time when courtesans appear in many literary genres, they were both undoubtedly inspired by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) and his *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudanting* 牡丹亭).[56]

At the time, there were quite a number of translations of various stories from *Wonders Old and New*, in French, English, German and Latin. There were two translations available of the story in question, one in English in 1872 by Samuel Birch (1813–1885) entitled 'The Casket of Gems', another in German in 1884 by Eduard Grisebach (1845–1906) entitled 'Du Shiniang Angrily Throws her Jewel Box in the Floods' (Tu-schi-niang wirft entrüstet das Juwelenkästen in die Fluten).[57] None were available in Dutch and the only Dutch access to information about the anthology was the above-mentioned literary review by Jan ten Brink of Schlegel's French translation of 'The Oil Vendor' in 1878.

What follows below, is a copy of the entry in Borel's diary:

[54] Ten Brink 1884.
[55] Chang and Owen 2010, p. 119-120.
[56] Ibid, p. 145.
[57] Cordier 1966, Vol. III, pp. 1761-1769.



From Borel's diary. Courtesy of the Literary Museum, The Hague, the Netherlands

Borel writes: 'Wednesday 23 March 1892. in the library in the afternoon. I am reviewing an ancient tale from the [*Jingu qiguan*] 今古奇觀 : It contains many lovely stories and legends. Let me record the following things, they are beautiful poetry.' On the left side of the Chinese characters, Borel notes that 'the character *lian* 蓮 for lotus was a symbol for the Chinese Buddhists.' It is unclear why he explains this here, for in this context there is no relation to Buddhism. Instead, one can say that in Chinese poetry the use of flowers symbolizes the beauty of women. What follows on the next page of the diary is the Dutch translation of the Chinese poem:

Haar geheel lichaam was bevallig en schoon. (Her entire body was graceful and charming.)
Haar geheel lichaam was liefelijk en geurig. (Her entire body was lovely and fragrant.)
Haar gebogen wenkbrauwen waren als de verre omtrekken van blauwe bergen. (Her curved eyebrows were like the distant contour of the blue mountains.)
Hare oogen waren helder en zacht als het water in den herfst. (Her eyes were bright and soft like water in autumn.)
Hare wangen waren als de kelk van den lotus. (Her cheeks were like the calyx of the lotus.)
Hare lippen waren als roode kersen. (Her lips were like red cherries.)
Hoe treurig dat zulk een vlekkelooze edelsteen bij toeval was gekomen in wind en stof! (How sad that such an immaculate gem happened to end up in wind and dust!)

Borel explains that the poem is about a beautiful and good girl who is led by fate onto the wrong path. Borel's translation is quite different from a recent English rendering of the poem

in *Stories to Caution the World* by Feng Menglong, translated by Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang:

> Her body full of grace and charm,
> Her skin soft and fragrant,
> Her brows the color and shape of distant hills,
> Her eyes as limpid as autumn water,
> Her cheeks as lovely as lotus petals,
> She was the very image of Zhuo Wenjun.
> Her lips the shape of a cherry,
> She was a veritable Fan Su.
> How sad that such a piece of flawless jade
> Has fallen by misfortune into the world of lust![58]

Borel's version is much more literal. This works fine where Borel has 'distant contour of the blue mountains', and Yang and Yang have 'shape of the distant hills'. But the Dutch translation of a line such as the last is unclear. Readers would wonder what happens to the courtesan when she 'accidentally ends up in wind and dust', which is comprehensible in the English version by Yang and Yang, where the courtesan has 'fallen by misfortune into the world of lust'. Lines 6 and 8 about the women poets Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 and Fan Su 樊素 are missing in Borel's translation. It is possible Borel did not know how to translate these or he thought translation would not enhance the meaning of the poem. There is no evidence that there are different versions of the Chinese texts. Moreover, Samuel Birch used the full text for his English translation *The Casket of Gems* in 1872. Birch does recognize the name of Zhuo Wenjun and gives an explanation in a footnote, but he mistranslates the line about Fan Su, which shows that he did not know it was a name.[59]

Although the above-mentioned poem was not published, it is evidence of the direction Borel was going. It shows Borel is inspired by Schlegel and is interested in cultivating knowledge about China through reading and translating Chinese literature. This is in contrast with the view of de Groot, who was impatient with this kind of work, complaining 'Why are we never supplied with a word on Chinese literature, history, morals, customs, religion?'[60] It appears that Schlegel, whose books are full of translations and summaries of texts, expects his students to extract the information from written texts in their original Chinese version, rather than lecture in his own words on these topics.

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[58] Feng 2005, p. 548.

[59] Birch 1872, p. 5. Birch's translation of the poem reads: 'Her whole form was elegant, her *tournure* lovely and fragrant; her two winding eyebrows resembled the outline of the distant hills, surmounting a pair of eyes the distillation of the autumnal waves; her waist resembled a lily's stem, she was a Cho-wan-keun [Zhuo Wenjun], her lips were like peaches when they screen the elevation and purity of a white house. It was a pitiable piece of loveliness, as a gem without flaw, delusively letting fall its elegance like wind and dust into willows and flowers.'

[60] Werblowsky 2002, p. 17.

### 1.4 Perceptions of China

Yet for all the reading and translating, Borel felt in retrospect that he was wrongly prepared for what he would encounter in China. Schlegel's lessons, the class material, and other books available must have contributed to this. The study of Chinese at Leiden University was mainly focused on language acquisition. After all, 'Language represents the whole nation', as Schlegel explained in his inaugural speech mentioned above. This was also noted by Joosten, who draws the following conclusion, based on the letters by Prikker:

> There is no indication whatsoever that the study of Chinese went beyond learning the language. Prikker's remark 'Don't you remember how we harbored suspicions about China in the past? We thought there was nothing to be found there,' confirms this idea resulting from the scarce information in Borel's diary about the program.[61]

The line that Joosten quotes from is a letter by Prikker to Borel, which contains Prikker's reaction to the postcards and photos that Borel had sent to him from China. It occurs to Prikker that neither of them had had any idea about the arts in China. He recalls that they were skeptical about it, which by then he realizes was rather 'foolish.'[62] It means surprise for both Borel and Prikker. This shows that Borel's perception of China was different from the expectations that he had. It is possibly caused by the fact that Borel did not put enough effort in the study of Chinese, but the lessons with Schlegel and his idea that knowledge of the language will give insight into the people, culture, customs, did not help either.

It is not clear which (extra-curricular) books Borel read, but we do have an idea of what was available back then. From very early times in the sixteenth century, the Dutch had access to travel accounts by merchants and sailors, history books (many in translation) and literary relay translations from English, German or French.[63] Quite a number of books on China came out in which readers showed interest, still the overall idea is that knowledge of China remains limited. One example is the anonymous review of the book *Three Years Wandering in China* by Scottish botanist Robert Fortune (1812–1880) about his trip to China, which came out in Dutch translation in 1848. As the anonymous Dutch reviewer indicates:

> His book is a description of what he has experienced in China, the impressions of social circumstances of which little is known and a country which is shrouded in a mysterious darkness.[64]

There was still a consensus in the Netherlands that China was a mystery. It is unclear whether that was caused by the way authors wrote about China (e.g. there was a more

[61] Joosten 1980, p. 11.
[62] Joosten 1980, p. 83.
[63] For more about the history of publications about China in the Netherlands, see Heijns 2012. The image of China in literary works is examined in *The Porcelain Pavilion: Dutch Literary Chinoiserie and the Western Image of China (1250-2007)* (Het Paviljoen van Porselein: Nederlandse Literaire Chinoiserie en het Westerse Beeld van China (1250-2007)) by Arie Pos. PhD thesis 2008.
[64] Anonymous 1848.

mercantile spirit) or because many of the books about China in Dutch were translations (e.g. those by British authors contained matters that were of British interest).

Like elsewhere in Europe, in the nineteenth century an effort is made to transform China into an object of academic study in the Netherlands. Although the focus was still on training students for a career in the Dutch East Indies, the start of an academic trend can be traced to 1857, when Hoffmann translated into Dutch and German *Chinese Moral Maxims* (*Xianwenshu* 賢文書). It was retranslated from the English version by John Francis Davis (1795-1890).[65] Then in 1863, military pharmacist C. F. M. de Grijs (1832–1902) who had studied Chinese, published his *Forensic Medicine* (Geregtelijke Geneeskunde). This is a translation of the original Chinese work *Records of Washing Away of Injuries* (*Xiyuanlu* 洗冤錄) which de Grijs published in the journal *Transactions of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences* (Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen). In 1866 Schlegel published a Dutch translation *Huajian ji: History of the Flowered Letter-paper* (Hoa Tsien ki of: Geschiedenis van het Gebloemde Briefpapier) (*Huajianji* 花箋記) in the same journal. De Groot published his *Annual Festivals and Customs of the Chinese in Xiamen* (Jaarlijkse feesten en gebruiken der Emoy-Chinezen) in Dutch in 1882, albeit not a literary translation.

From Borel's publications, it is clear that he tried to give a different view of China, compared to earlier works. Borel explains the difference of perception in the review of *Alone in China*, which I quoted above: he blames the scholarly approach to writing about China, as these writers are 'icy calm and desperately exact' in describing their findings and fail to describe 'the beauty' of China, 'the very soul of that vast country'. It is this realization that the existing image of China in the Netherlands is dissimilar to his own perception of China when he arrived in China that must have inspired Borel to take a different approach in his own works on China. He was determined to convey his personal impression of China in an attempt to dispel the (in his eyes) existing mistranslation of China. This garnered mixed reactions: Borel is praised as 'the benefactor of humanity'[66] but he is also criticized for portraying something that is not there. He acknowledges this in 'A Book about China':

> Yet I was almost the only one who held such a view of China and the Chinese, and I am perfectly aware that people suspected me of exaggeration, imagination and excessive enthusiasm, even the reviewers who wrote favorably about my works.[67]

It is not only a scholarly approach that Borel rejects, but also other popular writing, such as *Chinese Characteristics* (Chineesche Karaktertrekken), which is a collection of essays by the engineer William Meischke-Smith published in 1895, reprinted from *The New Rotterdam*

[65] Kuiper 2005, p. 116-118.
[66] Anonymous 1897, p. 374.
[67] Borel 1898c, p. 250.

*Newpaper* (De Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant). According to Borel, these essays that give an overall negative view of the Chinese must surely have aggravated the harsh judgment about the Chinese. Meischke-Smith was an engineer who lived in China many years and is said to have had knowledge of the language, culture and customs. An anonymous reviewer compares *Chinese Characteristics* with *Beauty and Wisdom from China* and attributes the difference in views (Meischke-Smith is negative vs. Borel is more positive) to their background:

> Mr. Henri Borel is a Chinese interpreter and has spent some years in Xiamen and other places of the Heavenly Kingdom. He is an artist who has been transferred to another milieu and looks at matters differently from Mr. Meischke-Smith, who is reputedly an engineer and a cool, emotionless and critical, practical person.[68]

Instead, Borel identifies with a book like *Alone in China*, which recounts the personal experience of Julian Ralph who had no prior knowledge of the Chinese language and culture. Borel admires Ralph's positive appreciation of China and agrees with the way he found China beyond expectations. This explains the approach that Borel will take, but before we go into his own writing and publications, we will first turn to his personal experiences when he travels to China in August 1892, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

[68] Anonymous 1896a, p. 11.