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The Early Dutch Sinologists : a study of their training in Holland and China, and their functions in the Netherlands Indies (1854-1900)

Kuiper, P.N.

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Author: Kuiper, Pieter Nicolaas

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of Chinese studies in the Netherlands are unique in their kind. Early Dutch sinology was different from elsewhere, since it was not directly connected with the needs of diplomacy, commerce, mission or scholarship, and not primarily directed towards China. It began as a training course for Chinese interpreters for the colonial government of the Netherlands Indies (now Indonesia), where a large and important Chinese minority was and is living. This resulted in the unusual decision to study Southern Chinese dialects (languages) instead of the Mandarin spoken in Northern China. In the nineteenth century, all Dutch students of Chinese followed a rigorous training programme for Chinese interpreters and were appointed as such after graduation—although the position of Chinese interpreter soon proved problematic. Since they all belonged to the same corps of linguists interacting with each other over a period of half a century, this study on the first generations of Dutch sinologists has chosen the prosopographical approach. This method seemed most suitable and straightforward because it allows a description of all aspects of the life and career of the Dutch sinologists without having to confine its discourse to a Procrustean bed of theoretical questions. I firmly believe that only in this way can justice be done to an almost forgotten group of pioneers. As a result this study, which may also be seen as an homage to the early Dutch sinologists, has resulted in an extensive collective and interactive biography of the 24 young men who were trained in sinology between 1854 and 1900. Most of them first studied Chinese in Leiden, then in Amoy (Xiamen), and were finally appointed in the Netherlands Indies, where they were cast into the depths and soon discovered that the position they had been trained for was not as well-outlined as they had expected. Being intelligent and talented men, they all tried to make the best of it, and many later pursued other careers ending up in high positions, such as Vice-President of the Council of the Indies, Chief of the Opium Monopoly, Labour Inspector, or Professor of Chinese in Leiden University.

In tracing and analysing the life stories of the first Dutch sinologists, describing their studies and their careers, observing China and the world through their eyes, and reliving their experiences, a fascinating story unfolds against the background of half a century of East-West relations in the heyday of imperialism. During this period, the consolidation of the Dutch colonial empire in the East Indies had great legal, social and economic implications for the Chinese minority. In the midst of these developments, the Dutch sinologists balanced as go-betweens between East and West. As a result, the description and analysis of the studies and various functions of

the Dutch sinologists requires a multidisciplinary point of view combining history, linguistics, anthropology, and law.

In writing this thesis, I was inspired by two major works on Dutch colonial history. In the first place, C. Fasseur's *De Indologen: Ambtenaren voor de Oost 1825–1950* (The Indologists: Public Servants for the Netherlands Indies 1825–1950). This book gives an in-depth account of the discussions about and the organisation of the training of Indies colonial officials. Their training always included some basic study of languages such as Malay, Javanese, Sundanese etc. The second is H.W. van den Doel's *De stille macht: Het Europese binnenlands bestuur op Java en Madoera, 1808–1942* (The Silent Power: The Interior Administration by Europeans on Java and Madura, 1808–1942), giving a similar in-depth description of the discussions on and organisation and workings of the regional colonial government in the Netherlands Indies. Compared with the relatively large numbers of indologists and Indies officials, the number of sinologists was of course very small, and they were trained as language specialists, not as administrators. Therefore a description of the studies, lives and work of all incumbents has been possible, and more attention is here paid to details of their linguistic training and work, and to cultural aspects. Similarly to the aforementioned studies, this thesis concentrates on the Dutch system, referring only where necessary to the colonial administrations or sinological training of Britain and France. In nineteenth-century discussions about the organisation and training of Dutch sinologists, reference is but rarely made to similar enterprises in other countries. Moreover, to my knowledge there exist no in-depth studies like the present one in English and French historiography.

My thesis also attempts to provide a history of nineteenth-century sinology at Leiden University, including student life, ending with an overview of Dutch sinology in the first half of the twentieth century with respect to the Indies. In this area, a third major source of inspiration has been W. Otterspeer's dissertation *De wiekslag van hun geest: De Leidse Universiteit in the negentiende eeuw* (The wingspan of their minds: Leiden University in the nineteenth century).

In a nutshell, then, this study endeavours to answer the following questions:

1. For what purpose and in what manner did sinology as an academic study come into being in the Netherlands?
2. How was the training of sinologists organised at Leiden University and in China: recruitment, background, and character of the students;
3. What was the curriculum and the level of competence in Chinese attained in Leiden and in China?
4. Which Chinese dialects were studied and why?
5. What was the nature of the work that was assigned to the sinologists in the Indies: interpreting, translation, and advising; special assignments?

6. What was the role of the Chinese teachers/clerks assigned to the interpreters in the Indies?
7. How did the sinologists-at-work manage to combine the needs of the administrative and judicial colonial authorities with the exigencies of scholarship (or their aspirations), in particular when these requirements seemed to be at loggerheads?
8. What scholarship was produced by the sinologists in direct connection with their work in the Indies? What was the quality and impact of these works?
9. Why, in the course of time, was the function of interpreter of Chinese in the Indies not a success and was their statutory number reduced from ten to four?
10. What remedies were created by the sinologists themselves to improve their difficult situation and to make their work more fulfilling? What other careers were pursued by those who left the interpreter corps?
11. What was the Dutch sinologists' perception of and attitude towards the Chinese and Chinese culture, and what did the Chinese think of them?
12. To what extent did the sinologists contribute to a better understanding of the Chinese minorities in the Indies on the part of the government, the judiciary and the public?

Chapter One introduces the beginnings of Dutch sinology (1849–55). Six of the fifteen chapters are about the study of the Chinese language. Three of these concern the organisation, recruitment, study programmes, and student life of three cohorts of students trained by Hoffmann in 1854–65 (Chapter Two) and by Schlegel in 1873–8 (Chapter Eight) and 1888–95 (Chapter Nine); one is about the temporary training in Batavia (1864–77) (Chapter Seven), and two are about the studies in China of Hoffmann's (1856–67) (Chapter Three) and Schlegel's students (1877–80 and 1892–8) (Chapter Ten). Two Chapters, respectively Four and Eleven, deal with special topics: the collecting of flora and fauna specimens in China (1857–64) and the compilation of three Chinese dictionaries. Six chapters focus on the interpreters at work: De Grij's activities for the conclusion of the Sino–Dutch Treaty of Tientsin of 1863 (Chapter Five), their teachers/clerks in the Indies (Chapter Six), their interpreting and translation work in the Indies (Chapter Twelve), advisory functions (Chapter Thirteen), publications and missions (Chapter Fourteen), and other administrative functions and careers (Chapter Fifteen). The Epilogue gives an overview of later developments in Dutch sinology in 1900–54. The Conclusion gives a thematic summary of the major findings of this dissertation. Personal backgrounds and details on individual careers are described in the short biographies in Appendix A.

In addition, there are some twenty appendices containing tables and lists (for instance of terminology), and three Dutch texts of regulations concerning the sinologists' training and work; there are also two maps, one graph, 45 illustrations, and a general bibliography.

It was at the suggestion of my doctoral supervisor, Leonard Blussé, that I started my research on this thesis. We already knew each other from our studies in Leiden, where he was five years my senior. In 1989 he had asked me to do the final editing of the Chinese version of his history of Sino–Dutch relations, *Tribuut aan China* (Tribute to China), which was being translated by our Chinese students of Dutch, resulting in *Zhong-He jiaowang shi* 中荷交往史 (A History of Sino–Dutch Contacts). In the same year Blussé published his pioneering article “Of Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water: Leiden University's Early Sinologists (1853–1911).” Originally he wished to work out this theme in a larger study himself, but some time afterwards he suggested that this might be a suitable topic for a doctoral dissertation by me. He handed me his notebook containing the sources and basic information for his article. A few years later, when I still had not yet started working in earnest, I began to feel embarrassed. But when I returned the notebook to him, he refused to accept it and gave it back to me, urging me to give the project a second thought. At the time I was working on a catalogue of Chinese and Sino–Western manuscripts in the Leiden University Library, which included documents left by some early Dutch sinologists. This turned out to be an excellent preparation for the present monograph. When the catalogue was finished in 2003, I finally started working on my doctoral research. I first investigated who these early sinologists were, and collected materials for the draft biographies. Then I wrote the first draft of Chapter Eleven (dictionaries), a subject that Blussé told me to include in any case, and the first draft of Chapter Six (teachers), which is a smaller topic relatively isolated from the rest. From then on, I wrote all chapters in their present sequence. In all, I have been working on this study for twelve years.

Writing and analysing the history of Dutch sinology was for me personally an extremely meaningful activity. I always had in mind my own experiences as a student in Leiden and Taiwan, as a teacher of Mandarin, as an interpreter/translator of Mandarin and Cantonese, and as a trainer of courtroom interpreters.

The original plan was to cover a longer period, from the beginnings of Chinese teaching in Leiden in 1854 until the major reorganisations of 1916–9, which marked a change in the orientation of Dutch sinology towards China instead of the Indies and the introduction of Mandarin as the main dialect taught. But after I had finished about ten chapters, it became evident that the dissertation would become much too long. At my supervi-

sor's suggestion I decided to stop at 1900, leaving out De Groot's students (1907–14) and the Chinese Emancipation Movement in the Indies (after 1900), keeping those studies as possible nest-eggs for future publication. Vestiges of the earlier plan can be seen in appendices B and H, which cover the period until 1917.

This dissertation aims to study the beginnings of Dutch sinology in the context of the sinologists' training in the Netherlands and China and their later functions in the Indies. It is almost completely based on primary sources, namely the archive of the former Ministry of Colonies in the National Archives in The Hague, and letters, diaries, and publications by the sinologists themselves in libraries and other archives, to which were added data from the digitised Dutch newspapers from the Indies and the Netherlands (now on www.delpher.nl). Unfortunately, no use could be made of possibly still-extant sources in Indonesia. The main secondary sources are studies on the history of the Netherlands Indies and of Sino–Dutch diplomatic relations. Names of important archives and internet sources, and all titles of books and articles that are referred to at least twice, can be found in the general bibliography.

The following choices were made as to the spelling of geographical and personal names. For geographical names in China, usually the most common old standard spelling is used, so as to make it easier to consult sources and to search old maps. Some nineteenth-century geographical names have disappeared, such as Kia Ying Chow—in modern *pinyin* spelling: Jiayingzhou—which since 1912 is called Meixian; it would be impossible to find the name 'Jiayingzhou' on any contemporary map. Modern spellings in *pinyin* are used for less frequently appearing geographical names or in case the pronunciation has changed, such as modern Gulangyu versus old Kulangsu (Gulangxu). For geographical names in the Indies, mostly the modern Indonesian spelling is used. Some exceptions to this rule are well-established names such as Batavia (Jakarta), Borneo (Kalimantan), and Atjeh (Aceh). A list of variant spellings can be found in Appendix I (letter I).

Similarly, names of Chinese in the Indies are spelled in the Hokkien or Hakka pronunciation as they appear in the old texts, but characters are added if known. Transcribing these names in Mandarin (if the characters are known at all) would make them unrecognisable. But names of which only Chinese characters are known are transcribed in Mandarin. Names of Chinese in China are usually spelled in the modern Mandarin spelling, but the older spellings are added in a note. This results in a mixture of spelling systems, but it seems the most practical solution to connect past and present.

