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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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CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation has been to provide an in-depth history of early Dutch sinology in chronological and geographical sequence. Grouped thematically, the following conclusions may be drawn.

The emergence of sinology as an academic study in the Netherlands is dealt with in Chapters One, Two, and Eight. Sinology came into being in the Netherlands for the practical purpose of training interpreters of Chinese for the Netherlands Indies government. Although P.J. Veth already saw a need for a university chair of Chinese in 1849, the first steps in this direction were only taken after the Indies government submitted a request for training such interpreters to the Minister of Colonies. In 1853, the issue became urgent in the Indies because of the implementation of new laws and the occurrence of some specific problems concerning the local Chinese. Minister of Colonies Ch.T. Pahud consequently consulted the only China specialist in the Netherlands, J.J. Hoffmann, government translator of Japanese since 1846, who was living in Leiden. Subsequently, Hoffmann wrote a master plan for teaching Chinese and reported on his own teaching experiences. The next year (1854) Minister Pahud charged him with teaching two students. This marks the beginning of sinology in Leiden, although these two students were not yet destined to become interpreters. At that time, Pahud wished to send students from Batavia to China and, after the completion of their studies, have these sinologists train new candidates in the Indies. When it soon became clear that not enough suitable candidates could be found in the colony, the Minister charged Hoffmann to train Chinese interpreters personally. In 1855, Hoffmann was appointed titular professor of Chinese and Japanese at Leiden University. In that position he trained a total of eight interpreters, who afterwards continued their practical studies in China. Ten years later, when they were stationed in the Indies, they attempted to train the second generation of interpreters in Batavia, but this was not successful for the same reason as before: there were not enough suitable candidates. In 1872, G. Schlegel went on sick leave to the Netherlands, and the next year he was at his request charged by the Minister to train new students in Leiden. Two years later Schlegel became titular professor of Chinese at Leiden University, and finally in 1877, when the Dutch university system was reformed, a chair for Chinese was established for Schlegel at Leiden University.

The organisation of the recruitment and training of students in the Netherlands is discussed in Chapters One, Two, and Seven to Nine, while the study in China is treated in Chapters Three, Seven, and Ten. In the

1850s, Hoffmann recruited students in Leiden by informal means: he sought talented youngsters aged 14-18, mostly at secondary schools in Leiden, and after testing their linguistic and other skills accepted them. These students then received from the Ministry of Colonies a monthly allowance for their studies and livelihood, and free passage to and from China. They were not registered as university students. In 1873 Schlegel introduced the competitive entrance examination, originally created in Batavia, with more success in Leiden, each time selecting the three best candidates, according to the needs in the Indies. These students had all finished their secondary education at the HBS and were usually about 18 years old. They were mostly of middle class background but without means; a fully paid training course and the security of a government position, combined with the chance to see the wide world was probably attractive for them. After about three years, most students were ready for practical training in China and they entered the Colonial service. In China their studies were monitored by the Dutch Consul.

The training curriculum in various periods is discussed in Chapters One to Three and Seven to Ten. In his teaching, Hoffmann began teaching Chinese characters on the first day, used collections of Chinese sayings as texts, with the emphasis on grammar, and compiled a manuscript dictionary and grammar to be copied by his students. They read moral primers, parts of novels and the *Four Books*, and texts on natural history. He taught them a Mandarin transcription system but did not teach them to speak Chinese, since he could not speak any dialect. Consequently, his students had to study in China for a relatively long period afterwards.

In the 1870s, Schlegel used a new teaching method. He started teaching the spoken language of Hokkien (Tsiangtsiu), and only began teaching Chinese characters after a few months. Subsequently he taught both the spoken and the written (colloquial and classical) language. In contrast to Hoffmann, he did not teach grammar to beginning students. Schlegel also compiled a Tsiangtsiu vocabulary to be copied by this students. After about three years of study in Leiden, the students could read basic texts such as popular novels, the *Sacred Edict* and the *Four Books* (Confucius, Mencius, etc.). Schlegel also taught them practical skills such as translating Indies ordinances into Chinese and Chinese account books into Dutch. Since he taught the right dialect from the start, it was thought that one year of studies in China would suffice. Later it became clear that this was too short, in particular for learning about Chinese customs and traditions, and their studies in China were lengthened to two years in 1893.

In China the students each hired a private Chinese teacher with whom they studied both the spoken dialect and the written language, usually for four or more hours a day. In addition, they learned a lot through their travels and their contacts with both Chinese and Europeans. These personal

experiences were essential for their work in the Indies. During these years, they learned the basics of the Chinese language, but they still needed to continue their studies in the Indies.

Since interpreters were trained for the Netherlands Indies, the students did not learn Mandarin, but Southern Chinese dialects spoken in the Indies. The question of which dialect or dialects were to be studied led to several debates between sinologists and the government, sometimes even within Parliament. This subject is discussed in Chapters Three, Seven, Nine, and Ten. About half of the students learned the basics of two dialects in China, namely Hokkien (Minnanhua) from Fujian and Cantonese or Hakka from Guangdong province, which were (thought to be) spoken respectively on Java and in the Outer Possessions. The first two students began learning Cantonese in 1856, and three others started with Hokkien in 1857 and 1858. Actually, studying Cantonese proved to be a mistake, since that dialect was at the time rarely spoken in the Indies. When in 1862 Schlegel arrived in Batavia, he must have reported this to Governor-General Sloet, whereupon the latter decided to take Hakka as the second dialect. In the 1880s and 1890s, the question as to which dialect should be studied was even raised several times in Parliament, but after consulting the sinologists, Minister of Colonies Sprenger van Eijk decided they should study Hokkien first. From 1897 on, some students also studied Hoklo (Chaochow dialect) in China; it is closely related to Hokkien. It would not be easy to learn two dialects at a time, of even consecutively, and some sinologists asserted that it would be better to learn only one dialect well than two defectively; others were confident that it was possible to learn two dialects.

By 1858, Mandarin had been excluded from the curriculum, being considered of no use in the Indies, and only two interpreters charged with special diplomatic tasks in China studied this dialect. After 1900 Mandarin became more important in the Indies, and in 1909 for the first time an Indies sinologist (Borel) was allowed to study Mandarin. Ten years later, in 1919, a turnabout took place in Leiden. From then on, all students trained for the Indies were required to study both Mandarin and Hokkien.

The key question was of course: what was the prospective function of the sinologists, for what task or tasks were they trained? Answers to this question can be found in Chapters Five and Twelve to Fifteen. Originally the Indies Government envisaged having Europeans trained as interpreters and translators of Chinese—no distinction being made between these functions—who would also provide information about the Chinese, but their function was not well defined. In the first Interpreters' Directive of 1863, they were called 'interpreter of the Chinese language' (*tolk voor de Chinesche taal*). Their interpreting and translating functions were primary, while their advice *could* be asked by the administrative and judicial author-

ities. However, it soon became clear that there was not enough work for them. On Java, most Chinese could speak some Malay or were even better in Malay than in Chinese. Moreover, the position of interpreter was too low for highly educated Europeans, and Chinese could do interpretation as well as or even better, just as before. Therefore, after some years, the sinologists, despite their title, were rarely asked to work as interpreters. Only the translation work in Batavia, mainly the translation of Dutch ordinances into Chinese, was rather voluminous, as was translating and analysing Chinese account books. And from 1866 on, they could also be useful as extraordinary members of the Orphans Chambers.

When the first group of Schlegel's Leiden-trained students arrived in the Indies in 1878, and places of stationing had to be found, Albrecht reported that their function was in most places a sinecure. The basic reason for this was that the Chinese were ruled by their own headmen; the interpreters did not have a position in the hierarchy and did not have fixed responsibilities, always having to wait for the assignment of work. Although they were allowed to do private interpretation and translation, this rarely happened and they hardly profited from it. In the beginning, the government seems not to have realised that the interpreter's function could work in both directions—not only proclaiming government regulations to the Chinese, but also voicing Chinese grievances, at least publicizing malversations by Chinese and Europeans alike. Therefore, the regional administrative authorities often considered them 'snoopers' (*dwardskijkers*). Only the judicial authorities sometimes asked their advice on Chinese legal matters and during criminal investigations. An effort by the central government to strengthen their position in 1879 was not successful, nor was the reorganisation of 1896, when their advisory functions were put to the fore and their title changed to 'Official for Chinese Affairs' (*ambtenaar voor Chineesche zaken*). Yet, all agreed that it was essential for the government to have at least some sinologists, and some of them were used sporadically as trouble shooters. Later several were charged with special tasks such as recruiting Chinese coolies in China, escorting remigrating coolies to China, and inspecting labour conditions in the Indies.

In race- and status-conscious colonial society, the important role of non-European assistants was often glossed over. This was also the case with the Dutch sinologists and their dependence on Chinese assistants. This subject is treated in Chapters Six and Twelve. The sinologists engaged personal teachers/clerks in China and took them along to the Indies; these teachers would help them in their further studies and assist them in their work. Some of the teachers' names are known, but mostly only in transcription and not in Chinese characters; little is known about their lives. Schlegel complained about the low quality of these teachers/clerks, stating that they could hardly be of help when making translations. But as

is shown in the present study, the other sinologists were quite dependent on their teachers/clerks, in particular when reading Chinese manuscripts in cursive script and at least for some also when translating into Chinese. These teachers were also indispensable for keeping up the sinologists' language skills in the spoken language when there was little other opportunity for practicing. And they were an important source of information on Chinese customs and traditions, and about the Chinese in the Indies.

The sinologists were trained for practical work, not for scholarship. Yet their training entailed a scholarly education, and some of them also produced fine scholarly works of practical value. How could these sinologists combine practical needs with their scholarly ambitions? This subject is treated in Chapters Nine, Eleven, and Fourteen. Their comparatively light workload allowed the sinologists to devote their time to other pursuits, such as scholarship. However, for some the lack of work and of official incentives for study diminished their motivation. Only those with a natural predilection for study took the opportunity and devoted their time to sinology, in particular Schlegel and De Groot. Many years later, they both became professors of Chinese in Leiden. Schlegel, however, soon proved to have more academic and idiosyncratic than practical interests. And it is typical that before his study mission to China in 1886–90, De Groot was explicitly not charged to study subjects of direct practical interest. The reason for this was that Director of Justice Buijn was worried that otherwise De Groot's study results might constrain the government unduly in its law-making policy. De Groot was given complete liberty of research in China, which suited him well. Some others, such as Groeneveldt and Hoetink (the latter after his retirement) studied historical subjects far removed from practical life in the Indies. Others, such as Meeter and Borel, actively published their opinions and concerns about current issues in newspapers, and as a result also often ran into trouble. It should be stressed that the Minister of Colonies usually supported scholarship; after his return to Leiden, Schlegel obtained full cooperation from the Minister to publish his Dutch–Chinese dictionary. De Groot also obtained government support for the publication of his major opus *The Religious System of China*. The relationship between the sinologists and the government is well illustrated in their correspondence, for instance about plans for the organisation of the training course, showing how the sinologists tried to attain their purpose in an elegant manner. These discussions also describe how a system was being built that lasted for many years.

The Dutch sinologists produced a number of major works of practical scholarship that had a certain impact. This subject is treated in Chapters Eleven and Fourteen. Scholarly works directly connected with their work in the Indies were in the first place the dictionaries. These were of course only influential within the small circle of sinologists. The earliest

were Francken and De Grijjs' Amoy–Dutch and Schlegel's Dutch–Chinese dictionary for translators, both pioneering works. However, the first was the work of a beginner and it took so long to be printed that it was already said to be outdated when it appeared, although it was still useful because of the Chinese characters added. The second was the result of Schlegel's gigantic labour, and although it contains many practical words and much ethnographic information, there is also a large amount of unpractical academic detail. As a result of major changes in Chinese vocabulary and language during the 1900s, it was outdated sooner than expected. Still, both dictionaries are monuments of Dutch sinology never equalled afterwards. Van de Stadt's Hakka dictionary is partly based on other dictionaries; it is much less ambitious than Schlegel's but gives a lively picture of the Hakka language spoken in the Banka and Biliton mines. Other works include Schlegel's meticulous study of secret societies, *The Hung-League*, which is still being reprinted. According to Schlegel, its publication lessened the fear of the Chinese (Sinophobia) and led to mitigated immigration rules. De Groot also contributed to mutual understanding by informing the public about Chinese customs in his book *The Yearly Festivals and Customs of the Amoy Chinese*, comparing them with those of Europe. His work on the Chinese kongsi on Borneo also had a great impact. He pleaded for more autonomy for the Chinese on Borneo in order to prevent the emergence of dangerous secret societies. It is remarkable that De Groot showed understanding for the predicament of the Chinese living in a hostile environment under foreign dominance. His *Religious System of China* remains an important source of ethnographic information. But many other smaller works and articles, such as those by Young, Meeter, Van der Spek, Borel and others, also had an impact in popularising knowledge about China and the Indies Chinese.

The Indies government at first expected to need a large number of European interpreters of Chinese, but in actual practice it soon became clear that there was little work for them and no need for their advice. This subject is treated in Chapters Twelve, Thirteen, and Fifteen. The original high expectations of the government in the 1850s, when ten interpreters were thought to be needed, were not fulfilled, leading to reductions of the required number in 1879 (four) and 1896 (five). The primary causes of the reduction were the general lack of work in translation and interpreting, and their very modest position in the bureaucracy. They also could not compete with the rich and powerful Chinese who were at the same time officers. Of course, the sinologists were inexperienced and young when they were first appointed, but they could not further develop themselves (except in scholarship) since they were denied any administrative responsibilities concerning the Chinese. In hindsight it turned out that the government only needed a small number of sinologists as trouble shooters

and safeguards during crises. Later, even after the establishment of the Bureau of Chinese Affairs in 1916, the number of active sinologists remained small.

All sinologists sailed to the Indies with high expectations but were deeply disappointed by the lack of work and appreciation. Having little to do, many of them were ready to take upon themselves other administrative tasks. Being highly educated men, most could very well perform these jobs. For one-third of the sinologists, this later developed into a stepping stone for a new career in the Indies, making use of their special knowledge of Chinese affairs. One had a career in the administration ending as Vice-President of the Council of the Indies; another became President of the Batavian Orphans Chamber, a third Chief of the Opium Monopoly and a fourth the first Inspector of Labour. Two joined private companies in the Indies, and two returned to Europe and became successful in scholarship. Only one chose an entirely different career in Europe.

One interesting question is what the attitude of the sinologists was towards China and the Chinese. Most references to this can be found in Chapters Three, Nine, Ten, and Thirteen. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Europeans in general had a low opinion of China and the Chinese. In many ways, China was at the time considered a backward and despicable country, lagging behind in hygiene and scientific knowledge, and infested with the evils of corruption (squeeze), greedy mandarins, cruel punishments, treacherous and fraudulent activities, aberrant sexual morals, etc. Nineteenth-century students of Chinese were confronted with a much heavier culture shock than students nowadays. The sinologists shared some of these negative opinions, but through their studies of the Chinese classics and literature and their contacts with Chinese teachers and friends, they also learned to sympathise with the Chinese. Schlegel became a fervent supporter of Chinese culture and interests, or of what he thought these were. In his dictionary Schlegel always stressed the importance of finding *equivalents* in translation, believing that any text could be translated into Chinese. He did the same when explaining Chinese customs and institutions to the European public, including his students, thereby trying to bridge the cultural gap. But Schlegel's arguments were hampered by his fantastic theories and stubborn attitude, by which he estranged himself from both his friends and the public. Others such as Groeneveldt were more pragmatic and realistic in their appraisal of the Chinese, and still others like Meeter did not agree with Schlegel's optimism about finding equivalents of all Western concepts in Chinese. But being confronted with both the backwardness and the greatness of Chinese civilisation, all had an ambivalent attitude. This is well illustrated by the case of Borel, who could both rail against the bad behaviour of his Chinese teachers, servants and

Buddhist monks, and at the same time idealise the spiritual qualities of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

In the Indies, there was often competition between the well-educated sinologists and the wealthy, powerful but illiterate Chinese officers, parts of whose tasks were taken over by the Europeans. The sinologists often had a greater liking for the Chinese newcomers (*sinkheh*), who were the underdog in Indies society, although disdain for the uncivilised and rude coolies was also not uncommon among some. The situation varied, and the sinologists often had different opinions leading to debates in the press. From the Chinese side, there is evidence of their respect for the learning and wisdom of Dutch sinologists, and even of some remarkable cases of friendship.

Finally, the question remains: to what extent did the sinologists contribute to a better understanding of the Chinese, and what was the overall impact of sinology in Indies society, including the government and judiciary? What difference did the sinologists make? This subject is treated in Chapters Twelve to Fifteen. Clearly, by translating and interpreting, the interpreters could help resolve a lot of problems and misunderstandings, but this happened only rarely. The same is true for their *notas* for the administration and reports to the courts. But among the European public, through their publications, they could foster a certain degree of understanding and more respect for the Chinese. This was perhaps the main impact they had. And although the sinologists were rarely asked for advice by the administration, they were appreciated by the Indies scholarly world: from 1870 until 1914, almost continuously at least one sinologist was a member of the Board of Directors of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, showing that they were in any case academically respected.