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# Translation in the Malay World

## *Different Communities, Different Agendas*<sup>1</sup>

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It is said that translations do not have much value because they are merely duplicates. Be that as it may, they do occupy a significant place in literature.<sup>2</sup>  
(Tzu You 1939:21)

**Abstract:** *For many centuries in the Malay world active and questioning use has been made of Arabic, Chinese, Indian and European source texts of all kinds. They were translated into Malay as well as into regional languages. This article outlines indigenous translation activities and colonial translation policy during the 19th and 20th centuries as they affected Malay literature. With the growing interference of the European colonial power in the educational sector and text production, the situation and tactics of the translators – among them Eurasians, Chinese, Sino-Malay, Arabs, Malay and Javanese – could not but change. Influenced also by their differing ethnic backgrounds, these translators developed diverse strategies, revealing divergent and sometimes contradictory notions of translation, translation history, and ‘ownership of the word’. This paper depicts the momentum that these concepts and strategies created in the Malay world. The screening and selection of cultural knowledge from outside the Malay traditions, as well as its purposeful acquisition and incorporation into the indigenous culture, has always relied on translation, but increasingly so when indigenously-run print media emerged in the Malay archipelago. From the late 19th century onwards literary translation in the broadest sense began to play a central role in the intellectual life of the Malay world. Within the indigenous context, a translation was apparently seen only as a first step, necessary to make the foreign source accessible, assessable, and – if deemed sufficiently relevant to be incorporated into the indigenous culture – adaptable.*

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on two chapters that form part of a forthcoming handbook on translation in Indonesia. Henri Chambert-Loir has undertaken the almost impossible mission of bringing together the expertise of scholars worldwide in order to produce a handbook on translation in Indonesia (former Netherlands East Indies). The publication of the handbook, in English and in an Indonesian translation, is planned for 2005.

<sup>2</sup> “Salinan katanja ada tida begitoe berharga, sebab tjoema ada barang ‘duplicaat’ sadja, tapi biar poen begitoe ia toch ambil kadoedoekan penting dalem literatuur”. (This and all following translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated).

## 1. Introduction

Over the centuries, foreign cultures and their languages have again and again touched the Malay Archipelago and left their traces in one way or the other; some were welcome, others forced themselves upon the indigenous cultures. One manifestation of this intercultural encounter is innumerable translations – from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian, as well as from various West European languages such as Dutch, English, German, and French. Apart from this cultural impact from the outside, a lively intra-regional exchange has also contributed to the history of translation in the Malay world. Translations from and into Malay<sup>3</sup> from the numerous regional languages – in particular, larger languages with a long tradition of writing of their own, such as Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese – form a significant part of the multi-cultural character of the region. Translation has also helped make connections amongst the numerous regional languages themselves, sometimes moving between oral, written, semi-oral and semi-written forms.

The earliest texts to be translated were of a religious character (the *q'ran* and the Bible being the most prominent ones) and legal texts concerning traditional law or, later, mostly colonial and governmental law. Facilitating and optimizing the colonization process required a good knowledge of the cultures subject to this process. Thus linguistic materials, classical literature and folklore as well as other oral traditions were also recorded, compiled and translated into the colonizer's language on a larger scale. In support of the modernization processes, translation into the languages of the colonized was expected to help provide school teaching materials, technical handbooks, and medical and other scientific texts, but also modern prose, plays and poetry. Closer studies reveal the linguistic journeys that some texts have undertaken, not only travelling from one language to another, but also from one genre to the next and even from one medium to another – for instance, from book to stage or from film to book.<sup>4</sup>

At least four major components of translation – i.e. the source text, the translator, the act of translation, and the target text – would have to be examined minutely to obtain a comprehensive picture of translation into Malay. It is impossible for a single article to cover it all. Moreover, the data required to meet that goal – if available at all – are far from complete. Space restrictions and the limits set by the accessible material allow me to focus only on literary translation activities as seen

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<sup>3</sup> The term Malay is used here for the various variants of Malay, standardized or not, spoken and printed up until Independence in 1945. In the more recent past the lingua franca Malay developed into the two separate national languages of Malaysian and Indonesian.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of more recent developments one would also have to look at film dubbing and sub-titling in the cinematic and TV world in this region.

against the background of Dutch colonial translation policy in the Netherlands East Indies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the field of Malay studies, the study of translation seems to have been restricted to some kind of linguistic pastime. Especially within Malay literary studies, the idea still prevails that any translation is merely a copy or imitation of an original. It is that original (not necessarily the source text per se, but the assumed creativity and individuality associated with it) that was regarded as 'authentic' literature and that has been the declared object of Western research interests. In today's Indonesia translation is valued more as a practical skill than as an academic discipline. Only very recently is the strong active element in translation being acknowledged and perceived as a response to – rather than as a passive reception of – foreign cultures. The perception of translation as an act of communication from colonized to colonizer entails two central questions: What are the concepts of translation in the colonial context and what are the intentions and strategies of the translators?

## 2. Disrespect for the original

The Western idea of the author as authority, as the creator and owner of a text, extends to the translated text. The concept of translation in its Western context strives to reduce the translator to an imperceptible element in text production, and it is eager to create the illusion that the reader is viewing some kind of cloned source text by the 'original' author, simply in a different language. Within the Malay traditions, however, the distinction between author and translator was far less relevant, and only under the heavy demands of Westernization and modernization processes did such a distinction slowly emerge. The range of terms used for translations at least up until the late 1960s reflects the still-ambivalent state of the concept. The closest to the word 'translated' is the Malay *tersalin* (also *disalin*).<sup>5</sup> Other expressions are *terkarang* (written, composed), *ditjeritakan* (narrated), *terkoetip* (copied, excerpted, quoted), *ditoeroenkan* (passed on, generated from), *di(bahasa)melaajoekan* (put into the Malay language), *ditoetoerkan* (arranged), and *dioesahkan* (organized, worked). All these terms, with the exception of *tersalin*, seem to be used almost synonymously. Often, however, translations or adaptations were not even marked as such at all. Malay translators fostered a certain creative disrespect for the 'original', drawing on a long tradition of narrative freedom that had not yet developed anything like the Western 'copyright mentality'.

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<sup>5</sup> When used in its reflexive form (*menyalin*), this verb also means 'to give birth'. Paradoxically, amongst all the different possible expressions it is *tersalin* that allows the least room for the translator's/author's creativity and productivity. Among the variety of possible expressions, it is this one that acknowledges the dependency on a source text.

Their prime objective was not to translate a piece of foreign culture as accurately as possible but to make the foreign text (or parts of it) accessible to their own culture. Whoever deemed the text entertaining and/or didactically valuable would then appropriate the text further by way of adaptations and variations.

In contrast to this Malay tradition, the Chinese and Sino-Malay not only looked back on a longer tradition of printed narratives, but they were also apparently imbued with a more pronounced concept of the individual author. Sino-Malay (**peranakan**) translators seemed not only more predisposed than translators of Malay origin to give references to the source text, but they would also adhere more closely to it during the early phase of its transfer. It is also in Chinese and Sino-Malay manuscripts of the first decades of the twentieth century that one finds reminders such as “*jangan dikoetip*” (not for quotation) or even direct references to copyright.<sup>6</sup> Western copyright in the Netherlands East Indies was prescribed by a law published in the *Staatsblad Bulletin* (1912, No. 600), although hardly anyone abided by it.<sup>7</sup> Some Sino-Malay authors sought to shield their publications against ‘copying’ by way of including personal stamps and signatures. Kwee Tek Hoay, one of the most productive Sino-Malay writers and translators, even extended his copyright claim to the future staging of his drama *Allah jang palsoe* (1919) – which itself is said to be an adaptation, allegedly of Oppenheim’s *False God*. Nonetheless, even the Sino-Malay often practised a more creative understanding of translation. A famous early example is Lie Kim Hok, who in 1886 combined *Les tribulations d’un Chinois en Chine* (1879) by Jules Verne with the Dutch youth novel *Klaasje Zevenster* by Van Lennep. Claudine Salmon (1994) discovered that Lie Kim Hok translated whole sections almost literally while omitting other parts completely. He also supplemented both the plot and the set of protagonists – e.g. adding some Javanese characters of his own invention. Nowhere, however, did he mention the two source texts.

Those translators who received a Western education or had even spent some time in Europe sometimes developed a ‘genuine’ interest in the Other’s culture. Some also believed that the ability to mimic Western culture could become a weapon in the struggle to pinpoint their own cultural identity. Yet others explored foreign culture and literature with great curiosity (as had been a long-standing practice even before the Dutch intrusion), searching for interesting or useful elements to introduce into their own culture without any high aspirations to learn about that Other.

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<sup>6</sup> “Nadruk verboden ingevolge de Auteurswet 1912” (Reprint prohibited by Author’s Law 1912) (Kwee Tek Hoaij 1919: cover **missing in ref**).

<sup>7</sup> In 1923 an additional decree was promulgated (*Staatsblad* 1923, No. 540) to specifically protect all publications by the Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur/Balai Poestaka (referred to below as Volkslectuur). The colonial publishing house was annoyed by the fact that indigenous writers used its publications as source texts without acknowledgement, thus depriving Volkslectuur of the extra publicity, not to mention profit.

For them the source text was one source among many to harvest, legitimately, searching for useful ideas and tools that might enrich the ways of self-representation and communication among the translator's own people.

### 3. A case study: Robinson Crusoe in Malay

The history of the Malay translation of *Robinson Crusoe* is a vivid illustration of the intricate receptive and creative reactions that translations of Western texts sometimes triggered in the Malay world. At the same time it displays the fragility of the link between translation and 'ownership of the word' – or in more modern terms, the concept of copyright.

The Malay Robinson experienced an intriguing journey through the print media of the time. Robinson's travel and commercial career, described at length in Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and its sequel, were not conveyed to the Indonesian reading audience. For his *Hikayat Robinson Crusoe*, the Eurasian Adolf Friedrich von de Wall picked the island episode as he had found it related in one of the Dutch translations circulating in great numbers in the colony.<sup>8</sup> He made minor adjustments to the text in an obvious attempt to make it agreeable to indigenous readers. The Malay translation was printed in 1875 by the government press in Batavia for use as a school textbook, and in 1906 it saw its seventh edition – by colonial standards, an indication of successful distribution.

This book was new in so many ways. It was printed (not manuscript); it was in Dutch script (not Arabic or Javanese script); it was in punctuated prose (not rhythmic verse). [...] In the late 20th century we are so accustomed to a modern form of Malay as the national language of Indonesia that it is hard to appreciate what a great step in this direction Von de Wall's Robinson Crusoe represented, and how different it was to all previous Malay literature. (Proudfoot 1997:47)

That might account for the fact that Robinson soon found his way into the rapidly growing world of the Malay press.<sup>9</sup> In the end, however, its success did not effectively

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<sup>8</sup> Also see Proudfoot (1997:46) and Jedamski (2002:25-30). It is likely that Von de Wall used Gerard Keller's Dutch translation as the source text. Keller's version had been published in 1869 in the Netherlands under the title *De geschiedenis van Robinson Crusoe* and was very popular both in the Netherlands and the Indies. The version in question is based on the German writer Joachim Campe's adaptation of Defoe's text. The possibility that Von de Wall's father, a German, kept a copy of the Campe version in his library cannot, however, be ruled out. **non of the titles in this paragraph is in the Works Cited.**

<sup>9</sup> I thank Matthew Cohen for pointing out the existence of the two *Robinson Crusoe* texts in *Bintang Soerabaia* to be discussed below.

go beyond the domain of the Dutch-controlled school textbooks. The motif of the shipwrecked man who discovers his real and self-reliant Self in total isolation did not find a place in Malay or Indonesian literature.

Nevertheless, during the 1880s Robinson Crusoe did succeed in turning the daily *Bintang Soerabaia* into the arena of an intriguing episode worth reconstructing in more detail here. Around the turn of the nineteenth century indigenous periodicals would not have had a great pool of local editors or correspondents at their disposal. This lack of personnel forced most indigenous periodicals to rely on material either previously published in other Malay or Dutch sources or sent in by readers. In this way readers could take the part of authors, critics, local reporters and translators. In May 1888 *Bintang Soerabaia* began printing a serialized story sent in by one such reader-correspondent. The text opens as follows:

Provided that no objections pertain, may this text be printed in *Bintang Soerabaia*. It goes as follows: This is a story about a man named Krusoe who lived in the land of Hangborg ...<sup>10</sup> (4 May 1888:1).

Except for the unconventional spelling of names – Hangborg is the German city of Hamburg – the text that follows is a more or less literal reprint of Von de Wall's *Robinson*. The episodes appeared monthly (fortnightly in July, August and December) in one or sometimes two columns on the front page. Each episode bears the pen name *Tjahaja Bintang* (Starlight) and is introduced with “*Slamet! Slamet!! Slamet!!! Batjalah di sini sobatkoe dari Robinson Krusoe*” (Hail! Hail!!! Hail!!! Read here, my friend, about Robinson Krusoe). No reference is made to Defoe's novel or the fact that this Malay version of *Robinson* flowed from Von de Wall's pen. On the contrary, the text is presented as *karanganku* (“my composition”). This ‘copycat’ text is, however, supplemented with two footnotes, the first of which expresses *Tjahaja Bintang*'s regrets about the early death of Robinson's brother. The second footnote appears in the subsequent part, emphasizing the immense kindness of Robinson's captain.

The first reader reaction was printed on 8 February 1889, after thirteen episodes. In his letter Poetoet Djoho Baliloe suggested dropping the Robinson series. It was of no use, averred Poetoet, since everyone knew the story from school. Moreover, the book was still available in the shops, so there was no need at all to print the text in the newspaper. He continues:

It would be best were you to print peculiar stories that have not yet appeared in any Malay book and that you [the editor] have written yourself.

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<sup>10</sup> “Djikaloe tiada laranganpoen kiranja hendaklah aken mengletaken pada di halaman Bintang Soerabaia bahoewa karangkoe ini, ja ini: Bahoewa ini soewatoe hikajat maka adalah saorang orang di negeri Hangborg bernama Krusoe ...”.



In that way the readers' cognition and reasoning would be enhanced and knowledge broadened, wouldn't it?<sup>11</sup>

Poetoet does not argue in terms of plagiarism or 'theft of the word'; rather, he stresses the elements of mimicry and originality and their educational benefit. There was no response from the editor, but on 12 February 1889 one more episode of *Robinson Krusoe* appeared, and this turned out to be the last, despite the usual 'to be continued' at the end of the episode. In the months that followed, the feuilleton section instead presented texts of Javanese, Malay and Arabic origin, while *Robinson Krusoe* was quietly halted.<sup>12</sup>

In 1901 Robinson surfaced for a second time, again in *Bintang Soerabaia*. This time a reader-correspondent from Probolinggo offered the editors a story entitled *Hikajat Anoewari, anaknja saorang miskin* (The story of Anoewari, child of a poor man). It was accepted for publication and thirteen episodes appeared between 25 June 1901 and 13 December 1902. All episodes were signed "*Maaflah dari saia P.T.B.S., M.C. Kertas Angin*" (My excuses, P.T.B.S., M.C. Wind Paper). On 24 October a letter reached the editor complaining that Kertas Angin (Wind Paper) was obviously trying to "pull the wool over the readers' eyes" (*menghamboerken pasir di mata* (2)), for the story of Anoewari was actually Robinson Crusoe's story. The sender of the letter, Moechatib No 42 from Solo, maintained that only the protagonist's name had been changed in Anoewari's story; otherwise it was identical to Von de Wall's Malay translation that had been circulating in indigenous schools for years. Moechatib expressed strong reservations about the continuation of Anoewari's story and closed his letter with the demand that this shameful venture be stopped (24 October 1902:2).

From a Western point of view, the indignation formulated in the letter above would not be interpreted as anything other than disgruntlement about an attempt at plagiarism. However, an altogether different interpretation is possible (and, from a Malay standpoint, more plausible). Here the 'shameful venture' refers to something other than the clumsy attempt to 'steal' Von de Wall's *Robinson*. It would express the reader's disappointment about an adaptation that was signalled but not provided. The prospect of such an adaptation was held out the moment

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<sup>11</sup> "Maka baiklah masoeken tjerita'an apa iang aneh jang beloen pernah terseboet dalem kitab kitab tjitakan melajoe, jang terbit dari pada karanganmoe sendiri, sedeng jang demikian itoe membikin loewasnja nalar lagi menambah pengetahoean lagi pembatja, tiadakah?"

<sup>12</sup> Von de Wall's Malay translation of the Arabic *Hikajat Bahtijar* had been published in *Bintang Soerabaia* in 1888. He also published a number of articles on the Malay language in the same newspaper and during the period that the *Krusoe* sequel featured. Apparently, he did not see any need to intervene in the debate on his translation of *Robinson Crusoe* – unless, of course, he was *Tjahaja Bintang* or Poetoet Djoho Baliloe himself.



Kertas Angin changed the name of the Western hero to that of an indigenous one. Unfortunately, he stopped at that, without attempting to appropriate the rest of the story to the indigenous world in any way. Hence Moechatib might have felt deceived. It is difficult to produce hardcore evidence to sustain this reading, but it does find ample support in the general practice of literary adaptation of the time. The fact that Moechatib let ten episodes and four months pass before sending his angry letter to the editor also supports this interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

The day after Moechatib's letter was printed, one more episode of Robinson alias Anoewari appeared in *Bintang Soerabaia* (25 October 1902), but the subsequent numbers instead contain the Malay version of a text by C. Spat, complete with all references. It was the *Bintang Soerabaia* issue of 12 November 1902 (second edition: 1), that carried a response from Kertas Angin to Moechatib. Again, the language of the letter is ambiguous and allows various readings. Kertas Angin thanks Moechatib for his critical comments, but continues:

Moreover, I hope that you, as you know so surely that the story is taken from the book Robinson, will explain this story from beginning to end.<sup>14</sup>

Thanking Moechatib once again, Kertas Angin emphasizes that he is only a country bumpkin who would not know how to write better. The actual point of criticism is not even touched on. On 19 November, 1902, a week later, another episode of *Hikajat Anoewari* made a surprising appearance in the literature section of *Bintang Soerabaia*. Obviously, Kertas Angin had picked up on the critique asking him to show more creativity. In this episode of the Robinson story Anoewari's life takes an abrupt turn and leaves his alter ego Robinson behind. Anoewari is freed from his isolation on the island and released to an 'indigenous life'.

It must remain open to speculation whether this belated adaptation performance (in style and vocabulary far less eloquent than the Von de Wall translation) was a desperate endeavour to cover up attempted plagiarism. I am inclined to believe that Kertas Angin did after all feel the urge to provide the cultural adaptation demanded. Whatever his intentions might have been, he did not quite succeed. After the open critique from Moechatib, the adjusted *Hikajat Anoewari* saw just two more episodes and a rather forced ending. About a month later Kertas Angin suggested another text for publication, stressing that the proposed manuscript was a Malay adaptation of a Javanese book. The editor declined.

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<sup>13</sup> During those four months Moechatib sent in a couple of other contributions to *Bintang Soerabaia*, but nothing that referred to the serialized story.

<sup>14</sup> "Lain dari itoe djikaloe toewan Moechatib No. 42 soenggoe tahoe kaloe itoe hikajat petikan dari boekoe Robinson, saia harep soepaia di terangken dari pertama sampe di brentinja itoe hikajat".

#### 4. Translation and its agents in the Netherlands East Indies: A rough sketch<sup>15</sup>

As in any other colonial society, in the Netherlands East Indies different population groups became involved in translation at different periods of time and for different reasons. The Dutch, the Eurasians, the Sino-Malay and the **pribumi** ('natives', in this context primarily of Malay origin) all played prominent roles in translation, but hardly ever had they been trained as translators. Bound together in the confines of their colonial world, they were in one way or other interconnected. By depicting their activities we can draw a rough map of the history of translation in the Netherlands East Indies.

Any act of translation requires two basic prerequisites: access to the source text and command of at least two languages. In the rigid hierarchy of the colonial world, Western education therefore came to play a key role. Provided the translation was also to be published, financial capital or access to printing facilities also played a key role. The upshot was that Dutch and Eurasians were the first to translate into Malay (and some regional languages) in a more systematic fashion. These first translations of primarily Western sources sprang from individual initiative and were mostly prompted by linguistic or missionary interest. From the 1850s onwards there also emerged a need for teaching materials, albeit still in small quantities. Most of the translators were civil servants, scholars, writers, journalists or teachers – more than once all in one person. Consequently, although not yet structured and organized, translation was grounded on a certain policy, closely intertwined with basic colonial interests. When it came to prose texts, however, personal taste and availability often determined the selection of titles to be translated. The corpus of Von de Wall's prose translations, for instance, reveals a strong liking for travel and adventure literature. As well as translating Robinson Crusoe's episode on the island into the *Hikajat Robinson Crusoe* (1875), Von de Wall also translated *Sindbad* (1876) and Uilken's *De lotgevallen van Djahidin* (1879).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Malay translations of Western prose began to count as an economic factor in the (mainly Dutch) publishing business. Being an almost guaranteed sales success, Western adventure novels in Malay were a welcome source of profit. Around 1890 the brothers Gimberg & Co in Surabaya published *Boekoe tjerita-an hikajatnja Baron van Munchhausen* (The Book of Stories of the Accounts of the Baron Munchhausen). This booklet of 86 pages cannot be more than an abbreviated version of the source text, probably the popular Dutch translation by Gerard Keller with illustrations by Gustave Doré

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<sup>15</sup> I will restrict myself to the colonial period from around 1870 to 1945, when the growing technical and educational opportunities stimulated the various non-Western groups in the Netherlands East Indies to actively participate in the press media and literature market.

that was already available in its fourth edition around 1880. In 1895 G.C.T. van Dorp put out a small series of Jules Verne translations in Semarang. *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1869) was 'retold' in low Malay (*tertjaritaken di dalem bahasa Melaijoe renda*) by W.N.J.G. Claasz, who is said to have based his version, *20.000 mijl di dalem laoot*, on a French edition. Claasz also retold *La Maison à vapeur* (1879-80), but this was apparently based on a Dutch translation (*Het Stoomhuis*), as was the third book in this series, *Poeloe rasia* (*L'Île mystérieuse* (1875)). Jules Verne was extremely popular, and not just among Dutch publishers, who had to seek a certain profit to survive, unlike the governmental printing house. Most likely translated by a Sino-Malay, *Hikajat Fileas Fogg atawa mengoelilingi boemi dalem 80 hari lamanja* (*Le tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* by Jules Verne) appeared in Semarang in 1890. Like most of the early translations, this gives only initials: L.T.H.M. (Salmon 1981:31). Likewise for M.C., who rendered Verne's *Michel Strogoff* into Low Malay in 1896 for the publisher Tjiong Eng Lok.<sup>16</sup> The success of the private Dutch publishers with their Malay versions of Western adventure literature might have acted as a stimulus to the nascent Chinese and Sino-Malay publishers – but it could just as well have been the other way around.

Although more detailed research is required on Eurasian and Sino-Malay translation activities, it is safe to say that it was primarily these translators who in the beginning acted as 'cultural gatekeepers', selecting Western and/or Chinese texts, in particular novels, and translating them into indigenous languages. Not only did they have access to both cultures, but they also tended to see themselves as mediators between those cultures and also between the colonizer and the colonized. The Eurasians in particular might have considered their mediating position as an upgrading of their actual social standing. Whatever position the Eurasian or Sino-Malay translators assigned to themselves in the cultural power play, by translating Western literature into Malay they did open up an avenue into the Western world of thought for the indigenous population. This avenue, however, was not yet a bustling thoroughfare. We might indeed ask whether the segment of the indigenous population that was educated to read Malay in Latin script towards the end of the nineteenth century was at all eager to learn about Western thought. Eurasian and Dutch translators were didactically aiming to help the Malay gradually 'climb the ladder of evolution' by introducing Western values and concepts. Paradoxically, the indigenous recipients seem to have tested all translations of the foreign into

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<sup>16</sup> Decades later, around 1938, the private Dutch publisher Graauws brought out another series of at least five volumes of Jules Verne novels in Malay. The translator, F.B. Sanders, was a former inspector of indigenous education. It is noteworthy that, like Claasz before him, he too translated the first Verne volume from the French source, while the other volumes were apparently based on Dutch translations.

Malay for their acquisition potential first and foremost – that is, the texts' further translatability into and actual use in their own cultural context. Western texts met with various degrees of acceptance, and at no time were they automatically embraced merely because of their Western origin.

With the spread of Western-oriented education among the indigenous population and an ever-increasing demand for reading materials in indigenous languages, non-Western translators also gained prominence. From the 1880s Chinese and Sino-Malay publishers, often educated privately or overseas, set the stage for a Malay literature production dissociated from any colonial agenda. Most of them were located in the larger cities in Java, where they had started their own business by buying up periodicals and printing plants from Europeans who had gone bankrupt during the depression of 1886. This first generation of Sino-Malay writers/translators/publishers produced quite a number of translations from Western and Chinese prose, publishing them either in book form or serializing them in their own periodicals.<sup>17</sup> The latter proved one of the more effective media for circulating self-composed or translated texts not only among the Chinese and Sino-Malay, but also among the Eurasians and Malay. Finally, a new format emerged, the **roman madjalah** (novel journal), which was even more effective. That second generation of Sino-Malay translators will be discussed below in more detail. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Sino-Malays had secured themselves a firm position in the world of writing, translating and printing. This was also when the first occasional Sino-Malay book translations of Western texts appeared alongside translations from Chinese.<sup>18</sup> Decades later Tzu You (1939:21) states that

the style and language of Malay translations from Western languages are better than Malay translations of Chinese literature. This is understandable, because lately the translators have been people who have had a Western education.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to Malay and Dutch, the educated Sino-Malays at the turn of the century apparently already had a command of English. In 1892, for instance, English-speaking teachers from Singapore taught all kinds of courses at the Anglo-Chinese school in

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<sup>17</sup> In 1900 Oey Tjay Hin even founded a weekly that was entirely devoted to translations of Chinese texts and translations from regional languages (Salmon 1981:404).

<sup>18</sup> Two of the earliest **peranakan** translations were the above-mentioned Jules Verne titles that came out in 1890 and 1896 respectively. The first Sino-Malay translation of a Western novel, however, has not yet been ascertained. The earliest known translation of a Western novel into Malay is the previously discussed title *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared in 1875. It preceded the first Sino-Malay translation of a Chinese novel by seven years (Salmon 1994:21;126).

<sup>19</sup> "Dibandingkan dengan salinan dari literatuur Tionghoa salinan Melajoe dari literatuur Barat bahasa dan stijnja ada lebih baik. Satoe hal jang bisa dimengarti, sebab penjalin-penjalin jang blakangan ada terdiri dari orang-orang jang telah dapet peladjaran Barat".

Batavia, including English composition and grammar (Adam 1995:63). The biographical data provided by Salmon (1981)<sup>20</sup> show that quite a number of Sino-Malay writers had received (English) schooling abroad.<sup>21</sup> During the 1920 and 1930s the Sino-Malay print media were full of advertisements for dictionaries and language courses, mainly for English but also for Dutch and Malay. Nevertheless, most translations derived from Dutch-language sources, probably because those were more numerous and easier to obtain.<sup>22</sup>

Only a few **pribumi** produced and published translations independently. As was the case with the Sino-Malay, 'native' translators were hardly ever professionals. In the beginning they were stimulated and ambitious readers, mostly teachers and junior officials. Their profession might be why they often did not sign the contributions they sent in to journals and newspapers. If they did, it would usually only be with their initials or a pen name. Although Chinese and Sino-Malay translators and writers must have easily outnumbered all others, it can be assumed that translators from other ethnic backgrounds also hid themselves behind the colourful pen names that were used (as apparently happened in the case of *Robinson Crusoe*).

The literary market was opening up to the creative power of the **pribumi**. In this context it might seem astounding that neither Raden Mas Tirto Adhi Soerjo (1880-1918), the pioneer of the **pribumi** press and author of a number of Malay prose texts, nor any of his followers came forward with translations of Western literature. A descendant of a powerful Javanese noble family with close links to the Dutch rulers, Tirto spoke Dutch more fluently than Malay, and only after he had launched his political fight against colonial arbitrariness did he start writing in Malay. Numerous friends and students supported him, but nor did any of them engage in the translation of (Western) fiction. Not all of Tirto's followers had a command of Dutch or any other Western language – some did not even have a proper school education. This might account for the lack of interest in translation. A more likely explanation, however, is that the group focused so firmly on its political goals and active social engagement, including giving active legal advice and supporting media actions, that

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<sup>20</sup> More than two decades after its appearance, Salmon's annotated bibliography *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia* (1981) remains the most comprehensive collection of data on Sino-Malay literature and translation. It is because of this impressive work that Sino-Malay literature has not fallen into total oblivion and that people became aware of this aspect of Malay cultural production and the major role it played in the beginnings of 'modern Indonesian literature'.

<sup>21</sup> Chinese-financed schools and, later, the Dutch Chinese schools would serve **peranakan** Chinese who could not afford to or did not want to send their children abroad. Naturally, the Dutch schools emphasized the use of the Dutch language.

<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that it was Dutch translations of French popular literature that mostly attracted the attention of Sino-Malay (**peranakan**) translators and publishers – often one and the same person.

translations or adaptations, in particular of Western literary sources, were an expendable luxury. The reason that the translation of literature in general did not gain a place in the early political struggles of this group must remain open to speculation. Unlike some Sino-Malay writers and translators who produced a remarkable number of adaptations that presented imaginative drafts of social and political utopia, these **pribumi** writers did not recognize the political potential of translated and adapted fiction. It is possible that Western texts and their translation were neglected simply because of their Western origins or perhaps because of the lack of political effectiveness still ascribed to fiction in general.<sup>23</sup> It is even conceivable that the production of novels was still regarded as the domain of the **peranakan** and Chinese publishers.

Many of the **pribumi** writers and translators were, in one way or other, affiliated with the Dutch 'Bureau of People's Literature' (*Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur* or *Balai Poestaka*), founded in 1908. Quite a number of them, in fact, received their complete training from that colonial agency. With the emergence of the literary journal *Poedjangga Baroe* in 1933 in Batavia, for instance, a group of indigenous intellectuals tacitly supported by Volkslectuur came to the fore. Some of its founding members actually worked for the governmental agency. The circle was heavily oriented towards Western literary concepts, and its choice of texts to be translated also fell back on Dutch literature. Among other endeavours, *Poedjangga Baroe* writers became famous for emulating works by the so-called Tachtiger, a famous group of Dutch writers from the 1880s whose literary production subscribed to realism. It is worth noting that *Poedjangga Baroe* devoted more attention to Western poetry than did other groups at the time.

Around 1935 and in the course of strong politicization on the one hand and the ongoing secularization of Islam on the other hand, the Medan-based Islamic Malay publishers in Sumatra began to stir. At a safe distance from the centre of colonial power in Batavia, they had far more room to act than, for instance, the Sino-Malay, who seem to have been under constant colonial monitoring. A highly ambiguous attitude towards the colonizer on the one hand, and open detest for the Sino-Malay on the other hand, marked the group's activities, as will be discussed a little later.

## 5. Translation and colonial policy

At no time did Dutch language policy in the Netherlands Indies represent the common pattern of one dominant Western language opposed to the oppressed indigenous languages, a pattern that is found in most former colonies, where to the present the language of the colonizers remains the predominant one. While

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<sup>23</sup> Later, the young followers of Tirta would indeed produce fiction. Semaun and Mas Marco wrote novels and short stories, none of which – as far as we know – is a translation or adaptation.

other colonial powers imposed their own language on the indigenous population, the Dutch ruled and later educated the Indonesian people in their own indigenous languages and in Malay. This language policy led to considerable consequences for colonial translation policy that can only be touched upon here. When after 1850 the colonial education system hesitantly started to open up to a small fraction of the indigenous population, the colonial government felt obliged to start procuring 'suitable' reading materials. At this point, translations were still only a marginal issue. The target groups, the Eurasian descendants and the Western-oriented feudal elite, were presumed to be reading books in Dutch, ones also listed in the school curriculum of Dutch schools in the Netherlands, or traditional texts in Javanese or *Jawi*, Arabic in Malay script. Thus it would be an exaggeration to mark what was merely an uncertain first step as the definite beginning of a translation policy. The only 'policy' that had been pursued up to this point, and which was still being maintained, can be described as alertly guarding both the Dutch language and Western thought against uncontrolled indigenous access. During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the need for translation was spreading beyond governmental decrees and law texts. The steadily widening education system led to growing demand for school textbooks, including in indigenous languages. The colonial government could no longer leave the production of reading materials to missionaries and private Dutch publishers. In 1878 the Depot van de leermiddelen was commissioned to put out textbooks and teaching materials, but the results were meagre. It is only with the founding of the Commissie voor de Volkslectuur (Commission for People's Literature; later also called Balai Poestaka) in 1908 that one could speak of a systematic approach to translation.

The Commission for People's Literature (herebelow, Volkslectuur) started off as a small group of both active and retired officials who would on an honorary basis and in a consultative function only advise the Department of Education and Religion. Accordingly, the selection of texts to be translated depended on the personal taste and judgement of the members rather than on a clear concept. Volkslectuur underwent distinct changes when D.A. Rinkes was appointed director of the Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur in 1917.<sup>24</sup> Among other strategies, Rinkes worked towards developing clearly defined selection criteria for translations and on a focused search for skilled translators. He made no bones about his ambition to push the Malay language, which until then had been neglected in favour of the regional languages Javanese, Sundanese, and even Madurese. In the beginning his efforts were severely impeded by pragmatic problems. The lack of source materials and the severe shortage of qualified personnel were obstacles with which the newly established Malay

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<sup>24</sup> The Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur had been created in addition to the Commissie as the result of an internal administrative problem with Commissie personnel, and it soon superseded the Commissie in every respect.



section of Volkslectuur had to cope. Rinkes went so far as to openly appeal to Malay-speaking readers to help him by way of translating and sending in manuscripts. Yet no matter how desperate Rinkes' appeal might have been, on no account would Volkslectuur ever have drawn on the already flourishing Sino-Malay literature – part of which represented fine translations and adaptations of Western and Chinese works. On the contrary, this was conceived of as a severe threat to (colonial) culture in terms of both moral values and language.

Within just a couple of years Volkslectuur developed into a wide-reaching colonial agency. It also served as the official translation bureau that trained its own translators and writers, who were working as swiftly with non-literary texts as with literary source materials of all kinds.<sup>25</sup>

It was also very fortunate that the Bureau for Popular Literature served as the official translation bureau. Apart from publishing authentic or translated narratives as well as simple technical reading matter, it could also exert a creative and regulatory influence by bringing out juridical regulations and informative texts in Malay, in various areas of official control and interest, ranging from pineapple cultivation to baby care. The Bureau for Popular Literature thus contributed remarkably to the shaping of the modern Malay before the war.<sup>26</sup> (Drewes 1948:17)

Such manuals, handbooks, and guides, often translated from Western examples and constituting a crucial element in many colonial campaigns, indeed manifest the attempt to implement Western views, values, and concepts, ranging from traffic regulations, health care, modern communication and transport, punctuality, poultry farming and how to grow rice and mangoes, to the rules of a monetary system. This kind of translation work met with the acceptance and support of other colonial authorities. Literary translations, on the other hand, seemed much harder to justify in the context of colonial power maintenance. Rinkes was one of the few officials who did recognize the manipulative potential of literature – and had texts systematically adjusted. At the same time Volkslectuur publications were meant to oust the highly

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<sup>25</sup> Outside Volkslectuur and in competition with it there were also some private Dutch publishers who engaged in translation. Presumably the most successful ones among them were Kolff(-Buning) and Wolters, the latter having a monopoly on school textbooks.

<sup>26</sup> “Een gelukkige omstandigheid was echter weer, dat het Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur als officieel vertaalbureau dienst deed, zodat het behalve door eigen uitgave van oorspronkelijke en vertaalde verhalen en van eenvoudige vaktechnische lectuur ook creatief en regulerend kon werken door zijn Maleise uitgaven van wettelijke voorschriften en voorlichtende geschriften op alle mogelijk terrein van ambtelijk toezicht en belangstelling, van ananascultuur tot zuigelingenverzorging toe. Het Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur heeft dan ook zeker aanzienlijk bijgedragen tot de vormgeving van het moderne Maleis vóór de oorlog”.

successful Sino-Malay literature, including its selection of translations. For its own selection of texts to be translated, Volkslectuur did formulate a few selection criteria:

As to the choice of European books (nothing other than Dutch books or those for which a Dutch translation is available), above all it is the educated native who has already read and assessed the particular book in Dutch whose judgement is to be followed. Books that feature horrifying stories for the sake of sensation, or books full of praise (propaganda) for something beyond the pale – which is to be found abundantly in native books – will all be unacceptable. Those books that bear a connection of some kind to the present time and its condition have to be selected. (Rinkes 1923:147)<sup>27</sup>

Volkslectuur explicitly used the labels translation and adaptation, but the line between the two is vague and the distinction not coherent. In most cases no serious attempt was made to be faithful to the ‘original’. A list containing the titles of both translated and adapted Western novels that was appended to one of the numerous Volkslectuur self-presentation brochures (Bureau voor de Volkslectuur 1929) heightens this impression. It is puzzling to see that *The Adventures of the Baron von Munchhausen* is categorized as an “adaptation”, while *Puss in Boots* features as a “translation”, even though the plots of both texts have been transposed into an indigenous setting.<sup>28</sup> A Volkslectuur ‘translation’, marked as such on the cover and in catalogues, would undergo only subtle changes and no drastic alterations in form or plot, even in cases where the plots were transposed into an indigenous setting, as was the case with *Puss in Boots* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Other examples that were to be regarded as successful translations according to Volkslectuur officials were *The Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, and the very Dutch-style youth stories revolving around *Dik Trom*. Drawing on traditional traditions and values, all these renditions help produce an affirmative reading of the given power structure.

Straightforward adaptations, on the other hand, were supposed to undergo a complete and intentional adjustment. All plots were redesigned to suit the colonizer’s perspective and transferred to a colonial Indonesian setting sketched out as the colonizer wished to present it. The Western characters were all replaced by indigenous protagonists and, ideally, the hero was readily transformed into the law-abiding

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<sup>27</sup> “Tentang pilihan kitab-kitab Eropah (semata-mata kitab-kitab Belanda atau jang lain, jang telah ada salinannja dalam basa Belanda) hoebaja-hoebaja ditoeroet timbangan Boemipoetera jang terpeladjar, jang telah pernah membatja dan menimbang si kitab-kitab itoe dalam bahasa Belanda, akan tetapi kitab-kitab jang berisi tjeritera jang ngeri-ngeri oentoek penarik hati, atau jang mengandoeng poedjian (propaganda) tentang sesoeatoe maksoed atau hal-hal jang moestahil, jang telah banjak dalam kitab Boemipoetera sendiri, sekaliannja itoe tiada terambil, jang dipilih ialah kitab-kitab jang agak berhoeboengan dengan keadaan-keadaan pada zaman ini”.

<sup>28</sup> Bureau voor de Volkslectuur (1929). For a detailed analysis of the Volkslectuur ‘translations’ of *Puss in Boots* and *Sleeping Beauty*, see Jedamski (1988).

and grateful role model of the colonized envisioned by the Dutch. To exemplify this second category of ‘translations’, Rinkes chooses

... the story of OLIVER TWIST, which has come out under the title SI DJAMIN DAN SI DJOHAN, which takes place in Betawi. The murderer and thief in London becomes a pickpocket in Pasar Senen, a rich Chinese helps DJAMIN; cinemas, Pasar Ikan, Sluisbrug etc. all appear in the narrative too. In short, this story is actually adapted and not just literally translated as the other books.<sup>29</sup> (Rinkes 1923:147)

On top of it all, the adapted version of a source text would also be interspersed with distinct references to all kinds of ‘civilizing’ and ‘educational’ campaigns mentioned earlier on. Again the Oliver Twist adaptation can serve as a vivid example. The Volkslectuur book catalogue for the year 1919 nicely fills in some of the aspects not yet mentioned by Rinkes:

Its contents: the story of two despairing children, because they are living with their stepmother. Moreover, their father is often drunk, for he really loves drinking alcohol. Thus, the father is a drunkard, the stepmother an opium addict. It is very obvious that opium and alcohol cause real human feelings to disappear and destroy all decent behaviour.<sup>30</sup> (Daftar 1919:90) ~~date is 1922 in ref~~

The Volkslectuur adaptation of *Oliver Twist*<sup>31</sup> achieved the status of the classic example to be quoted whenever Volkslectuur presented its literature production and translation policy. It was neither the first nor the only Western novel to be given an indigenous setting, but it is probably the best known.

Another vivid example of a free adaptation is *Baron von Munchhausen*. Volkslectuur first brought out an abridged Javanese translation by F.L. Winter in 1924,

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<sup>29</sup> “[...] tjerita OLIVER TWIST jang diterbitkan dengan nama SI DJAMIN dan si DJOHAN, jang berlakoe di Betawi, pemboenoh dan pentjoeri di Londen, djadi boeaja Pasar Senen, seorang Tjina kaya menolong si DJAMIN, bioscoop, Pasar Ikan, Sluisbrug d.l.l. dibitjarakan djoega. Pendeknja tjerita itoe sebenarnja disalin dan tiada sadja ditoeroet segala perkataan seperti pada kitab jang lain-lain”.

<sup>30</sup> “Isinja: Mentjeriterakan doewa orang anak sengsara karena menoempang kepada ma’tirinja, apalagi kerap kali bapanja maboek, sebab gemar-gemar meminoem minoeman keras. Djadi bapa peminoem, ma’tiri pepadat. Njata sekali madat dan minoeman keras itoe menghilangkan perasaan manoesija jang sempoerna dan meroesak ‘adat sopan satoen”.

<sup>31</sup> The Volkslectuur adaptation, *Si Djamin dan Si Djohan* (1918) by Merari Siregar, is based on Van Maurits’ Dutch adaptation of the Dickens novel entitled *Jan Smees* (1879). Teeuw (1985) discusses the metamorphosis of this Dutch text into the Malay adaptation. Merari Siregar also adapted the Dickens novel *Nelly* for Volkslectuur, under the title *Azab Sengsara Seorang Gadis* (1920).

based on a Dutch adaptation by Gerard Keller.<sup>32</sup> A couple of years later Baron von Munchhausen reappeared, now transformed into the Malay *Pa' Bohong* (1928). This adaptation was created by B. Th. Brondgeest and Sutan Perang Boestami. It is not known how closely they actually worked together, but the first produced the narration, “following the story of *Baron van Munchhausen*” (“*Ditjeriterakan menoeroet hikajat Baron van Munchhausen*”) – and very likely also using the Dutch adaptation by Keller. The other then translated the adapted adaptation. It is striking that in the course of the adaptation process even the Dutch illustrations, which had still been used in the earlier Javanese version, were now transformed into Malay illustrations. *Pinokkio* underwent a similar transformation in text and illustrations when he was turned into *Si Kentus* (Nr.282/a:ca.1919).

In their search for source texts, one might expect that the Volkslectuur officials would have turned to the products of Eurasian translation or at least to the stock kept in the *Depot van leermiddelen*, but they rarely did so, instead seeking inspiration elsewhere. To a small degree it was the indigenous employees and their suggestions that provided source texts. The Dutch libraries and reading rooms also run by Volkslectuur<sup>33</sup> were another source of inspiration. The list of Malay translations of Western literature put out by Volkslectuur conspicuously resembles the contents of those Dutch libraries. This observation invites the assumption that a great number of source texts actually derived from this collection. On the other hand, it is obvious – despite the resemblance between the two collections in question – that numerous novels made accessible in Dutch were not provided in any of the indigenous languages. Novels by Couperus, Kooy van Zeggelen, Strindberg, or Hesse, for instance, never made it to the Taman Poestaka, the Volkslectuur libraries holding books in the indigenous languages.

A comparison between the list of Volkslectuur translations and the translations produced by non-Dutch publishers indicates one further relevant selection criterion. Volkslectuur had been systematically monitoring indigenous press activities and literary production since 1917. Since the early 1920s Sino-Malay publishers had been producing translations and adaptations of Western novels – that is, of all categories of literature – with ever-growing success. From the mid-1930s Sumatran Malay publishers followed their example. A closer look at Volkslectuur publication and lending lists reveals that many of their best-lending translations – Volkslectuur books circulated more successfully via its libraries than by actual sales – were preceded by successful indigenous versions. Volkslectuur was not acting but reacting when it started to bring out Malay translations of novels by Jules Verne and Dumas (both father and son). Even the Malay adaptation of Dickens' *Oliver*

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<sup>32</sup> F. L. Winter had already published a Javanese version of *Münchhausen* in 1883 under the title *Cariyosipun Baron phan Munghausen*, based on the Dutch translation of R.E. *Raspe's Baron Munchhausen's Narratives of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia* (1786).

<sup>33</sup> Most of the Dutch libraries were attached to *Hollandsche Inlandsche Scholen* (Dutch-language Indigenous Schools), but there were also some in private schools.

*Twist* had a Sino-Malay predecessor.

It was never the intention of *Volkslectuur* to open up Western literature unconditionally and to thereby present Western models of thought to the Indonesians. An equal cultural exchange was not an option – as it has never been an objective for any colonial power to provide the colonized with unlimited access to Western culture so that they could actively choose and select from it. Book translation was meant to be a) the controlled transfer of Western value patterns and b) an opportunity to have a long-term impact on the indigenous production of meaning. *Volkslectuur* translations served exactly that purpose:

Now there are ‘Taman Poestaka’ [*Volkslectuur* libraries for the indigenous population], and also book prices have been lowered, so readers cannot but eventually grow in number, and whatever they are reading as well. The increase in books will inevitably make more people want to write. These are people who have benefited from various kinds of European understanding or knowledge. They have picked up European skills, conserved them well in their minds, and eventually they will be disseminating them in their own language.<sup>34</sup> (Daftar Balai Poestaka 1922:3).

In other words, translation and adaptation were a crucial means of colonizing the minds of the Indonesians. However, translating books into the indigenous languages was not the goal but the means, a first step – i.e. that “books in foreign languages which were translated, or the essence of which was used, would turn into new Indonesian narratives”<sup>35</sup> (Pamoentjak 1948:20). It would be naive to blame the colonizers for pursuing their colonial interests. It is, however, crucial to shed light on the very intricate process of colonization and its long-lasting effects. Translation and adaptation played a crucial role in this colonization process, but they also played as crucial a role in the decolonization process.

## 6. ‘High’ and ‘low’ literature and the second generation of Sino-Malay translation

The early Sino-Malay translations had already produced a number of popular titles, and crime fiction in particular developed into the customers’ favourite. It is

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<sup>34</sup> “Oleh karena soedah ada ‘Taman Poestaka’ itoe dan harga kitab-kitabpoen soedah dimoerahkan, ta’ dapat tiada lama-kelamaan bertambah banjak djoega orang jang membaca dan semakin banjak poela jang akan dibatjanja. Oleh sebab pertambahan kitab-kitab itoe nistajalah kian banjak orang jang soeka mengarang, ja’ni orang-orang jang telah memoengoet serba djenis pengertian atau ‘ilmoe orang Eropah. Kepandaian orang Eropah itoe dipoengoetnja dan dikoempoelnja baik-baik didalam kepalannja, achirnja disiarkannja dengan bahasanja sendiri”.

<sup>35</sup> “buku-buku dari bahasa asing jang diterjemahkan atau diambil sarinja dan didjadikan tjerita Indonesia baru”.

therefore not surprising that Lie Kim Hok came forward with a translation series featuring the noble criminal character Rocambole.<sup>36</sup> The five parts of *Rocambole* appeared between 1910 and 1915, and only the shortest one (317 pages) was not portioned out into episodes. The other four parts, each totalling between around 600 and 1000 pages, were printed in episodes, with seven to twelve episodes in each part (Salmon 1981:231). The *Rocambole* series is an early attempt to leave the feuilleton of the newspaper and introduce the serial to the book medium – on a grand scale. In 1914 another such book series appeared – again a member of the large and popular family of crime fiction, but less voluminous this time. *Riwayat Sherlock Holmes*, translated by Phoa Tjoen Hoay, consisted of at least seven volumes containing translations of Conan Doyle's famous detective stories.<sup>37</sup> The renderings all stay close to the source texts, except for some short explanations here and there interspersed in the text, often in parentheses. They explain issues of 'European culture', or names and places unfamiliar to the Malay reader. The translator displays a remarkable knowledge of the English context; very rarely does he mis-translate or misinterpret. In *The Red-Headed League*, however, he apparently was misled by the Dutch translation. Unaware that The Strand is one of London's most famous streets, he translates it as 'beach', mistaking the street name Strand for the Dutch word *strand*, which indeed means 'beach'.<sup>38</sup> Holmes would soon personify one of the most-translated heroes ever, and Malay translations and adaptations of Sherlock Holmes' adventures remained popular throughout the decades. The 1920s and 1930s also witnessed the publication of a number of these, such as *The Hound of Baskerville*,<sup>39</sup> *A Scandal in Bohemia*,<sup>40</sup> and *The Six Napoleons*.<sup>41</sup>

Further book series of translated Western crime fiction followed shortly after,

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<sup>36</sup> Like *Captain Flamberge* (1908), also translated by Lie Kim Hok, *Rocambole* was of French origin – as were the majority of translations from Western sources. For a detailed description of the historiography of *Rocambole* in the Malay world, see Roff (1974).

<sup>37</sup> Phoa Tjoen Hoay (i.e. T.H. Phoa Jr.), Batavia: Tjiong Koen Bie & Co, 1914. Some parts consist of up to 80 pages, while others seem to have amounted only to some 12 or 15 pages. Only four of the seven Holmes stories have been identified so far: The Noble Bachelor, The Beryl Coronet, The Boscombe Valley Mystery, and The Red-Headed League.

<sup>38</sup> "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand" is translated as "*Akoe tjoemah maoe menanja di mana djalanan jang paling dekat aken pergi ka pinggir laoetan*" (I only wished to ask you where to find the shortest way to the beach) (1914:22).

<sup>39</sup> *Andjingga koelawarga Baskerville*, translated by Nio Joe Lan. The text was serialized in the magazine *Penghiboer* from 31 March 1924 onwards (Salmon 1981:258).

<sup>40</sup> *Prampoean Tjerdik*, translated by S.Y. Lee, *Penghidoepan* IV (Oct. 1928) 46. Soerabaia: Tan's Drukkerij.

<sup>41</sup> *Anem kepala Napoleon (tjatetan dari Dr. H. John Watson, sobatnja Holmes. Penghidoepan* IX (15 May 1933) 101. Soerabaia: Tan's Drukkerij.

including *Lord Lister*<sup>42</sup> and *Fantomas*,<sup>43</sup> which met with particular success. With such serialized publications the publishers were moving away from the volumes mounting to hundreds and hundreds of pages that their predecessors had not hesitated to publish. Serialized publications quickly gained ground, as they accommodated economic considerations – readers would rather spend 30 cents four or five times than fl1.20 all at once; they also took into account the prevailing habits of readers not yet familiar with the endurance required to tackle thick novels such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* in one go. The so-called **roman madjalah** or novel journals, a print media form to be revived during the 1920s, addressed these problems in yet another manner. After the voluminous or serialised Malay translations of ‘classic’ Western or Chinese novels, this more reader-oriented format offered short(ened) novels of about 80 pages plus an editorial, some photos of movie stars or landscapes, occasionally a supplementary story (often a translation), advertisements, and occasionally poems or quotes from famous personalities,<sup>44</sup> all combined in a monthly subscription magazine.

According to Salmon (1981:34), the Sino-Malay translations of Western works during the period from 1911 to 1923 “may be attributed to about 30 translators, two of whom were women”.<sup>45</sup> This number grew with the increasing number of Sino-Malay periodicals. In 1924 at least five such **roman madjalah** were launched (p. 107). Two of them, *Senang* [At Ease] and *Tjerita Pilihan* [Selected Stories], were in fact devoted to translations, or, because of the restrictions imposed by the format, more likely adaptations, mostly of Western novels. *Tjerita Pilian* appeared in 1924 and 1925 in Bandung and contained detective novels. Its editor, Tio Ie Soei, describes the form and aim of his magazine as follows:

‘Tjerita Pilian’, appearing at least once a month, will contain selected stories translated from the works of famous European, American and Chinese

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<sup>42</sup> *Lord Lister alias Raffles*. Batavia: Kwee Seng Kie, o.J. (ca. 1918). The translator remains unknown. It is not clear how many episodes appeared, but at least two are preserved. The *Lord Lister* series, ‘originally’ created in 1914 by the Dutch journalist Felix Hageman, had achieved massive success in the Netherlands before coming to the colony. Over a period of 16 years Hageman produced about 800 episodes. The hero’s second name, Raffles, is ‘borrowed’ from E.W. Hornung, a brother-in-law of Conan Doyle.

<sup>43</sup> This translation surprises with extensive (by Malay standards) references to the source text. *Fantomas. Satoe pendjahat besar di kota Parijs, satroenja detectief Juve jang termashoer. Ditjeritaken oleh Pierre Souvestre dan Marcel Allain, disalin oleh Tan Kim Sen* [Fantomas. A Great Criminal in Paris, the Enemy of the Famous Detective Juve. Narrated by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, translated by Tan Kim Sen], Batavia: Probitas Aug. 1921.

<sup>44</sup> These quotations give an idea of the range of foreign authors that were read – or at least quoted – in Sino-Malay circles. Famous and less famous names from all over the world pop up here, representing not only the field of literature, but also politics, sciences and sport.

<sup>45</sup> The activities of women writers and translators in the Netherlands East Indies are, alas, hardly documented, let alone researched.



writers or original compositions, preferably police mysteries, full of wit, feats of strength, bravery, evil, honesty etc. With the publication of *Tjerita Pilian* we aim to provide more **interesting** and **inexpensive** books.<sup>46</sup> (*Tjerita Pilian* no.1, 1924:1; emphasis orig.)

The first book in this series, *Advocaat-Detectief; Tjerita Politie Resia di Frankrijk* (April and May 1924),<sup>47</sup> was probably translated by the editor himself. It was printed in “only 5000 copies” (*ditjita tjoema 5000 boekoe*), as he mentions in the foreword. Not much is known about precise circulation figures of the non-governmental publications of the time. Publishers of exceptionally successful titles such as the aforementioned *Count of Monte Cristo* dating from 1922 – it sold at least 10.000 copies – would sometimes make mention of sales figures in advertisements or in the book itself. A figure of 5000, however, was already a very respectable number of copies, seldom surpassed even by publications of the colonial publishing house Volkslectuur. Apparently, the *Advocaat-Detectief* novel was in demand, for it was “sold out in no time” (*soeda didjoel abis dalem sedikit tempo sadja*). Two thousand five hundred more copies had to be printed, an impressive success considering the still-low percentage of literate indigenous people and the price of f 0.50 cents plus postage – money that many people simply could not afford to be spending on reading matter of whatever kind. Letters to the editor (*Tjerita Pilian*, 1924, no. 2), on the other hand, inform us that enough people found the price very reasonable. The letters also bear testimony to the enthusiastic reaction that the first novel of the series elicited.

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<sup>46</sup> “Dalem ini ‘Tjerita Pilian’, jang terbit saboelan paling sedikit satoe kali, nanti dimoeat tjerita-tjerita jang terpilih, disalin dari karangannya pengarang-pengarang Europa, Amerika atawa Tionghoa jang termashoer atawa karangan-asal, sebisanya jang mengenaken dari halnja politie-resia, penoe dengen akal-akal aloes, kegagahan, kebranian, kedjahatan, kedjoedjoeran enz. Maksoed kita orang terbitken ini ‘Tjerita Pilian’ aken adaken lebi banjak boekoe-batja’an jang m e n a r i k h a t i dan m o e r a” (emphasis orig.).

<sup>47</sup> This example of popular fiction is preceded by a Goethe quotation. Apart from *Advocaat-Detectief*, the following parts appeared in this series: 2. *Tjap Resia. Penoeatoerannya Frank Burgoyne, satoe journalist Inggris*, transl. Lim Tjhioe Kwie (May 1924); 3. *Ingenieur Lettman (tjerita politie resia di Zweden)* (June 1924); 4. *Kawa-Kawa Item (Parijs dan Londen). Penoeatoerannya Dr. E. van Buuren, satoe tabib Olanda*, transl. Kwee Kang Tik (July 1924); 5. *Souw Lian Eng. Tjerita Politie-Resia di Tionggok*, transl. Ch.P. Chen (Aug. 1924); 6. *Sherlock Holmes. Tjatetan-Peringatan dari sobatnja, jaitoe H. John Watson [...]*, transl. Tio Ie Soei (Sept. 1924); 7. *Brilliant jang tertjoeri. Tjerita politie-resia di Nederland*, transl. Lauw Giok Lan (Oct. 1924); 8. *Graaf zu Bolck Watke. Tjerita Politie Resia di Duitschland. Menoeoet penoeatoerannya Dr Ph. C.J. Brensa*, transl. Tio Ie Soei (Nov. 1924); 9-10. *‘Lie Eng Hwee’ dan Resia Kartoe. Nasibnja satoe anak kembar*, transl. Njonja The Tiang Ek (Dec. 1924-Jan. 1925). All but the last are translations of European novels. The Tiang Ek was one of the very few woman writers and translators. She also published her writings under the pseudonym of Mrs Leader. Volume 8 is introduced by a Malay translation of the translator’s foreword to the Dutch version.

It is striking how little it mattered that the story derived from a Western source.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, information on foreign (here French) police work impressed the readers. The language and style of the story were praised, as was the clarity of the structure and layout. The editor's idealistic goal of disseminating good-quality reading matter in Malay among the indigenous people was also repeatedly stressed as praiseworthy. Not a single word was mentioned about the 'foreignness' of the story, and as yet there were no demands to create 'original' and 'authentic' stories instead of copying Western culture. Nor was the popular nature of the text criticized, possibly because no literary hierarchy had yet been established of the kind that layers Western literature, stigmatizing large parts of literature as inferior to a small segment of 'high literature' defined by an elitist institution of literature.

Conan Doyle's detective stories were accompanied by a highly varied selection of works like *Il Decameron* by Boccaccio, *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, *L'Homme qui rit* by Victor Hugo, *Mon Oncle Jules* and *La Parure* by Guy de Maupassant, *The Kreutzer Sonata* by Tolstoy, *The Sorrows of Satan* by Marie Corelli, *Poste Restante* by Ernest Daudet, *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck, etc, as well as novels by Alexandre Dumas and Edgar Rice Burroughs. (Salmon 1981:74)

Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Goethe were also available in Malay translation, and they were treated as creatively as any other text.<sup>49</sup> Tzu You claims that the translations of works by Shakespeare are too numerous to list. He mentions "Comedy of Errors, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, Taming of The Shrew, The Tempst [sic]" (1939:23) and adds that all but one of the Shakespeare plays had lost their theatrical form and undergone a transformation into "normal prose" (*tjerita biasa*). Such Malay prose-versions were commonly based on Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. The play *Romeo and Juliet* was singled out to retain its generic form, although the printed drama was not necessarily meant to serve as the script for an actual performance. Rather, it was expected to sell well as a book of fiction. To that end, the 'translator', Pouw Kioe An, abridged and adjusted the drama drastically, with the trimmed version appearing in the press organ of the theatre association *Liang You* (Tzu You 1939:23).

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<sup>48</sup> Interest in 'the West' and knowledge of Western languages were undoubtedly growing, but so were scepticism and anxiety, as mentioned later. Yet an advertisement for the Batavia-based *Tijdschriften Import 'Universe'* (*Liberty*, Dec. 1931, no. 57) offers an astonishing range of Dutch, English, French and German weeklies and monthlies for subscription at 2 and 4 Gulden per month per journal.

<sup>49</sup> Strikingly, non-governmental Malay translations of Shakespeare or Goethe dating from this period are scarcely to be found in any library stacks. It is an odd phenomenon that it is translations of popular literature that are still preserved and available today.

Further examples of Western ‘high’ literature authors translated into Malay are Thomas Hardy, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekhov, Nicolai Gogol, and François Voltaire. Works by Tolstoy, Maupassant and Wilde can be added to the list. There were also (Sino-)Malay translations of Claude Anet’s *Mayerling*, Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, E. M. Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Pouw Kioe’s translation of *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo (*Sin Po*, 1939 II:24). *The Good Earth* by the Nobel prize-winner Pearl S. Buck was translated twice, once by T.L. Liem based on the ‘original’, and for the second time by Pouw Kioe An, who is said to have used the Dutch translation (*ibid.*).

According to Kwee Kek Beng (1936:105-106 **missing in ref**), editor-in-chief of *Sin Po* and translator of several Voltaire short stories for that Sino-Malay periodical, Chinese Malay periodicals also made occasional attempts to translate Dutch, English and French poetry. Another *Sin Po* article (p. 21; possibly also written by Kwee Kek Beng) confirms this observation and highlights English-speaking poets such as Dryden, Pope, Gray, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, Thackeray and Keats. The author of the article admits, however, that often only fragments were chosen for translation. The Sino-Malay literature journal *Moestika Romans* also carried a regular column on English and American poetry. After a short introduction to the poet and the poet’s work, selected texts were presented both in English and Malay. In 1939 and 1940 the journal covered such writers as Eliza Cooks, Robert Burns, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Rudyard Kipling and Lord Byron. *Moestika Romans* diverged from the typical **roman madjalah** format in that it also published articles on literary history and theory as well as on contemporary politics. Some of the articles were, as with a number of short stories, translations of publications taken from English-language journals, *Prediction* being one of them.

Yet it was the classics of popular literature, and in particular the masters of adventure and suspense, who offered true inspiration to the indigenous writers and translators. **Resia** or **rasia** (mystery, secret) was the magic keyword – and as such often appeared on the book covers. The book series *Rasianja Dr. Fu-Manchu* (The secret of Dr Fu-Manchu, 1925) is just one example among many. This series of five volumes, 80 pages each, was brought out in Surabaya by Ang Sioe Tjing. With this Chinese protagonist who endeavours to win control over the West Rohmer had created a challenging personification of the ‘yellow peril’. Handsome, strong, incredibly rich, highly intelligent, educated in all the sciences, but devil-like and a master of disguise, Fu-Manchu resembles an exotic Eastern drawing of Sherlock Holmes’ adversary, Professor Moriarty. In the colonial context and seen from the perspective of the colonized, this creation might have appeared as the hero of decolonization, or at least as the fulfiller of vengeful fantasies.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Indonesian translations of several other Fu Manchu titles were successful as pocketbooks, even during the 1960s – e.g. *Fu Manchu*, *Sardjana Iblis* (date unknown, but thought to be around 1966).

Generally, Malay versions of French popular literature still proved the most successful in the Netherlands East Indies of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> Tzu You (1939:21) formulates one possible explanation: “This is possibly because French literature knows many stories about the lives of criminals, detectives, adventure, strange fantasies and so forth, stories that are very exuberant and intriguing”.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, the most popular French heroes in Malay translation were the ‘good baddies’, those who were not law-abiding but were, often in a Robin Hood-like manner, smartly rebellious. Another pragmatic reason to choose such source texts might have been their accessibility in Dutch translation. Judging from the number of Dutch translations of French authors circulating in the Netherlands at the time, it can be assumed that French (popular) literature was also popular among Dutch readers in the colony. Source texts by Jules Verne and Alexandre Dumas Senior guaranteed the Sino-Malay publishers commercial success, as had already been the case during the late nineteenth century with the private Dutch publishers. Commercial success was essential to staying in business.<sup>53</sup>

## 7. Sumatra’s Islamic Malay translators of the 1930s and 1940s

The prolonged discrediting of fantasy and literary imagination, in particular by orthodox Islamic groups, might help explain the rather late emergence of Islamic writers and translators in the field of modern literature. The 1930s, however, not only witnessed a steady strengthening of the nationalist movement, but also the results of

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<sup>51</sup> A couple of translations from German novels popped up, but hardly any Dutch prose (Tzu You 1939:24). While most source texts were indeed in the Dutch language (i.e. in Dutch translation), neither Dutch novels nor **Indische romans** (novels written by Eurasians or Dutch born in the colony; they are always set in the Netherlands East Indies and use the variant of Dutch typically spoken by the so-called Indos) ever attracted much attention from the Sino-Malay side. The above mentioned novel *Klaasje Zevenster* by Van Lennep is one of the rare exceptions. Another novel by Lie Kim Hok, *Prempean jang terdjoeal* (1927), is supposedly based on the nineteenth-century Dutch novel *Dolores, de verkochte vrouw* by Hugo Hartmann (Tio Ie Soei, according to Salmon 1981:232).

<sup>52</sup> “Bisa djadi ini disebabkan oleh itoe hal jang dalem literatuur Fransch ada banjak tjerita-tjerita tentang penghidoepan pendjahat, detective, avontuur, fantasie aneh d.l.l. Tjerita mana ada sanget rame dan menarik”.

<sup>53</sup> Volkslectuur aspired to putting the Sino-Malay out of business. Although Volkslectuur despised the popular genre, nor did it want to leave this to the Sino-Malay. During the late 1920s Volkslectuur put out a selection of translations of Sherlock Holmes and other whodunits, but all of the harmless kind: no drugs, no violence, no murder. In 1925 an attempt was made to sell *Buffalo Bill* – until 1923 labelled *Hikayat*, a traditional Malay narrative form – as a detective story.

the ongoing secularization of Islam in the Netherlands East Indies. The expansion of Western education played a decisive role in this process. The Islamic community found itself caught between religious dogma and the pressing process of modernization, and it was only a matter of time before the secularized and orthodox forces stood opposed to each other. A heated debate flared up over the role that Islam and the modern media should take in the shaping of national literature and culture. The dispute inevitably touched upon literary production and reception at some point.<sup>54</sup> Considering it idle and dangerous entertainment, orthodox Muslims looked on modern fiction, in whatever form, with deep suspicion. The Western-educated and politicized groups, however, regarded the new media (novels, the radio, theatre and film) as a potentially strong vehicle that could and should be deployed to serve both Islamic propaganda (**dakwah**) and nationalism.

As argued earlier in this article, the first generation of **pribumi** who had ventured into the world of the printed fictional word had not taken much interest on the translation of Western literature, either because of the political mission that stood central for them, or because of limited language skills. It is safe to assume that a limited knowledge of Western languages and unpolished language skills still constituted an impediment to most young Sumatran Malay writers, who initially came forward with plain stories rather than with translations. It was not long before they launched their own literary magazines, the format of which they unabashedly copied from the Sino-Malay **roman madjalah**. The Sumatran Malay novel magazines came to be known as **roman picisan**, dime novels, and they did contain translations, but far fewer than their Sino-Malay counterparts. Most of the translations were, in fact, adaptations. Some of the more ambitious and talented Sumatran Malay writers, however, had ‘practised’ and improved their writing and translating skills, for instance, by way of writing and translating for Sino-Malay periodicals. One of those young writers was Joesoef Sou’yb, who worked as a regular freelancer for *Liberty* during the mid-1930s. Among other works, *Liberty* printed his translation of the story *Uitvinder* by Droville.<sup>55</sup> It can be presumed that in the beginning and apart from the goal of earning a little money on the side, translation served Sumatran Malay writers as a means to a single end – i.e. to learn how to compose and write. Before long their **roman picisan** began to flourish.

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<sup>54</sup> In Sumatra this conflict lingered on for some years before reaching its climax in 1939. It was marked by a deep suspicion between the conservative religious leaders and the modernised young Western-educated Moslems. Contributions published in the Islamic periodical *Pedoman Masjarakat* throughout that period provide enlightening documentation of the opposition between ‘**ulama**’ and ‘intellectual’ that lay behind the Islamic attitude towards Western literature.

<sup>55</sup> Droville’s name, in bold letters, precedes the translator’s name (in much smaller letters). This was remarkable in a time when the translator’s name would appear on the book cover but usually the author’s name was either not mentioned at all or buried somewhere on the second or third page. Moreover, the story is explicitly classified as a “free translation” (*disalin dengan merdika*) (Juni 1936:22 **missing in ref**).

This generation of indigenous writers and translators set their sights far higher than becoming the successful rivals of the Sino-Malay publishers. They were determined to oust unwanted competitors, and they did nothing to disguise their dislike of their compatriots, claiming to be contributing actively to the creation of a national Indonesian identity by, among other means, defeating the Sino-Malay publishers on the battlefield of literary production.<sup>56</sup> They had no compunction about reproducing the Sino-Malay book format, but offered their novels for an even lower price than their competitors. Some books were made available for 45 cents or less (instead of 50 to 80 cents for a Sino-Malay publication).<sup>57</sup> Soon Medan became the centre of the **roman picisan** or 'pulp fiction' and the Islamic writers celebrated their triumph over the Chinese Malays:

One victory that we have achieved, according to Hasanoel Arifien in this meeting of writers, is to move the literary world away from the Chinese Malay writers into our hands. Twenty years ago, the world of the Chinese novel had already been set in motion; they were faster than we were, said Riphath. It was twenty years ago that Chinese writers such as Lie Kim Hok were already translating works by Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo and others into Sino-Malay. Then Balai Poestaka appeared, and now, finally, young writers from all over Indonesia have emerged into the arena, especially in Medan!<sup>58</sup> ([Hamka] 1940:67)

The first Sumatran Malay **roman picisan** had appeared around 1934, but the ones that were to grow into threatening competitors of the Sino-Malay and to be a nuisance to the Dutch colonials did not come out before 1938. They, too, preferred to feature popular fiction of the kind that combines crime, action and romance; the translated title *Bereboet oewang 1 millioen; Kelitjinan tjara Amerika* (Snatching Away One Million; Slickness the American Way)<sup>59</sup> is just one example fitting that

<sup>56</sup> In this confrontation the Islamic Malay side made an issue of language and the different Malay variants, not shying away from open disparagement of the Sino-Malay variant and highest praise for the standardized variant propagated by Volkslectuur (Tamar Djaja 1939:1001).

<sup>57</sup> In April 1941 the novels *Nona Bessy* and *Lady Marion Curtis*, both probably translations or adaptations, were advertised for the special price of 26 cents each.

<sup>58</sup> "Satoe kemenangan jang telah diperdapat menoeroet keterangan toean Hasanoel Arifien didalam pertemoean pengarang itoe tempo hari, ialah pindahnja doenia kesoesasteraan daripada pengarang2 Tionghoa Melajoe ketangan pengarang2 kita. 20 tahoen jang laloe doenia roman Tionghoa telah bangoen, dia lebih dahoeloe dari kita, kata toean Riphath. 20 tahoen jang telah laloe karangan2 Alexander Dumas, karangan Victor Hugo dan lain2 telah diterjemahkan kedalam bahasa Melajoe Tionghoa oleh pengarang Tionghoa sebagai Lie Kim Hok. Kemoedian itoe tampillah Balai Poestaka, dan achir2 ini timboel dalam kalangan pengarang2 moeda di seloeroeh Indonesia, teroetama di Medan!"

<sup>59</sup> M. Kasim, Fort de Kock: *Roman Pergaoelan I* (1.Dez.1939) 10. The Malay text is based either on a novel by B. Delannoy or taken from a series of the same name. This publication must have particularly provoked Volkslectuur, as the translator belonged to a group of young



pattern. Some of the Western texts selected for translation were still fairly recent, and some contained clear references to contemporary historical events. Sou'yb's *Mempereboetkan Peta Laoetan* (Fight over a Sea Chart)<sup>60</sup> is a spy story set in New York at the beginning of World War II. Another novel that used the war as a backdrop was *Menentang Maoet di Boedapest, Spion Perang Doenia* (Face to Face with Death in Budapest: A Spy during the World War).<sup>61</sup>

Despite all their differences, the Sumatran Malay and the Sino-Malay writers shared an understanding of translation that allowed them to treat any source text primarily as a source of inspiration, disregarding authorship and copyright. Whenever they did address copyright issues, it was only in an unorthodox manner. Sou'yb's *Petir Rahsia* (The Secret Thunderbolt),<sup>62</sup> for instance, leaves no doubt about its Western origin but guarantees that the "copyright was still with the author" (*hak tetap pada pengarang*). The Western author, however, is not mentioned and no reference is made to title, place, year or anything else that could help identify the source text. Could it be that Sou'yb himself, in an equation of translator and writer, is referred to as **pengarang**, the author? Nor does the above mentioned novel, *Menentang Maoet di Boedapest*, conceal its status as a translation. The translator's name is given and, as in the previous example, the cover illustration signals the Westernness of the text to the reader. The copyright in this case, however, is shifted: no longer is the author's copyright the focus; it is "the translator's copyright" that is "protected" (*hak penjalin diperlindoeng*).

The traditionally perpetuated 'ignorance' of Western concepts of ownership of the word is one explanation for the omitted references. Another conceivable explanation lies in a new form of media – i.e. film. Sumatran Malay writers and journalists (the latter were exempted from the entrance fee to films) also improved and practised their writing skills by duplicating film plots. Joesoef Sou'yb would go to the cinema for the afternoon or evening show, then return home inspired and sit at his table to write down the story he had just seen – or whatever he wished to remember of it.<sup>63</sup> Like Sou'yb, other writers also 'translated' film stories into book stories and turned the camera gaze into a new narrative device on paper, although some proved more virtuoso at this than others. In many cases this transformation is not susceptible to proof. *Membalaskan dendam* (*Doenia Pengalaman* II, 30 March 1939, Nr.

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Indonesian intellectuals that Volkslectuur thought it had 'incorporated' (see Jedamski 1992:158-164).

<sup>60</sup> *Loekisan Poedjangga* II (15 Feb. 1940) 6. *Leboernja kota Warsawa* [Warsaw Burnt to Ashes] by the same author makes even more obvious reference to the war.

<sup>61</sup> Translated by Abwart Satyaputra, *Loekisan Poedjangga* (15 September 1940) 20, Medan: Tjerdas. Spy novels were apparently very popular among the Islamic Malay translators.

<sup>62</sup> The Western source text is still unidentified. *Roman Pergaoelan* III (25 April 1941) 42, Fort de Kock: Penjajaran Ilmoe.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with the author (November 1992).



6), set completely in New Orleans and populated with Western characters, is an obvious adaptation of some Western story. The plain camera-like style of the Malay narrative and the conspicuously limited dialogues indicate, however, that the writer, Sahiboel'hikajat,<sup>64</sup> fabricated his story on the basis of a film. Would writers like him not have considered themselves creative writers instead of translators? Even more so when their writing skills were indeed improving while their literary imagination slowly emancipated itself from Western models – be that book or film.

The modernization and intellectualization processes had entailed a new understanding of individuality and 'intellectual property' and, at the same time, had also fostered a more critical attitude towards the culture of the colonizer. Translation from Western sources, whether marked as such or not, was now often equated with blind imitation of the colonizer and more likely ascribed a negative connotation. On top of that, it was feared that prose with a Western background might undermine the morale of the indigenous people, particularly that of the youth and women. During the 1930s indigenous intellectual circles aspired to develop indigenous authors of the calibre of Goethe or Shakespeare who would create 'authentic' literature to express a modern but Eastern identity. This still did not rule out inspiration from Western models, but it was now openly argued that inspiration should rather be sought within their own cultural context. Notions of Easternness and Westernness, of Here and There, of Self and the Other form new threads in the indigenous discourses, particularly among the Islamic Malay nationalists:

If someone like *Goethe* received his inspiration for the 'Westöstlichen Diwan' from the East and someone like *Dante* drew the inspiration for his 'Divina Comoedia' from the [Islamic] tale *mi'radj*, how good and appropriate it would be if Islamic writers were also to search for sources closer by – and more in tune with our way of life as Muslims!<sup>65</sup> (Natsir 1940:25, emphasis orig.)

## 8. Divergent readings – similar discourses

Some of the Western texts led to not just one Malay rendition but several; a couple even reappeared as a Sino-Malay, Sumatran Malay, and Volkslectuur version. While one rendering would barely deviate from the source text, the other might digress remarkably; nevertheless, they all represent divergent readings of one source text.

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<sup>64</sup> It is an ironic detail that *Sahiboel'hikajat* can be translated as 'owner' or 'master of the story' (Salleh 2001:1 **missing in ref**). This Sahiboel, producing translations and adaptations, was the master only of 'borrowed' stories.

<sup>65</sup> "Kalau seorang Goethe mengambil inspiratie dari Timoer oentoek 'Westöstlichen Diwan'nja, kalau seorang Dante mengambil inspiratie dari kisah mi'radj oentoek 'Divina Comoedia'nja alangkah baik dan pantas, sekiranya Poedjangga Moeslimin kita mentjari poela soember2 jang lebih dekat, dan jang lebih sesoeai dengan falsafah kehidoepan kita orang Islam!"

This is not the place for an exhaustive textual comparison, but an overview article would be sorely lacking were it not to mention at least a few examples of such multiple appropriation.

Some, if not all, of the Sumatran Malay writers were well acquainted with the Sino-Malay publications of the time.<sup>66</sup> Quite a number of Sumatran Malay translations and adaptations – as was the case with a great many of the Dutch colonial Volkslectuur publications – had Sino-Malay predecessors. One such example is Williams Le Queux's *Landru*, a fictionalized story of the infamous Henri Landru who was guillotined in February 1922 for the murder of ten women and a boy. In 1922 the Batavia-based publisher Probitas printed a Sino-Malay rendition of the story, *Landru; Kedjadian di tahun 1922* (Landru, an incident in 1922). The cover cites Le Queux as the author and NUMA as translator. Then in 1939 the Sumatran Malay writer S. Djarens published his novel *Taboet* in *Doenia Pengalaman*, one of the popular Medan-based **roman picisan**. His novel adopts the Landru story but abbreviates it and places it in a Malay setting with indigenous characters. The Medan version, however, was caught up in the debate between religious leaders and secularized intellectuals, and it became the target of harsh criticism from all sides. *Taboet* was singled out for its violence and sensationalism and was presented as a negative example of how modern Indonesian (meaning Islamic) literature should not proceed in the future. There is no indication that anyone realized that Djarens' text was a third-hand emulation based on a Western popular novel based on a real event. Violence was indeed an element that neither the Sumatran Malay **roman picisan** novels nor the Sino-Malay **roman madjalah** novels would do without. The fear of losing traditions and being engulfed by change, the anxiety that accompanied the new societal structures and, above all, the capitalistic order of the modern world were often expressed in plots revolving around violent events.

The detective, on the other hand, personified the positive aspects of modernity: progress, technology and sciences that seem to guarantee the explicability of the world. The Sumatran Malay translation of the Sherlock Holmes story *The Speckled Band* did not create a scandal, but it also had a Sino-Malay predecessor. *Randjang Kematian* (Deathbed) by Moechtar Nasution – faithful to the source text to a degree atypical in the Sumatran Malay context – appeared in 1941 in the Medan-based **roman picisan** *Loekisan Poedjangga*. Almost twenty years before Nasution's rendition, Ang Sioe Tjing, the publisher of the above mentioned Fu-Manchu series, had presented his Sino-Malay translation of this story. *Satoe kamar jang berbahaya* (A Dangerous Chamber (1922)) is again an almost word-for-word translation.

Prostitution and a woman's 'lost honour' were a popular theme, and around

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<sup>66</sup> Riphath S. (1940:47) proclaimed that the writer and religious leader Hamka had been strongly inspired by Sino-Malay writing. Sou'yb (1984:1-3) provides further insights into the knowledge that the circle of Medan writers had regarding Sino-Malay literary production.

this time were no longer automatically looked on with contempt. Social circumstances and even a husband's misbehaviour found acceptance as adequate justification, and the 'noble but tragic prostitute' figured in quite a number of novels of the time. A Western narrative that stimulated a variety of Sino-Malay translations and adaptations is *La Dame aux camélias*. It is difficult to determine if the novel by Alexandre Dumas Jr. had indeed introduced this Western story to the colony. Although less likely, it might have been Dumas' stage play, or Prosper Mérimée's adaptation, or Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, or one of the many film versions<sup>67</sup> that inspired Phoa Tjoen Hoay in 1907 to publish his serialized translation *Marguerite Gauthier* in the journal *Li Po* (Salmon 1981:529). About ten years later Tjan Kiem Bie produced a four-volume rendition entitled *Marguerite Gauthier atawa satoe pertjinta'an jang soetji dari satoe prampoean latjoer* (Marguerite Gauthier or The Pure Love of a Prostitute (1918)).<sup>68</sup> In 1925 Monsieur Amor (i.e. Njoo Cheong Seng) was, as far as we know, the last Sino-Malay to devote his attention to this theme. He gave his admittedly free adaptation the title *Marguerite de Fantassie*. His heroine, Annie, is "a Dutch girl (father Italian and mother Dutch)" (*satoe nona Belanda [bapak Italian dan Iboe Olanda]*). In a foreword the author observes that his text "was written with the approval of some friends and one Italian lady in Soerabaia who play the main characters in this story"<sup>69</sup> (*Penghidoepan*, 15 August 1925). Apart from the obvious parallels in plot and personage, direct references are made to the Dumas story throughout the text. Under the title *Margaretta Gautier*, the famous writer and religious leader Hamka presented a free-style Sumatran Malay translation of Dumas' novel – all references given. Hamka's translation is based on Said Moestafa Loethfi Almanfaloeth's Arab translation. The exact year of appearance of the first edition has not been verified, but a reprint came out in the 1960s.

During the 1930s another Western heroine – just as famous and well-travelled in the world of book, film, theatre and opera as Marguerite Gauthier – attracted Nyoo Cheong Seng's attention. In May 1933 he published a four-page synopsis of the story of Madame Butterfly in *Liberty* while he was probably already working on his first theatre adaptation of the theme. The famous **stamboel** theatre group Dardanella Opera performed the play *Raden Adjeng Moerhia* around late 1933 or early 1934. In March 1934 Seng published an 87-page **roman madjalah** book version in *Tjerita Roman* under the same title. His third adaptation was again for the stage. The play *Timoeriana* was performed sometime between 1937 and 1939, but only in 1941 did

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<sup>67</sup> The first film version was a silent movie dated 1907, but many more followed, starring Greta Garbo among other actresses. Possibly one American and one German version were shown in the Netherlands East Indies.

<sup>68</sup> Salmon (1981:529) mentions a play by Pouw Kioe An entitled *Sedap Malam* that is also said to be based on Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias*.

<sup>69</sup> "ditoelis atas perkenannja sobat-2 dan satoe perempoean Italy di Soerabaia, orang-2 siapa ada memegang role dalem ini tjertia".

Njoo Cheong Seng come forward with a revised book version of this theatre adaptation. It is conceivable that a particular ‘Medan novel’ had prompted Njoo Cheong Seng (using his pen-name Monsieur d’amour) to bring out the book version, also entitled *Timoeriana*. In August 1939 Doenia Pengalaman in Medan had published the **roman madjalah** novel *Antara Doea Doenia* (Between Two Worlds). It takes little effort to see that the Sumatran Malay writer Sahiboel’hikajat (The Master/owner of the Word) had drawn heavily on Njoo Cheong Seng’s theatre adaptation *Timoeriana*. The resemblance in plot structure and the correspondence of many narrative elements are striking, but – as if wishing to correct the Sino-Malay vision, which in this point correlates with the Western source text – Sahiboel’hikajat chose a different, happy ending.

As briefly mentioned above, Volkslectuur subtly adjusted its publishing programme in response to the success of Sino-Malay translations. A ‘Dutch Colonial’ Malay translation of *Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*, and a number of Sherlock Holmes stories were the outcome of this policy. With the publication of Merari Siregar’s adaptation of Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* in 1918, Volkslectuur successfully launched a colonial-minded reading of the text. *Si Djamin dan Si Djohan* (Djamin and Djohan) saw many reprints, and since the early 1950s it has been presented as **karangan asli**, authentic Indonesian prose. Today the text retains the status of must-read literature in schools. Its Sino-Malay predecessor, Tio Ie Soei’s *Cerita Sie Po Giok; atawa Peruntungannja Satu Anak Piatu* (The Story of Sie Po Giok or The Luck of an Orphan), on the other hand, did not attract much attention and since its release in 1911 it has seen only one – albeit a surprising one – reprint, in 2000. Both free renderings of *Oliver Twist* addressed very different target audiences. The first turned to the **pribumi** readers, with the aim of inculcating Western values. The latter addressed the urban Chinese and **peranakan** circles, partaking in their discourse on social justice and the role of education.

Molière is one of the few non-Dutch authors who happened to be translated by Volkslectuur but in all probability not by a Sino-Malay publisher. In 1926 Volkslectuur brought out the play *Si Bachil* [The Miser], a Malay rendition of Molière’s play *L’Avare*. The introduction provides minute information as to the origin of the source text. In 1863 Taco H. Beer had translated the play into Dutch, and this was reprinted many times. In 1878 the text was accommodated to contemporary Dutch life. The 1898 reprint of the latter adaptation served as source text for the Volkslectuur rendition, in which the story is moved to the household of Hadji Malik in Betawi at the beginning of the twentieth century. Perhaps it was the Islamic setting with a religious leader as the miser that inspired the Sumatran Malay writer Tamar Djaja to present his rendering of Molière’s story in 1941.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>70</sup> Tamar Djaja retained the title *Si Bachil* but not the theatrical form, instead composing his text

the manipulative power of money and the danger of materialistic thinking were another theme found in many novels of the time. Although Djaja did not recast the role of the miser significantly – in his version too the miser is a religious leader, a rich *hadji*, in Sumatra – the two readings convey, understandably, completely different images of Islam society in colonial Indonesia.

It is striking that despite all the differences and socio-political opposition amongst the agents of translation, text selections by the Sino-Malay and by the Islamic Malay reflect very similar discourses, including in the field of translation. Both groups apparently developed the same prominent issues, such as mixed relations and forced marriage versus love marriage. They both developed a gendered discourse on modern women and morality, and they both feared the impact of new concepts on their women. Both groups distinguished between positive modernity – i.e. progress and technology – and the negative impact of modernity and Westernization – i.e. mimicry, alienation and the loss of their own traditions. Both groups warned about the capitalistic structure of society and the corrupting power of money. They both chose subtly anti-colonial settings and characters (although Sino-Malay text selection is more explicit in this respect), and they both fantasized in great variation about revenge.

## 9. Concluding remarks

In the process of modernization and Westernization in colonial Indonesia, translation and the adaptation of Western narratives of all kinds figure prominently. They served varied objectives, depending on the ethnic, political or social background of translator and publisher. Text choice, language use, target audience and text appropriation were all subjected to their specific understanding of translation.

We may conclude that both Chinese Malay and Islamic Malay translators basically selected their source texts according to two criteria: the prospect of commercial success and compatibility with and benefit to the indigenous discourse. Their texts – no matter whether translations, adaptations or originals creations – reflect very similar discourses, although the Sino-Malay soon chose the path of intellectualization, while the Islamic Malay oriented around their nationalist discourse, remaining transfixed by the religious challenges. Nonetheless, both groups apparently developed the same major issues: the possible benefits to be derived from modernity, progress and Westernization, and the inherent dangers. Both groups feared for their traditions and values, most clearly expressed in the issue of the relationship between the sexes. They both warned of the precariousness of

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as a novel. The author of the present article is planning a detailed textual analysis and comparison of these two Molière adaptations.

an omnipresent capitalistic structure in society. Nonetheless, both groups aspired to become part of the imagined 'global community' of the modern world.

While Volkslectuur was clearly pursuing colonial goals, the Sino-Malay sought to combine commercial necessities with social and political visions, addressing an audience beyond its own people. Its inclination towards English and French sources is only one aspect that exhibits the Sino-Malay interest in and openness to cultures beyond that of the colonizer and their own. This attitude can be juxtaposed with the rather narrow Dutchness manifested in the prominent preference for (nineteenth-century) Dutch literature that Volkslectuur nurtured. Walking a tightrope, the secularized Islamic writers and translators, on the other hand, endeavoured to not only combine their religious and nationalist beliefs, but also to tune them in to commercial realities. They learnt and profited from the expertise of others, both Dutch and Sino-Malay. Anticipating that the future national identity would be Islamic Malay, however, they excluded the Chinese and Sino-Malays from their vision. Yet even the silent agreement or 'bonding' between Sumatran Malay and the colonial institute Volkslectuur did not succeed in eradicating the strong Sino-Malay literary market – or, at least, not immediately.

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