MING GOVAARS

Dutch Colonial Education

The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900-1942

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Translated by Lorre Lynn Trytten

With a Foreword by Wang Gungwu

Chinese Heritage Centre

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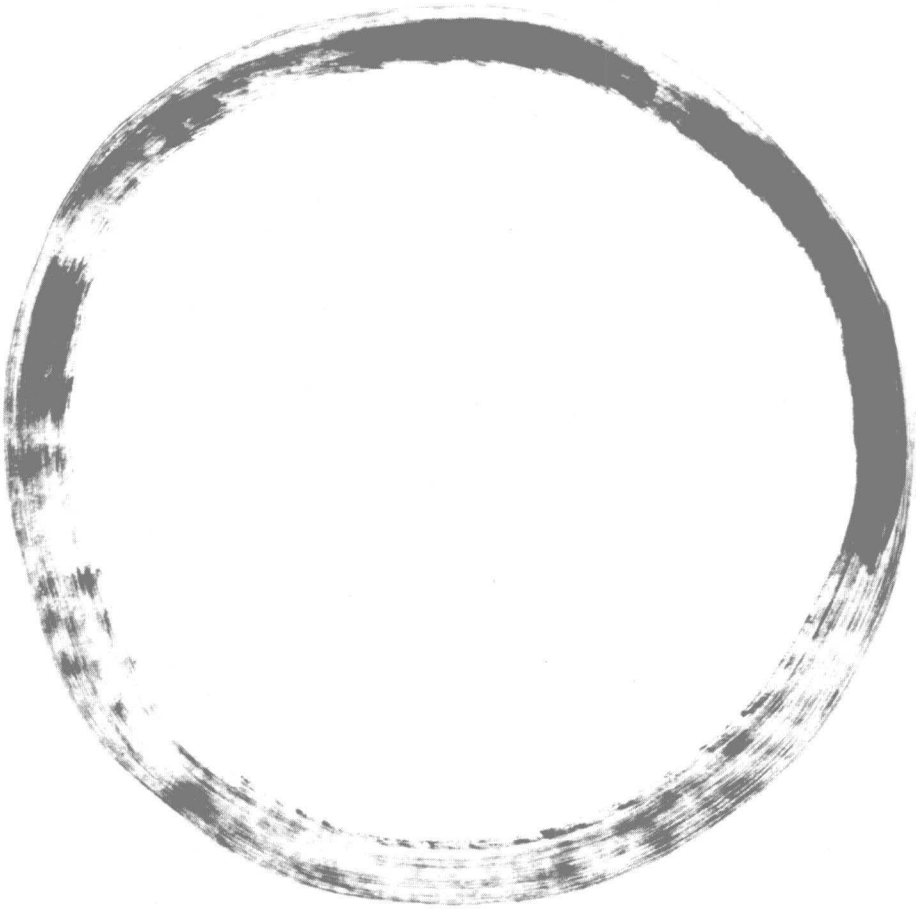
The Chinese Heritage Centre was established as a non-profit organization in May 1995 to promote knowledge and understanding of the people of Chinese descent outside China and their heritage through research, publications, conferences, public lectures and exhibitions. It also houses a reference library, the Wang Gungwu Library, with a specialized focus on the Chinese Overseas and their heritage.

An international Board of Governors comprising distinguished business leaders, scholars and public figures from across Asia, Australia, Europe and America guides its activities.

To the memory of my father and mother and W.B. Govaars

For the Chinese who lived and worked between hope and remembrance



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FOREWORD

WANG GUNGWU

It gives me great pleasure to commend this careful study of Dutch colonial education to all historians of education, colonialism, and the Chinese Overseas. Although her period of study is largely the first 40 years of the 20th century, there is much in the story that anticipates developments in the second half of the century and also provides valuable comparative material for a better understanding of colonial policies elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In particular, what the British, French and the Americans were doing for their Chinese populations during the same decades in Malaya and Burma, Indochina, and the Philippines respectively, could be re-examined in the light of the Dutch policies looked at here.

The history of colonial education in Southeast Asia has not been a glorious one. Of the early colonial powers, the Portuguese and the Spanish, with royal and church support, were interested in spreading the Christian faith at the same time as they collected spices and silks for the European market. Therefore, they built schools not so much for the sake of education but primarily to win converts among the indigenous peoples. In the Philippines, for example, seminaries and schools prepared students for the first colleges and universities and eventually some of the local-born of Chinese descent received their education there. The protestant European powers like the Netherlands and Britain, however, worked for over 200 years through highly focused trading companies that had little interest in local souls. Thus their interest in education was negligible. For the Chinese who lived under Dutch company rule from the early 17th century and under the British from the end of the 18th, they were left on their own and most of them did little for themselves where education was concerned. But the community of local-born *peranakan* Chinese in the Malay archipelago and peninsula became increasingly concerned with this question as the numbers of their children grew. Only the rich could afford to employ private tutors and only very few Chinese who were literate and willing to teach their children were available. By the 19th century, those in Penang and Singapore had found the British willing to accept Chinese children into the newly established English schools, whether built by the colonial authorities or by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. But the Dutch were much more reluctant to do the same, and it was this continued reluctance stretching into the first half of the 20th century that provides the underlying themes of this fascinating book.

The rapid expansion of modern Chinese schools in the 20th century in Southeast Asia is a story that has been told many times in Chinese books published both in the region and in China. Although we still know less about Indonesia than about

Malaysia and Singapore, there have nevertheless been many accounts of the efforts by the East Indies Chinese community to deal with the problem. The various schools themselves, before most of them were closed down in the 1950s and 1960s by the nationalist Indonesian government, have left records of what the community had to do to keep education going in the face of suspicion if not downright hostility, not least under the Dutch colonial regime.

For the first half of the 20th century, the struggle for better educational and career opportunities among the Chinese led to divisions that did nothing to remove those suspicions. This well-researched study examines the link between the rise of Chinese national consciousness and the grudging and calculated willingness of the Dutch to provide them with some education. The quest for a modern education had led to an attempt by the *peranakan* Chinese to re-sinify themselves. This alarmed the Dutch authorities enough to pay some attention to their demands which resulted in the building of more Dutch Chinese schools to counter the attraction of the Chinese schools introduced by the Tiong Hwa Hwe Koan. This measure eventually succeeded in wooing most of the *peranakan* away from Chinese schools and, thereafter, leaving those schools to be maintained and expanded by the *totok* Chinese who were largely newcomers from China. Although the larger Chinese community was also divided over other identity-based and ideological issues, it was the bitter fall-out within the community over education that undermined all efforts to act together as a community.

The tragedy was that, in that struggle to gain influence and advantage, most of the *totok* and *peranakan* were not prepared for yet another possible outcome, the ultimate victory of the indigenous nationalists who were determined to have their own independent nation-state. In seeking a fuller and more privileged life under the Dutch or in identifying with Chinese national pride and pursuing opportunity, both groups of Chinese paid little attention to the demand for respect and a place in the sun among the majority indigenous population. This comes out clearly in this study which shows the extent to which both the Dutch and the Chinese were myopic and self-centred in the search for an appropriate education policy. The unspoken assumption that Dutch policies were prudent and needed no changes, and that the Dutch empire was invincible, led the protagonists on colonial education to be narrowly focused in their arguments. In quote after quote, the author brings this feature to light. The evidence of the severe limitations of colonial rule of any kind, if we still need any more, is overwhelming.

I would like to end with a personal note. Thanks to the Dutch policies towards education described here, the Chinese community in Surabaya built their own high school and asked my father to be its headmaster. He went there in 1929 and stayed until 1931, and that is why I was born in an East Indies hospital with a Dutch birth certificate. The world depression at the time hit the Javanese sugar

economy badly and the school went through very hard times. Thus he chose to leave and went to Perak in British Malaya. Were it not for that move, I might have grown up to become an Indonesian. Finally, let me congratulate Dr Govaars for giving us this rich and stimulating account of an enduring problem to enlighten all of us who are concerned with modernization, political and cultural identity, and the role of education.

East Asian Institute
Singapore

November 7, 2005

In 1987 Prof. L. Blussé suggested I write a dissertation about Dutch-Chinese education in the former Dutch East Indies "from the inside" (as a peranakan born and bred in the Indies, with one totok in each of four consecutive generations of my family). I was intrigued by the idea. My interest in education was the deciding factor, and I accepted the proposition.

I quickly realized I needed a more extensive knowledge of social and political backgrounds, cultural issues, and the historical aspects which had affected the various ethnic groups making up the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. The result of further study was a clearer understanding of both the collective Chinese experience and the position of education in a complex society.

While I was working on the dissertation I lost a number of relatives, friends and supporters. With gratitude I recall my mentors Prof. A. F. P. Hulsewé, Prof. G. Nuchelmans and Han Yun-hung; the generous Mrs. A. Gaaikema, Dean of Students; the ever friendly Gerard Nagelkerke of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies; Mrs. A. Merens of the Sinological Institute; Mr. Thee Tjoen Giap, former principal of a Dutch-Chinese school; Lien Hoogerdijk and Coby Lipovsky.

Without wishing to neglect anyone I would like to take the opportunity here to thank certain people for their invaluable assistance. Dr. Claudine Salmon's observations after reading the manuscript were greatly appreciated. Prof. Kwee Swan Liat generously shared the benefit of his experience and wisdom. Wim Feenstra invested much energy and patience in helping me solve the many technical problems involved in processing text and tables on the computer. The attentiveness of Dr. G. C. Zijlmans of the antiquarian bookshop "Batavia" made it possible for me to find many an obscure book. R. G. Ulrich was helpful in supplying hard-to-find books on China.

To the directors and staff of the National Archive, the National Library of the Netherlands and the Literary Museum at The Hague I am happy to express my special gratitude. This also applies to the assistance I received in Amsterdam from the International Institute of Social History and the Royal Tropical Institute. In Leiden, G. Pater and his staff at the University Library were ever available and helpful, as were P. Sutikno, Rini Hogewoning and Josephine Schrama at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies.

It is my firm conviction that no one achieves anything on one's own. I greatly regret therefore that it is impossible for me to offer my sincere thanks to each individual at Leiden University who made valuable contributions to my dissertation.

The dissertation appeared in Dutch in 1999 in a beautiful edition produced by Geurt van de Kerk of Uitgeverij De Vijver. At that time, any thought of an English

translation was far from my mind. Enthusiastically encouraged by Dr. Henk Blezer, I found in Lorre Lynn Trytten a translator whose enthusiasm and conscientiousness were a constant reassurance. It was no trivial task to put into English the Dutch "officialese" of a bygone era, full of terms which even young native speakers might find baffling. Dr. Lloyd Haft was a source of continual advice on editorial and linguistic matters.

Thanks also go to Prof. Ng Chin-keong, Director of the Chinese Heritage Centre, for guiding the publication at every step, and to Prof. Wang Gungwu for his generous and informative foreword. Clearly the story of the Chinese quest for a modern identity of their own is not just a quaint chapter of history but an ongoing story. I welcome responses, corrections or additions to what I have tried to tell here.

Ming Govaars
Oegstgeest, The Netherlands
November 2005

Education in the Dutch East Indies was closely interwoven with the social, cultural and economic relations obtaining among the various sectors of colonial society. It was substantially defined by politics. The history of Indies education is a mirror of colonial policy, wrote J. F. H. Alb. de la Court.[1] I. J. Brugmans observed that no branch of the colonial government was a better touchstone of colonial policy.[2]

The division of the Chinese community into a China-oriented totok group and a more assimilated peranakan group was reinforced by the introduction of Dutch colonial government education for the Chinese. This education along western lines was based on totally different principles than the private nationally-oriented Chinese schools of the Chinese Movement. The significance of these schools, seen in the context of their time, deserves closer investigation. Connections will emerge between the various factors which influenced their establishment and further development. This book is intended as a contribution to the study of migrant communities in a colonial context. It may also provide insight into the background of the many Indies Chinese who were smoothly assimilated into Dutch society after the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949.

Dutch education in a colonial setting: the Chinese experience, 1900-1942

"Education" has a positive connotation of upbringing, progress and development, learning and knowledge, whereas the perception of "colonialism" is ambiguous. Opinions vary "from brutal oppression and exploitation to the counting of colonial blessings."[3] For our subject of education in a colonial setting we accept the analysis of the structure and essence of colonial society given by Raymond Kennedy of Yale University.[4] In the former Dutch East Indies we find all prominent characteristics mentioned by Kennedy, which affected education as well:

- the color line, on which social, economic and political structure is based;
- political power in the hands of the colonizer, who allows the Native inhabitants little or no part in the administration of their homeland;
- economic dependence on and supervision by the colonizing country, as well as the exploitation of colonial regions as producers of raw materials. Where a middle class exists, this is usually formed by Asian immigrants from China or India;
- little development in social welfare, especially education. In some cases there is a moderate degree of health care, public works and other material services, but the neglect of Native education is universal, except in the Philippines;
- no social contact between Natives and the ruling upper class except in formal relationships such as between employer and employee. There are differences in

degree on this point, with the English on one end of the scale and the Portuguese on the other.

Although in the Dutch East Indies there was no formal color line because of the legal equality of Indo-Europeans with the full-blooded or totok Dutch, ". . .the social contrasts between full-blood and mixed-blood were still a reality. . . .The mixed-blood were never treated as true equals by the Dutch, despite their equality before the law."[5] "The European, Indonesian and Chinese societies were worlds unto themselves. Any real contact was almost out of the question. There were many societies, swimming pools, hotels which refused admittance to Indonesians and Chinese."[6]

The period 1900-1942 has a unique historical significance. The century began with a new ethics in the colonial policies of the western powers. The leading doctrine was now "dual mandate" (England), "vocation civilisatrice" (France), "the white man's burden" (United States) and "ethical policy" (the Netherlands). In 1901 Queen Wilhelmina spoke of the moral duty the Netherlands must fulfill as a Christian power toward its overseas subjects.[7] This new outlook was a noteworthy moment in the history of Dutch authority, which had begun with the first Governor-General Pieter Both (1609-1614).

In the Dutch colonial social order of the period 1900-1942 the Chinese Movement was a "problem" and Indonesian nationalism formed a threat to "peace and order." Education for the Chinese gained momentum until the Great Depression of the 1930s arrested the growth of all education in the Indies.

The last in the long line of 67 Governors-General was jonkheer A. W. L. Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer (1936-1945). On 27 December 1949 the Netherlands transferred sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia. The abrupt end of colonial power, however, had come in 1942 with the Japanese invasion of the Indonesian archipelago.

Research questions

How was education organized? How did it develop? Why, to what purpose and in what manner did it change? What was the result and what were the consequences? These are our basic questions. The period 1900-1942 is only a fragment in the long history of the world. That fragment, however, includes significant economic, political, cultural and social changes.

Why, at a time when colonial government schools existed only for the European and Native communities, did the government establish the Dutch-Chinese school for the Chinese in 1908? Ever since the days of the Dutch East India Company (1602-1799) the colonial government had taken the view that education for the