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The interpreters’ directive of 1863

When in 1853 Governor-General Duymaer van Twist reported to Minister of Colonies Pahud on the need for reliable European translators of Chinese, his motivation seemed to be twofold. On the one hand, reliable European translators were needed, since the existing Chinese interpreters (the Chinese officers) could only translate into Malay, and this was considered “as a matter of course defective.” He mentioned the example of the Banka case in which there existed two conflicting translations of one document and the authorities were unable to decide which was correct. Reliable interpreters were also needed in court trials for both accused and witnesses. On the other hand, and this was according to some the main reason, the government needed to be better informed about the Chinese, since more was becoming known about their illegal activities. This concerned in particular Chinese secret societies, which had been prohibited in 1851. Moreover, the contents of Chinese publications in the Indies could be harmful and should also be known to the government. The government seemed to have in mind that these European interpreters should also be a kind of intelligence officers or advisors. But the responsibilities of the interpreters were not yet clearly defined.

On 9 August 1860, the first two interpreters, Albrecht and Von Faber, were appointed in Mentok (Banka) and Pontianak (Borneo) in the Outer Possessions. A few months after their appointment, Government Secretary A. Loudon asked both interpreters to devise after one year of service a directive and list of standard fees for the European interpreters of Chinese and send these via the local Resident.

At the time there only existed the 1819 directive for translators of French, German, and English at the European courts on Java, and probably none for the native interpreters. The translators were sworn in at the regional Raad van Justitie (Court of Justice) and were paid for each translation and interpreting job according to a fixed rate, both for their services to the government and to private persons. They did not have a fixed salary such as the European interpreters for Chinese would have. In case no sworn translator or interpreter was present, the court could, from 1837 on, assign anyone knowing the language to act as such after being sworn in. In 1859, the text of the translators’ oath had just been revised at
the request of the Resident of Surakarta, a town where several translators were charged with translating Dutch ordinances into Malay and Javanese. The text of this oath was to be sworn—or for those who had religious objections against swearing an oath, to be affirmed—in front of the head of regional government. It concerned integrity, good faith, speed and conscientiousness in fulfilling the translators' duties, the personal integrity of the translators themselves, and confidentiality, fees according to government regulations, and the affirmation that they had not obtained their position by corruption.

Albrecht and Von Faber may have sworn this oath or affirmed its text when they assumed their functions. But as to the content of their work, it must quickly have become clear to them that this was quite different from what they had expected: there was hardly any work for them to do. Moreover, they had been studying the wrong dialect: Cantonese was not understood in the Outer Possessions. Details about their actual position will be discussed in Chapter Thirteen. As a consequence, after one year of service, Albrecht seems to have refrained from writing a nota containing a directive and fee list for the interpreters, and he only replied in November 1862 after he had been requested to do so for a second time. In Montra-
do, Von Faber could at least do something. After about one year of service, he duly wrote a nota containing a directive and fee list for the interpreters.

After Schlegel and Francken arrived in Batavia in July 1862, Albrecht and Von Faber travelled to Batavia to meet them and of course discussed their predicament. Originally, the Government planned to appoint Schlegel in Riau and Francken in Pontianak in the Outer Possessions, but they must have convinced the government that Cantonese was not spoken in the Indies and that the most important dialect studied by them, Hokkien, was spoken on Java. Thereupon, on 20 August 1862, two interpreters were appointed in Batavia: Schlegel and Von Faber, and on 22 September Francken was stationed in Surabaya.

After Von Faber's nota and Albrecht's belated letter with the directive and fee list and accompanying letters from the local Residents had arrived, the Resident of Batavia D.F. Schaap, probably after consulting Schlegel, also sent a proposal. None of this correspondence could be found in the archives, but a later report summarised Schaap's arguments. This report stated that during the discussions resulting in the Directive of 1863, in particular the question was raised whether, in connection with the work to be assigned them, another title, namely 'advisor for Chinese affairs' (adviseur voor Chineesche zaken) would not be more appropriate. Schaap stated that since the government knew little about Chinese institutions and customs, more profit could be obtained from the extensive studies of the sinologists than could be expected from their work purely as interpreters. He mentioned the position of 'protector of the Chinese' which at the time
already existed in Hong Kong and carried more responsibilities. Moreover, the title ‘advisor’ would give the officials a higher status among the Chinese than that of ‘interpreter,’ which in China was considered a very low position. These arguments are similar to those used by Schlegel later, and may have been inspired by him.

These suggestions, however, met with no sympathy from the Council of the Indies. Making the interpreters mediators (middelaars) of the Chinese with the government, as ‘protector of the Chinese,’ would be contrary to Article 73 of the Government Regulation (Regerings Reglement), which placed the Chinese under the leadership of their own officers. Starting in the early seventeenth century, the Chinese had been ruled by their kapitein (headman or chief); later this was interpreted as a military rank, and therefore his assistant was called luitenant. In the nineteenth century the function of majoor was added above kapitein. This point was later elucidated by Albrecht as follows:

It has indeed always been the wise policy of the Dutch to rule over the various ethnicities in the Indies by their own chiefs; these should therefore be fully trusted by the European government; but if one gives a European official who does not exercise any authority, official charges that belong to the actual responsibility of the chiefs, or if the government uses him to investigate and check the doings of these chiefs, this will deal a severe blow to their prestige, and the evil engendered by this is disproportionate to the discovery of a few wrongdoings.

In this way, however, from the start an unavoidable flaw was created in the position of the interpreter. This flaw could paralyse them in the execution of any function that was not strictly that of interpreter and translator.

On 15 April 1863, Governor-General Sloet van de Beele decided upon the “Directive and fee list for the European interpreters of the Chinese language in the Netherlands Indies.” This remained in force until 1896. The complete Dutch text can be found in Appendix Q: the following is an English translation of the Directive; the fee list is discussed in the section “Private Translation and Interpretation Work.”

A. Directive for the European interpreters of the Chinese language in the Netherlands Indies

Art. 1 The sworn European interpreters of the Chinese language render their services of written or oral translation from Dutch into Chinese and vice-versa, as often as required by the judicial or administrative authorities.

They are not entitled to a fee for their required services, except in criminal cases where a verdict of guilty is pronounced, in which case the fee can be claimed from the convicted person according to the fee list referred to below.

Art. 2. They provide information to the head of regional government—if need be after a previous investigation by them on orders of this head—as well as considerations and advice about affairs concerning the Chinese.

They accompany the head of regional government on his tours of inspection, as often as he deems necessary.
Art. 3. They also provide their services at the request and for the sake of private persons, for a fee according to the list referred to below.

Art. 4. Before assuming their position, the interpreters of the Chinese language swear the following oath or affirm the following in front of the head of regional government, and if they are already in function, as soon as this instruction shall be known to them:

“I swear (affirm) that I shall be observant and loyal to the King and the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies, the latter being the representative of the King; that I have not given or promised, nor shall give or promise anything to anyone, whoever he may be, indirectly or directly, under whatever name or pretext, for obtaining my position as interpreter for the Chinese language in ...;

that I shall render all oral or written translations with the highest faithfulness and conscientiousness;

that I shall keep secret what should naturally be kept secret or of which secrecy is requested from me in my official position;

and further that I shall behave with diligence and conscientiousness in the exercise of my duties, as befits a good and honest official.”

Article 1 defines the primary functions of translating and interpreting, in accordance with their official title “interpreter for the Chinese language” (tolk voor de Chinesche taal). The second paragraph of this article, surprisingly, states that the interpreter could in case of a guilty verdict claim an extra fee (in addition to his fixed salary) from the convicted person, thereby profiting from such a verdict. Unfortunately no explanation or rationale for this provision could be found. Despite the interpreters’ oath of faithfulness in translation, such an opportunity for an extra fee could be a temptation jeopardizing their neutrality, but none of the interpreters seems to have expressed any worry about this. In actual practice, fortunately, this provision remained a dead letter, and the right to claim such an extra fee was abolished in 1895.19

Article 2 concerns the advisory and intelligence tasks of the interpreters. Nowadays the different tasks mentioned in articles 1 and 2 in general cannot be combined in one person, or at least not simultaneously. The combination of the two functions of translating and giving information and advice could lead to conflict, on account of the interpreters’ obligation to confidentiality. This problem seems never to have been raised by any of the interpreters in the Indies, who considered themselves in the first place advisors and not pure interpreters. The advisory functions will be discussed in the next chapter.

Accompanying the Resident on his tours of inspection was the interpreters’ only representational duty.

Article 3 entitled the interpreters to do translations and interpretations for private persons as well. It was expected that they could earn substantial emoluments from this. This will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.
Article 4 contained the interpreters’ oath, which was very similar to the 1859 version of the translators’ oath, except for the addition of loyalty to the King and behaving as a good and honest official. These were obvious additions, since the interpreters were officials receiving a fixed salary from the government.

This directive also makes clear that the interpreters did not have any administrative or judicial responsibility. Although they could receive orders from the ‘head of regional government,’ usually the Resident, they had no position within the administrative hierarchy. The same was true with the judicial authorities. From 1870 on, when the Department of Justice was established, they were simply subordinates of the Director of Justice in Batavia.

Working as interpreters

The interpreters could do interpreting at the Landraad (District Court for natives and Chinese), the Raad van Justitie (Court of Justice for Europeans and Chinese), the civil and military High Courts (Hoog Gerechtshof), at the so-called policie-rol, the “Police Court” of the Resident handling minor cases, and at the Residency’s Court (Residentiegerecht) in the Outer Possessions etc. They could also act as interpreters for the administrative authorities.

Within a month or so after Schlegel’s appointment, he was asked to act as interpreter in a major criminal case against fourteen Chinese who were accused of piracy and murder. Schlegel would later on various occasions mention this case to show the importance of interpreting, and therefore it will be recounted here in detail.

In those days piracy was a serious problem in general, but most pirates, many of them Chinese, were active in the waters around the Outer Possessions. In this case, a group of seventeen suspected pirates had been apprehended on 30 December 1861 in the waters off Cirebon, Java. They were entering the harbour on a wangkang (a small ship, a kind of proa) from Siam, which they had captured and the crew of which they had cruelly murdered with the exception of three men. The case was first tried from 17 to 19 June 1862 at the Raad van Justitie (Court of Justice) in Batavia, and on 26 June fifteen culprits were sentenced to death. One was spared since he had treated the captured sailors in a more humane way; he was sentenced to twenty years at hard labour outside Java. The defence lawyers lodged an appeal in cassation (beroep in cassatie) at the High Court on the formal ground that no Chinese advisor had been present at the trial, and therefore the composition of the Court had not been legal. According to article 7 of the Regulations on the Judiciary System (1847), the atten-
dance of such an expert, usually a Chinese officer, was required to advise on the religion and other laws of the Chinese. In August this appeal was successful, the verdict was reversed and the case was referred back to the same Raad van Justitie where it had been tried in the first instance.23

The Batavian Court of Justice retried the case from 14 to 16 October, now with the assistance of two Chinese advisors, who were Chinese officers. There were now fourteen accused, since their leader had already died in prison. They were defended by the same lawyers as before,24 one of whom was J. van Gennep; he would many years later become a member of Parliament and of the State Council.25 This time Schlegel acted as interpreter, and maybe also Von Faber, who was of course not as proficient in Hokkien.

In an interview in 1902, Schlegel said about his ability to interpret:

Of course the young interpreter left nothing undone for the optimal fulfilment of his task. Beforehand, he paid a visit to the pirates in prison and spoke with them in order to ascertain if the accused understood him, and vice-versa, if he understood them. That went fine. When the first session ended, the President of the Court of Justice told him the two Chinese officers had complained that they could not understand the interpreter.

“The main point, president, is that the accused understand me,” the interpreter answered, “and would you please ask them.” Judging from the posture and facial expressions of the accused, one had no reason to doubt that they perfectly understood the interpreter.26

The Chinese officers may not have understood Schlegel’s purely Chinese translations of the names of Dutch officials and terminology, for which they would use Malay and Dutch loanwords. But this complaint is also symptomatic of the fundamental antagonism and conflict of interests between the Chinese officers and the European interpreters.

Public opinion was unfavourable to the accused. According to a report in the Java-bode, all seem to have denied guilt and “were profiting from the judges’ difference of opinion.”27 Schlegel later mentioned the cruelty of the pirates: one witness described how they had mercilessly dumped into the sea the sailors of the captured ship.28

In his inaugural lecture in Leiden in 1877, Schlegel would refer to this case to show how crucial the service of the European interpreters could be, even amounting to a matter of life and death:

I had been less than a month in function as Chinese interpreter in Batavia, when I had the pleasure of not only helping extricate from the earlier death sentence two of those, who were accused of being accomplices of piracy and murder, but also to obtain their complete acquittal and release. It became clear that their conviction in the first instance was only to be blamed on the extremely sluggish manner in which the previous interpreter, a Chinese, had fulfilled his serious task; and whose fault it would have been if the death sentence pronounced by the judge would have been carried out. 29
Schlegel explained elsewhere that two of the accused were actually no pirates, but innocent barbers who had been kidnapped by ruse and force onto the pirate ship. At the trial, the public prosecutor now requested lighter punishment for the latter two. Thereupon the Bataviaasch Handelsblad commented:

The usefulness that can always be expected from European translators of Chinese has in this case, if nowhere else, been shown and felt superlatively.

On 24 October the sentence was pronounced: two of the accused, Tio Tok and Tio Kouw, were acquitted, another was sentenced to 20 years at hard labour, a beating and public exposure, and the other eleven received the death penalty.

The next day, in a comment on this sentence, the Bataviaasch Handelsblad first stated that it was strange that the same court now acquitted two of the accused who had been found guilty earlier. But since the defendant lawyers had now been better able to counter the arguments of the court, knowing them already, the judge chose to correct his error. The comment ended, in italics: “Fortunate is the country that possesses such judges and such defenders.”

Many years later, Schlegel recounted that the two acquitted men settled in Batavia as barbers and every year expressed their gratitude by presenting their lawyer J. van Gennep with a bouquet. The pirates who were convicted must have gone into appeal, for after preliminary detention for three years, their death sentences were commuted by the Governor-General.

No other such major cases are known, and other accounts show that the interpreters’ role as court interpreter was limited. In 1865, when the heads of regional government and the interpreters were asked to report on the need of a Chinese teacher or clerk, there were only two replies (out of six) giving details about the interpreting work. From Java the Resident of Batavia, J.C. de Kock van Leeuwen, wrote about the translation and interpretation work as follows:

Those interpreters now have little to do. Their services are arranged in the following manner: The interpreter Von Faber makes the translations and Schlegel assists in interpreting at the policie-rol, the Landraad, and now and then, when his services are required, at the Raad van Justitie and both High Courts.

His assistance at the policie-rol is completely superfluous, because there is always a Chinese officer present who can, when needed, act as interpreter.

This division of labour seems natural, since Von Faber had only studied Hokkien for one year and would not be as proficient in the Amoy colloquial as Schlegel was. But Schlegel must also have done translation work, judging from several of his notas, his teaching programme in Leiden, and from his dictionary, which he specially compiled for the aid of translators.
From the Outer Possessions, the Residency's Secretary in Mentok, P.A. Gijsbers gave a detailed description of Buddingh's interpreting work. He hardly mentioned written translations, which were in any case rarely made in the Outer Possessions. Buddingh himself had explained in a letter to the Resident that his knowledge of Chinese languages was still limited, and in this respect he may not have been typical. He had only studied for two years in China, learning two dialects, of which Hakka had as yet scarcely even been described by Europeans. In Gijsbers' description, Buddingh's interpreting work seemed more aimed at giving him an opportunity to do something, and to continue his language studies, than to be of practical importance. All he did was to translate into Dutch the Hokkien (or Hakka) translations by the Chinese officers, and to check their versions. Secretary Gijsbers must have been told that the difference between Chinese dialects was mainly a matter of different pronunciation of characters, since he wrote:

For the interpreting of those different pronunciations by Chinese who appear before the Landraad, until now Chinese officers have been used; sometimes also the assistance of others is required when none of these officers understands the language spoken. The European interpreter is present to translate for the Court the versions of the Chinese officer, who is liable to express himself better and more understandably vis-à-vis the European interpreter. The questions that the Court wishes to ask the witnesses or accused, are communicated in Dutch to the European interpreter and in Malay to the Chinese officer, to the latter for translating them for the witnesses or the accused. The European interpreter is charged to warn the Court, when he observes—as far as he understands the words spoken by witnesses or accused or knows their purport—that the Chinese officer's translation is not fully correct. …

Attending the Landraad's sessions offers an opportunity for the European interpreter to get practice with the variant pronunciations of Chinese words.37

Schlegel, who must have felt sympathy for his cousin Buddingh's predicament, would later explain the language situation on Banka, which amounted to a Babel-like confusion. He wrote that it was more complicated than elsewhere as a result of the continuing immigration of Chinese workers. During a short visit to the island in 1862, Schlegel had himself observed that the Chinese officers spoke either the Amoy (Tsiangtsiu) or Hakka (Kia Ying Chow) dialect, and that the Chinese population spoke “five or six dialects from Canton province: Hoklo, Kia Ying Chow, Chonglok, Hainan, etc.”38 Schlegel would later even assert that for Banka, four or five European interpreters were needed.39

The most lively accounts of the sinologists' interpreting work were given in retrospect by Meeter in newspaper articles published in 1896–9, long after his retirement. He had been most unhappy in his role as interpreter, complaining about the lack of appreciation for the sinologists' opinions
evinced by most of the administrative and judicial authorities; he often even felt humiliated by them. But still, from his accounts, a glimpse can be seen of the actual work of interpreting, and of the important role that the sinologists could play for the authorities in elucidating Chinese affairs and dispelling current misconceptions.

In Riau, his first station, he only served as interpreter in the *politierol* (police-roll). In the *politierol*, judicial and administrative authority were combined in one person, namely the Resident, in Riau at that time E. Netscher. In these sessions, only minor offenses were tried, and there was no possibility of appeal. Meeter wrote that he used to designate his role there jokingly as “to act as barking Chinese” (*dienstdoen als blaf-Chinee*). He did not explain the meaning of this expression, but it undoubtedly referred to his translating the “barking” reprimands given by the Resident to Chinese offenders.

In Pontianak, his second place of stationing, on 2 February 1871, J.C.J. van der Schalk became the new Resident, succeeding C. Kater who went on leave. Van der Schalk, who had been Assistant Resident of Police on Java, ‘invited’ (charged) Meeter to attend every session of the *politierol* to serve as interpreter. These were held three times per week, during the hot afternoons when all other officials were enjoying their afternoon naps. Meeter protested against this assignment, arguing that most of the time there would be nothing for him to do, since most Chinese appearing as accused or witnesses could speak Malay tolerably well. To this Van der Schalk replied that even if his services sometimes proved unnecessary, it would be a good opportunity to enlarge his knowledge of Chinese and native affairs and to understand better the administration of justice in the police courts for the natives and the Chinese. Meeter, however, did not appreciate this opportunity given by the Resident:

Now for an unprejudiced observer and therefore also an unprejudiced interpreter there is nothing more hilarious and at the same time pathetic than the administration of justice of the so-called *politierol*. All cases have been prepared by the native prosecutor (*djaksai*), assistant-prosecutor (*adjunct-djaksai*) or his clerks, and the accused and witnesses have been heard, so that the ‘police-judge’ (*politierechter*) usually gives his judgement after summary investigations, and that judgement often reminds one of the *ut aliquid fiat* (to do at least something) of the medical profession.

Therefore, according to Meeter, it could easily happen that a well-to-do Chinese, accused of an offense such as maltreating a policeman, hired a coolie to bear the blame for him and arranged witness accounts without the Resident’s noticing it.

Meeter recounted in detail two *politierol* cases in which he acted as interpreter and at the same time as advisor, giving his ‘opinions and considerations’ both at the request of the Resident and on his own initiative.
There is no evidence that the European interpreters felt that their role of interpreter could be in conflict with that of advisor.

The newly appointed Resident Van der Schalk had proclaimed a series of police measures that aroused dissatisfaction among the Chinese inhabitants of Pontianak, such as the obligation to carry a lantern at night. In passive protest, some Chinese closed their shops, while others used another method that they considered more effective: calling upon their gods for help. For this purpose, a young man, who had hardly reached adulthood, was intoxicated with alcohol or opium and made to act as a youthful medium in the temple. He proclaimed that the new government policy aroused discontent among the people, and that the obligation to walk around with fire would anger the gods, causing them to strike the town with a terrible fire. Every day a large crowd gathered around the temple; Meeter heard about this from his Chinese clerk. After three days these gatherings were reported to the Resident, who in panic called together the local civil and military authorities, and also the Chinese interpreter. Emergency measures for suppressing riots had immediately been taken. At the meeting, Meeter was asked for his opinion. He suggested posting an official announcement in Chinese, warning against prophecies that only incited unrest, and making it known that there was no more danger of fire than before. He also suggested that he could go to the temple and investigate the matter in half an hour. He was allowed to do so, and took along his Chinese clerk. He observed that most of the Chinese did not take the prophet too seriously; thereupon he asked his clerk to tell the young prophet to go home, explaining to him that otherwise he might become ill, and to appear the next day at the Residency.

When Meeter reported this to the Resident and other authorities, all were relieved. The emergency measures were withdrawn, and the Resident announced that he would punish the culprit heavily. After the others had left, Meeter put in a good word for the boy, who was still young and had evidently been used by others, but by doing so he enraged the Resident. He was wise enough not to tell the Resident that the boy’s elder sister was a woman of loose morals who sometimes paid a visit to the Resident’s house and was therefore known as njai residèn, the Resident’s concubine.

The next day at the politierol both the boy and his sister appeared; the latter wished to speak for her younger brother, since he could not express himself well in Malay. She was allowed to attend, but the interrogation was done with the assistance of Meeter. Actually, the boy’s answers did not help to clarify the matter, since he said each time that he knew nothing. The Resident then sentenced him to the shortest possible time of forced labour. At the request of his sister this was to be spent indoors, cleaning up the prison building, instead of on a chain gang as used for building roads.46

In another case, a disputed request for divorce, Meeter played the same
double role of interpreter and advisor, basing himself both on his clerk’s and his own investigations. It turned out that the wife’s mother was trying to implement a divorce so that her exceptionally pretty daughter could thereafter earn a high income as a prostitute. Through Meeter’s interpreting and information, this case was also brought to a good end—the application was rejected. He even enjoyed interpreting in this case:

> Since both parties did not speak enough Malay, by exception he had the pleasure—this time it was really a pleasure—to translate the statements by both parties into Dutch, and vice-versa the questions of the Resident into Chinese.47

After he again made an offensive personal remark to the Resident, he was to his pleasure relieved from his obligation to attend all politierol sessions. The Resident had discovered that most Chinese could speak Malay rather well, and in case an interpreter was needed, he could ask a Chinese officer or district chief (wijkmeester). In this way Meeter’s interpreting at the politierol came to an end.48

In Surabaya, where Meeter was stationed in 1876–88, he was sometimes required to act as interpreter at the Raad van Justitie. He was also unhappy with this role at court, suggesting in his articles that he would prefer to assume the role of ‘Chinese advisor,’ giving advice and at most checking the ethnic Chinese interpreter, rather than interpreting himself.

> That would also bring to a definite end the folly of a European official, in front of judges and a not always distinguished public, being obliged to translate for hours the stupidities of the Chinese accused and the statements of lying witnesses from a language that is not understandable for all persons present, so that often the impression is given that the interpreter does not have a firm enough grasp of the spoken language, while it is actually the unwillingness and the evasive answers of accused and witnesses that make it impossible for any interpreter to bring forth from the mouth of the interrogated Chinese a definite answer to the questions asked by the judge.49

Of course, in a colonial situation, being an advisor would in general be a more fitting role for a European than being an interpreter.

Except for court sessions, the sinologists could also be summoned by officials of the Interior Administration for interpreting services. This rarely happened, but Meeter gave a hilarious example illustrating the dilemma of the interpreter’s position.

In Surabaya, the Assistant Resident of Police once came to Meeter’s office, requiring him to proceed immediately to the Resident’s Office to act as interpreter for an important affair that was both a political and a police secret. When he arrived, the Resident first told him in private that two sinkheb, Chinese from China, had recently arrived and that according to the Chinese majoor they were swindlers. Allegedly they were trying to
fleece the well-to-do Chinese inhabitants of their money. Their pretext was that they had been sent by the Chinese government to establish a Chinese shipping company with regular services between Java, Singapore, and China. If that were true, the Resident said, he would have heard about it from the Governor-General. Moreover, their names as pronounced by them were different from the ones on their passes from Singapore. Since they spoke a dialect not understandable to the Chinese majoor, he had asked Meeter to act as interpreter.

From his clerk, Meeter had already heard about the visitors, and that they had communicated with the Chinese officers in writing. The guests wrote a letter in elegant and polite phrases, to which the officers, who could hardly write Chinese, had replied with a few rude and impolite sentences. The guests were startled by this impudence and left in anger, thereby offending the majoor. But since Meeter was only summoned to interpret and was not asked for his opinion, he did not tell the Resident.

When Meeter saw the two sinkheh, they appeared to be of high-class background. Meeter could communicate with them, but he did not specify which dialect they used. Since he had himself studied Hakka, a dialect not spoken by the Hokkien-speaking Chinese officers on Java, the guests may have been of Hakka origin. But probably Meeter somehow communicated with them in Mandarin, which is more similar to Hakka than to Hokkien, and the basics of which he had learned from Hoffmann. After they explained the purpose of their visit, and showed official documents, which Meeter recognised as authentic, the Resident asked the guests which names were mentioned on the document. Meeter replied: “Li A Sjong.” This name seemed different from the “Le A Heung” on their passes from Singapore. When the guests could give no explanation of this difference, Meeter explained that the name from Singapore was in a transcription that he knew from Chinese–English dictionaries; these names were simply two different transcriptions of the same characters, which could be easily verified if one compared the character texts. Now it seemed distasteful to the Resident that on account of “all that scholarship” (al die geleerdheid) of the interpreter, the basis for his suspicion would disappear. Therefore he asked the Chinese officers to confirm this, which Meeter experienced as a personal humiliation. Even then, the Resident remained suspicious, whereupon the guests suggested to have the Dutch Consul in Singapore check their names. A few days later, the Resident summoned Meeter again to the Residency. Now the names had been confirmed by the Consul, and therefore the Resident ordered the Chinese officers to fully cooperate with the visitors from China and give them all assistance they needed.

In his account of interpreting at the Raad van Justitie in Surabaya, Meeter also raised the question of the quality of the European interpreters. He recognised that his own ‘Chinese’ was not as good as that of his colleague De
Grijs from Semarang. Meeter wrote that he had heard De Grijs converse with Chinese, admiring his fluent pronunciation and perfect tones (zijne vloeiende uitspraak en onberispelijke intonatiën). Meeter conceded that he was certainly much less proficient, which could be ascribed to his shorter stay in China. De Grijs had lived and travelled there four times longer than he had. It remains unclear which ‘Chinese’ Meeter meant: perhaps he meant both Hakka, his own first dialect, and Hokkien, De Grijs’ dialect.

One case is known in which the interpreter was unable to perform his task since he could not understand the Chinese accused’s accent. This incident led to reports and a polemic in the Sumatra-Courant and Bataviaasch Handelsblad, giving a rare insight into both the position and the proficiency of an interpreter. During a hearing of witnesses at the Raad van Justitie in Padang, Young, who was also one of the witnesses, was going to interpret for the accused Tan Gie, as he had been doing during the whole investigation. One person present suggested asking the local interpreter Van der Spek, who was then summoned to the court. For Van der Spek, translating into Chinese was no problem, but when the accused Tan Gie began to speak, he could not understand him, and honestly said so; thereupon he was replaced by Young. The Sumatra-Courant expressed doubts about the suitability of Van der Spek and also his colleagues as interpreters and their reliability in investigations against Chinese of high standing. Three weeks later, someone who must have been present at the hearing sent a letter to the editors of the Bataviaasch Handelsblad under the pseudonym “Justus,” in which he related what had happened, requesting an investigation as to why Van der Spek could not understand Tan Gie while Young could, and if the result should be that Van der Spek did not understand this dialect which was widely spoken in the Indies, he should be replaced in Padang. Again two weeks later, Meeter came to Van der Spek’s help with a letter to the editors under his own name. Van der Spek must have written to him, for Meeter was well acquainted with the incident. Meeter explained that Justus’ judgment was unfair. Van der Spek could not understand Tan Gie since he was from Formosa and spoke Hokkien with a slightly different accent. Moreover, Van der Spek had not interpreted in the case before, while Young had, and therefore he could make no sense out of the rambling orations of the accused. Moreover, Van der Spek lacked self-confidence, being stared at by all present, since European interpreters were rarely seen in the courts—he probably had little experience with court interpreting, like most of his colleagues at that time. Van der Spek’s acknowledgement of his incompetence was a sign of his honesty and accuracy. He was one of Schlegel’s best students, and since he had finished his studies not so long ago, he had not yet forgotten his Chinese. Meeter himself had experienced several times that Van der Spek’s Chinese was excellent, and he was also good at detecting fraud in account books.
Meeter entertained doubts as to whether Justus might have been involved in the case, and might have wished to discredit Van der Spek and have him removed, since Van der Spek was charged with investigating a major case of fraud at the Orphans and Estate Chamber in Padang. He was suspicious that the changing of interpreters, from Young to Van der Spek in the first place, might have been set up for Van der Spek. This led to a hateful reaction by a certain ‘Spaarpot’ ("Piggy-bank"), who showed a complete lack of understanding of the interpreter's work, and pleaded for abolishing of the whole corps of interpreters. According to Spaarpot, the sinologists not only were bad interpreters, but had also proved to be incapable of checking fraudulent account books; abolishment of the corps could save a lot of money.

Few other references could be found to the sinologists' competence in spoken Chinese. Schlegel, who probably spoke Hokkien very well, was optimistic about the competence of the Dutch interpreters. He must have been writing about the situation in the 1860s, when the sinologists did more interpretations than later:

The student interpreters had sufficient time in China to learn to understand and speak the spoken language; and the continuing practice in their later function as interpreters enabled most of them to speak and understand the Chinese language as fluently as their own language.

A decade later, Meeter was pessimistic about the possibility of improving one's Chinese by practicing. He remarked about Van der Spek that he had left China too recently to have forgotten his Chinese, and that he was nervous when he had to interpret in court—probably because he was inexperienced. And still later, Ezerman stated that after his studies in China, where he learned basic Chinese, his Chinese did not get much better in the Indies.

Some other sinologists spoke Chinese very well. Many years later, De Bruin wrote that among the older Hakka residents in Borneo, Groeneveldt was still admired for his fluency in Hakka.

According to Schlegel, the most proficient of all was Young. He wrote in Young's obituary:

Young was the best interpreter of all his colleagues. According to the testimony of Prof. J.J.M. de Groot, he spoke the dialects of Amoy, Canton and of the Hakkas with a purity of accent and a fluency rarely attained by Europeans.

Many interpreters seem never to have lost an accent when speaking Chinese. De Bruin commented about this, when writing about uneducated coolies:

They like to play tricks on a European who speaks Chinese, by using double entendres as much as possible. On the other hand, a European who does not
Elsewhere he wrote about coolies:

Exactly because of the typical monosyllabic character of all dialects, the Chinese language is particularly suitable for puns and making ambiguous jokes. Every Chinese has a strong feeling of humour and they enjoy nothing more than having a European on.

But as soon as they realise that one is up to their tricks, they begin to chuckle and calmly go on working.

In the beginning, quite a few interpreters were stationed in places where the dialect they had studied was hardly spoken. Albrecht and Von Faber had mainly studied Cantonese, a dialect that was then hardly of use in the Indies. Buddingh was stationed in Mentok, where many dialects were spoken. De Breuk had studied Hakka, but was stationed in Hokkien-speaking Cirebon on Java, since all Hakka-speaking positions were taken. Groeneveldt was sent from (Hakka-speaking) Pontianak to (mainly Hokkien-speaking) Padang, and had to brush up his Hokkien. And Meeter, who had only studied Hakka, was first stationed in (mainly Hokkien-speaking) Riau, and then in (Hakka-speaking) Pontianak. In order to cope with this problem, from 1871 on some interpreters were temporarily accorded a second language teacher for learning another dialect.

Schlegel and De Grijs were both of the opinion that the interpreters should only learn one dialect. It was better to learn one dialect well than to have defective knowledge of two dialects. But they did not keep others from studying another dialect. Groeneveldt was more optimistic about learning more dialects: he had studied both Hokkien and Hakka in China, claimed that he had easily learnt some Hoklo, and later also learnt to speak some Mandarin. He was probably exceptionally gifted, just as Young was. Other interpreters acknowledged that their second dialect was weak: Von Faber had not learnt enough Hakka in one and a half years in Montrado to act as court-interpreter or to teach, which is not surprising, and Stuart, who had learnt Hakka on Banka, quickly forgot his second dialect after transfer to a non-Hakka speaking region.

Acting as a Chinese interpreter in the Indies was even more difficult than in China on account of the variety of dialects. Later, when the sinologists rarely acted as interpreters, De Bruin would write that even communicating with the Chinese could be difficult. Although he had studied three dialects in China, and was always stationed in the Outer Possessions (Banka, Medan, Borneo), with more opportunities to practice, he wrote:

I firmly believe that the study of Chinese is in some respects the most discouraging study that exists—not when one is in a certain region as a missionary in China and only has to deal with Chinese from that region—but certainly
here in the Indies, where the great variety of Chinese people has the conse-
quence that after ten years of study one feels that one still is just a beginner.\textsuperscript{64}

Elsewhere De Bruin wrote:

Moreover the languages are divided into dialects that are sometimes very dif-
ficult to understand. This is the constant experience of sinologists who in the
Netherlands Indies are in contact with Chinese.\textsuperscript{65}

Perhaps De Bruin was thinking of one important interpreting job he had
done in 1903, when he had assisted J.L.T. Rhemrev, the public prosecutor
sent from Batavia to investigate possible abuses and crimes on the planta-
tions in Deli. Rhemrev, perhaps partly because he was a Eurasian, met with
a lot of opposition from the press and the planters; so did De Bruin, who
was once accused of stirring up the coolies deliberately.\textsuperscript{66} The author of the
following note may have been one of those opponents, who was attempt-
ing to discredit Rhemrev’s report. He may also have hated De Bruin for
his “siding with the Chinese,” a reproach that was addressed to him several
times. In 1906 the following news item was published about De Bruin,
who was then 32 years old:

We have heard that Mr. A.G. de Bruin, now on leave in the Netherlands,
has been operated there for gallstones. He will probably be declared unfit
for the Indies service. Not much will be lost in that case. Since what Mr. De
Bruin was being paid his salary for, namely speaking and understanding Chi-
nese, was very poor, as became clear during Mr. Rhemrev’s inspection in Deli
when De Bruin’s assistant interpreter—the coolies could not at all understand
De Bruin himself, nor could he understand them—when that Chinese assis-
tant-interpreter told the contract coolies the most ludicrous things while De
Bruin, that weirdo, could make head nor tails of it and stood on the sidelines
with a grotesquely ceremonious face and a magnificent golden cap on his
head. Serious misunderstandings and loss of human lives were the unfortu-
nate result of his defective knowledge.\textsuperscript{67}

It should be noted that since their change of function in 1896, the sinolo-
gists were allowed to wear a uniform and a gold-rimmed cap. The hateful
tone of this comment is similar to that of Van der Spek’s critic twenty years
earlier. In any case, even ten years after the establishment of the function
of Official for Chinese Affairs in 1896, De Bruin was still being considered
not more than an interpreter! Moreover, the author was wrong about De
Bruin’s later career: after two years of leave he would return to the Indies,
and although he almost immediately left government service to become
Advisor for Chinese Affairs of the Deli-Maatschappij, he thereafter still
worked in various functions in the Indies for almost twenty years.

The language situation in the Indies was very complicated, but one may
conclude that some interpreters must have been very good at speaking
Chinese, such as Schlegel, De Grijs, Groeneveldt, Young and Hoetink,
while others, who after their training in China had little opportunity to practice and improve their spoken Chinese, such as Ezerman and Van der Spek, were less proficient, as they both candidly admitted. Probably most of them, except Young, continued to have an accent in speaking Chinese, as De Bruin asserted, but this would in general not make communication impossible.

Replacement by ethnic Chinese interpreters

In 1878, Groeneveldt and Albrecht both stated in official letters that pure interpretation work was by then mostly done by ethnic Chinese, who could just as well or even better serve in the courts. Groeneveldt wrote in his letter to Director of Justice Buijn:

For this translation work, which mainly consists of oral translations at policierol and Landraad, one really does not need persons who have pursued such studies and are paid so relatively highly; this work can be done just as well by Chinese who speak Malay, and in most places this happens without any objection.68

Albrecht wrote in his nota about the work of the Dutch interpreters:

As to oral interpreting, the courts for natives, even in places where a European interpreter is stationed, kept to their habit, in the few necessary cases, of having the Chinese advisors who appear in those courts, do the interpreting. Among the courts for Europeans, even the Raad van Justitie in Batavia has its own Chinese interpreter69 and I believe that the High Court, and the Raad van Justitie in Surabaya70 are the only courts that regularly require the service of the European interpreter.

Now there is in general no objection against using a Chinese as interpreter, since only in very rare cases the interpreter has any interest in the case for which he interprets, while if it becomes clear that he has such interest, one could easily charge another Chinese with the interpreting. Moreover, he can often translate more successfully than a European interpreter, because he is acquainted with the local situation and translates what he has heard into Malay, the language of court proceedings [in the Landraad].

If one considers interpreting by a European official a greater guarantee against improper proceedings, what does that advantage amount to, enjoyed by a few Landraden while a hundred other courts are bereft of their services?71

From the 1860s on, some names of ethnic Chinese interpreters are mentioned in the Regeeringsalmanak voor Ned.-Indië, next to the Dutch interpreters. They were called translator (translateur) or interpreter (tolk), without distinction in meaning. They were often appointed by the local government or court, instead of the Governor-General. They probably were either paid according to the decision of 1866, that is, one to three guilders for each case, the same as native interpreters,72 or received fixed
monthly salaries of $40 or $50 such as were allowed in Medan in 1876 and in Riau in 1880. In 1898, their fees for private translations were specified as half that of European interpreters of Chinese.73

From 1864 on, Semarang always had an ethnic ‘Chinese translator’ (translateur in de Chinesche taal).74 On Billiton, where no European interpreter was stationed, from 1869 on there was always an ethnic Chinese interpreter (tolk voor de Chinesche taal) in function.75 From 2 September 1874 until 1878, in addition to one or two Dutch interpreters, a second ‘Chinese interpreter,’ Lie Alim, was active in Batavia. In Medan and Bengkalis (East Coast of Sumatra) Chinese interpreters were appointed at the Residentieraad (Resident’s Court) from 1876 on at a fixed monthly salary of $40; they acted at the same time as clerks.76

In the 1880s the number of ethnic Chinese interpreters mentioned in the Government almanac increased considerably.77 Most of them were now directly connected with the courts; a system of ethnic Chinese court interpreters was established in Batavia, Medan, and Riau. As from 1 January 1880, a translator could be appointed at the residentieraad and policierol in Riau at a fixed salary of $50 per month.78 From 2 June 1884 on, the Raad van Justitie in Batavia had Tan At Tiam as ‘sworn interpreter for the Chinese language’ (gezworen tolk voor de Chineesche taal).79 From 31 July 1884 on, the Landraad in Batavia also had one ethnic Chinese interpreter, Lauw Kong Boen, and from 15 August 1889 on a second one, Tjioe Goan Jok.80 The Landraad in Medan had a Chinese interpreter, Tan Sioe Kioe, starting on 2 September 1887, and the Landraad in nearby Bindjeh had Lau Kie Djoce from 24 September 1887 on.81 The Landraad in Riau had Siem Soen Hoat as from 28 March 1889.82 Ethnic Chinese interpreters also continued being appointed in Semarang and on Billiton.

Europeans could also serve as Chinese interpreters or translators without a fixed salary: A. Bloys van Treslong Prins was on 9 April 1875 at his request appointed unsalaried Chinese interpreter (tolk voor de Chinesche taal buiten bezwaar van den lande) in Pasuruan, staying in function until 1880.83 After his retirement in October 1896, Von Faber was appointed by the Director of Justice as ‘translator of Chinese’ (translateur voor de Chineesche taal) in Surabaya as from 28 December 1896, and he stayed on in that capacity until his death in 1917. In 1898–9 he advertised regularly in the Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, but not afterwards. In June 1898, a fee for the unsalaried European interpreters of Chinese was decided, which was the same as for the Officials for Chinese Affairs.84 This fee seems to have been specially established for Von Faber, who was the only such translator in the Indies.

When in 1879 Hoetink was appointed as interpreter in Medan, he did not even begin working as court interpreter. On account of the variety of dialects, the ethnic Chinese interpreters continued to be used exclusively.
Moreover, Hoetink could only speak Hokkien and not the locally more prevalent Hakka and Hoklo. When he conversed with the Chinese *majoor* and *kapiteins*, who were themselves of Hakka origin, they all used Hokkien.85 Hoetink later confirmed in a *nota* that for court interpreting ethnic Chinese could be used just as well, or even better, giving new arguments:

> Indeed, in the Netherlands Indies where the great majority of the populace speaking only Chinese belong to the lower class, oral interpreting from and into Chinese can in general be done better by Chinese than by Europeans. For this reason, in the Straits Settlements and in Hong Kong, only Chinese are used for oral interpreting in cases tried by European magistrates and courts.

Europeans who learn Chinese only at a later age as a foreign language will only very rarely become so proficient that they can express themselves just as fluently as native Chinese. It is true that less can suffice, but the fact remains that in general Europeans will lag behind Chinese in ease of expression and ability to understand the Chinese and make themselves understood, and those whose words have to be translated also feel more at ease with them.86

Hoetink also considered the (moral) reliability of ethnic Chinese interpreters no issue. Most interpreters would be *peranakan* Chinese, born and raised in the Indies, who would translate for the *sinkheh*, Chinese coming from China who could not speak Malay. They belonged to two social classes who usually had little contact with each other. Still, Hoetink expected that in practice the *peranakan* Chinese would not translate unfaithfully in order to either favour or harm the *sinkheh*. In any case, there had never been complaints about the Chinese interpreters at the *Landraad* or *Raad van Justitie*.

The advantage of European interpreters was that they could understand the judge better. According to Hoetink they were used in the beginning, but later gradually only Chinese were used in the courts:

> Although a well-educated European will better than a Chinese understand the import of sometimes complicated questions asked by a European official, this advantage should in my opinion not be overestimated. In the beginning, when European interpreters for Chinese were a novelty, the *Landraad* and *Raad van Justitie* as a rule always required their services. Gradually the right to request their services was left unused, to my knowledge not because they proved unfit for those services, but because one could make do just as well with Chinese, although a question sometimes had to be repeated or explained. For various practical reasons, it was simpler and easier to use the services of Chinese than to summon highly qualified European officials to act as interpreters of Chinese.87

The role of interpreter was not found suitable for the sinologists, despite their title of ‘interpreter.’ In 1878 Groeneveldt had already suggested that they should better be considered ‘Officials for Chinese Affairs’ assigned to the Residents. And in 1895, in his *nota* pleading for a reorganisation of the
interpreter system, he again put their advisory functions in the lead role. In order to strengthen these, he wrote:

I believe one could in another manner try to do more justice, even in wider circles, to the expert knowledge of these officials. The officials concerned should be completely relieved of the role of interpreters and should be made Officials for Chinese Affairs.88

As a result, in the new directive for the Officials for Chinese Affairs, interpreting and translation became secondary functions, only to be required if there were “important reasons” for doing so.89

Meeter had access to the “memorandum of explanation” (memorie van toelichting) of the new regulations, which stated that:

… in general there is nothing against charging Chinese to do oral translations. Their knowledge of the spoken language is usually greater than that of the written language, and since they are closer, as regards education and background, than European officials to their fellow-Chinese who do not know enough Malay, their services are in most cases to be preferred, since Chinese feel more at ease with them.90

However, Meeter doubted the accuracy of oral translations by ethnic Chinese—just as Schlegel had done—on account of the lack of preciseness in their written translations (see below). Therefore he suggested having the Official for Chinese Affairs assist at court sessions to check the native Chinese interpreter, and at the same time to replace the Chinese advisor.91

Although interpreting services could still be required in the new regulation for “important reasons,” Meeter would not object to the Officials for Chinese Affairs’ complete exclusion from such services.

Many years later, De Bruin also wrote about the advantages of using ethnic Chinese interpreters. Since they could feel and think as a Chinese, and made idiomatic translations, they were best able to bring across the meaning. These were exactly the same conditions for making correct translations put forward by Schlegel: one should be able to feel and think like a Chinese and to find Western ‘equivalents’ of the Chinese; that is, to use idiomatic, free translations. De Bruin also described the functions of the European interpreters in Hong Kong, which tallied with Meeter’s suggestion: the Europeans did not translate in court, and they were only responsible for checking the Chinese interpreters:

As interpreters at the Landraden etc. mostly Chinese are used, who were born in the Indies or the Straits and learnt different dialects as children. Still, it also happens now and then that the translation is done on hit-or-miss, hope-for-the-best principles.

An advantage of Chinese interpreters above Europeans is also that they follow and understand much better the train of thought of a Chinese. They ask the question in a more idiomatic way and grasp the meaning of the answer faster.
An interesting example of this is given by Mr. Dyer Ball in one of his articles in the China Review.

A Chinese was asked if he had been at such-and-such place the day before. The answer was: “My foot hurt.” The train of thought of the man turned out to be: “I wanted to go there, but because I could not walk, I stayed at home, and therefore I have not been there.” A Chinese interpreter feels such things immediately. Even though a Chinese interpreter may have difficulties with a dialect, in thinking and feeling he is much closer to the accused or witness than a European. What he does not understand, he can fill in. But it is crucial that the gentlemen are checked, and this is mainly the work of the European interpreter in Hong Kong. They have to know one dialect well and be able to check in a few other dialects whether the Chinese translate honestly and faithfully or not. For the rest, they concern themselves with the written language.

After 1900, in notas about the reorganisation of the system of Officials for Chinese Affairs, no mention was made of such a system of checking the Chinese interpreters, so it was probably never consistently implemented in the Indies.

One conclusion from the above must be that the name “interpreter” for the sinologists’ profession (used until 1896) was more a formal designation than a factual one. Most of them soon stopped and some never even began working as interpreters. On the other hand, and ironically, this designation also led to exclusion from their more important and suitable function as advisors. This will be shown in Chapter Thirteen.

Working as translators

Before the arrival of the European interpreters in 1860, translations from and into Chinese had always been made by Chinese. These were mainly the translations of government ordinances and decrees proclaimed to inform the Chinese population. At least from the beginning of the nineteenth century, general government decisions often ended with phrases like:

And in order that no one pretend ignorance, this will be made known and posted at the usual places, both in the Dutch, and the native and Chinese languages …

An example of such a translation is the 華人美色甘條例 (Regulations of the Chinese Orphans Chamber). Other examples can be found in the minutes of the Chinese Council in the Kong Koan archives. These translations seem in general to be correct, but since they were not translated from Dutch, but from Malay, there were some undesirable consequences. A striking example can be found in the local ordinances sent by the Government Secretary in Batavia to the Consul in Canton for checking by
the students in China in 1859. These translations were heavily influenced by Malay syntax, and Dutch names of officials and institutions were not translated; rather, the sounds were simply transcribed, as was usual in Malay translations. On Java this would be no problem, but for those who did not know Malay or the Hokkien pronunciation of the characters, much in these translations would be nonsensical.97

In the Government Regulation of 1854, it was also stipulated that laws and ordinances, when needed, should be translated into the Chinese and native languages; according to Albrecht in 1884, these translations into Chinese were the main function of the European interpreters.98

From 1860 on, apart from oral interpreting, the European interpreters could also be charged to make written translations both from Dutch into Chinese and vice-versa. Translating such legal texts from Dutch into Chinese became the main translation work of the interpreters, and most of it was done by those stationed in Batavia. This continued to be one of their most important activities; in 1900 they were still translating such texts in Batavia,99 and this situation remained unchanged at least until 1912.100

All interpreters agreed that the translation of Government regulations into Chinese was the only substantial translation activity of the interpreters in the Indies. But this work was mostly done by the interpreters in Batavia, while elsewhere there was little translation work. Albrecht wrote in his nota of 1878:

As to written translations, the interpreters in Batavia were sufficiently occupied in translating ordinances issued by the Government, as well as the rules and police regulations both from the Resident of Batavia and other heads of regional government. The interpreters outside Batavia only have to translate the few ordinances issued in the region where they are stationed.101

Schlegel’s heavily subsidised Dutch–Chinese dictionary was compiled for the purpose of helping the interpreters to translate these government proclamations. In his nota pleading for the publication of the dictionary in 1881, Schlegel also gave a clear exposition of the scope of their translation work:

They mainly have to translate from Dutch into Chinese, that is Ordinances, Laws and Staatsbladen published by the Government, rules of tax-farming (pachtvoorwaarden), local by-laws and ordinances, etc., while it rarely happens that they have to translate from Chinese into Dutch.102

According to Schlegel, the Dutch interpreters in the Indies could not use the translation method of the European interpreters in China. The latter could depend on educated Chinese, who after hearing the sinologist’s oral Chinese explanation of the text’s meaning, composed excellent draft translations in Chinese, which only had to be checked by the sinologist. In Schlegel’s opinion, no such highly qualified Chinese could be found in
the Indies, and the Indies interpreters were left to their own devices. As arguments for publishing a Dutch–Chinese dictionary, Schlegel described the difficulties with which the Dutch interpreters had to cope:

The difficulties that the interpreters had to overcome during the first years after their appointment were almost unsurmountable, owing to the lack of such a dictionary, and caused an enormous loss of time. For instance, when the Government charged the interpreter to translate an ordinance about logging, expropriation for public use, the exploitation of oil wells etc.—documents edited by special engineers, which were full of legal and technical vocabulary—days were lost in searching for suitable equivalents in Chinese. Voluminous Chinese works about forestry and mining, numerous legal documents had to be scanned through and studied in order to, after several days of searching, at last find a Chinese equivalent for the Dutch technical and legal terms. Sometimes one did not even find any, and all efforts had been in vain. Then a term had to be concocted with the help of a Chinese clerk, which was not always successful and understandable. In short, precious time and effort were lost often leading to a negative result.103

While Schlegel only mentioned the difficulties of translating special terminology, De Grijs, when arguing for the need of Chinese teachers, also brought forward the general difficulty of composition in Chinese. According to him, for elegant Chinese composition, a Chinese teacher or clerk would always be indispensable:

A Chinese essay of any nature usually consists of a number of standard expressions that they are somehow able to combine in various ways, but the complete knowledge and use of these expressions is for Europeans an almost hopeless task.104

Therefore, according to De Grijs, the European interpreter in China was always assisted by Chinese teachers, since the European interpreter had not mastered the richness of expression that Chinese scholars had. De Grijs knew from experience that the interpreters and Consuls of Western countries all needed help for a clear style. He considered Chinese clerks necessary for composing all official correspondence with Chinese Government officials and for the publication of proclamations and other official documents in the Indies. As to simple announcements, police regulations etc.—documents written in extremely simple language—these could be made without the help of a language teacher, although the less elegant style would betray the European translator.105 In 1857–63, De Grijs had been acting Vice-Consul in Amoy, and in 1863–4 he had translated diplomatic correspondence and the Dutch–Chinese Treaty of Tientsin; therefore he may have been more aware of the difficulty of translation than his colleagues.

Many years later, in 1898, Hoetink had a much less optimistic view than Schlegel about the sinologists’ ability to translate into Chinese in-
dependently. While he was in Tientsin translating Netherlands Indies law into Chinese, he wrote a *nota* about the requirements for future interpreters at the Dutch Legation in China, intended for the Dutch Minister-Resident Knobel, saying:

> With perhaps a few exceptions, no western sinologist has reached the point where he, without the assistance of a Chinese literator, can provide a faithful and idiomatic translation of just any European text, and the required mastery of the Chinese written language will only be obtained after years of experience and study. In practice, the interpreter explains the contents of the Western text that he has been charged to translate *orally* to his clerk, whose task it is to compose it in the required form.\(^{106}\)

This was the same method that had been used during the whole nineteenth century when missionaries translated Western books into Chinese; these were always done by a pair of translators, a sinologist and a Chinese. In his *nota* Hoetink did not make any distinction between the translators’ work in China and the Indies. It seems reasonable to assume that for him this difference did not exist, and that he used this method himself. The excellent quality of his translations into Chinese (see below) is one indication of this; another still stronger one is the journalist Deen’s statement, in 1895, that Hoetink’s translations into Chinese were made by his clerk (no doubt after Hoetink’s oral explanation of the Dutch text). Besides, he had been able to select an excellent teacher/clerk to take to the Indies in 1878 (Jo Hoae Giok), and probably was able to do so later as well.

No matter which method was followed, all translations were officially done by the Dutch interpreter; and they were and are in the present study always presented as such. Some must have followed the method of Schlegel, who only (grudgingly) acknowledged accepting his clerk’s suggestions for translations of some difficult terminology, while others made their translations in various degrees of cooperation with their clerk. These differences in method, the varying levels in the quality of both interpreter and clerk, and of course translators’ choices, led to the variations that can be seen in the examples of translations in the section “The Technique of Translations” below.

When stationed in the Outer Possessions, Hoetink had his clerk keep a record of his translations in a copybook that is now in the KITLV-Collection in Leiden.\(^{107}\) This can give an impression of the content and amount of his translation work. The copybook contains mostly translations into Chinese, but there are also some original Chinese texts that he may have translated into Dutch. Assuming that this is a complete record, and that these translations were made by himself, one can ascertain the volume of his work. From the year-and-a-half that he was stationed in Makassar (1878–80), there are thirteen translations (in total 11 pages). Four of these are local regulations about such things as vehicles, slaughter, and a tax on fishponds. The other
nine are short texts: five appointments or short notices for Chinese officers, and four rules of contracting (aanbesteding). If this is indeed all, he would have had to make one translation into Chinese about every forty days.

From his stationing in Medan (1880–9), there are 53 translations into Chinese, amounting on the average to one per two months, even less than in Makassar. In Medan, these are mostly short notices such as appointments and rules of contracting. There are only a few longer regulations, for example on opium tax-farming, business tax (bedrijfsbelasting), Chinese shops, plantation labour, street lighting, vehicles, hygiene, cholera, and prostitution. The number of translations is even smaller than in Makassar, but perhaps Hoetink only had one example copied of each standard translation. On the average, this amounts to about six translations per year, but the variance was great. The largest number of translations made in one year is fourteen (1882), amounting to one translation in 26 days, but in one month (October) he produced five short translations.108

While oral interpreting could in general just as well be done by ethnic Chinese, and for interpreting the Europeans had been gradually replaced by ethnic Chinese, this did not apply to written translations. Hoetink wrote in 1900 that the Chinese were not qualified for this:

The Chinese who are used for oral translations, are almost always born in this country and—even though they originate from China—are hardly suitable to produce a decent translation of an official document into Chinese, or to deliver a correct translation of a document written in Chinese.109

The first reason for this was that only a small minority of Chinese could express themselves in writing and could read Chinese literature, and that the Chinese officers and interpreters born in the Indies only rarely reached a level in the Chinese written language enabling them to function as translators. The second reason was:

Moreover there is the objection that the Chinese lack a quality which, according to Western opinion, is an indispensable requirement for translations. That is, they have no notion of accuracy, no respect for the letter, and they therefore do not see the necessity of trying to reach the highest degree of precision.110

Therefore European interpreters were in general to be preferred above Chinese for making written translations.

But when Hoetink stated that translations should not be made by the Chinese, he actually must have meant that a Chinese could not translate independently: he should do so in cooperation with a sinologist explaining the meaning of the Dutch text and checking the result.

Hoetink’s opinion had also been expressed in the “memorandum of explanation” of the new regulations of 1895, which was no doubt based on reports from the interpreters, possibly himself:
Chinese in general have no understanding of meticulousness and preciseness to the extent required for the translation of important documents. The Western respect for the letter is unknown to them; they content themselves with an à peu près.111

The interpreters were rarely asked to translate from Chinese into Dutch. According to De Grijs, who was the most experienced, translating from Chinese into Dutch was not so difficult, as long as the text was written with clearly readable characters. In this respect the Chinese clerk could provide important services. In 1898, Hoetink also stated that translating the Chinese official style into Dutch was relatively easy.112

Nevertheless, other Chinese texts could still be difficult to translate. When Schlegel was charged in 1863 to translate Chinese documents of a secret society in Padang, these were at first unintelligible to him, and he did not have enough time since the case was pressing. A few years later he published translations of these in his Hung-League.113 The most difficult to understand were encoded texts. Schlegel described how he was fascinated by this kind of puzzle and finally cracked the code:

Those documents so despotically took possession of the sinologist that they left him restless, made him forget time and everything, even disturbed his sleep. After a few weeks of pondering and searching, while those texts occupied all his thoughts, during one night of sleepless tossing about on his couch, he suddenly obtained a flash of insight, a fiery vision. Isn’t it the second half of some Chinese characters of which this magic piece is composed, so that the real meaning of the whole only appears if one adds the other half? He jumps right away out of his bed and hastily writes down his conjecture on a slip of paper, fearing that otherwise the next morning his vision would be lost. Thereupon he lies down confidently, to enjoy the sleep of the righteous sinologist. Already in the early morning he wakes up, grabs one of the pamphlets and to his greatest joy, his conjecture is confirmed! Armed with the magic key he gradually deciphers the whole text.114

When acting as experts on Chinese law for the courts, the interpreters often had to translate parts of the Qing Code into Dutch. Since only three partial translations into Dutch had been published, they had to make a new translation each time.115

Very few other examples could be found of Chinese texts translated into Dutch. One example of a short translation from Chinese was a Chinese letter to the Governor-General complaining about the abuse of power by a Dutch official, which De Grijs was asked to translate in 1875. Unfortunately, the name of the Dutch official was not clear to him since it was only transcribed in Chinese characters, and it was not known in which dialect they should be pronounced.116 In his Dutch letter book, Hoetink only mentioned two translations from Chinese, one ordered by the Resident of the East Coast of Sumatra (containing some unidentifiable place names in the Indies), and one by the Director of Justice.117 An example of a transla-
tion used in a civil law case is Stuart’s translation of a Chinese document about adoption in 1886.\textsuperscript{118} It must have been a great disappointment for the interpreters that they could only rarely use their hard-earned skills in translating Chinese into Dutch.

Before 1900, no reference could be found to the translation of ‘subversive’ Chinese newspaper publications in the Indies; only after the Chinese Movement became active in the 1900s would the sinologists check the Chinese and Malay-Chinese press in the Indies and translate or summarise newspaper articles into Dutch.

In the nineteenth century there was, however, one kind of translation from Chinese that was done fairly regularly, namely that of Chinese account books in cases of suspected fraud.\textsuperscript{119} This will be treated in the section “Translating and Excerpting Chinese Account Books” below.

\textit{The establishment of a Chinese printing facility in Batavia (1862)}

In the past, the Chinese translations of new ordinances and regulations must have been copied by hand and then distributed throughout the Indies. These were posted at certain public places to inform the Chinese inhabitants. For some time, these proclamations were printed by lithography, but this was an expensive process.

Therefore it is no wonder that after 1860, when Chinese matrices had been produced in the Netherlands, Governor-General Pahud wished to establish a Chinese printing facility in Batavia. The Director of the Government Press, R.M. Daendels, was asked about the conditions for such a press. Daendels reported that he would be able to print Chinese, since one of the compositors had been trained for this for about nine years by W.H. Medhurst; but there was no special well-lighted room for this work, and pupils should be trained as well; letter cases were also needed and should best be made in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{120} After receiving this report, Pahud immediately gave permission for building such a room for composing Chinese texts.\textsuperscript{121}

Pahud then asked the Minister of Colonies, J. Loudon, for type and accessories, and a budget for appointing one compositor and two pupils. When Loudon obtained Royal Approval for this budget, he charged Hoffmann to select a set of characters necessary for printing ordinances, tax-farming conditions etc.\textsuperscript{122} In his reply, Hoffmann suggested sending a \textit{complete} set of type to Batavia, for printing any text that the Dutch interpreters in the Indies wished to have printed, not just for a limited purpose.\textsuperscript{123} The Minister agreed; thereupon Hoffmann had type made by Tetterode in Amsterdam and tin cases by a tinner (\textit{blikslager}). On 20 May 1862, the complete set of 5,740 type, each in 50 copies,\textsuperscript{124} was delivered and thereupon despatched with the cases to Batavia.\textsuperscript{125} In later years, ad-
ditional sets of characters made from new matrices in Amsterdam were regularly sent to Batavia.126

The Chinese press probably became operative for printing later that year. For the next year (1863) the salaries of one Chinese compositors and two pupils at the Government Press were put on the Colonial budget.127 When De Grijs sent his translation of *Geregtelijke geneeskunde* (*Forensic Medicine*) to Batavia on 25 June 1862,128 he must have known about the preparations. For printing purposes he had added numbers for the few characters that he wished to have inserted; these numbers were taken from Hoffmann’s type catalogue of 1860129 and tallied with the type sent from Holland. The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences announced the receipt of the manuscript at the meeting of 20 September 1862 and decided on the same day to publish it. Half a year later, at the meeting of 27 March 1863 the translation came off the press.130 But in this book, which was printed by De Lange, no Chinese characters were inserted, and only these numbers were printed. Possibly De Lange was not able to borrow characters from the Government Press, or the sheets had already been printed in 1862 before the Chinese press was operative.

The earliest known printing with the new Chinese type in Batavia dates from the next year. In the Almanac for the Netherlands Indies for 1864, characters were inserted in one article. In the preceding years, a short article about the Chinese calendar had appeared in the Almanac. In this year, this article was corrected and enlarged by Schlegel and was printed with numerous Chinese characters.131

The Government Press in Batavia continued to use this type at least until the 1920s.132 For rare characters for which no type was available, wooden type were specially cut. These were mainly used in scholarly works such as Francken and De Grijs’ dictionary and Schlegel’s *Sinico-Aryaca*.

The Chinese section of the Government Press was well occupied with printing Government ordinances. When in the 1870s Francken and De Grijs’ dictionary was being printed, this could only be done outside normal working hours in free time.133 The printing took much longer than expected.

The translations were printed on European paper, and mainly published in two formats. One format was used for ephemeral ordinances, such as tax-farming rules, and printed on large sheets of circa 34 × 42 cm, which were folded in the middle. The other was used for ordinances of longer use, such as regulations; it was printed on smaller pages, and bound as a booklet of 21 × 14 cm, about the same size as the *Staatsblad* itself. The latter appeared from the 1880s onwards attractively designed in Chinese style, with a double frame (雙欄框), central margin (版心) with one ‘fish tail’ (魚尾) and page number, and bound in Chinese fashion with double folded pages (see illustration 22).134
WORKING AS INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

The printed Chinese translations were distributed to the various parts of the Indies, but at least one of them could also be acquired at the Government Press. Von Faber’s translation of the Regulations on Prison Discipline and Labour (1871), bound as a large size booklet, could be ordered for ƒ0.17 from the 1870s to the 1910s.\textsuperscript{135}

Some problems of legal translation

The problems of legal translation were brought out by Roelofs in a letter to the editors of the Java-bode on 19 October 1882. The previous day, in the same newspaper a certain Z. had complained about the “abra cadabra” of a Government decision, since it consisted almost exclusively of references to other decisions and ordinances. For Roelofs this was grist to his mill:

Imagine how pleasant it is for someone who, although not fully understanding such a text in his mother tongue, on account of his function is obliged to translate it into another language, for instance Chinese.

One does it, of course, but … it takes enormous effort. Fortunately one can still take care of the matter by using other expressions or by circumscribing—after having first oneself taken the trouble to find out what the meaning is.\textsuperscript{136}

Here Roelofs mentioned the two main problems for the interpreters, who were not trained in law, namely: getting to understand the legal text and coping with the lack of suitable legal terminology in Chinese.

The special problems of translating legal texts into Chinese were best summarised by Hoetink in two notas of 1897 and 1898, in which he requested to be sent on a mission to China in order to translate the Civil and Commercial Codes of the Netherlands Indies into Chinese. Hoetink’s arguments give a clear insight into the problems of legal translation.\textsuperscript{137} He wrote that in 1892—after having been stationed in Batavia—he had experienced great difficulties in translating the ordinance of 30 November 1892 entitled “Provisions Concerning Civil and Commercial Law and Some Subjects of Criminal Law for the Chinese on Java and Madura.”\textsuperscript{138} This was an amplification of the ordinance of 1855 (Staatsblad van Ned.-Indië 1855, no. 79).

In the ordinance of 1855, most of the Commercial Code and some parts of Civil Law had been made applicable to the Chinese. In his nota, Hoetink was highly dissatisfied with the results of his translation of 1892:

I discharged this assignment as best as I could, although I was aware that it was impossible to make a decent translation with the tools available to me, and that even the best translation of the ordinance would be worthless for the Chinese.\textsuperscript{139}

Hoetink explained that a translation of Chapter I of the ordinance would be of no use for the Chinese, since the full text of the relevant articles
第四條凡所轄地方內各吏司所辦理者本地人等與同類之人
相告其相告之事情至壹百二
犯規例所罰銀僅至壹百盾罰作工至三
物件人官與否任從判斷定奪不得翻訟上司
第五條凡吏司升堂審案被告人若有頭目必當在堂若在丹戎彬
必兼有二沃沙俱在
第六條凡吏司他往府尹當派人權理其事若丹戎彬榔田杯巡察轄
內等處則府尹亦當派人代理丹戎彬榔事或府尹要自兼理
第三同貴官堂
First double page of Schaalje's printed translation of Reglement op het rechtswezen in de Residentie Riouw, 1884 (photocopy in BPL 2106 II 12).
was lacking. The ordinance only mentioned the subjects that were applicable with reference to the Civil Code itself, of which no translation existed. For instance, it would be of no use for the Chinese to know that the articles on “matrimonial conditions” were applicable to them, if they did not have a translation of the articles themselves. According to Hoetink, references to other laws in ordinances were only acceptable if the relevant laws were also translated. Therefore he proposed to make a full translation of all articles applicable to the Chinese in both the Civil and Commercial Codes of the Netherlands Indies. Although by giving his opinion on the usefulness of a translation Hoetink was not strictly staying within his role as translator, it was just because of this argument that the Director of Justice would agree with his proposal. He realised that Hoetink would produce a completely different kind of translation than he had made in 1892.

The other reason for his dissatisfaction was that no equivalents existed in Chinese for European legal terms. These still had to be invented for expressions such as “the enjoyment and loss of civil rights,” “legal community (of property),” “matrimonial conditions” and many others. It is remarkable that Schlegel’s dictionary, just completed in the previous year, could also not satisfy Hoetink’s needs. This confirms Meeter’s view that much was lacking in Schlegel’s dictionary.

The ordinance of 1892 incited so much discussion that it never came into effect. In 1894 the government charged the jurist J.H. Fromberg to draft a new version. Fromberg finished his revision in 1896, again leading to comments by jurists and sinologists. Hoetink proposed to translate this draft, including the full texts of the articles proclaimed applicable, since he expected it to come into effect soon.

He proposed to charge only one Official for Chinese Affairs with this translation, giving the following explanation:

A Chinese translation or adaptation of a text such as referred to by me, shall necessarily be a paraphrase. It would make no sense to proceed here as with the translation of the Bible or other sacred texts; the primary condition is that the contents are understandable for any Chinese able to read the written language.

This principle had been generally followed by the interpreters, as will be shown in the section “The Techniques of Translation” below. According to Hoetink, if more than one translator were to be charged with making this translation, they would have widely divergent ideas, and for the sake of consistency it would be best to have only one translator.

In the Indies it would be impossible to make a decent translation or an understandable summary of such an extremely difficult legal text. The translator should therefore be sent to China:
In China there exists no civil or commercial code and no academic study of law; consequently a legal language has not yet been born. And for the translation or adaptation of a text such as that of Western codes of law, one could probably not use Chinese legal terms, in case they existed, because they would express completely different concepts from those appearing in Western codes of law.

Whoever has to clarify such Western legislation to the Chinese, has in part to create a new language by coining new expressions or giving a more extensive meaning to existing expressions.

This is only possible in the country itself, where he can secure the cooperation of Chinese of a higher literary education than the clerks with whom one works in this country, and where moreover other tools can be found that are missing in this country. For instance, in several parts of China one can find some Chinese who have studied law in Europe, and the supposition is justified that the translator or editor when in China will succeed in interesting such a person in his work and obtaining his cooperation. Outside China, without the assistance of literate Chinese and a large library, a satisfactory translation or understandable overview of such a peculiar and difficult text as a Western civil and commercial code cannot be produced by any Official for Chinese Affairs, or by any sinologist.146

As to the problem of legal translation, Hoetink’s arguments were to the point: in 1898 the legal gap between the West and China was enormous. Although some Western legal works had been translated into Chinese, Chinese law itself had not yet been influenced by it, and the Qing Code was still in force. Only after 1900 did the Chinese government make and effect plans for modernising Chinese law following the example of Japan. In both countries, a new Penal Code was the most urgent: it was the only way to end the extraterritorial rights of foreigners, who in the coastal towns were tried according to their own laws and by their own judges; this was considered a violation of Chinese sovereignty, and a great shame for China. Japan had already adopted a Western-style Penal Code in 1882 and Civil and Commercial Codes in 1893; in an 1894 treaty with Britain, extraterritorial rights were abolished as of 1899. China proclaimed the first modern Penal Code in 1908, and Civil and Commercial Codes in 1912. If Hoetink could have waited another ten years or so, there would have been no need to create new terms for basic legal concepts in Chinese.147

In the end, Hoetink’s proposal was accepted—except that he had to translate the laws that were in force at the time, not Fromberg’s draft law. In September 1898, he left for China where he stayed for two years. He went to Northern China and lived in Tientsin and Peking for a long time.148 The translations were never published; the manuscripts are now kept in the East Asian Library in Leiden. An example of his technique of translation will be given in the next section.

Meeter had in 1897, long after his retirement, vented his opinion about legal translations into Chinese, cynically arguing that they were useless.149
According to him, both the translation of local ordinances in the Outer Possessions and of the *Staatsbladen* in Batavia served no reasonable purpose. When Meeter translated the former, he qualified them as no more than high-strung orations of conceited Residents. Translating all legal texts was a superfluous activity. In one of his “Indische Chinoiserieën” he addressed a beginning sinologist as follows:

That activity itself, as you will probably know by now, is similar to translating into Chinese the so-called *Staatsbladen*: it is just a useless and needless waste of time and paper, for the simple reason that most Chinese cannot read these translations and the few who can read them, do not wish to do so. Those translations, printed with care at the Government Press, are therefore commonly used at the various Residency Offices as cover paper for official letters, and they are without doubt suitable for that, but actually too expensive. If you would ever have the opportunity, and wish to do some really good work, do propose as a measure of economising to end that useless waste of time and money!\(^{150}\)

It must be conceded that Meeter himself did not much like to make translations into Chinese, calling it “monastic drudgery” (*monnikenwerk*). And he once succeeded in convincing a Resident in Surabaya to cancel the translation of a police ordinance with the argument that it was of no significance for the Chinese.\(^{151}\)

Hoetink, who was still working as an Official for Chinese Affairs and was hoping for a study mission to China, had a more sedate opinion based on a legal argument. In his proposal of 1898, he was aware that although these translations were of limited use, they were also indispensable:

Both owing to the nature of the original text and to their poor knowledge of the Chinese written language, especially among the Chinese living on Java, relatively few people will be found for whom such a translation or summary would be of any use, but when a specific law is promulgated for a part of the population, the opportunity should not be lost to let them acquaint themselves with that law through a translation or adaptation in their own language. And when that law is pronounced applicable to the Chinese outside Java, it would no doubt be fair to provide a translation or adaptation, since among the Chinese in the so-called Outer Possessions knowledge of Malay is much less widespread than among their fellow Chinese on Java, and in the absence of a Chinese text it will be impossible for them to know the contents of the law applicable to them.\(^{152}\)

No matter what the use and social utility of these translations was, the interpreters took great pains (even when assisted by their clerks) to provide understandable renditions of Netherlands Indies law into Chinese. This was in itself an activity deserving admiration. Some examples will be given in the next section.
The techniques of translation

In 1859, the students in Amoy were asked by the Indies government to evaluate some Chinese translations of ordinances from Batavia. These were relay translations by ethnic Chinese from Malay, not directly from Dutch. In response, Albrecht, representing the others, gave his comments, showing that the students were highly disappointed by the quality of the translations. Albrecht mentioned several criteria. These became the principles of translation that were in various degrees later observed by the Dutch interpreters.

Concerning the form I do not wish to make any objections; the Malay translation is followed literally. This is the easiest manner, since it would be too laborious to write the beginning and the end in Chinese fashion. A lot of Dutch words are left without translation. For instance one finds that Commissie, Justitie, College, Residentie, Gouverneur-General, etc. etc. simply kept their original pronunciations and the translator was content to represent those sounds to the extent possible in Chinese characters. All this I can still understand, because it is really difficult for Chinese to know the significance of all names of officials and technical terms, and then find corresponding Chinese expressions for them. The style, however, is really atrocious; it is not Chinese but Malay through and through. The Chinese of Java are used to it, and will be able to understand the meaning, and they will certainly do so, since they wish to do so in good faith. I will quote a few examples to show how incomprehensible it would be for an uninitiated Chinese. Sentences beginning with relative pronouns, such as “he, who …” (hij, die …) and “those, who …” (zij, die…) or simply “whoever” (wie…), all begin in this translation with 誰 [shéi]. No, this word is and will always remain an interrogatory pronoun meaning “who?” (wie?). They certainly only followed Malay syntax. In Chinese documents it is usually translated as 凡 [fán], “all,” and similar numerals, concluding with the relative pronoun 者 [zhé]; this can be translated into our language with “all those who …” (alle die…). Moreover, they translated, for instance, the word “according to” (volgens) as 從 [cóng], which means “to follow” (volgen), but can never function as a preposition. There are other characters for that. Finally, there are many peculiar switchings of characters that I cannot show in this summary.

These principles of translation can be summarised as: free translation (versus literalness), adaptation to the Chinese style of documents (certain formal phrases at the beginning and end), translation of the titles of Dutch officials and names of institutions (versus transliteration), and literary style (versus colloquial or dialect style). The influence of Malay syntax could, of course, be easily avoided by the Dutch interpreters.

Some examples of translations by Chinese can be found in the archives of the Chinese Council (Kong Koan) of Batavia, such as the translation of a regulation for bread bakers in Batavia in 1823 starting as follows:
CHAPTER TWELVE

The High King (Governor-General) promulgates on the fourth day of this month in the Dutch calendar in decision no. 21 the ‘Regulations (kondisi) for making bread (roti’).”¹⁵⁶ In these, Dutch terms are almost always transcribed rather than translated, and they are full of Malay words. They often literally follow the structure of the original text. Still, they are of good quality and would be understandable to the local Chinese of Java. The Chinese Council usually engaged as secretaries newly arrived Chinese who had been educated in China. The translations shown to the students in 1859 may have been of lesser quality. Perhaps they had been criticised by other Chinese and were therefore sent to the students in China for assessment.

The defective quality of these translations was a reason for the students to request permission to take along teachers from China instead of hiring local teachers. But they may also have had another effect, inspiring the students to compile a list of standard translations of names of Dutch officials and institutions in the Indies. A copy of such a list comprising about 100 terms, dating from about 1860, has survived among Schaalje’s papers.¹⁵⁷ After arrival in the Indies, the interpreters must have enlarged this list. Schlegel mentioned in his dictionary several standard translations on which the interpreters must have later reached agreement.¹⁵⁸ In the dictionary, most translations are the same as on Schaalje’s list, with a few minor adaptations. For instance, for the names of Chinese officers, Schaalje’s list only provided purely Chinese names, such as 鄉正 (hiang-tsìng) for kapitein. Schlegel’s dictionary also mentioned the old transliterated names that were commonly used, such as 甲必丹 kappit-tan; in their translations the interpreters would mostly use the latter names. Many translations of terms are in fine literary style, but some are clumsy, including “interpreter for the Chinese language,” translated as 翻譯漢字官.¹⁵⁹ A list comparing the translations of terms by Chinese and Europeans is in Appendix K.

Not many translations into Chinese by the Dutch interpreters could be found in the Netherlands. In total there are nine printed translations by seven different interpreters, and nine short translations by Schlegel in his dictionary. There are also three manuscript translations by De Grijs and 68 by Hoetink. The original Dutch texts of many are known; a list is in Appendix L.

The most obvious differences with respect to the earlier translations by ethnic Chinese are (1) the use of standard translations for Dutch names of officials and institutions, and (2) the adaptation of the beginning and end of the texts to Chinese style, as used in Chinese decrees. This would make their translations better understandable to newly arrived Chinese.
The translations by the Dutch interpreters are in general written in a clear style, but with colloquial elements. Some are influenced by the Dutch original, and by the interpreters’ imperfect mastery of the Chinese literary language; as De Grijs wrote, “their less elegant style betrays the European translator.” This also shows that these translations must have been made without much assistance from the Chinese clerks, or with clerks who were not highly educated.

Some translations use a purely literary style and cannot be distinguished from texts produced in China: for instance, some of the translations by Schlegel and De Grijs, and all by Hoetink and De Jongh. On the basis of the available evidence, it seems that the second generation of translators, who had been specially trained by Schlegel for translating government regulations into Chinese, was better in literary Chinese than the first.

When analysed according to the principles of translation mentioned above, one finds that the beginning and end of all translations are always in a pure Chinese style. These are freely translated, perhaps modelled on the 1848 Shaoxing edict that most students must have known. In the following example by Von Faber in 1871, the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies is called 總督 zōngdū, which was the term for a Governor-General (of two provinces) in China. The original Dutch text and Chinese translation are followed by English translations of both.

Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië. No. 78 […]
IN NAAM DES KONINGS!
DE GOUVERNEUR-GEERAAL
VAN NEDERLANDSCH-INDIË,
Den Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië gehoord;
Allen, die deze zullen zien of hooren lezen, Salut! doet te weten:
Dat Hij, het wenschelijk achtende nieuwe voorschriften uit te vaardigen tot bevordering en handhaving van orde en tucht onder de gevangenen in Nederlandsch-Indië en tevens om in afwachting van eene meer volledige regeling bij de ordonnancie, bedoeld bij art. 11 van het wetboek van strafregt voor de Europeanen en van de in bewerking zijnde reorganisatie van het dwangarbeiderstelsel, eenige regelen te stellen, betreffende den arbeid der veroordeelden;
…
Heeft goedgevonden en verstaan:
…
REGLEMENT van orde en tucht onder de gevangenen in Nederlandsch-Indië en tot voorloopige regeling van hunnen arbeid.
English translations of the above:

Netherlands Indies Law Gazette, No. 78 […]

IN THE NAME OF THE KING!

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

OF THE NETHERLANDS INDIES,

having heard the Council of the Netherlands Indies,

All those, who will see and hear this, be greeted!

makes known:

That He, considering it desirable to promulgate new regulations for promoting and maintaining order and discipline among prisoners in the Netherlands Indies and also, pending a more complete regulation by the ordinance referred to in art. 11 of the Criminal Code for Europeans, and the reorganisation of the system of forced labour now being revised, to establish some rules concerning the labour of convicts;

…

Agreed with and understood:

…

REGULATION of order and discipline among prisoners in the Netherlands Indies and provisional labour rules.

At the end there is also a standard formula, which in the translation is partly incorporated in the beginning:

Gelast en beveelt voorts, dat alle hooge en lage kollegiën en ambtenaren, officieren en justicieren, ieder voor zooveel hem aangaat, aan de stipte naleving dezer de hand zullen houden, zonder oogluiking of aanzien des persoons.

English translations of the above:

Furthermore [He] charges and orders that all high and low boards and officials, military officers and justice personnel, each insofar as it concerns him, shall maintain strict compliance with these, without fear or favour.

It is specially made known that all should respect this in awe, without contravention.

In translating the main text of a regulation, the interpreters faithfully translated the meaning of the text, but unavoidably in a free manner. They often reorganised the text in a more logical way. For example, in the translation of the beginning and ending of an ordinance, they simplified or omitted legal and administrative niceties such as references to other ordinances and various special conditions and exceptions. This becomes clear in Schaalje’s translation of the Regulations concerning the legal system in Riau. The following is the beginning of the main text up to the system of
the lowest court, the magistrate’s court, commonly known as the *politiebol*. Schaalje elegantly circumscribed legal concepts that did not yet exist in Chinese.

Reglement op het regtswezen in de residentie Riauw
Hoofdstuk I.

**VAN DE REGTERLIJKE ORGANISATIE EN HET BELEID DER JUSTITIE.**

**Titel I.**

*Algemeene bepalingen.*

Art. 1. Voor zooveel bij de met de inlandsche vorsten in de residentie Riauw gesloten kontrakten niet anders is bedongen, is de uitoefening der regterlijke magt in dat gewest, onverminderd de regtsmagt van den militairen regter en die, bij het reglement op de regterlijke organisatie en het beleid der justitie in *Nederlandisch-Indië* aan den raad van justitie te Batavia en het hoog-gerechtshof van *Nederlandisch-Indië* toegekend, opgedragen aan:

- de magistraten;
- de Landraad;
- het residentiegeregt.

…

**English translations of the above:**

Regulations concerning the legal system in Riau Residency.

Chapter I.

Concerning legal organisation and judicial policy.

Title I.

General provisions.

Article 1. As far as not stipulated otherwise in the treaties with the native rulers in Riau Residency, the exercise of judiciary powers in the region, without prejudicing the jurisdiction of the military judge and [the jurisdiction that is] according to the *Regulations on the Judiciary System and Judicial Policy in the Netherlands Indies* assigned to the *Raad van Justitie* (Council of Justice) in Batavia and the High Court of the Netherlands Indies, is charged to:

- the magistrates
- the *Landraad* (District Court);
- the Residency Court.

…

Rules for lawsuits within Riau Residency …

Book 1. Regulations for managing lawsuits.

Chapter 1. General provisions.

Article 1. All cases that do not contravene matters decided in documents contracted by this country with the native kings in Riau Residency, and excepting matters about military garrisons or matters that should be taken care of by the Council of Justice in Kalapa (Batavia) or the High Court of the Country of the Indies, are lawsuits that are taken care of within Riau Residency, managed by the Magistrates, the District Court, and the Residency Court.
Titel II.
Van de magistraten.

Art. 3. Met de uitoefening der magistratuur zijn belast de in het gewest bescheiden europeesche gezagvoerende ambtenaren, ieder binnen de grenzen van het gebied, waarover hem het dagelijksch bestuur of, waar geen regtsstreeksch bestuur door of van wege het Nederlandsch-Indisch gouvernement wordt uitgeoefend, het dagelijksch toezigt is opgedragen.

Art. 4. De magistraten nemen, ieder voor zoover zijn ressort zich uitstrekt, kennis:
1°. van alle burgerlijke regtsvorderingen, ingesteld tegen inlanders en met dezen gelijkgestelde personen, wanneer het onderwerp van het geschil eene waarde heeft van niet meer dan f 100;
2°. van alle klagten tegen inlanders en met dezen gelijkgestelde personen, ter zake van overtredingen, waarop geene zwaardere straf is gesteld dan eene geldboete van f 100, of tenarbeidstelling aan de publieke werken voor den kost zonder loon van drie maanden of gevangenisstraf van acht dagen, met of zonder verbeurdverklaring.

De uitspraken in deze zaken zijn aan geen andere voorziening onderhevig.

English translations of the above:

Title II.
Concerning the Magistrates.

Art. 3. Charged with the exercise of magistrature are the competent European officials appointed in the district, each within the boundaries of the region in which they are charged with the daily administration, or, in places where no direct administration by or on account of the Netherlands Indies government is exercised, the daily supervision.

Art. 4. The magistrates each have in their respective administrative region jurisdiction regarding:
1. All civil actions against natives and persons of the same status, when the subject of dispute has a value of not more than f 100;
2. All charges against natives and persons of the same status in cases of minor offences not punishable more heavily than with a fine of f 100, or hard labour at public works with board but without wage for three months, or detention for eight days, with or without confiscation of property.

Sentences in these cases are not subject to any appeal.

Chapter 2. The Magistrate’s Court
Article 3. (The controleurs)
Charged with the Magistrate’s Court are the Dutch civil officials within Riau Residency, each within his region of jurisdiction.

Article 4. The cases which each Magistrate handles within the region of his jurisdiction are, firstly, cases in which natives or people of the same category sue each other in matters up to one hundred guilders; secondly, all cases in which natives or people of the same category are accused of offending regulations punishable with a fine of up to one hundred guilders only, doing public works up to three months or detention up to eight days, irrespective whether with confiscation of goods or not; any sentence once decided cannot be reversed by higher authorities.
Although the most prominent innovation introduced by the Dutch interpreters was the use of standard translations for Dutch terms instead of transcriptions of sounds, they did not always adhere to this principle. For some terms that were not on Schaalje’s list and also did not have practical translations in Schlegel’s dictionary, such as commissie (commission), transcriptions continued to be used. Moreover, since the new standard translations were probably not generally known, sometimes transcriptions were still used. Accordingly, some translations are full of such loanwords. The following is a translation by Albrecht of one article in an ordinance about business tax for Foreign Orientals in 1878 (Article 7), containing four transcriptions from Malay, which are underlined here: 軍黎絲 kun-lê-si, commissie (commission); 的西 tik-si, Dutch taxeren, Malay taksir (to tax, to assess tax); 鑒光 kàm-kong, Malay kampong (village, quarter, neighbourhood); 亞實連黎絲珍 a-sít-diên lê-si-tin, assistent-resident (Assistant Resident).

Art. 7. Gedurende eene maand na de vergadering der commissie worden de belastingeschuldbreken in de gelegenheid gesteld, om kennis te nemen van het bedrag, waarvoor zij door de commissie zijn aangeslagen, en om daartegen bij het hoofd van gewestelijk of plaatselijk bestuur bezwaren in te brengen.

Het hoofd van plaatselijk bestuur geeft van de bij hem ingebragte bezwaren zo spoedig mogelijk kennis aan het hoofd van gewestelijk bestuur.

English translations of the above:

Art. 7. During one month after the meeting of the commission, the taxpayers are given the opportunity to apprise themselves of the amount for which they have been taxed by the commission, and to lodge objections against this with the head of regional or local government.

The head of local government notifies as soon as possible the head of regional government of the objections lodged with him.

Article 7. Within one month after each commission has made a tax-assessment, the people of the villages wishing to know how much the tax-assessment is, can request to see it and become clear about it. If they are unwilling (to pay), they can submit a document requesting the Resident; they can also request the Assistant Resident, asking him to forward and report it to the Resident.

Albrecht’s translation not only contains many Malay words, it is also in a much more colloquial style than most others, probably in accommodation with the Chinese language as used on Java. While his style is not influenced by Malay syntax, it is not always elegant. When at the end of this
ordinance (art. 15) Albrecht wished to express that some previous ordinances were from now on cancelled (vervallen), he used a vulgar expression which would seem ridiculous to an educated Chinese: 打死不行, literally meaning “to kill and not to carry out,” “[it is] to be killed and not to be carried out,” or more freely translated “[it is] invalid and not to be carried out”164 The full text is as follows:

Art. 15. De ordonnancie van 21 November 1872 (Staatsblad no. 205), betrekkelijk de hoofdelijke belasting in Benkoelen, voor zoo veel zij vreemde oosterlingen betreft, zoomede de heffing van het hoofdgeld der vreemde oosterlingen in de Zuider- en Ooster-afdeeling van Borneo en te Amboina, vervallen.

English translations of the above:

Art. 15. The ordinance of 21 November 1872 (Staatsblad no. 205), concerning the poll tax in Benkulen, insofar as those concerned are Foreign Orientals, and the levy of poll tax of Foreign Orientals in the Southern and Eastern Division of Borneo and on Ambon, are cancelled.

In the Chinese translation both references to Foreign Orientals were left out, probably because this information would seem superfluous to Chinese readers in a translation intended for them.

Transcriptions of Dutch and Malay words were sometimes also preferred by other interpreters. For instance “police,” translated as 差頭 on Schaalje’s list and in Schlegel’s dictionary, was transcribed as 玻黎絲 po-lê-si by Schaalje in 1882 (art. 19) and as 保黎司 pó-lê-si by De Jongh in 1891 (art. 31). Although these transcriptions are inconsistent, this would not lead to misunderstanding among the Chinese, who were used to it. The interpreters therefore also seemed not to strive for consistency in transcription. Another peculiar example of a transcription can be found in an oath formula, a document destined for one person to be read in the temple, where De Grijs translated Raad van Justitie with the colloquial toà lát 大叻, from Malay tuan Raad (Gentlemen of the Court). 166

The transcription of geographical names was also not consistent, even for the names of main towns. The Chinese continued to designate Batavia by its ancient name Kalapa, which had earlier been transcribed as 咬囉吧 or 噶喇吧 Ka-la-pa, simplified as 吧城 Pa-town,167 but the Dutch
interpreters transcribed it as 加蚋巴 Ka-la-pa (Schaalje, 1882, art. 1, see above), 加蚋巴 (Young, 1885) and 咖留巴 (Schlegel, Supplement, 1891). The word “European” was sometimes translated as 荷蘭, “Holland, Dutch,” from Malay Belanda (Schaalje, art. 5), or as 歐羅吧人, now the standard name (Von Faber, 1871, art. 2), but once even as 亞魯豹人 A-ló-pà lâng, in which the character pà “panther” has a negative connotation (Schaalje, art. 19). For Sumatra, at least five different transcriptions were in use: 双門答納 (De Grijs, 1875), 司馬的哈 (Albrecht, 1878), 斯馬德叻 (Hoetink, 1883, p. 80), 蘇媽擇蚋 (another list by Schaalje from Medan), 蘇門搭喇 (Supplement to Schlegel’s dictionary); the modern name is 蘇門答臘 (Sumatra).

To facilitate the identification of geographical names, vertical lines were sometimes added next to the characters (De Grijs, 1875; Albrecht, 1878; Young, 1885). Traditional Chinese texts lacked punctuation, but in one translation, it was added for easier reading (Groeneveldt, 1875).

Colloquial Mandarin or dialect vocabulary was often used, for instance 三個月 “three months,” and 了 (particle; Mandarin), 芬 “tobacco” (Hokkien; Young, 1885), and 伊 “he” (Hokkien dialect; also used in other dialects; Schaalje, art. 3).

Some translations show the hand of a European: the awkward choice of words, colloquialisms, and the word order betray the foreign translator of the texts. They are in general understandable, but even an educated (modern) Chinese sometimes has to read some sentences several times in order to understand their meaning.

Hoetink’s translations were the best of all. They were written in elegant and idiomatic literary Chinese with only a few colloquial words, and they are easy to understand. He was one of the second generation of interpreters, trained by Schlegel. However, the Deli journalist J. Deen intimated in 1895 that Hoetink’s Chinese clerk did the translations, which must have meant that Hoetink explained the meaning orally and the clerk composed the Chinese written translation (see above). During the translation process, however, he left out some information that was probably considered obvious and therefore irrelevant in Chinese. He even did this in the following local police regulation (politiekeur) on the use of horses, carriages and wagons (carts) in Deli (1883), a simple text without legal terminology. In the translation, the numbers of the articles are replaced by long dashes (—). It should be noted that in the Netherlands Indies, just as in British colonies, traffic kept to the left.
ORDINANCE on the use of horses, carriages and wagons in Deli Division, except in Tamiang Subdivision.

Art. 1. On public roads one is not allowed to drive faster than at a steady trot or at a moderate gallop.

Art. 2. One should as much as possible drive in the middle of the road.

When two carriages or wagons coming from opposing directions meet each other, both swing to the left and leave enough space between them.

He who wishes to overtake a carriage or wagon makes this known by clacking the whip, after which the carriage or wagon in front swings to the left and the carriage at the back overtakes on the right side.

Art. 3. Persons on horseback swing out when meeting and overtaking as do carriages.

In the translation, however, it is not clear to which side the carriage should swing when meeting, and the clacking of the whip is left out. Surprisingly (for a modern reader), all Hoetink’s translations show the lack of precision that he observed with the Chinese.

An example of an awkward, literal translation is one about opium tax-farming by De Grijs in 1875 (Supplement A). Five years later, Hoetink “revised” this translation, taking over some of De Grijs’ expressions and rewriting it in a clearer and better literary style.
Dutch text and translations by De Grijs and Hoetink:

Art. 1. De pachter heeft het uitsluitend regt tot den verkoop:
  a. van bereide opium.
  b. van onbereide opium anders dan in geheele bollen.

Art. 1. What in this tax-farming should be sold, is prepared opium paste and fragmented raw opium, but all opium formed into balls cannot be sold on one’s own.

Finally here is an example of Hoetink’s translation (1900) of the Civil Code (1847), showing how he dealt elegantly with legal terminology, and also used some modern terms.

Art. 108. De vrouw, al is zij zelfs buiten gemeenschap van goederen getrouwd, of van goederen gescheiden, kan, zonder bijstand van haren man in de acte, of zonder zijne schriftelijke toestemming, niets geven, vervreemden, verpanden, verkrijgen, hetzij voor niet, hetzij onder eenen bezwarend titel.

Art. 108. The wife, even if she has married without community of property, or is with partitioned property, cannot without the concurrence of her husband in the deed, or without his written consent, give, alienate, pawn, or obtain anything, whether for no consideration or under an encumbered title.

Art. 108. If the wife, although herself managing her property, wishes to give or receive, to hand over, to donate, to mortgage goods and property etc., she cannot act on her own authority and convenience, but the husband should personally issue a special permit and only then she can act. If the husband commissions his wife to draw up a contract in his stead, or to execute an incumbent obligation, the wife should also wait for the special permit of her husband and can only then receive a sum of money and draw up a receipt.
Hoetink left out one legal nicety, namely “whether for no consideration or under an encumbered title,” which is indeed hard to translate. Precision was only a relative matter.

Finally the question remains as to whether the Dutch interpreters’ new vocabulary left any traces and contributed to the modernisation of the Chinese language as used in the Indies. The influence of the new vocabulary items created by the Dutch interpreters, although they were well chosen, was extremely limited outside their own translations into Chinese. For instance, the Chinese Council of Batavia (Kong Koan) did not adopt these words in its minutes, but continued to use the old manner of transcribing Malay and Dutch words.¹⁷¹ This is not surprising in view of the general antagonism between Chinese officers and European interpreters. Not even the principle of translation instead of transcription was adopted.

The new terminology did leave some traces in the first Dutch–Chinese and Chinese–Malay–Dutch dictionaries compiled by Chinese in the 1930s. The principle of translation rather than transcription was used, as was now common in China, where in the first two decades of the twentieth century a large number of new terms had been introduced for Western concepts. Some of these were now used for translating Dutch terms. Other translations in these dictionaries are the same as or similar to those used by the interpreters. In Tseng Chao Yeh’s *Nieuw Hollandsch–Chineesch Woordenboek* (1932), ‘Governor-General of the East Indies’ is translated as 東印度總督, ‘Resident’ as 府尹, while there are three names for ‘Residency’: 府, 州, 縣, and controleur is 縣知事. Tseng made use of Van de Stadt’s *Nederlandsch–Japansch Woordenboek* (1922), and names of courts of law are now all taken from Japanese, for instance *Landraad* is 地方裁判廳 and *Raad van Justitie* 裁判所. In Li Joek Koey’s *Practisch Chineesch–Maleisich Woordenboek* (1933, 4th edition 1941), only the names of the Governor-General 總督, Residency 府 and Resident 府尹 are the same as the interpreters used. The names for Assistant Resident and controleur, both 縣官, and the name of the High Court 大理院 are similar to Schlegel’s.¹⁷² The other courts of law all have completely different names: *Landraad* is literally translated as 地審 廳 and *Raad van Justitie* as 高審庭 (pp. 22, 37, 38, 43). Pernitzsch and Tittel in their *Chinesische Buchhaltung* (1927) only provide the popular names for Resident 公爺, 大淡, Assistant Resident 杯爺, 副淡, and controleur 田杯 (p. 67), but for Residency they give 州 (p. 68).¹⁷³ With these few exceptions, all the ‘classical’ translations of the interpreters had disappeared.

*Translating and excerpting Chinese account books*

The most important and only substantial translation work from Chinese into Dutch was the translation and excerpting of account books. Aside
from the translation of ordinances in Batavia, Groeneveldt called this one of the “only serious activities” of most interpreters. Such translations and excerpts were needed in cases of suspicion of fraud, in particular of fraudulent bankruptcy. The interpreters could be charged with this task by the Orphans and Estate Chamber, which acted as curator in cases of bankruptcy. If the interpreter discovered fraud during the investigation, the Chamber reported this to the Public Prosecutor. The latter could also directly charge the interpreter with these tasks, or require his services in court as expert witness. In 1873, Schlegel wrote about this:

Only the Judicial authorities seized warmly upon the opportunity to use the services of the European interpreters for Chinese, in order to find out the eternal malversations of the Chinese.

In the nineteenth century, cases of bankruptcy and fraud with bankruptcy were rampant among the Chinese on Java. The reasons for this cannot be discussed here in detail. But it was generally accepted that one reason was the overly high rate of credit given by European importers to the Chinese “second-hand” (retail) traders. Another reason was, according to Meeter, the application of European Commercial Law to the Chinese on Java and Madura pursuant to Staatsblad 1855, no. 79, which gave the Chinese there many opportunities for malversations that could hardly be detected and still less be proven in court. In any case, for Meeter personally, Chinese bankruptcy was almost synonymous with fraud.

Checking account books must have been an important activity from the start, since a special fee was mentioned in the fee list of April 1863.

The first known cases were Schlegel’s checking the account books of opium tax-farmers in Bagelen and Kedu in Central Java in 1864. In these cases, for a few weeks he was put at the disposal of the Residents of these towns.

From about 1865 on, the study of Chinese account books also became a regular part of the curriculum of the Chinese interpreters. And from 1870 on, double-entry bookkeeping (“Italian bookkeeping”) was one of the subjects examined in the comparative entrance examination. It would be easier for the interpreters to translate and excerpt Chinese account books, if they were also well versed in Western bookkeeping. And in their reports to the courts, they had to explain Chinese account books in Western bookkeeping terms.

Meeter became an expert in investigating account books and wrote many articles about the subject. In his opinion, the system of these books was not difficult to understand. He was one of the first to have already studied Chinese account books in China, and he found them easier to handle than Western ones. After his first investigation of a case in Surabaya in 1876, he published an article in which he explained the system and the
different kinds of books.\textsuperscript{181} There were two major difficulties for the interpreter. One was that the cursive Chinese writing could be hard to read; in this respect the teacher/clerk could play an important role. The other was the use of special vocabulary. In East Indies account books, many names of products were used that would never occur in China; these were vulgar transcriptions of Malay and Dutch words, often using characters in a curious manner. Meeter soon became interested and made a special study of these names. In an article he gave some examples, such as 文茶牙 bûntê gâ, literally “dignified, tea, tooth,” a transcription of Malay mentega, “butter.”\textsuperscript{182} Meeter was urged by a zealous drive to fight Chinese fraud, and in his articles he minutely described and explained various types of fraud. In 1884 he wrote that he had so far checked about fifty sets of account books.\textsuperscript{183} However, his expertise was not recognised by all, resulting in fierce debates with European traders and lawyers in the \textit{Soerabaiasch Handelsblad} and other newspapers.

When investigating account books, a direct translation was not enough: the books had in the first place to be excerpted and analysed. Otherwise it was almost impossible for creditors or judges to discover the fraud. When a large number of account books was concerned, this could be an enormous task. Meeter therefore first used his Chinese informants, providing them with a few hundred guilders, to find out clues as to where to search.\textsuperscript{184} As with other types of work, checking account books was mostly done by the interpreters on Java, but rarely in the Outer Possessions.

Since the results of the investigation or translation of account books could have serious consequences for the person concerned, both financial and legal, the interpreter could in such cases be confronted with heavy pressure and attempts at bribery, and when these yielded no result, vicious slander. As usual, Meeter recounted in his articles a number of hilarious examples. From these it is clear that Meeter was not afraid of hard work against heavy odds. He always considered his responsibility wider than just translating: he had a strong feeling of justice and was eager to fight fraud and corruption. Without being required by his office to do so, he conducted his own investigations, drew his own conclusions, and acted accordingly. The following case illustrates how he as an interpreter had to balance between a fraudulent Chinese, a possibly corrupt official, and his own conscience.

In one of the Outer Possessions, where Meeter as usual had a bad relationship with the local Resident, he was once visited late in the evening by a wealthy Chinese, who was a tax-farmer of alcoholic beverages and gambling (\textit{arak- en dobbelpacht}). After some introductory conversation, the Chinese showed him a red parcel containing a ring with a large diamond, allegedly a present from a relative working in the diamond mines, and offered it to him. Meeter refused to accept, explaining that as an offi-
cial he might be required to give advice in lawsuits in which the giver was implicated, and his impartiality would then be in doubt. The Chinese assured him that this would never happen, pressing Meeter to accept. Finally Meeter found a way out by saying he could accept the ring on the day of his transfer, and give a similar present in return. His resolute refusal made the Chinese leave in embarrassment.

Meeter was surprised by the friendly offer of the Chinese, but when a few days later he was summoned by the Resident, the reason became clear. The Resident told him that the tax-farmer of alcoholic beverages and gambling had requested remission of part of the tax-farming fee (pachtschat) because a large fire had reduced most of the Chinese quarter to ashes and he had suffered heavy losses. The Resident impressed upon Meeter that he believed the man was honest, and said he had asked the tax-farmer for his account books. He would send these to Meeter for investigation.

Of course, Meeter remembered the offering of the ring a few days earlier, but he was wise enough not to reveal anything to the Resident, wondering if the latter had already accepted a diamond or something else.

When Meeter received the two account books, he immediately noticed that these were not the real ones, but only newly made excerpts containing the revenues and expenses of the last few months. He therefore invited the tax-farmer to his house, and asked him if these were the real account books; the tax-farmer answered that the Resident had asked for excerpts showing his losses, and therefore he had noted them in these two books. Believing this could well be the truth, Meeter returned the books to the Resident, stating these were only excerpts, not account books.

Meeter then visited one of his Chinese friends in the Chinese quarter, a well-educated sinkheh, asking him about the losses caused by the fire. The latter answered that some large export companies indeed had suffered considerable losses—but not the tax-farmer of alcoholic beverages and gambling, who would on the contrary make great profits from the many sinkheh who were now out of work.

Now the Resident sent the books a second time, requesting a translation, not an explanation of the nature of the books. So Meeter quickly translated them both, but he could not refrain from adding a footnote at the end: “These books are not the proper account books of the tax-farmer of alcoholic beverages and gambling.” He concluded the text with the usual formula: “For the translation / upon my oath sworn to the country / the interpreter of the Chinese language in …” and his signature.

Although he realised that this note could be a reason to find him “obnoxious,” he preferred this to fearing that he might have helped a Chinese tax-farmer, with a Resident as his accomplice, to cheat the government.

Subsequently he heard nothing more about the matter, but at his trans-
fer he was not offered the diamond ring again. The Resident probably had not dared to forward the tax-farmer's request.

Right after the incident, when Meeter told the whole story to a good friend, the local doctor, the latter advised him to omit any such footnote, since he had only been required to provide a translation of the text. And when Meeter argued that in his oath he had promised to act as “a good and honest official,” the doctor said that next time he had better send a letter to the Director of Finance, if need be anonymously for self-protection.187

On Java, the pressures and attempts at bribery for the interpreter could be even more serious.188 Meeter recounted several examples. Once a bankrupt Chinese was sent to his house by the Procurator General to ask for his “help” in checking his accounts, thereby putting in doubt this official’s incorruptibility. Usually bribes were offered in an indirect manner. Once a bankrupt Chinese and his wife paid a visit to his home late at night, imploring him to save them from disaster. After Meeter had refused to accept any gifts, the bankrupt man’s wife came back in the daytime and without anyone’s noticing it, simply left a collection of shoes, sarongs, and jewels in the courtyard, as well as two f500 bills which were found crumbled in the hands of Meeter’s young daughter! Afterwards, Meeter duly brought all these bribes to the curator, the Orphans Chamber (see illustration 23).189

Because of the frequent cases of fraudulent bankruptcy, many Dutch traders and officials proposed requiring the Chinese to keep their books in Malay written in the Western alphabet,190 or in Dutch. It might seem these books could then more easily be checked, and judges and traders could do that themselves. At least from 1881 on, opium tax-farmers and pawnshop owners were already obliged to keep their books in Malay or Dutch.191 But Meeter brought forward convincing arguments against this.192 On the one hand, it would be unfair to many Chinese traders, such as newcomers (sinkheh), who knew little Malay, or those who only traded with China, and it would also be unfair to force the Chinese to give up the age-old habit of bookkeeping in Chinese.193 In this respect Meeter was in sympathy with the Chinese. But on the other hand, and most importantly, Malay bookkeeping would not facilitate the investigation of the books. On the contrary, Malay books were easier to falsify, because Chinese ink was impossible to erase, and he expected that the Chinese would continue their bookkeeping in Chinese, just as opium tax-farmers were doing, and would only make translations of certain books into Malay or Dutch. Moreover, not the books themselves but the excerpts provided by them might be fraudulent. The counter-argument that it was in Meeter’s personal interest that the books were in Chinese so he would have an opportunity to earn emoluments, was easily refuted by him: he did not at all like to check account books, and he was sometimes even proud not to have earned private emoluments.194

Finally, Meeter also had a sinological argument. If no characters were
provided for Chinese personal names, identification would often become impossible. One advantage of using Chinese characters in account books was the variability of alphabetic transcriptions of Chinese names. Meeter gave the example of the names Kwee, Kwik and Kweh, all representing the same Chinese name 郭 (Guo). Identification of debtors in cases of bankruptcy could be difficult when no Chinese characters were provided,
since Chinese were not eager to pay their debts in such cases and could evade their responsibility simply by the variant spelling of a name. Meeter recounted that he had once received two telegrams on the same day from Semarang, in which two lawyers (representing both plaintiff and accused) asked him whether the names Bo and Mo could be different spellings of the same name. A Chinese debtor named N. Bo N. had been detained, but he asserted that his name was N. Mo N. and not N. Bo N. Of course no definite answer could be given, since the telegraph could not convey the character or characters for Bo and Mo. Meeter could only answer that it was possible that some Chinese pronounced the same name as bo and others as mo, but it was also possible that these sounds represented different characters and therefore different people. Accordingly, the court immediately released the detained person, since his identity could not be confirmed. Therefore Meeter advised that if the government decided that account books were to be kept in Malay or Dutch, characters should still be provided for Chinese names.

The debate about the language of account books continued until the end of the century, but did not lead to any change. Just as in the British colonies, the Chinese traders were allowed to keep their books in Chinese until the end of colonial rule. The checking of account books would remain an important function of the sinologists.

**Private translation and interpreting**

When the interpreters’ salary was decided upon in 1860, considerable emoluments were expected. Therefore their maximum salary (f 800) was kept low compared with other civil officials (f 1,000). The sources of these emoluments were not made explicit, but they were certainly expected from private translation and interpreting. In April 1863, together with the directive on interpreters, the following fees were established for private services of the Chinese interpreters (Dutch text in Appendix Q).

B. Fees for European interpreters of the Chinese language in the Netherlands Indies

For written translations:

- From Chinese into Dutch:
  - one page of 28 lines in Dutch translation \( f8 \)
  - for each following page \( 4 \)

- From Dutch into Chinese:
  - for the first 100 characters \( 10 \)
  - for each following 100 characters \( 5 \)

Stamp duties not being included
For copies of translations one-fourth of the fee may be charged. For oral interpreting on the same day:
  for attendance:
    for the first hour or less \( f_8 \)
    for the second hour or less \( f_4 \)
    for each following hour or part of it \( f_2 \)
For checking account books, memoranda and bills:
  for every 100 characters or less, an attendance fee of \( f_5 \)
For copies or excerpts of account books, memoranda or bills:
  for every 100 characters or less \( f_{2.50} \)

The fee rate was almost twice as high as that for French, German and English translators in 1819. The main difference with these languages was the addition of a fee for checking account books. Translating and summarising these would become one of the important functions of the interpreters, although it would rarely be done for private customers. In practice, this rate was too high for private customers, and the actual fees were often lower.

In the beginning, Schlegel and Francken may have had some private earnings. At least, such was suggested in one of De Grijs’ letters to Francken in May 1863, in which he wrote:

To judge from what I hear and understand from your and Schlegel’s letters, you have nothing to do over there for the government, and only have to take care to have as much private business as possible.\(^{201}\)

Yet they were hardly successful. Four years later, Schlegel deplored the lack of jobs requested by traders. In 1867, in an article about Chinese bankruptcy, he pleaded for the use of European interpreters of Chinese for translating Chinese account books in such lawsuits. According to him, for a fee of \( f_{200} \) to \( f_{500} \) the interpreter could ascertain whether the bankrupt Chinese was in good faith or not. These costs, divided among many creditors, should not be any objection. But still, this did not happen, as Schlegel wrote:

The trading community, which in the past complained bitterly that the government did not provide Chinese interpreters to check the fraudulent activities of the Chinese—that same trading community now, five years after the government appointed such interpreters, makes no use of them.\(^{202}\)

In 1878 in his \textit{nota} about the work of the interpreters, Albrecht summarised the main sources of private emoluments as follows:

The assistance of the interpreters is only required for translating private documents, when they are needed for civil lawsuits, for checking and excerpting account books submitted in civil lawsuits, and for giving advice about Chinese customs and institutions, in particular about intestate inheritance law.\(^{203}\)
With a few exceptions, there is no evidence that the interpreters’ earnings from private translation and interpreting were more than marginal. Albrecht and Groeneveldt both asserted, respectively in 1878 and 1894, that the private emoluments were extremely limited. Albrecht wrote in 1878 that he had rarely been asked to make private translations and that he could not be personally blamed for that:

That making little private earnings was not a personal problem is proven by the unanimous statement by all interpreters that their emoluments amount to little, and that, with the exception of a rare piece of luck, one cannot count on it.204

Albrecht gave one example of a private translation made by himself in a case of bankruptcy, designating himself as “he”:

Only once was he invited by a few trade companies to conduct a meticulous investigation of the books of a bankrupt man, in order that terms could be found to sue the merchant. He used all his free time during two months for this investigation, and he wrote an extensive report with its results, which actually led to criminal prosecution, but he can assure you that it cost him a lot of trouble to collect the promised fee of only £500, to be paid by eight creditors.205

The only reason why an expert’s opinion was sought as little as possible, Albrecht continued, was that this would cost more money, and creditors did not wish to pay more when they had already lost so much.

Creditors preferred to have these translations made on orders of the Public Prosecutor, so they would not have to pay for it themselves. Because of the sinologists’ double function of official and private interpreter, private parties often attempted to have their translations done for free. In 1891, De Grijs wrote in a letter to the editor of a Dutch newspaper that in the past he had sometimes been asked by the trading community to translate Chinese account books, and he was once even gratefully offered a silver tea set for this work. But after the introduction of the hated business tax for Europeans in 1880,206 he fell out of favour with the Semarang traders. Some time in the 1880s, when a certain Chinese merchant went bankrupt, the traders now asked the Public Prosecutor to charge De Grijs with making a translation, so that effectively he would not be paid what he considered was due to him. A complaint by De Grijs with the Public Prosecutor was to no avail. De Grijs then showed that an interpreter could also make good use of the restrictions of his position. Working by the rules, he translated three complete account books, and when the Public Prosecutor asked him if he had found any grounds for fraudulent bankruptcy (bedrieglijke bankbreuk), he answered that, as an interpreter, he had done his duty by providing a translation, and that the merchants should themselves search. As could be expected, they did not succeed in finding
any clue; subsequently De Grijs was summoned to appear as a witness before the Raad van Justitie. When the president of the court asked him the same question, De Grijs handed to him an excerpt from the translation showing that certain amounts of goods were missing. De Grijs ended with remarking, not without satisfaction, that the Chinese fraud was justly punished.207

Meeter recounted several similar cases from the Orphans and Estate Chambers, where the interpreters’ double function, official and private, also provided opportunities for private persons to have them work for free.208

In 1894, Groeneveldt, who had been interpreter in 1864–72 and 1874–7, gave some precise data about the interpreters’ emoluments in his nota to the Council of the Indies:

In general, the emoluments are insignificant. I worked as an interpreter for ten years and received during that time about f1,200 in emoluments, including f1,000 for an elaborate and mostly useless investigation required by a hot-tempered solicitor in a sensational lawsuit.209

In the 1880s and 1890s, the interpreters’ yearly emoluments were listed in the Staatsblad van Ned.-Indië. All government officials were required to report their total emoluments, which were used for assessing their contributions to the Widows’ and Orphans’ Fund (Weduwen- en Weezenfonds) for the next three years. The following table shows that emoluments were continuously reported only in two towns; at the time interpreters were stationed in six to nine places. 210

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Batavia</th>
<th>Semarang</th>
<th>Surabaya</th>
<th>Riau</th>
<th>Pontianak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>620 (Stuart)</td>
<td>840 (Meeter)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>76 (Von Faber)</td>
<td>210 &quot;</td>
<td>840 (Moll)</td>
<td>159 (Schaalje)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>210 (Young)</td>
<td>840 (Von Faber)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>120 (Stuart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>380 &quot;</td>
<td>780 &quot;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In his nota of 1894, Groeneveldt only mentioned the figures of 1891, commenting on the high total for Surabaya:

I do not know for sure the reasons for the high figure in Surabaya. I know that in the past the interpreter was asked to assist at the transfer of real estate from and to Chinese, reputedly to check the names and signatures, a wholly superfluous formality leading to unnecessary charges. I assumed it had been abolished long ago, but from the figures just mentioned, I assume that it still exists; there is no other explanation. Therefore one cannot expect such high emoluments in the future.211
Meeter was stationed from 1876 to 1888 in Surabaya, where the highest emoluments were reported. In 1897, he wrote about his private services:

While in the Outer Possessions his services for private persons are only very exceptionally required; on Java his help is often sought by European merchants, lawyers and notaries, and he is as it were a go-between between Europeans and Chinese. For this and other reasons, his work on Java can be much more extensive, and from a financial point of view more profitable, than at an outer post.  

Meeter also wrote about his private work:

Lawyers and other private persons from time to time needed his services outside the main town and outside the Residency, in which cases he asked for one or two days of leave within the country.

Meeter’s emoluments in Surabaya were at times considerable. Soon after his arrival in 1876, he was asked by a lawyer representing a large group of European creditors to check the account books of a bankrupt Chinese. According to the official fee list, he should have earned about £30,000, but this was clearly outrageous. The lawyer then offered him £3,000, which Meeter accepted. These emoluments were a constant occasion for jealousy on the part of other officials, who could not earn them. When the Public Prosecutor H.N. Grobée heard about this fee, he still found it exorbitant and lodged a complaint against Meeter with the Procurator General in Batavia, accusing him of “extortion by a public servant” (knevelarij). After Meeter had explained at great length that he had not demanded it, but had been offered this amount, the case was dismissed and Grobée was transferred.

Since the official fees proved to be unfeasible, Meeter in 1880 concluded a contract with a large group of European traders in Surabaya to check Chinese account books for two years for a fixed fee. The number of Chinese bankruptcies diminished considerably, but this was also due to a few cases of heavy punishment for fraud. As soon as Meeter went on sick leave in May 1881, the positive effect was lost again. But Meeter later stated that he did not in the least like this work and therefore after two years he did not continue the contract.

Albracht claimed that if the interpreter was prepared to play hard and fast (beunhazerij), he could earn many more private emoluments. This was confirmed by Meeter, who even wrote that if he had been shrewd and compliant, he could have earned a fortune, since the Chinese paid well. But both interpreters asserted that they were not willing to do so.

In 1878, Albracht had asserted that the only customers were Europeans; the Chinese never asked the Dutch interpreters to make translations; but Meeter for some time did have many Chinese clients, which in itself was a reason for suspicion among some Europeans.
Another possible source of emoluments was giving legal advice about Chinese customs and law in civil lawsuits. Meeter was once asked by a young lawyer to give his “valuable answers” to ten questions about Chinese inheritance law, but when he accepted, and mentioned his fee of f1,000, the lawyer not only abandoned his request, but also sent a complaint to the government about the exorbitant costs. Meeter never mentioned any similar assignment, but Albrecht pointed out this possible source of emoluments.

Another source of private income was stipulated in article 1 of the Directive of 1863: if the accused was found guilty, the interpreters could claim an extra fee from the convicted person. Only one example of such a claim could be found. In 1895, Von Faber was charged to work in a criminal case for the Raad van Justitie in Surabaya, which led to the conviction of Kho Swie Siang for fraudulent bankruptcy. When he submitted his invoice of f472 pursuant to article 1, payment was apparently refused, whereupon he sent a request to the Governor-General asking whether it should be paid by the Government. The answer was that the amount should be claimed by himself directly from the convicted person. This provision seems not to have been controversial among the interpreters, probably since there was hardly any interpreting work. In 1897, Meeter considered it just another possible source of extra income, remarking that it appeared to be 'beneficial' to the interpreters, but adding that they never actually received the fee they were entitled to; when they submitted their invoices to the authorities, these were either refused with the argument that they had already received a fee, or they were told that they could start a civil action to claim the money, or some other excuse was given for not paying. In 1895, Von Faber's question to the Governor-General not only received a negative answer, but actually led to the abolishment of this provision. The text of article 1 was changed, and the obligations of the interpreters were made more specific, probably to avoid misunderstanding about their duties, as follows (new text in italics):

> As often as required by the judicial or administrative authorities, the European interpreters of the Chinese language render their services of written or oral translations from Dutch into Chinese and vice-versa, of checking and investigating account books and documents in the Chinese language, and of making copies or excerpts of such account books and documents.

For these services they cannot claim any fee.

In the Directive for the Officials for Chinese Affairs of 1896, this provision was also left out, thereby, according to Meeter, preventing future disappointments. Notwithstanding, some interpreters seem to have earned a considerable extra income. In 1880, Van der Spek heard from Albrecht that Meeter earned many emoluments. Perhaps because of this, or after having heard
stories from Schlegel and Meeter (about the f3,000 emoluments?), Borel cherished high-strung expectations regarding his income. In 1892 when he arrived in Amoy, Borel wrote in a letter to Van Eeden that he expected his salary in the Indies could be doubled by private emoluments.225

The private emoluments were not only a reason for jealousy among other government officials, but also among the interpreters themselves. When in 1892 new competitive examinations for Chinese interpreters were announced in the Dutch press, Meeter and Van der Spek tried to warn possible candidates in a subtle manner. At that time, Meeter was living in Leiden and Van der Spek had just set up as a dermatologist in Amsterdam. They sent an open letter to many newspapers urging the parents of youngsters who wished to take part to become adequately informed about the negative aspects of the position of interpreters in the Indies. They offered to answer any questions and provided their addresses. The only known newspaper that published their letter was the Leidsch Dagblad (Leiden Daily).226 Of course, Schlegel was enraged, and a heated debate ensued. The next day, Schlegel tried to refute their opinion in another open letter. He also attacked them personally, writing about their supposed emoluments:

Moreover, these interpreters are entitled to work for private persons and therefore to earn emoluments; and in view of this Mr. Meeter and Mr. Van der Spek have not the slightest reason to discredit that position. The former earned so many emoluments that he can now have, with his pension, in the company of his wife and six children, a carefree life, while Mr. Van der Spek saved so much money in the five years during which he was an interpreter, that after his discharge from government service he could study medicine for five years in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, and Vienna. Therefore the warning of both gentlemen appears to me unfounded and misplaced.227

The next day Meeter reacted by saying that it would be difficult to prove Schlegel’s allegations, and by accusing Schlegel of indiscretion (onkieschheid) in giving this personal information; he also retaliated by mentioning Schlegel’s personal allowance of f1,200 per year for teaching Chinese.228

In a final reaction Schlegel replied:

Mr. Meeter knows too well that I have never been a “money-making man.” He repeatedly reproached me with this jokingly when I complained that I did not reap profits from my position as interpreter.229

In any case, Meeter stated a few years later that he found the emoluments not worthwhile. After the new directive and fee list for Officials for Chinese Affairs had been made known in 1895, he commented:

The so-called fee for private services could assuredly have been cancelled, thus freeing the position of Official for Chinese Affairs of its awkward and
ambiguous character, both official and private. I am fully convinced that, if not all, surely the great majority of the officials concerned would be very content with such a regulation, since with few exceptions those emoluments from private services are so little and so often give rise to problems and unpleasant things, that they would be happy to renounce them for a relatively small compensation.230

Finally, with the establishment of the Bureau for Chinese Affairs in Batavia in 1916, the double function of both official and private translator and interpreter came to an end. Although the same fees for private translations by the Bureau were promulgated as in 1896, from now on those fees were no longer intended as emoluments of the translator himself, but were to be transferred monthly to the National Treasury.231