HARNESSING NATIONALISM: CHINESE EDUCATION IN THE LATE-COLONIAL DUTCH EAST INDIES, 1900-1942

Kankan Xie

University of California, Berkeley, USA

xiekankan@berkeley.edu

Abstract

The implementation of the Ethical Policy (Ethische Politiek) in 1901 generated complex repercussions to the Indies Chinese minorities. Education in particular, was one of the most contested areas. With its establishment in the early 20th century, the THHK (Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan) schools galvanized the rapid rise of the Chinese nationalistic sentiment and triggered an unexpected tendency of “resinicization” within the Indies peranakan community. Deeply worried about the potentially dangerous influence of the THHK schools, the colonial government took an initiative in 1908 to establish a Dutch-language school system specifically tailored for the Indies Chinese. By exploring the competitions and intricacies between the two Chinese education systems, this paper tries to problematize the existing literature that predominantly focuses on only one side of the story. The paper argues that the emergence of the two systems was not only a natural result of the Ethical Policy, or simply driven by the Indies Chinese’s desperate demand for education opportunities, but also a vivid reflection of various socio-political tensions within the heterogeneous Chinese community, and its complex relationships with different fractions of the society, the transforming colonial state, and the ambiguous position of the ancestral homeland, etc.

Keywords: Chinese Education, Ethical Policy, Resinicization, Dutch Colonialism

1. Introduction

The turn of the 20th century is an important watershed in the history of the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia). With the formal introduction of the Ethical Policy (Ethische Politiek) in 1901, the Dutch colonial authority proclaimed that it would shoulder more moral responsibilities by bringing social progress to the colony while improving the material living standard of their colonial subjects. Despite various controversies surrounding its implementation, the Ethical Policy was considered a critical shift of the Dutch colonial rule from its previous colonial exploitation, which regarded Indonesia merely as a conquered territory for making profit (wingewest). Education for the non-Europeans, along with various other reforms, became the main focus of the Ethical Policy. Although the government’s effort in building more schools was largely constrained by economic fluctuations, education opportunities were gradually expanded from Europeans and a few privileged natives to a wide variety of indigenous population with relatively humble background.

To the Indies Chinese minorities, however, the implementation of the Ethical Policy generated rather complex repercussions. Categorized as “foreign Orientals” under the Dutch racial classification policy, the Chinese constantly struggled with this ambiguous social status, which effectively prevented them from enjoying various privileges of the Europeans despite their economic success. With the shifting colonial policies at the turn of the 20th century, the Chinese were made scapegoats of the evil Dutch colonial exploitation of the past. In economic domains, historically Chinese-dominated business, such as opium, pawnshops and moneylending, started to experience unprecedented hardships due to the colonial authority’s effort to abolish the monopoly concession system. Thousands of Chinese, whose livelihood was closely associated with business in these areas, suffered greatly from the loss of concessions (Govaars 2005, pp. 27-28). The deterioration of the economic circumstances coincided with the ratification of the 1899 Japannerwet (Japanese Law), which collectively granted the Japanese the legal status equal to the Europeans. Many Indies Chinese inevitably regarded the introduction of the Japannerwetas a sheer insult, as they saw themselves by no means inferior to the Japanese. In the meantime, the Indies Chinese increasingly realized that they were also deprived of opportunities to access a number of benefits enjoyed by the indigenous population under the supposedly benevolent Ethical Policy. For instance, while more and more natives gained access to public education, the number of Chinese students admitted to European and native schools remained extremely low. Profoundly disturbed by such discriminatory treatments of the colonial state, the long-existed sense of insecurity within the Chinese community soon developed into a more vocal demand for equal rights. Education in particular, became one of the most contested areas.

Under this backdrop, the Indies Chinese founded the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (Zhonghua Huiguan or Chinese Chamber, THHK hereafter) in 1900, with a primary goal of integrating the fragmented Chinese community by promoting a shared Chinese cultural identity. In doing so, the THHK made great efforts in establishing schools, in which Chinese Mandarin was used as the language instruction. Within a few years, the THHK schools mushroomed across the Dutch East Indies, thousands of Chinese pupils—both newly arrived totoks and peranakans who had lived in the Indies for generations—were drawn to such privately funded schools. The remarkable popularity of the THHK schools galvanized the rapid rise of the Chinese nationalistic sentiment and triggered an unexpected tendency of
“resinicization” within the Indies peranakan community, or the so-called Pan-Chinese Movement, which was seen by the Dutch authority as a threat that could potentially undermine the social and economic foundation of the colony. Deeply worried about the dangerous influence of the THHK schools on the Chinese population, the colonial government took an initiative in 1908 to establish a public school system specifically tailored for the Indies Chinese. With a clear political purpose of countering the so-called “Pan-Chinese Movement”, in which THHK schools played a significant role, the government schools adopted neither Chinese nor Malay but the rarely used Dutch as the language of instruction. From their establishment at the turn of the 20th century to the abrupt termination of Dutch colonial rule due to Japanese invasion in 1942, the private THHK schools and the public Dutch-Chinese schools (Hollandsch-Chineesche School, or HCS) were the two most prevalent forms of education available to the Indies Chinese. Despite nearly constant financial difficulties caused by harsh domestic economic situations and global events such as the Great Depression, both school systems managed to survive and thrive in providing more accessible education opportunities to the Chinese community. In any measure, it is fair to say that both systems exerted profound influence on the Indies Chinese community and have significantly shaped the social landscape of the colony in a number of important ways, which will be elaborated later.

A handful of scholars have written specifically on Chinese education in the late-colonial Dutch East Indies. However, due to obvious language barriers and the scattered nature of relevant materials, existing scholarship often predominantly focuses on one side of the story. Ming Govaars’ *Dutch Colonial Education: The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900–1942* (2005) is by far the most comprehensive study on this topic. As a peranakan Chinese who received her early education in European schools in the Indies and later moved to the Netherlands, Govaars’ dissertation-derived work offers great insight into the Dutch colonial education and its impact on the Chinese community. Primarily relying on materials collected from Dutch colonial archives, Govaars’ study is rich in details regarding the Dutch-Chinese schools. The more China-oriented THHK schools, by comparison, are only used as a frame of reference. Besides Govaars’ monograph, S.L. van der Wal (1963) published an annotated collection of official documents (bronnenpublicatie) concerning the education policies of the Dutch East Indies during the same period, which could also serve as an important source in understanding the political motives of the colonial state in dealing with issues surrounding Chinese education. In the Sinophone world, by contrast, discussions on Chinese education during this period has been largely concentrated on the THHK schools where Chinese is the language of instruction (Li & Huang 2005; Yang & Huang 1985; Loh Tien 1935; Liu 1930). It was not uncommon that people often saw education for overseas Chinese as the derivative of Chinese education from China. Although neither the private THHK schools nor the public Dutch-Chinese schools used Malay for educational purposes, we should bear in mind that Malay was still the lingua franca of the Dutch East Indies and was the most commonly used language in business and print media. Regardless of their distinct political orientations, many peranakan intellectuals wrote opinion pieces in Malay in various publications in order to reach broader audience. Therefore, the Malay sources are also indispensable to the analysis of this topic.

In addition to the above-mentioned secondary sources, I also use primary materials such as pamphlet, official documents and newspaper articles in Malay, Chinese and Dutch in order to make better sense of the social dynamics of the colonial education. By exploring the competitions and intricacies between the two Chinese education systems, this paper tries to problematize the existing literature. I argue that the emergence of the two systems was not only a natural result of the Dutch Ethical Policy, or simply driven by the Indies Chinese’s desperate demand for education opportunities, but also a vivid reflection of various socio-political tensions within the heterogeneous Chinese community, and its complex relationships with different fractions of the society, the transforming colonial state, and the ambiguous position of the ancestral homeland, etc. While a lot of people benefited from the improved conditions for receiving education, the two highly politicized education systems also accelerated the divergence, or to some extent, the fragmentation and alienation of the Indies Chinese population.

2. The THHK Schools and the Pan-Chinese Movement

As Govaars observed, the emergence of the Pan-Chinese Movement in the turn of the 20th century had to do with both the unfavorable socio-economic environment, in which the Indies Chinese lived in, and the unprecedented overtures from China, through which the Chinese community deemed as a strong moral support (Govaars 2005, pp. 51-52). With the introduction of the Ethical Policy, the economic prominence of the Indies Chinese was severely undermined as the Dutch colonial authority abolished the monopoly concession system while the tax burden remained extremely heavy. Additionally, the Indies Chinese were also quite discontent with the colonial regime’s long-existed discriminatory treatment, which not only limited their freedom of movement, but also made them subject to the “incompetence and arbitrariness” of the inferior native criminal laws (*ibid.*). While the Chinese felt deeply insulted when the Japanese were collectively granted the European status under the 1899 *Japannerwet*, they were also inspired to see the prospect of improving their own legal status through modernization. As a result, education became a primary concern. However, the situation that they were facing at that time was certainly not optimistic. On the one hand, Chinese children were usually not admitted to European schools. Even if rare exceptions were made on individual basis, the schools would charge them for higher fees; on the other hand, although theoretically speaking Chinese children could attend native schools as long as there were enough spaces available, very few could be actually enrolled, as the
native schools could barely accommodate the basic necessity of the vast indigenous population (Govaars 2005, 52). With extremely difficult access to government schools, the Chinese realized the urgent need to develop their own education: while being inherently “Chinese”, their new schools must be also characteristically “modern”.

Beyond the political boundary of the colony, the Pan-Chinese Movement of the Indies Chinese was also closely associated with a number of historical events occurred in China during the same period. After decades of fierce struggles against the aggression of the Western powers since the 1839 Opium War, people in China gradually came to realize that a thorough modernization was much needed for the survival of the nation. Such a consensus notwithstanding, the ways in which modernization should be carried out remained controversial. While it was widely accepted that China should “shì yì chāng jì yì zhī yì”, literally “to study the merit of the barbarians in order to resist them”, the legitimacy of the Qing monarchy was central to the debate among the conservatives, the reformists, and later the revolutionaries. Under constant external pressures, the Qing Court agreed to make certain concessions to safeguard its power. In the area that the Indies Chinese most concerned, for instance, the Qing government lifted the ban on emigration in 1914 and decided to pay more attention to the welfare of the overseas Chinese community. Championed by prominent reformists, the young Guangxu Emperor launched a reform movement in 1898 in hope of making radical changes in the field of politics, national culture and education. Within only 104 days, however, the movement was shut down by the conservative ruling elites headed by the Empress Dowager Cixi. Championed by prominent reformists, the young Guangxu Emperor launched a reform movement in 1898 in hope of making radical changes in the field of politics, national culture and education. Within only 104 days, however, the movement was shut down by the conservative ruling elites headed by the Empress Dowager Cixi. The leading figure of the movement, fled overseas to reorganize by working closely with the local Chinese community and hoped to eventually establish a constitutional monarchy in China. In the meantime, the Sun Yat-sen-led revolutionary movement, which aimed to overthrow the Qing dynasty, became increasingly active in mobilizing the overseas Chinese across the globe. Due to the obvious geographical proximity and the sheer size of the population, the Indies Chinese became deeply plugged in the domestic politics of China. It was also under this particular circumstance that the Pan-Chinese Movement of the Indies Chinese, in which education played a critical role in pursuit of modernity, gained unprecedented significance generated by this momentum.

Of course, we should acknowledge the fact that the education for the Indies Chinese did not start from scratch as a direct result of the Pan-Chinese Movement. The earliest institution for Chinese education in the Indies could be dated back to the period when the colony was still under the control of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). In 1691, the Chinese Council of Batavia (Huaren Gongguan), a Company-designated autonomous administrative body for Chinese affairs, proposed to establish charity schools (yixue), in which Chinese classics were taught in southern Chinese dialects. Similarly, affluent Chinese families could also afford to hire teachers for children of their own or of their relatives. Sometimes, these teachers could also take the initiative to recruit students to attend his classes, which would later develop into private schools called sishu (Yang & Huang 1985, 290). In the following two hundred years, yixue and sishu were the two most common forms of schools available to the Indies Chinese. In spite of its long history, such traditional education was often considered low-quality and somehow detached from the Indies reality. Especially in the early period, the majority of the Chinese were mostly sojourners who came to the Archipelago mainly for business reasons, the desire to settle down and raise families was nothing but lukewarm. Even though some of them did choose to stay, and their offspring gradually became assimilated into the local society as Malay-speaking peranakans, the demand for education in classical Chinese, which was usually seen as unpractical, was quite low. The lack of interest also led to the relatively slow development of the Chinese education in general, which often failed to attract enough qualified teachers to travel all the way from China (Li & Huang 2005, p363). As of 1900, there were in total 439 such old-style Chinese schools in the whole Dutch East Indies (257 in Java and 28 in Batavia), which enrolled only 7835 students—an extremely low number considering the size of the Indies Chinese population.

With the establishment of the social organization THHK 1900, however, the Indies Chinese education experienced a radical transformation. The first and the foremost change was the emergence of the modern THHK schools with drastically different educational concepts from the traditional ones, which coincided with the similar development of modern education in China at the same time. Founded in Batavia in 1901, the first THHK school Zhonghua Xuetang modeled after that of the Chinese schools in Japan. Instead of emphasizing Confucian doctrines through the memorization of classical texts such as the traditional “Four Books and Five Classics (Sishu Wujing)”, the THHK schools taught vernacular Chinese, mathematics, general knowledge, music and English by using simple textbooks imported from Japan. The language of instruction was no longer the disparate southern dialects but the northern dialect-based standard Mandarin (Zhengyi or Guoyu) (Loh Tien 1935, 87). At the initial stage, some conservatives opposed the modern curriculum of the THHK schools, as they saw this sort of modern education as unorthodox, which would fail to cultivate students’ true appreciation for traditional Chinese culture and was thus unable to arouse their patriotism for the ancestral homeland. However, such doubt was soon dispelled, as the erudite THHK teachers—usually those who had been trained in both the old and new systems—gave convincing testimonies to explain the merits of the modern curriculum. The THHK schools gained even higher prestige when the THHK students outperformed their yixue counterparts in joint-exams that aimed to test the students’ mastery of Chinese language. As a result, the Chinese Council, which had been in charge of allocating charity funds for traditional yixue, started to give more substantial support to the THHK schools (Loh Tien 1935, 88). As the THHK schools gained more popularity, the traditional yixue and sishu gradually died out in the following years.
With the tremendous success in Batavia, the THHK schools soon expanded to other major cities across Java and attracted a lot of attention from both within and beyond of the Indies Chinese community. In 1903, the Batavia branch of the THHK invited Kang Youwei, the esteemed Chinese reformist in exile, to visit Java. After his trip to various cities throughout the island, Kang expressed his very positive impression of the rapid development of the modern education. While speaking highly of the achievement of the THHK schools, he repeatedly stressed the significance of the modern education in relation to the cultivation of patriotism within the Indies Chinese community (Yang & Huang 1985, 291).

The number of the THHK schools continued to grow, the Qing Court also started to show great interests in supporting the development of the Chinese education overseas. Since 1906, the Chinese government had sent high-level officials to Java quite frequently in order to discuss issues surrounding Chinese education. By working closely with prominent Indies Chinese Officers (Majoort or Kapitein), such visits gave a fresh impetus to the formation of the Chinese Association for Educational Affairs (Xuexu Zhonghui) in Java, an overarching body that aimed to coordinate and supervise the development of the Chinese schools (Li & Huang 2005, pp368-369). With the support of the Qing government, the shortage of qualified teachers had been significantly alleviated. The THHK schools used to rely on a handful of teachers hired from Japan, now the government could dispatch teachers directly from China or the nearby British colonies (Govaars 2005, 56). In 1906, the Qing government established the Jinan Xuetang in Nanjing, a secondary school that specifically tailored for Chinese students who completed their primary education overseas. As long as the students could take care of their own travel expenses, the school would cover their tuition, accommodation and other living expenses in China. Upon their graduation, many Jinan students chose to further their study, either at universities and military academies in China, or various schools in Europe and America (Loh Tien 1935, 88). Around 200 students from the Dutch East Indies, mostly those graduated from the THHK schools, attended the Jinan Xuetang before it ceased to exist after the 1911 Revolution (Nio 1940, 106). The THHK schools still received ceaseless support from the republican government after the fall of the Qing Empire.

However, given the tough financial situation of China itself, the governments’ modest assistance could barely meet the increasing demand for expanding Chinese education. Unlike the European and native schools of the same period, which could count on guaranteed funding from the Dutch colonial authority, the private THHK schools encountered numerous difficulties to maintain its operation from the outset. Besides the handful subsidies allocated by the Chinese Council, the THHK schools had to rely on various external funding sources such as donations, gifts, legacies and membership dues of different Chinese associations, etc. (Govaars 2005, 57). The Chinese community in general showed great interests in supporting the THHK schools. Indies Chinese merchants, peranakans and totoks alike, often collectively raised retail price of certain goods in order to provide much-needed funds to the struggling Chinese education (Li & Huang 2005, 381). With varying financial support from different sources, a few THHK schools were better funded than the others. Not only could such schools provide free textbooks to their students, but also enrolled a number of students of humble background who could not afford the tuition (Govaars 2005, 54). While ordinary THHK schools continued to grow despite the tough financial situation, hundreds of special schools were established to offer tailored curriculum to educate poor kids and young people from the working class.

With the objective of providing more accessible education to Indies Chinese community, the expansion of the THHK schools appeared to be more successful in quantity. According to a survey conducted by Malay-Chinese newspaper Sin Po in 1935, the total number of the THHK schools across the whole colony had already reached 259 (Loh Tien 1935, 89). Among these 259 schools, however, only 21 offered secondary education and were predominantly junior middle schools, in which merely five schools had more than 50 middle school students. While the total enrollment of the THHK schools had already exceeded 30,000, the number of middle school students was only 1,251 (Loh Tien 1935, 91). Apparently, the overwhelming majority of the THHK school graduates did not really have the opportunity to further their education beyond the elementary level. Moreover, unable to enroll in local government schools for secondary education, a common route for the THHK school graduates was to continue their study by going abroad. While only a handful of them could afford to go to Europe and America, many students chose to study in Hong Kong and Singapore where the education system was most compatible with the THHK schools’ Chinese-English curriculum (Yang & Huang 1985, 292).

But why did the THHK schools teach English instead of Dutch as the second language? As mentioned above, the development of the THHK school system had been constantly constrained by its limited financial capability. For this very practical reason, the THHK schools’ curriculum design had to be consistent with their financial concerns. Apparently, it was so much cheaper to hire ethnic Chinese English teachers than finding capable Dutch teachers locally, while paying for their high salaries and covering various benefits required by the colonial authority (Li & Huang 2005, 367). Loh Tien, who wrote a report on Indies Chinese education published in 1935, explained the reasons for choosing English as the second language at the THHK schools: a. English was widely taught at schools of the Sinophone world, THHK school students must master English if they plan to study abroad after graduation; b. in general, English enjoyed broader use in the business and academic world; c. compared to Dutch, English is easier to learn for Orientals (Loh Tien 1935, pp. 88-89). All these motives for setting up English curriculum seemed to be at least reasonable—if not completely sufficient—to justify the Chinese schools’ deliberate exclusion of Dutch. As the consequence, such an arrangement caused the growing unease of the colonial authority, which had already seen the THHK activities as posing dangerous threat to the stability of the colony. In the eyes of the Dutch
colonial government, teaching English might not be anti-Dutch per se, but it was definitely one substantial step forward to further drive the Indies Chinese away from the Dutch control. In an opinion document of the Indies government in 1905, a Dutch colonial officer expressed his deep concern over the THHK schools:

"Besides Malay and Chinese, these schools taught exclusively in English. The younger generation will be gradually anglicized and became more and more alienated from us. This fear definitely should not be ignored, especially if we take into account that English is broadly used for trade, so much easier to learn than Dutch, and is spoken as a popular colloquial language in the contact between foreigners and the yellow race in East Asia. And once the Chinese have realized their purpose to teach and use English in this country, then "language (will become) the entire nation"—the language rather than their origin will serve as the binding force of the people." Such energetic element among our subjects will increasingly drive them away from us, and as circumstance might lead, even make them hostile to us."

In fact, the colonial government’s fear was not totally groundless. With the tremendous success of its schools, the THHK’s activities went far beyond its initially self-claimed role as a “cultural organization”. While the Chinese government made more serious efforts in winning hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese, the Indies Chinese community also became increasingly oriented towards China as the Pan-Chinese Movement was carried out more comprehensively. Especially after the Qing Emperors Guangxu died in 1908, the Sun Yat-sen-led revolutionary forces gained unprecedented popularity among the overseas Chinese, who saw Sun’s revolution as a perfect embodiment of China’s struggle for progress and national consciousness (Govaars 2005, 49). With clearly articulated goals of cultivating patriotism among the Indies Chinese, the THHK schools added extensive introduction to China’s on-going revolution against feudalism and imperialism on top of their normal curriculum on Chinese language and culture (Li & Huang 2005, pp. 373-374). By working closely with the China-oriented Shang Hui (Chamber of Commerce) and the highly politicized cultural organization Shu Bao She (literally, Book and Newspaper Club), the THHK schools profoundly stimulated the continuous rise of Chinese nationalism by strengthening the bond between the Indies Chinese community and China. As a result, the Dutch colonial government became increasingly cautious of the development of the THHK schools, which not only galvanized the re-sinicization of the peranakan community in addition to the increasingly revolutionary tendency of the totoks, but also contributed to the rapid convergence of two groups. To counter this potentially quite dangerous Pan-Chinese Movement, the colonial authority decided to take the initiative to divide the Chinese population by establishing a separate education system—the Dutch-Chinese schools, which will be elaborated in the following section.

3. The Dutch-Chinese Schools and the Desinicization

In a matter of just a few years, the THHK schools replaced the traditional Chinese education at the beginning of the 20th century. A large amount of Indies Chinese gained opportunities to receive modern education. In the meantime, however, their access to the considerably more prestigious European education remained quite limited, as the government schools only admit Chinese students on individual basis. Only a very small number of students, usually the children of the wealthy and the privileged, could attend such schools. Although some other forms of European education were made available at comparatively less exclusive private or Christian schools, modern Western education in general was still out of the reach of the ordinary Indies Chinese (Suryadinata 1978, 49).

With the Indies Chinese’s huge demand for education—and to a larger extent, for better social status—the aggressive expansion of the THHK schools in the first decade of the 20th century catalyzed the Pan-Chinese Movement (and vice versa). In addition to the growing tendency of resinicization of the peranakan community, the Chinese government also became increasingly interested in influencing the overseas population by providing support for their education. Apparently, such interactions significantly contributed to the formation of closer ties between the overseas Chinese community and their ancestral homeland. The Dutch colonial authority soon noticed this dangerous change, which could lead to the undesired break away of the Chinese and thus destabilize the socio-economic foundations of the colony. Deeply concerned with the consequence of the continuous development of the THHK schools, the Indies Council (raad van Nederlands-Indië), an advising organ under the Governor-General (GG), pointed out in 1905 that the Indies government should support and guide Chinese education “along the Dutch direction as much as possible”. In doing so, the Council suggested the government attracting and working closely with the “developed and influential” Chinese by providing necessary support to teach Dutch language at Chinese schools. However, the Council was of the opinion not to establish such curriculum by subsidizing the existing THHK schools, as they believed once they set a precedent, the government expenditure would be too high.

After the Ethical Policy was adopted in 1901, the Dutch colonial authority started to take more responsibilities to take care of the benefits of the natives. J.G. Pott, the the Director of Education, Worship and Industry (directeur onderwijs, eredienst en nijverheid) presented a report to GG J. B. van Heutsz in 1906, in which he suggested that the government should also pay necessary attention to the welfare of the Chinese, especially in terms of education.
While many existing THHK schools continuously petitioned to receive subsidies from the colonial government due to their financial difficulties, Chinese from many other places requested the government to found more schools specifically catered for the Chinese need. Despite the serious concerns over the largely China-oriented THHK schools, Pott was not totally against the idea of subsidizing private Chinese education per se, as the government was unable to commit to providing sufficient funds to establish a large number of new schools from scratch. However, Pott made it very clear that regardless of the type of schools, and whether they would be offering language courses in Chinese, Malay or English, the premise to receive government support was to use Dutch as the primary language of instruction. At the end of the same year, an article named “den toestand van het onderwijs onder de Chinezen in Ned. Indie” (the state of education among Indies Chinese) appeared in newspaper Soerabayasch Handelsblad, in which the author sharply criticized the authority’s negative reactions towards the requests of the Chinese community and called for government support to establish schools for the Chinese (Wal, S. L. van der ed. 1963, 99). In a mail report to GG van Heutsz, Minister of Colonial Affairs Dirk Fock called the accusation of this article groundless, however, he admitted frankly that Chinese education should be treated as an urgent issue.

It had always been a hot debate as to whether the government-established European and native schools should be made more open to the Chinese population. As mentioned earlier, only a very small number of Chinese children, mostly those from wealthy families, were able to attend public European schools by paying higher fees (Govaars 2005, 52). Although the native schools became more accessible, as the government made efforts to lift the restriction for Chinese enrollment, such education was still regarded as inferior, which was of little help for the Chinese to improve their status (Wal, S. L. van der ed. 1963, 99). In a government report in 1907, the Indies Council advised against making too much effort in opening public European and Native schools to the Chinese. Instead, the Council suggested that “Chinese in the field of education should no longer be left out, but they must also be guarded against, and they should not be privileged above the Europeans.” In order to counter the growing influence of the THHK schools, the government decided to establish a separate public school system for the Chinese, who could not afford the high tuition fees at the European schools, so that these Chinese could be channeled away from the dangerous nationalistic Pan-Chinese Movement. Would the emergence of this sort of school lead to discontent among the native population? The Council indicated that such worries were groundless, as they believed that the government had done enough for taking care of the indigenous people to improve their education. The Council further pointed out that while the new Chinese schools should allow European children to enroll, the admission of native kids was considered unnecessary, as it would diminish the value of establishing such schools in the eyes of the Chinese and the attainment of the objective would be compromised.

Therefore, it was against the backdrop of flourishing Pan-Chinese Movement that the colonial government founded the first Dutch-Chinese schools in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya in 1908. With a clear political purpose of harnessing Chinese nationalism, the Dutch-Chinese schools adopted the same curriculum of the European Elementary Schools (Europeesche Lagere School, or ELS), in which Dutch was used as the language of instruction. Unlike their European counterparts, however, most of the Chinese pupils had never been exposed to this language prior to their admission to school. They also had very limited chance to practice Dutch outside of the school setting, since it was neither spoken at home nor widely used in the non-European sections of the society. As the consequence, many students had to go through considerable difficulties in picking up the language. D. Fock, the Minister of Colonial Affairs, suggested that the Dutch-Chinese schools could start by teaching Malay or Javanese in lower grades and then including instructions in Dutch as the pupils grew older. In response to Fock’s proposal, however, J.G. Pott, the Director of Education, insisted that Dutch should be introduced from the very beginning, since the government could only make Chinese satisfied by providing a real European education (see Loh Tien 1935, 92; Govaars 2005, pp. 85-86). By setting up the Dutch-Chinese schools, the government could effectively achieve two objectives: 1. to meet the legitimate demands of the taxpaying Chinese; and 2. to keep them away from the unfavorable influence of the recent Pan-Chinese Movement by cultivating closer connections between the Chinese and Dutch civilization:

“From the Dutch point of view, it is desirable that so large a part of our Chinese Dutch subjects can speak and understand our language, read our books, comprehend our laws, our thinking, our commitment and our ideals. It is worth some sacrifice to accomplish this.”

Therefore, it is very important, according to Oudendijk, that the Chinese recognize the Dutch East Indies as their native country and become loyal to the Dutch authority. To realize this goal, the Dutch-Chinese schools must compete with their THHK counterparts. Given the socio-economic development of the colony, Oudendijk was optimistic that the Mandarin-based education of the THHK schools had very little “market value (marktwaarde)” in the long run: “eventually, with our better and much more solid education, the large majority of Chinese youth would be drawn to our schools, especially the children of peranakans.” At present, however, he admitted that the there was a popular perception within the Chinese community, which regarded the Dutch authority as not making sufficient effort in terms of providing equal education opportunities to the Chinese because of its discriminatory policies. In response to such unfair treatment, the Chinese attempted to prove that they could establish their own modern schools without the help of
the government. Oudendijk thus suggested that the Dutch-Chinese schools must put its primary emphasis on attracting peranakans, since the THHK schools were already working on “forming the citizens of the Republic of China” with a special focus on the peranakan community (Wal, S. L. van der ed. 1963, pp. 258-259).

Indeed, the legal status of the peranakan Chinese was quite tricky at this time. As mentioned above, the Indies Chinese population, peranakan and totok alike, had been categorized as “Foreign Orientals” according to the Dutch racial classification policy. In 1909, the Qing Government promulgated China’s first law on citizenship based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), which stipulated that a child of a Chinese father or mother should be regarded as a Chinese citizen regardless of his/her birthplace. Following this law, the vast overseas Chinese population automatically acquired the legal status of China. Only a year later, however, the Dutch colonial authority issued the Netherlands Citizenship Act S. 296 based on the principle of *jus soli* (right of land), which confirmed that all persons born in the Indies were considered Dutch subjects (*onderdanen*) even if their parents are not Dutch citizens (*burgers*). As a result, the Indies-born Chinese also obtained the status of Dutch subjects. To resolve the legal contradiction, the two governments signed a consular convention in 1911, through which the two sides principally agreed that peranakan Chinese were to be recognized as Dutch subjects as long as they resided in Dutch territories. Ironically, the Republican Government replaced the Qing dynasty through Sun Yat-sen’s national revolution right after the signing of the convention. With China’s chaotic domestic politics in the following years, such a rudimentary agreement was never effectively enforced. The ambiguities surrounding the legal status of the peranakans was never fully resolved until Indonesia gained its independence (Willmott 1961: pp.29-34).

Such ambiguities of national status inevitably reinforced the already quite divergent Indies Chinese community. While the THHK schools remained popular among totoks and the China-oriented peranakans, many Dutch-oriented peranakan families, especially those affluent ones, chose to send their children to attend the government Dutch-Chinese schools. In view of this development, Oudendijk, the Advisor of Chinese Affairs, put forward three suggestions in his report to GG Idenburg in 1913: 1. While the effort to establish new Dutch-Chinese schools should be carried on, the ELSs should open more spaces to children of the wealthy and good-natured (*gegoede* and *welgezind*) peranakan Chinese; 2. To connect the Dutch-Chinese schools to existing European schools such as the Advanced Primary Schools (*Mutuoscholen*) and Dutch Secondary Schools (*Hogere Burgerscholen* or HBS), so the graduates of the graduates of the Dutch-Chinese schools could access education of higher levels; 3. To compete with the THHK schools by offering Chinese language courses in the afternoon hours. Such measures, noted Oudendijk, would ultimately contribute to the formation of a modern “Dutch East Indies Society” (*Nederlandsch-Indische Maatschappij*):

“A Dutch East Indies Society”—a society in which all communities feel the sense of belonging. It will also work effectively in the present circumstances, if the wealthy, upper classes of the Chinese subjects turn away from the pure-Chinese school movement. They will be proud that their children are with the "European" children at school; they will therefore act as examples to select the Dutch education over the Chinese one because they have obtained their vanity which has been demanded for so long. Because the Chinese long for sending their children to the "European" schools; Chinese dignitaries reiterate this to me again and again.”

Oudendijk hence believed that the Dutch-Chinese schools of elementary level were far from enough, as only those who received education at high school levels or above had the best sense of—and thus more willing to be absorbed into—Dutch civilization. Oudendijk’s proposal on providing better education opportunities to the Chinese population received positive feedback from his superior GG Idenburg. Over the issue of introducing Chinese language courses in the afternoon hours, however, GG Idenburg had a different view. In his letter to Pleijte, the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Idenburg indicated that he really had very little to expect from the so-called “competition with the THHK schools” through teaching Chinese language, as the government’s primary concern was business and trade of the Chinese. To introduce Chinese language, he believed, would not only involve complicated issues such as importing teachers from China, the good learning spirit (*geest*) of the pupils would also be compromised. Instead, the government must “lead the development of the Dutch East Indies residents of Chinese blood with a Western spirit and not that of ancient China.”

Despite the guaranteed financial support from the colonial government, the development of the Dutch-Chinese schools was not without obstacles. The lack of teachers, for instance, was a primary issue from the outset. As early as 1907, one year before the first Dutch-Chinese schools were founded, the Indies Council pointed out in a report that the government would face great difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers, as the number of European teachers could barely meet the demand of the European and native schools, the establishment of the new Dutch-Chinese schools would only exacerbate the shortage. According to the author of this report, he put forward an “implementable” proposal anyway simply because the government asked him to do so in order to meet the need of the Chinese education. To tackle this problem, the colonial government realized the necessity to train Chinese teachers to fill the gulf between the supply and demand of teaching forces at the Dutch-Chinese schools. In doing so, a question emerged as to whether the Chinese students should attend the existing native teaching academy in Poerworedjo or to receive their training at a separate institution specifically tailored for the Chinese. For obvious reasons, to train Chinese teachers at a native teaching academy would significantly lower the cost and open the possibility of unifying the colony’s primary
education in the future. However, the government was also deeply concerned about the potential racial friction between the Chinese and native students, as they believed that these students were “incompatible in nature (incompatibel van aard)”:* “it feels like an insult (to the Chinese) if they are considered equal to the natives and it often arouses arrogant act... rather than rapprochement, we observed estrangement between the Chinese and the natives.” Given the acute tension between the two groups, the Council suggested that the chance of success to combine teachers’ training at one school would be quite slim. If the government were to make the Chinese accept such “native” education, the Council warned, the good intention would be interpreted as a political reactionary measure. Consequently, the Indies Council advised against the admission of Chinese students to the native institution. Despite its initial difficulties in matriculating enough students from primary schools, a separate Dutch-Chinese teaching academy (Hollands-Chinese kweekschool) was founded in 1917, which eventually became the single most important source of teachers of the Dutch-Chinese school system.

Supported by the colonial authority, the Dutch-Chinese school system developed rapidly. Apart from the government-established public schools, a large number of Dutch-Chinese schools were also founded by Christian and Catholic churches, as well as various private groups. All these schools could receive certain subsidies from the government. As of 1932, the total number of the Dutch-Chinese schools had reached 117, with 23,353 registered students (Loh Tien 1935, 91). With the backing of the government, there were a number of obvious advantages to study at such schools. Not only did the students receive presumably more superior education in terms of curriculum, teachers and facilities, but also enjoyed better opportunities to enter schools at higher levels: teaching academy, HBS, professional schools and even universities in the Netherlands (Li & Huang 2005, 375). While the number of students registered at Dutch-Chinese schools continued to grow, different voices regarding the downside of such education were also frequently heard within the Chinese community. The foremost critique, as the Chinese brought up to the colonial authority repeatedly, was the students’ loss of “national spirit (minzuxing)”. As Loh Tien noted in his critique:

“The biggest disadvantage of the Dutch education is its lack of national ideology. Dutch textbooks are mostly quite negative about Chinese. National hero Zheng Chenggong, for instance, was depicted as "Pirate Koxinga".... One example shows the rest. Without proper guidance of the family and society, this will certainly lead to students’ contempt for our motherland. The negative impact will be huge.”

Due to the government’s concerns over the Pan-Chinese Movement, Chinese language and culture were never taught at the Dutch-Chinese schools. Although Chinese Mandarin was later introduced as an optional subject at the Dutch-Chinese teaching academy, the colonial authority insisted that setting up Chinese language curriculum at public schools was not its task.

Some parts of the Chinese population, especially those from lower classes, were also not quite content with the formalism and elitist outlook of the Dutch-Chinese schools. Despite the growing capacity over the years, the enrollment of government schools remained relatively exclusive, since only middle class or above could afford the tuition. Many peranakan Chinese chose to study at the THHK schools simply because they did not have sufficient financial means to register at the Dutch-Chinese schools. In general, however, the education of the Dutch-Chinese schools was considered more suitable for the Indies situation. Besides smoother transitions to schools at higher levels, the graduates of the Dutch-Chinese schools usually enjoyed broader options for employment and higher salaries compared to their THHK school counterparts (Suryadinata 1978, 52). It was reported that even the prominent figures of the THHK started to send their children to the more prestigious Dutch-Chinese schools. Impressed by the great acceptance of the Dutch-Chinese schools among the Indies Chinese population, many people started to believe that the disappearance of the THHK schools was just a matter of time (Loh Tien 1935, 89). As a result, some peranakan leaders started to discuss the possibilities of revising the curriculum at the THHK schools. By launching such a reform, it was hoped that their primarily Chinese-educated students could be better prepared for the real-life challenges of the Indies. However, the intended adjustment was never materialized, partially because the THHK could hardly provide necessary funds to support a radical change to its school system (Suryadinata 1978, 53).

In addition to the steady increase of the government schools, a large amount of privately funded Dutch-Chinese schools also mushroomed across the colony. As the number of the enrolled students continued to grow at the Dutch-Chinese schools, it seemed as though the Dutch education had gained upper hand in its competition with the THHK schools. Did the THHK schools actually fail? Not really. It was true that more and more peranakan parents started to send their children to attend the Dutch-Chinese schools for presumably more suitable education, the enrollment of the THHK schools did not drop accordingly. As of 1935, the total number of Chinese schools reached 450 with approximately 45,000 registered students. The Dutch-Chinese school system, by comparison, had only one quarter of the schools and half of the students (Loh Tien 1935, 91). Given the sheer size and the uninterrupted growth of the THHK school system, it would be unfair to call it a failure. In fact, such increase had to do with a major demographic shift of the Indies Chinese population, namely the rapid growth of the totok population, which was driven by the huge influx of new immigrants from China since the beginning of the republican period (1911). With their obvious China-oriented minds, the totok population’s enormous demand for Chinese education was unquestionable. Not only did they
have every reason to enroll their children at the THHK schools, but were also quite eager to develop Chinese education by establishing new schools beyond the THHK framework. After the mid-1920s, the totok population gradually seized the control over the Chinese education by taking over the existing THHK schools while founding the new ones, many totok schools even dropped the name of the THHK (Suryadinata 1978, pp. 56-57). Perhaps this change of power was most evidently reflected in a case of 1927. The Kian Sing, a China-oriented peranakan leader, proposed to reform the THHK schools by adding instructions in Dutch, so that the students would be better prepared for employment opportunities in the colony. However, the THHK leaders rejected this seemingly quite “pragmatic” proposal right away by accusing him of ignoring the interests of the totok population and pushing the undesired “peranakanization” among the newcomers.

4. Conclusion

On one hand, the Chinese education of the THHK schools catalyzed the desinicization of the peranakan community, a large number of Indies-born Chinese became increasingly China-oriented; on the other hand, the Dutch education spearheaded by the public Dutch-Chinese schools stimulated a paralleled tendency of “desinicization” or “dutchification” among the Chinese, which drew a considerable amount into the sphere of more direct Dutch socio-cultural influence. To a certain degree, the two streams shared a common logic prevailed in the Indies Chinese population at that time, whose primary goal was to improve their social status by gaining better recognition from the colonial authority—in other word, to acquire the European status—through modern education. While Malay was undoubtedly the most commonly used language in the colony, the majority of the Indies Chinese regarded education in Malay as inferior and hence regrettably failed to establish a corresponding education system (see Govaars 2005, pp. 144-148; Wal, S. L. van der ed. 1963, pp. 412-421).

As peranakan leader Kwec Tek Hoy pointed out in 1931, the Indies Chinese community was so diverse that there were at least five different interest groups, and each of them had quite disparate demand for education: a. wealthy peranakans who intended to stay in the Indies and were eager to pursue quality European education; b. poor peranakans who had every reason to stay in the colony but only required their children to obtain rudimentary literacy, education in Malay language would be most practical; c. China-oriented peranakan nationalists who wanted to send their kids to China, or those who wished to retain their Chinese identity through Chinese education; d. peranakans and totoks who were committed to their Chinese identity, but somewhat flexible with the type of education; and e. totok Chinese, especially those Hakka and Cantonese immigrants, who just wanted to stay for a short period and planned to eventually go back to China. While both the public Dutch-Chinese schools and the private THHK schools succeeded in attracting a large number of students, neither could fully accommodate the distinct demand of every group. Therefore, as it was almost impossible to found an all-inclusive education system, a divergence of the Chinese population was inevitable. Such a divergence, as I demonstrated in this paper, did not strictly follow the line of the peranakan-totok division.

Ostensibly, to borrow Suryadinata’s words, both the “peranakanization” (dangdihua, or localization) of the totoks and the “totokization” (xinkehua, or desinicization) of the peranakans could potentially lead to the confluence of the Chinese community, which would ultimately gear towards the creation of a common identity of the Indies Chinese (Suryadinata 1978, 47). In practice, however, what actually happened was the polarization of the Chinese population catalyzed by the two highly politicized education systems: the sinicization of the China-oriented and the dutchification of their European-minded counterparts. Started from the 1930s, as Chinese nationalism continued to rise as a result of Japanese aggression in China and the Dutch colonial authority’s tightened control through its “rust en orde” (peace and order) politics, such polarization was further intensified. Consequently, the Indies Chinese became increasingly divided. Ironically, with the absence of the much-needed Malay education, the two prevailing systems were both responsible—significantly if not in their entirety—for the alienation of the Chinese community in the time when native nationalist movement was burgeoning. Further investigations on education, I believe, would be quite useful in offering valuable insights into diaspora politics in the nation-building process of Indonesia.

References:

Dutch:

**Chinese:**


**Indonesian:**


5. “Plan Perobahan Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan dari Toean The Kian Sing,” *Panorama*, March 27, 1927.


**English:**


Notes:

- Under the Dutch colonial regulation, Chinese were not allowed to move freely beyond designated quarters, which were usually overcrowded and had fairly poor living condition, unless they obtained special passes. Although the Chinese were categorized as “Foreign Orientals”, they were subject to much stricter criminal law. Due to its arbitrariness, the native court to the European one.
- Apparently, there were already a large number of Chinese who emigrated outside of China through various illegal means prior to 1894. The abolishment of the ban carried more symbolic meanings in recognizing the legal status of the overseas Chinese than its actual effect.
- The failed reform movement is thus commonly referred as the “Hundreds Days’ Reform”.
- The Dutch East Indies did not have a comprehensive and reliable census until 1930. According to the census report, the estimated Indies Chinese population was 537,316. —. (1931). Volksstelling 1930. Bataviaencentrum: Departement van Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel, vol 7, p48
- More specifically, the work of the Chinese Association for Educational Affairs included hiring teachers, establishing new schools, coordinating with the Dutch colonial government, and applying for funding from the Chinese government to develop Chinese education in the Indies, etc. With the rapid development of Chinese schools in the Outer Islands, the association expanded in 1911 and began to oversee the Chinese education across the whole Dutch East Indies, see Li & Huang 2005, pp368-369.
- In the case of the Dutch East Indies, the THHK helped the students to secure their travel expenses to China. See Nio 1940, pp 101-107.
- The author of the report acknowledged that the actual amount could be higher and 259 was just the number of schools with confirmed address. According to the statistics of the Dutch colonial government, although there were in total 450 Chinese schools formally registered, many had already cease to exist due to unstable enrollment and tough funding situation. See Loh Tien 1935, 89.
- The THHK schools did not actually have courses for Malay language, but since Malay is most commonly used in the peranakan Chinese community, it was usually the first language of the Indies Chinese children. Many people did not have exposure to Chinese until they started their formal education at the THHK schools. As a result, teachers needed to use Malay to teach Chinese.

“...De taal is gansch het volk” is a famous saying by Flemish writer Prudens van Duyse, a prominent figure of the Flemish Movement in the mid-19th century. In 1836, he co-founded a Flemish nationalist organization named “De tael is gansch het Volk”.

“Ligte in de richting dier scholen om, behalve in het Maleis en Chinees, uitsluitend onderwijs te geven in het Engels, dan zal het opkomende geslagt gaandeweg verengen en zich meer en meer van ons vervreemden. Deze vrees mag zeker niet tijdel genoemd worden, wanneer in aanmerking wordt genomen dat het Engelsch algemeen als handelstaal geldt, veel gemakkelijker is aan te leeren dan het Nederlandsch en als omgangstaal gebezigd en populair gemaakt wordt hij de aanrakingen van de vreemdelingen met het gele ras in Oost-Azië. En is eenmaal het streven van de Chinezen hier te lande er op gericht om het Engelsch aan te leeren en, te bezigen, dan zal, waar „de taal gans het volk is” en niet de afstemming maar de taal een volk bijeenhoudt, dat energieke element onder onze onderdanen zich meer en meer van ons afwenden en mogelijk zelfs, als de omstandigheden er to mochten leiden, ons vijandig worden.”, see “Advies van de raad van Nederlands-Indië van 28 april 1905 no XX” in S. L. van der Wal ed. 1963. Het Onderwijsbeleid in Nederlands-Indië 1900-1940; Een Bronnenpublikatie. Groningen: J.B. Wolters, pp 41-42.

“Shang Hui originated from China and served as the chamber of commerce that aimed to establish closer contact between the Indies Chinese business community and that of China. Although it did not have clearly articulated objective, the Shang Hui often organized charity events to raise fund for the THHK schools. It also served as a semi-official body that represented the interests of the Chinese government before the formal establishment of the consulate. For more detailed introduction to the Shang Hui, see Govaars 2005, 58; Shu Bao She was closely associated Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary party Yong Meng Hui. Its primary goal was to introduce Chinese revolution to the tolok Chinese community and thus cultivate mass support. Shu Bao She was particularly appealing to the working class. By cooperating with the THHK, both Shang Hui and Shu Bao She played positive roles in promoting Chinese education in the Indies. For more information on Shu Bao She, see Li & Huang 2005, 368.


“ontwikkelde en invloedrijke Chinezen”, ibid.


“...de Chinezen op onderwijsgebet niet langer worden achtergezet, dient er tevens tegen te worden gewaakt, dat zij niet boven de Europeanen worden bevoorrecht.” See “Advies van den raad van Nederlands-Indie van 28 juni 1907 no XVI”, S. L. van der Wal ed. 1963, 99


“Evenwel, van Nederlandsch standpunt uit gezien is het gewenst, dat een zoo groot mogelijk deel onzer Chinese Nederlandsche onderdanen onze taal kunnen spreken en verstaan, onze boeken kunnen lezen, onze wetten begrijpen en onze gedachtegang, ons streven en onze idealen omvatten; en dit te bereiken is wel enige opoffering waard.” See “Regeringsadviseur in Chinese aangelegenheden (W. J. Oudendijk) aan gouwener-generaal (Idenburg), 4 okt. 1913”, S. L. van der Wal ed. 1963, 258

“...zien slotte met ons beter en zoveel degelijker onderwijs de grootste meerderheid der Chinese jeugd naar onze scholen toe te trekken, vooral de kinderen der Peranakanen.”, ibid.

“De Republikein government of China issued its new citizenship act in 1929, which also followed the principle of jus sanguinis, and insisted that overseas Chinese could reclaim their citizenship in accordance with this law.


The Indies Council proposed to establish at least 42 schools to counter the Pan-Chinese movement. If three teachers were needed for each school, the total demand would be 126, which was unimaginable for the colonial government. See "Advies van de raad van Nederlands-Indië van 28 juli 1907 no. XVI" in Wal, S. L. van der ed. 1963, pp. 103-104.

"waarom ik een voorstoe dra gemaakt om zoodanige omvang dat het niet geheel voor uitvoering geschikt is. Op die vraag is maar één antwoord te geven: de Regering verlangt van mij voorstellen ter voorziening in de behoeften der Chineesenz voor toekomst." Ibid.


...het als een belediging gevoelt als de gelijke van den Inlander te worden beschouwd en dien vaak door arrogant optreden prikkel...in plaats van toenadering valt in de laatste jaren weleere verwijdering tussen Chinees en Inlander te constateren." Ibid.

"De goede bedoeling zal uitgelegd worden als een politiek reactionaire maatregel der Regering van Chinese zijde, die er op uit is om door middel van het onderwijs van de Chinezen Inlanders te maken." Ibid.

Zheng Chenggong was a renowned military leader who defeated the forces of the VOC in Formosa (Taiwan) at the end of the Ming dynasty (1661) and later led the resistance against the conquest of the Manchus (Qing government).

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