
This English translation of a Dutch doctoral dissertation is an invaluable resource for scholars studying Chinese Indonesian communities before World War II. In terms of the time period, thematic concerns and coverage of primary materials, it is a welcome addition to the much-cited but by now very dated Overseas Chinese Nationalism: the Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1916 by Lea Williams (1960). Both books address a critical event and moment in Chinese Indonesian history, the so-called “Chinese Movement,” specifically the educational movement spear-headed by the Batavian Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (Chinese Association) in the 20th century. Like Williams, Govaars provides not simply an overview of colonial policies but also a close look at the politics of colonial education with regard to the local Chinese communities during the final years of the Dutch empire in Southeast Asia. Govaars, however, addresses a much longer time period which allows her to chart historical changes in the Chinese Movement and discuss what she terms intriguingly “the neo-Chinese Movement.” Her book is also meticulously researched and the author’s mastery of copious materials culled from Dutch official archives is impressive as can be seen from the detailed information given in the endnotes and appendices.

The book is based primarily on Dutch-language materials and that has obvious advantages and disadvantages. The author provides us with an extremely detailed account of official policies and attitudes toward the thorny subject of providing education for a subject race considered by the Dutch colonial government as “foreign” to the Dutch East Indies. From Chapter 3 onward, Govaars discusses an apparent colonial “change of heart” on this issue. It is well-known that the colonial government did not see the need to provide mass education for the Chinese communities in the colony until 1908 when it began to establish the Dutch-Chinese schools specifically for them. The author traces this decision to a 1861 interpretation of a 1854 Government Regulation on education for indigenous children. The government’s rationale was that although the Chinese (categorized as “Foreign Orientals”) had “Native” legal status, they could not be admitted to schools for “Native” children unless vacancies were available.

Govaars demonstrates that the colonial “change of heart” in 1908 was a complex issue. In 1900, the Dutch Resident of Rembang had requested that a government school be set up for Chinese children in his residency but was vetoed by the Director of Education, J.H. Abendanon. The Resident had argued that a school for Chinese children would better prepare them for “life’s struggles” (p. 71)
and would bind the community to the government. Moreover, the government had already provided for the educational needs of European and indigenous communities and should do likewise for the Chinese (p. 71).

Although himself an avid supporter of education as a means of “uplifting” the “Natives” in the Indies, J.H. Abendanon was against educational support for the Chinese, arguing that it would take away financial resources earmarked for indigenous education. He stood firm on this position in 1904 when he vetoed a similar request, this time from the Resident of Batavia. In 1904, when the educational movement championed by the Batavian Chinese Association was well underway in the Indies, the Resident of Batavia expressed his concern that the teaching of Chinese \textit{and} English in schools set up by the Association within the Chinese Movement would estrange the community from the government (p. 72).

Govaars’ research reveals that within the colonial bureaucracy the teaching of English (not Dutch) in these schools was one overriding concern in debates on whether the government needed to set up schools for the Chinese. Unfortunately, the author does not discuss the precise nature of the perceived threat of teaching English especially in relation to that of Mandarin Chinese.

It would appear that the period of 1900 to 1908 was a critical one with regard to the Dutch administrative decision to establish Dutch-Chinese schools. One no less than Snouck Hurgronje, renowned Dutch colonial adviser-cum-scholar on “Native and Arab Affairs,” was called upon to weigh in on the issue. Govaars succeeds in presenting the views of the colony’s most important Dutch bureaucrats and scholars on the provision of education for the local Chinese. She describes in some detail the key role played by J.G. Pott, the new Director of Education in 1906, who felt that privately funded Chinese schools undermined the loyalty of the local Chinese to the Dutch colonial authority. Pott was alarmed by the political implications of allowing what he saw as China-oriented schools to proliferate in the Indies, and pushed the government to fund Dutch-Chinese schools in all areas where there were already privately-funded Chinese schools. His intention was to cripple the Chinese Movement. When the Indies Council and eventually Governor-General J.B. van Heutsz failed to support Pott’s plan, preferring to make the establishment of Dutch-Chinese schools contingent on a “clearly articulated desire of the local Chinese community for European education” (pp. 81–82), and further stipulated that “there could be no thought of destroying the Chinese Movement … [which] should neither be encouraged or discouraged” (p. 83), Pott tendered his resignation.

The strength of the book lies in its careful presentation of Dutch official debates on the politics of colonial education and the Chinese Movement which was far more complex than had been imagined previously. It emerges that the colonial machinery did not speak with one voice thus compromising its execution of educational policies where the Indies Chinese were concerned. The book is less