The Art of Translating among the Chinese of Java

L’art de traduire chez les Chinois de Java perçu à travers l’interprétation d’un décret de 1696

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Introduction

It is now well established that Insulindian Chinese played a key role in the movement of Chinese literary translations into Malay and other local languages that took place during the last decades of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.1 However, much less is known regarding the part played by Chinese migrants in the translations/adaptations made at the request of the local and colonial authorities.

Chinese sources occasionally provide some scarce information regarding translators and interpreters. For example, the Songshi 宋史 or “History of the Song” and the Zhufan zhi 諸藩志, “Description of Foreign Countries,” by Zhao Rukuo 趙汝適 (1225) report in their notices on Srivijaya (Sumatra) that at the court “the language was written with characters from India, and

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1. Our thanks to Paola Calanca, Claude Guillot and Waruno Mahdi who read a previous version of this article. Our gratitude also goes to Henri Chambert-Loir who transcribed the Malay rendition and to Mau Chuan-hui 毛傳慧 who helped us solve a few language issues.

that the king used his ring as a seal”. They add that “Chinese characters were used in the memorials accompanying the tribute”. The notation is important; it suggests that there were one or more secretaries, or even merchant-literati, in the service of the ruler, acting as interpreters and translators.

This practice was found in the following centuries. At the very beginning of the 17th century, Zhang Xie 張燮 (1574-1640) notes that the ruler of Banten (West Java) had six accountants in his service to keep his books, four of whom were Chinese. He adds that the people of this nation who knew the local language(s) well, literally “the foreign language(s)” (an yiyu 諳夷語), acted as interpreters (tongshi 通事) and that there was one man for every ship. This assertion is corroborated by English merchants who came to trade in Banten in the early 17th century, and who used to communicate with their Chinese counterparts in Malay. When Captain Saris passed through Banten in 1614 to negotiate a cargo of pepper, he asked two Chinese merchants, Lacmoy and Lanching, to translate the letter written in Chinese that the Lord of Hirado had given him in Japan for the King of England. The Chinese gave a Malay translation of the letter, which was later rendered into English. Worthy of note, an official letter in Malay from 1672, written in aksara with a Chinese seal impression upside down (hufeng 護封 or sealed for protection) emanating from a Ming loyalist in the service of the Sultan of Banten to the King of Denmark also attests to the role of Chinese as linguists in the commercial life of the sultanate.

The colonial administration during the Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie or VOC period (1602-1799) functioned in an ad hoc manner, and ruled by decrees and public notices or placards (plakaten). The posting of these directive placards and proclamations was the main medium for

5. The origin of this protective seal should be the ancient sealing clay.
6. The letter was found in the National Archives of Denmark (C.23 drafts and enclosures of East Indian matters 1668-1699) and was transliterated and translated, cf. F.H. van Naerssen, Th. G.Th. Pigeaud and P. Voorhoeve, Catalogue of Indonesian manuscripts, Part 2. Old Javanese Charters, Javanese, Malay and Lampung Manuscripts, Mads Lange’s Balinese letters and Official letters in Indonesian languages, Copenhagen: The Royal library, 1977, p. 161-162. (See here Plate 1).
communicating the government’s wishes and intentions. Fortunately, these placards have been published, although in a more or less summarized form, by J.A. van der Chijs in the *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek 1602-1811* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij & ‘Hage: M. Nijhoff, 1885-1900, 17 vol.). This corpus provides us with some flashes into the Company’s language policy. For example, in 1621, the VOC stipulated that in Batavia preaching should be in the Malay language (*Bepaling dat te Batavia in de maleische taal geprekt zoude worden*). However, initially it consisted of a reading by someone who was “quite versed” in Malay, and was therefore rather primitive; but the authorities understood that “all affairs must have a beginning before they are completely effective”.

As far as Chinese residents were concerned, an ordinance of 1628, about the prohibition for them to leave Batavia without permission from the Company, states that “it was the duty of their leaders to translate it or have it translated, and to have it displayed on posters on the usual places”. This text shows that the use of placards to give orders to the Chinese community had already become a habit. As regard the appointment of the head of the Chinese community, the *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia* states that the proclamation had just to be read in public. When Limlacco 林六哥 was appointed captain in Batavia in 1636, the commission was proclaimed in

both Dutch and Chinese “in the company of several eminent local Chinese”. “After a ceremony at the castle square, the gentlemen rode on horseback to the town hall where the proclamation was again issued in both languages to the common people.”

The placards were usually archived, but not the official posters. However, such a poster, in Dutch, Malay, Javanese, and Chinese, dated July 24, 1696 and issued by Governor General Willem van Outhoorn (in office 1691-1704), resurfaced about ten years ago. It was rediscovered by Edwin Wieringa of the University of Cologne assisted by Thoralf Hanstein of the Berlin State Library. The poster has a size of 52x73.5 cm. It has been scanned and is accessible on line. The Dutch text of this decree poster was aimed at forbidding the opening of new sugar-, arrack-, lime-, and brick- production sites, as well as the creation of lumber mills, because of the scarcity of firewood in the Batavia ommelanden or areas around it, but it had not been implemented because of the powerful interests involved. The increase of sugar mills and arrack distilleries did not discontinue during the greatest part of the following century, the shortage of firewood remained a problem, and little by little, sugar refineries moved eastwards to Central and Eastern Java. The decree and its historical context have been investigated in detail by Waruno Mahdi, in an article in which a transcript as well as a translation in English are given in appendix.

In addition, Henri Chambert Loir kindly transcribed for us the Malay rendition written in Jawi characters. Thanks to these two contributions, we are able to approach the Chinese rendering in a new light, and try to understand how the anonymous Chinese linguist proceeded, although some questions have remained unexplained.

But before studying the Chinese interpretative translation of the decree, which is so far the oldest known still in extant, we would like to consider briefly what is known about 17th-century Chinese translators/interpreters in Batavia, and how they were called upon by the VOC officials each time they needed to communicate either with the Zheng 繆 regime in Taiwan or with the Manchus rulers.

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12. Waruno Mahdi, “A rediscovered 1696 decree poster of the Governor General in Batavia, with unexpected stylistic particularities”, *Archipel* 93, 2017, pp. 85-108. The article is also accessible on line: https://journals.openedition.org/archipel/393. The author states (p. 86) that he “was unable to acquire a copy of the original placard of van Outhoorn’s decree from the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia and can only quote it from the strongly abridged record given in the *Plakaatboek*.”
Language Skills of 17th-Century Batavia Chinese

During the 17th century, the language of contact between Europeans and Chinese was the Malay and the Portuguese in which, according to John E. Wills, “the Dutch may have been less than perfectly fluent.”[^13] However, a few Chinese were also more or less knowledgeable in Dutch. Such as the first leader (Overste) of the Chinese community, the merchant So Beng Kong 蘇鳴崗 (d. 1644), who was appointed on 11 October 1619. He was then responsible for civil affairs, and was also a member of the College of Aldermen (Collegie van Schepenen) that was established in 1620.[^14] His signature has been preserved in Latin characters on a certificate in Dutch of the price of pepper, as negotiated in Banten between the Pangeran and the French, dated 1621[^15] (see Plate 2).

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Such also the Christian Martinus Bingam，who was appointed captain in 1645 until his death in 1663. He was closely linked to the Dutch, first as contractor of various works in the city (such as the digging of the canal of Molenvliet), and second because he had borrowed a huge amount of money from the VOC which he invested in sugar-cane plantations. When he passed away, he was still heavily indebted to the Company. He was said to have a beautiful handwriting in Dutch.16

This was also the case with Gan Tenqua，son of Captain Siqua（颜口官）（in office 1663-1665）and of a Balinese lady（d. 1678？）,17 who, experimented in spoken and written Dutch as well as other languages, accompanied a Dutch mission to Fuzhou in 1676 with the hope of undertaking a free trade.18 By a resolution of May 16, 1679, he was appointed “schrijver” or clerk in the service of the Company, and conferred upon the title of Serjeant.19 This function was apparently not reinstated after the passing of Gan Tenqua. Gan Tenqua was still alive in 1696.

It seems that it was also the case for Zhou Meidie，doctor to Governor General Joan van Horn（in office 1704-1709）and his family, who in his old age accompanied the retired governor to the Dutch republic, and where he stayed for several months before returning to Batavia. On his way back, he wrote a first letter to Nicolaes Witsen（1641-1717, passionate of the history of China and former mayor of Amsterdam），and a second one two years later.20

Unlike the Portuguese in Macao who, as early as 1627, institutionalised the function of interpreter and translator by issuing a series of rules that established the duties and obligations of the sworn interpreters（jurubaças）21 and scribes（escrevaens）who worked for the Senado da Câmara or Chamber Senate,22 the

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17. Siqua’s widow was appointed head of the Chinese community by the VOC. See B. Hoetink, “De weduwe van kapitein Siqua–Djanda Kapitein siqua,” Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih, jrg 2, n°1-2, 1918, p. 16-25, 98-105.
21. From the Malay juru bahasa which means translator. Worthy of note, the term juru bahasa（spelled jurubasse），was also used by the Dutch in Batavia; cf. B. Hoetink, “So Bing Kong, het eerste hoofd der Chineezee te Batavia,” p. 399.
22. Anno 1627, Regimento da Lingua da Cidade e, dos Jurbaças menores e Escrevaens, Biblioteca da Ajuda（BA）, Jesuitas na Ásia（JA）, Cód.49-V-8, fls257v.-251v.; Série da Província da China. The document called for the employment of three jurubaças who were divided into two types, lingua principal and jurubaças menores, and for two scribes. The bibliography on the subject is very extensive. See inter alia Mario Gómez.
VOC officials were content to resort to the Chinese merchants of Batavia each time they needed linguists, and continued to entrust the leaders of the Chinese community with the task of translating or having translated administrative texts, if needed. However, according to the *Plakaatboek*, the Company also tried to train Dutch interpreters of Chinese. For this purpose, in 1752 and 1753, three young men were placed in the Chinese Hospital in Batavia, before being sent to China and, in 1760, officially appointed as interpreters.23 Frederik de Haan, who does not quote his source, says that in 1777 the VOC felt the need to use a sworn Chinese interpreter.24

On December 29, 1679, when the VOC officially received the Tartar embassy in Batavia, various Chinese personalities were present, among whom Captain Tsoa Wanjock 蔡煥玉 (in office 1678-1684) and Gan Tenqua. Along with three other Chinese, they made a translation into Portuguese and Malay of the official missive Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1662-1722) had addressed to the Governor General. Only a Dutch adaptation of the latter is reproduced in the *Dagh Register*.25 During the stay of the embassy in Batavia (which lasted for seven months), the emissaries were accompanied and entertained by local Chinese, and the heads of the delegation were lodged in a house of the widow of a wealthy Chinese, a certain Njai Sotia.26 Their credentials were translated by Ensign (*Vaandrig*)27 Tenglauw [or Tengelouw?],28 along with Captain Tsoa Wanjock, Sergeant Thenqua [Gan Tenqua], and a certain Bonsiqua.29

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27. According to the editors of *The Chinese Annals of Batavia*, p. 66, n. 46, the first *vaandrig* was not appointed until 28 June 1678.
28. According to *Dagh-Register*, 8 May 1681, p. 214, Tengelouw was a sea-going merchant whose junk frequented China and Japan.
According to Dutch sources, the embassy was accompanied by Lim Lacco and Lappora, “two of the former Batavia Chinese who had often served as intermediaries in Fuzhou.” The Chinese sources mention two interpreters bearing different names who presumably accompanied the mission.  

It is conceivable that for merchants unaccustomed to court style, the translation of Kangxi emperor’s missive, as well as those of the emissaries’ credentials and the governor general’s reply, must have been very difficult, hence the need for a collective translation. It is likely that the interpretation of the decrees issued by the VOC, often written in a rather obscure language and referring to institutions without equivalents in the Chinese world, was not an easier task.

It should perhaps be remembered that the Chinese who acted as translators in 17th-century Batavia were not only untrained in this field, but had learned Malay and possibly Dutch without having had any linguistic tools at their disposal in their own language. The first embryonic Chinese-Malay manuals were not produced before the last decades of the 19th century.

**Public Notices and Questions of Literacy in Batavia**

The language situation faced by the VOC officers was not unlike that experienced by the Manchu rulers after their takeover of China. On both sides, they had to communicate with a population that was foreign to them and whose language or languages they knew little about. The comparison stops there. In China, it was the conquerors who learned the language of the conquered, to the point of mastering it perfectly after a period during which the two languages were used simultaneously. In Batavia, the conquering traders, while using Malay, according to their abilities, introduced an administrative system imported from Europe and written exclusively in their native language. In doing so, all the effort of acculturation and linguistic understanding were required from the local populations.

So far, we have not found any reflection on the issue of inter-comprehension in Java among the Dutch employees of the VOC. Did they ever think of the state of written knowledge of the persons to whom their messages were addressed, before having translations of decrees and public notice instruction posters placed in public places? Or did they think that it was enough for a limited number of persons to be able to read and understand the messages for their dissemination and implementation to take place? We favour the second interpretation.

In the case of the Chinese community, which was still relatively small, all that was needed was for the leaders and lettered merchants to be able to interpret the Company’s directives, so that the message would get through.

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31. Such as Lim Tjay Tat 林采達, *Kitab Tong Gi Tjin Liong Basa Malayoe of Tjin na 通語津梁*, Batavia, 1878, Singapore, Guangxu jichou nian 光緒己丑年 (1889).
Some Particularities of the Chinese Text

What is striking at first glance is the difference in length of the Chinese text, which has only about 443 characters, while the Dutch text has ca 1340 words, and the Malay one, which follows the original rather closely, about 1334. While taking into account the fact that expression in Chinese requires fewer terms than in Western languages, it remains that this Chinese text is shorter, which leads us to believe that it is not a “translation” in the modern Western sense of the term, but rather an interpretative translation. Here, the translator, as would an interpreter, takes the general ideas and condenses them, which implies a real “negotiation” with the original. To some extent, he made the content of the decree clearer. In particular, he avoided the many redundancies and explicit repetitions in the Dutch text and its Malay translation, which seem difficult to bear for a modern reader. This is evidenced by the way van der Chijs could not help abbreviating the decrees he produced in the Plakaatboek. Waruno Mahdi notes that “the decree repeats the lengthy paratactic listing ‘sugar mills, arrack distilleries, chalk burners, brick and tile kilns, as well as lumber mills’ in slight variations altogether ten times”, as does the Malay rendition, whereas the Chinese quotes the same listing only twice.

Worthy of note too, the Dutch header which reads:

Willem van Outhoorn Governor General and the Councils over the State of the General Netherlands Chartered East-India Company in India [herewith] makes known

has been omitted, unlike the Malay version where it reads:

Wilem Fan Uthron Gurundur Jenral dan segala Raden Fan India yang empunya perintah atas perihal Kompeni Wilandawi dalam India memeri tahu pada segala orang yang memaca dan yang menengar bunyi surat [?] yaitu undang2 ini, ketahui

The Chinese translator, who remains anonymous, like his counterpart of the Malay version, simply begins his translation with the expression chaofeng 抄奉, meaning “copy of an act or of a document”, but which here implies a rendering of the act in another language. This expression chaofeng was systematically used in the translations made at the request of the Company and the colonial government, as the documents we have been able to consult attest. Curiously, the terms yi 譯 or fanyi 翻譯, which mean “to interpret”, “to translate”, do not appear anywhere. Could it be that these terms have been avoided by the linguists for fear of being accused of errors in translation?

The reason why the translator of the decree does not indicate his name may eventually be explained by the fact that the “copy of the act” did not emanate from the head of the Chinese community. Indeed, in a translation made in 1800 by the captain of the Chinese of Makassar, (exhibited in the Museum Kota Makassar in 2005), his name is noted which reads: 望加錫甲必丹黄 抄奉 or “Copy of the act by the Capitain of Makassar, Oey [Nyeeko 雅哥]” (See Plate 3).

As for the last two sentences of the Dutch decree:

Issued in Fort Batavia on the Island Java Major, this 24 July 1696   W. van Outhoorn [signature]  
By ordinance of Their Hon. High Com.: C. van Swoll [clerk, signature]  
they have been rendered in the Chinese version in the following way: Issued on Dutch year 1696, June..., day…

This last sentence, which is very close to its Malay counterpart, also omits the names of the Governor General and the secretary\(^35\), but it differs in the

\(^{35}\) The Malay version reads: Tersurat dalam Kota Betawi atas Pulau Jawa Besar pada ... hari bulan Yulius tahun seribu enam ratus sembilan puluh enam. or “Written in the city of Batavia on the island of Java Major, July …, 1696.”
month. The date of “24 June 1696” is that which the decree was laid down
as recorded in the Plakaatboek (Van der Chijs, 1885-1900: 3, p. 405-407),
whereas the Dutch text of the official poster bears the date of “24 July 1696,”
which is that of its public display.

As far as the form is concerned, the text follows Chinese norms as regards
the marks of respect. When mentioning the Dutch Governor General, the
expression wangshang 王上 referring to him is placed at the beginning of
the line, two characters higher; and when referring to the Councils, Shangtai
上臺, one character higher, and three for Helan guo 和蘭國, Holland. 36

As for the transcriptions of foreign terms (in Chinese: yinyi 音譯 or sound
translation), that follow Hokkien pronunciation, it seems that they were
already rather systematized, in terms of the choice of characters, except for
the addition of the radical N° 30 (kou 口) before certain characters used to
transcribe a syllable (such as in bicara 嘔噁嘮), although it is not clear how
this systematization came about.

Worthy of mention too, the text contains a few Chinese character variants,
such as yao 窯, in place of 窯 for kiln, and zhe 櫛, instead of 櫛, for sugar-cane,
that were in use in South Fujian and Taiwan. The term zhe appears here in the
expression zhebu (Hokkien: chiapho 樁廍), which refers to a sugar-crushing
establishment or sugar-cane mill. Note that the character 廍 was exclusively
used in Hokkien or Minnan hua 閩南話, as well as in place names. By the
1630s, sugar-cane plantations owned by Chinese were already well developed
in Banten, 39 as well as in Batavia where they had been encouraged by the
VOC, which had started exporting sugar to Persia and Europe. 40

36. In the Kai ba lidai shji 開吧歷代史記, Hsü Yün-tsiao 許雲樵 Ed., Nanyang
xuebao 南洋學報, IX, Part 1 (N° 17), June 1953, the Governor General is called
Baguo dawang 吧國大王 or the Great King of Batavia, and the ruler of Holland
zuguo wang 祖國王 or King of the Motherland. Later, the Chinese in Batavia used
a transcription of the Dutch term: 敷文律得嘮 to refer to the governor general. See
Baguo huaren gongguan (Baguo gongtang) dangan congshu. Gongan bu (dier ji)
吧國華人公館 (吧國公堂) 檔案簿叢書, 公案簿 (第二輯), Yuan Bingling 袁冰
凌, Su Ermeng 蘇爾夢 jiaozhu 校注, Bao Leshi (L. Blussé) deng dingbu
包樂史等 訂補, Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2004, “18-19 shiji yinnihuawen zhong
de wailaiyu chutan 18-19世紀印尼華文中的外來語初探,” p. 421.

37. During the Ming dynasty, Holland was usually written 和蘭, and this form remained
in use in Java until the last years of the 19th century, as seen from its usage in
the Gongan bu and the Chinese epigraphical materials. In China proper under the Qing, the
transcriptions 贺兰 and 荷蘭 also appeared, the latter being the dominant one today.

38. See Rev. Carstairs Douglas, Chinese-English Dictionary of the Vernacular or
Thomas Barclay, 1923, p. 186.

Kelapadua, Banten, XVIIe siècle. Textes et vestiges », Archipel 39, 1990, pp. 139-158.

40. Marie-Sybille de Vienne, Les Chinois en Insulinde. Echanges et sociétés

Archipel 104, Paris, 2022

**Language of the Chinese Rendition**

As far as can be judged, since this translation is unique for the seventeenth century, the Chinese language then in use in Batavia was obviously \textit{Minnan hua}, but strongly marked by borrowings from Dutch and Malay, as well as by composite terms, and new expressions that seem to have been well established. The fact that the Batavia Chinese had been politically dependent on the VOC since the very beginning of the 17th century led them to reflect this reality by coining their own language that can be described as a kind of sabir.

In this short text, there are no less than six loanwords: five that seemingly come from Dutch, and one from Malay, as well as two composite expressions made from Malay too, and two new terms. However, if we scrutinize the Malay rendition, we notice that it also contains the same Dutch loanwords, all related to the operation of the VOC (except “July” which is rather curiously transcribed \textit{Yulius}). All this suggests that the Chinese translator may have worked from the Malay version only. However, the fact that the Chinese interpretation is dated “June 1696” while the Malay translation gives “July 1696”, casts doubt on this. This may suggest that the Chinese translator had access both to the Dutch placard and the Malay translation, or possibly to an oral lecture of these texts. There is no way to tell. Such situations show once again how relative the distinction between interpretation and translation is.

**Dutch Loans**

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textit{Compagnie} (Company) 公班啣 (1 occurr.)
    \item \textit{Fiscaal} (public prosecutor) 美錫葛 (1 occurr.)
    \item \textit{Heem Raad} (district council) 欣勿劈 (2 occurr.)
    \item \textit{Secretaris} 諸葛礁 (2 occurr.)
    \item \textit{Juni} 俞尼 (June) (1 occurr.)
\end{itemize}

These terms, except \textit{Juni}, were also used in later periods, notably in the \textit{Gongan bu} 公案簿 of the late 18th and 19th century, with occasionally slightly different transcriptions such as 公班衙 for \textit{Compagnie}.\footnote{See \textit{Baguo huaren gongguan (Baguo gongtang) dang’an congshu. Gongan bu (dierji) 吧國華人公館（吧國公堂）檔案簿叢書，公案簿（第二輯）}, p. 424.}

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42. See \textit{Baguo huaren gongguan (Baguo gongtang) dang’an congshu. Gongan bu (dierji) 吧國華人公館（吧國公堂）檔案簿叢書，公案簿（第二輯）}, p. 424.
Malay Loan and Composite Expressions

**bicara** 嘀喳唠 (3 occur.)
**Bicara cu** 嘀喳唠厝 (Collegie van Schepenen or College of Aldermen) (1 occur.)
**Nei Wai Tumenggung** 內外淡枋公 (baliuw & landrost or police officer, and landrost or bailiff of the Ommelanden) (1 occur.).

The Malay term **bicara** has several meanings: to talk, to discuss, to deliberate, to litigate. This diversity of meanings explains why it appears no less than five times in the Malay version, and three times in the Chinese rendition. This term was also extensively used in the *Gongan bu*, as well as **bicara cu** or House of Deliberations.43 As regards the composite expression **bicara cu** (cu in Minnan hua meaning house), during the period of the VOC, it was used to refer to the Collegie van Heeren Scheppenen or College of Magistrates or Gentlemen Aldermen, and after 1800, to refer to a law court. In the Malay version, Collegie van Heeren Scheppenen is rendered by a long periphrasis which reads: *perhimpunan tuan2 yang memegang hukum bicara merdehika dalam negeri* or “the association of gentlemen who hold the law of speaking freely in the country.” Later, this periphrasis was replaced by the expression **gedung bicara**, doublet of **bicara cu**, and still in use with the sense of Law court, alongside **gedung pengadilan**. The composite expressions **nei wai tumenggung** also appear in the *Gongan bu*, the latter spelled 內外澹扳公.44 Its equivalents in the Malay version are *bilyu dan temenggung luar*.

All these Malay borrowings show enough the difficulties encountered by the translators in rendering an administrative system terminology that was often rather obscure to them.

Dedicated expressions

**Wangshang** 王上, His Majesty (the king) to designate the Governor General (2 occurrences), on the model of **Huangshang** 皇上, His Majesty (the emperor).

**Shangtai** 上臺, The Superiors, to make reference to the Councils of India (5 occur.)

These two expressions were aimed at showing respect for the authorities. **Wangshang** was still in use during the first half of the 19th century in an unedited manuscript translation entitled “Rules for the Chinese Orphans’ Room (Weeskamer)” *Huaren meisegan tiaoli* 華人美色甘條例. However, the *Gongan bu* and the *Kai ba lidai shiji* had in the meantime opted for a transcription of the term governor-general.

Chinese Text and its English Translation

Transcript

We have punctuated the text, numbered the lines according to the original, and for a few characters, added the standard forms in square brackets.

[1] 抄奉


[5] 王令不得擅自抗違。如有抗違, 買罰錢二百文。將起蓋, 登時毀拆。為此示知城內外人等, 不論何人如樜廍酒灶 [灰] 瓦磚枋棚以炤舊為止, 不許從新創置, 或有起蓋未成者, 當入字啟請。

[6] 上臺查勘, 裁奪去留。如過月不報者, 登時買罰, 並將原蓋毁拆。又有住公班咗園地及山者, 或係班租, 或係自置, 或係自貿易, 以致嘧喳唠破家負債, 至於脫迯。


[8] 上臺謹定此案, 新令傳諭通國各色人等, 不論何人如樜廍酒灶 [灰] 瓦磚枋棚以炤舊為止, 不許從新創置, 或有起蓋未成者, 當入字啟請。


[10] 和蘭國壹仟陸佰玖拾陸年俞尼月 日給

English Translation

[1] Copy of the Act

[2] The Governor General (王上) and the Councils [over India] (諸上臺) have taken a decision after deliberation (bicara 嘴嘔嘔); this new decree is issued for the information of all kinds of people of the country.

45. The Dutch text reads: de Raden over den Staat van de Generale Nederlandse Geoctroijeerde oost-Indische Compagnie in India or “the Councils over the State of the General Netherlands Chartered East-India Company in India;” in the Malay translation: segala Raden fan India yang empunya perintah atas prihal Kompeni Wilanda dalam India or “all the councils of India which exert a control on the Company.”
Be it known that inside the state of Batavia (Baguo 吧國), sugar mills, arrack distilleries, chalk burners, brick and tile kilns, and workshops⁴⁶ are already very numerous, and their number increases every day. Before long, we will run out of firewood. [3] How will it be supplied in the future? Such a shortage will result in quarrels, competing against each other, court summons (bicara), family destruction, indebtedness, and flight for debt. Such facts have already been heard and witnessed by the Councils. This is why they were forced to deliberate (bicara) and take decisions that we hasten to communicate to the population to make them diligent. From now on, nobody is permitted to construct or to complete sugar mills, arrack distilleries [4], chalk burners, brick and tile kilns, and workshops; if someone has started such a construction, he must apply to the authorities for permission.

[5] The Governor General’s decree cannot be violated. In the event of transgression, a fine of 200 wen or rixdollars will be imposed, and the constructions dismantled. For the purpose of informing those inside and outside the city who have individually or in cooperation erected such constructions, the bicara cu 喼喳唠厝 or College of Magistrates will proclaim this ordinance and post it on the main city doors. Within one month after the date of the proclamation, [6] those who inside the city have constructed or rented such enterprises have to report their names, addresses, and the date at which these constructions were rented or made to the secretaris or secretary of the bicara cu or College of Magistrates, Yohanes Mouris (噠喳唠厝上諸葛礁毛里氏); those who are living outside of the city will report to the secretaris or secretary of the Heem Raad,⁴⁷ or District Council, Samuel Hoorn (欣勿勞諸葛礁三勿和屢), [7], this in order to facilitate the investigations and decisions of the authorities. If, after one month, no report is made, the infringer will be fined and his construction will be destroyed. And there are those who live in the gardens and hills of the Compagnie (公班哖), awaiting an authorization letter, renting, or as an owner, [8], the councils have given them a six-month limit to report to the Heem Raad (欣勿労)⁴⁸ or District Council(s). Those who do not get a written permission and continue to live and cut wood on the Compagnie’s gardens and hills illegally, will be punished by a fine of two hundred wen or rixdollars. If the penalty is not paid, then the law will be applied, and credit will not be tolerated.[9] The Councils of India have ordered the fiscaal (美錫葛) or public prosecutor, the police officer and the bailiff (内外淡枋公) to attend to the carrying out of the above mentioned. In order to enforce this

⁴⁶. If we understand the character fang (Hokkien: hong)枋 as its homophone坊. The original Dutch version has hout-sagerijen and the Malay one pegergajian kayu, which both mean “lumber mills.”

⁴⁷. In the Dutch text: secretaries van Heeren [College] van Heemraden deser ommelanden or Secretary of the District Council of these environs.

⁴⁸. In the Dutch text, we find the plural form Heeren Heemraden.
decree, texts in Dutch, Chinese, Malay and Javanese should be advertised in accordance to the decree; these tasks should be carried out without negligence. Special notification.
[10] Issued on Dutch year 1696, June…, day…

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This interpretative translation is of great interest for the historian. It provides concrete information on a case of language mediation in relation to a VOC decree aimed more specifically at Chinese entrepreneurs and craftsmen in Batavia and its ommelanden. This allows us to glimpse the recurrence of this type of administrative dialogue and its impact on the vocabulary by the introduction of numerous loanwords, but also the way in which the Batavia Chinese were led to reflect the social reality they were confronted with, by adapting their language accordingly. If, for the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, other tri- or quadrilingual placards were to be discovered in the archives, this would make it possible to study the evolution of interpretation over time, and to reconsider the supposed “inferior” status of interpretative translations.

Judging by the accounts of two Minnan scholars, Cheng Rijie 程日炌 (1709-1747) and Wang Dahai 王大海, who came to teach in Java respectively in the 1730s and 1780s, the Minnan hua of Java quickly spread beyond the borders of the island. It seems that the inhabitants of Southern Fujian had developed a taste for Malay and Dutch borrowings too, judging from the number of loans introduced by the two literati in their accounts. Indeed, these two scholars did not hesitate to sprinkle their narratives with terms borrowed from the Minnan hua of Java. Cheng who wrote just after the massacre of the Chinese in 1740, at the request of senior official Cai Xin 蔡新 (1707-1799, Zhangpu 漳浦, Fujian), provides a very informative presentation of Kelapa 喀喇吧 (former name of Batavia) in which he introduces no less than eighteen loanwords, among which that of Compagnie spelled gongbanya 公班衙, 49 which was used in China to refer to the VOC, the East India Company and the Compagnie française des Indes orientales (French East India Company). 50 As for Wang Dahai, he wrote on his own initiative an instructive account on insular countries in which he introduced a great many loans, more than eighteen. 51