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## Mandarin lessons: modernity, colonialism and Chinese cultural nationalism in the Dutch East Indies, c.1900s

Siew-Min SAI

### ABSTRACT

The Chinese Association in the Dutch East Indies, known locally as the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK) was first established in Batavia in 1900. A key objective of the THHK's foundation was the creation of modern schools instructing in Mandarin for local Chinese students. At the turn of the 20th century, this odd choice of instructional language led to highly charged debates about languages, pedagogical efficacy, practicality, modernity-tradition and cultural authenticity. Using underutilized source materials in the local Malay-Hokkien vernacular, this article revisits these debates amongst the Chinese in the Dutch colony. This article interrogates the transparency of common ethnicity in analyses of Chinese nationalisms that developed outside of continental China. Drawing on the concept of "literary governance" as well as comparative work by scholars on Indian and continental Chinese nationalisms, it demonstrates the significance of the colonial context which provoked the THHK to adopt the vocabulary of modernity in reworking progressive ideas circulating in displaced Chinese nationalistic circles. Notwithstanding the THHK's promotion of Mandarin, such reworking was accomplished through vigorous acts of transliteration and translation in the hybridized Malay-Hokkien vernacular. The THHK was hardly on the receiving end of nationalistic influences emanating from the proverbial China core but was an active agent in what has been described as a "global moment of Chinese nationalism." The case of the THHK demonstrates the need for a finer understanding of multivalent histories of Chinese nationalisms as well as how these histories intersected with those of European colonialism in Southeast Asia.

### KEYWORDS

Mandarin; Chineseness;  
Chinese cultural nationalism;  
literary governance;  
modernity; colonialism

### Introduction

The Chinese Association in Java, known locally as the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK) was first established in Batavia in 1900. The idea of establishing a THHK was subsequently embraced by Chinese communities elsewhere in Java and the rest of the Dutch East Indies (DEI). The THHK was a self-consciously modernist movement and this was reflected in its founding objectives: it sought to eradicate what was regarded as backward Chinese customs and superstitions, promote a culturally authentic yet rational belief system which it found in Confucianism and establish modern schools for local Chinese students. Teaching Mandarin was considered a crucial element in the THHK's proposed education reforms and in the larger scheme of things, a critical point in its attempt to reform local Chinese society. The THHK has long been studied by leading scholars in the field of Chinese Indonesian Studies. Much fruitful work has been done analysing the THHK as a project in cultural revivalism amongst Java's Chinese (Lohanda 2002), as a Confucianist (Coppel 1981) and as an

overseas Chinese nationalist movement (Williams 1960). More recently, scholars have also investigated the movement's cross-border connections with Singapore, South China, Japan and even America (Frost 2005; Kwartanada 2013).

Notwithstanding the breadth of existing literature on the THHK in Indonesian history and despite the focus of this scholarship on the education reforms it had spearheaded, the language reforms the THHK championed remain misconstrued. This article revisits a long-standing issue in the THHK's history – its adoption of Mandarin as the language of instruction, surely an odd choice given that Mandarin was virtually a foreign tongue for all of the DEI's Chinese communities in the 1900s. Arguing against commonplace impressions of Mandarin and its presumed signification of transparent Chineseness, I suggest that the THHK's Mandarin curriculum must be aligned to its progressive agenda and ultimately, to its invocation of a culturally authentic modernity in the DEI. Instead of situating the THHK as part of an overseas Chinese nationalist movement, I argue that the THHK's gesturing toward Mandarin reveals its participation in what China historian Rebecca Karl (2002) calls the global moment of Chinese nationalism. Far from communicating the cogency of Chineseness, the THHK's Mandarin curriculum was a novel, tentative and incomplete experiment in becoming modernized Chinese in a Dutch colony. So novel was this experiment that the very name and meaning of "Mandarin" was by no means fixed. Bearing in mind the nascent emergence of Chinese nationalism on the global stage and absence of any standardized forms of Mandarin at this juncture, this article attempts a careful look at the curious introduction of Mandarin in a Dutch colony. The case of the THHK's language reforms raises the kinds of questions literary scholar Jing Tsu has asked with regards to the linguistic integrity of the Chinese language; specifically, how it tends to be defined by the standardized sound of Beijing Mandarin and materialized in standardized traditional or simplified script which, she argues, fails to capture the language's fragmented and multiple presences in the world. Tsu (2010) uses the concept of "literary governance" to analyse the permutations of Chinese language and literature in a variety of locations outside of continental China. I suggest that the concept not only permits a discussion of the THHK's language reforms from yet another diasporic location but also enables a fuller view of the colonial environment driving and constraining the impulses of the THHK's leaders for language reforms, thus allowing us to better appreciate the entanglement of histories of Chinese nationalism with those of colonialism in South-east Asia.

### **Why not "overseas Chinese nationalism"?**

The concepts of "overseas Chinese nationalism" and a "Chinese diaspora" – the notion that there existed either a unified long-distance Chinese nationalist movement or a homogeneous global Chinese community outside of China – have been much criticized<sup>1</sup> (Wang 1991; Ang 2001). One unfortunate consequence of studying the THHK as part of an overseas Chinese nationalist movement or diaspora is to overplay its connection with developments in China and miss its germination within a colonial environment. The THHK movement would be easily recognizable by scholars of nationalism as a "cultural nationalist movement" that emerged, most commonly, in early phases of development of nationalism in many colonies. Cultural nationalists, as Hutchinson (1994, 124) defines, are preoccupied with the "moral regeneration of the historic community" and "the recreation of their distinctive national civilization." Hutchinson argues further that cultural nationalists, who insist on the uniqueness of their cultural grouping, would be focused on founding clubs, societies and journals with the aim of educating fellow members as well as outsiders about their distinctive civilizational heritage; they were uninterested in wresting power away from the colonizers. Appearing

politically toothless, scholars appreciate that cultural nationalism has political implications nonetheless. Prasenjit Duara (2002) argues that a “regime of cultural authenticity” is essential in demonstrating the right of collectivities to sovereign nationhood. Partha Chatterjee (1993) makes a similar point on the centrality of cultural authenticity to many Third World nationalisms, arguing that the imagination of a culturally distinctive modernity, typically juxtaposed against that of the colonizer, was a common feature of many Third World nationalisms. However, the colonizer-colonized and modernity-tradition divides played out differently across the world. Of relevance to this article is the discussion between scholars of China and India on the constitutive differences between Chinese and Indian nationalisms, which raises questions on the emergence and development of Chinese nationalistic movements in European colonies outside continental China.

Scholars comparing Indian and Chinese nationalisms argue that the two nationalisms are different on the question of modernity-versus-tradition because of India’s and China’s respective experiences of colonialism and semi-colonialism. Thus, in India, this issue was posed in much starker binary terms than in China. It was more difficult for Indian nationalists to either reject or embrace Western modernity completely. For this reason, Ashis Nandy (1988) describes British colonialism in India as an “intimate enemy,” an eloquent commentary on how colonialism was ingrained in the consciousness of Indian nationalist elites. China’s experience of semi-colonialism on the other hand, meant that colonialism had not always been a central issue for China’s nationalists, allowing them to adopt more variegated ideological positions with regards to the modernity-versus-tradition issue. Scholars often cite the example of Chinese intellectuals labelling and rejecting China’s past as “feudalistic” and their whole-hearted embrace of Western science and democracy during the May Fourth period as a significant comparative point with India (Seth 2013; Shih 2001; Duara 1995). Apparently, this would be inconceivable in India. Shih Shu-mei’s description of China’s semi-colonial condition is instructive. While China historians have objected to the imprecision of the term “semi-colonialism” (Goodman and Goodman 2012), Shih uses “semi-colonialism” not to suggest that China’s experience of colonialism was less intense or severe when compared with full-fledged colonies but to “foreground the multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China’s colonial structure” (Shih 2001, 34). Apart from the fact that unlike many Third World countries that underwent systematic and formal colonization, China did not evolve a centralized colonial state establishing extensive institutions and implementing policies, Shih argues that “China’s linguistic integrity – China was never forced to supplant its native language with a colonial one and its official language remains Chinese – is cultural proof for the incompleteness of colonialism in China” (Shih 2001, 34). Such comparative work pushes us to consider the differences between nationalism stemming from and directed primarily at the creation of a Chinese nation-state, on one hand, and Chinese cultural nationalism that took root in a full-fledged European colony, on the other. In addition, not direct European colonization but Qing imperialism constituted the immediate environment under which late Qing reformists and nationalists in continental China laboured. This difference and how it could have impacted nationalists operating inside and outside continental China leads us to question whether “overseas Chinese nationalism” in the European colonies in Southeast Asia was mainly a long-distance version of China-centred nationalism. Were these nationalisms categorically the same species?

One way of answering these questions is to re-examine the language issue. Language being the most visible marker of identity, the THHK’s attempt to teach in Mandarin is viewed by scholars as incontrovertible evidence of China-induced nationalism in the DEI’s Chinese communities. While they offer no explanation for what motivated the THHK to resort to Mandarin instruction, scholars tend to gloss over the decision by simply stating that Mandarin became the “national

language” or *guoyu* of the new Chinese republic (Suryadinata 1972; Govaars-Tjia 2005). Not only does this anachronistic interpretation of the THHK’s choice of Mandarin misrepresent the dissemination of ideas between China and the THHK movement, it assumes that the allure of the Chinese national language had simply been overpowering. Examining the career of the Chinese national language in multiple locations outside of continental China, Jing Tsu (2010) unpacks the naturalized alignment of the concepts of national language, mother tongue and linguistic nativity. Refusing to take linguistic nativity or the integrity of the Chinese language for granted, Tsu proposes that instead of approaching language as if it is a natural container for *an* identity, language should be analysed as a “medium of access” (Tsu 2010, 13). Using the concept of “literary governance,” Tsu explains:

[Literary governance] arises whenever there is an open or veiled, imposed or voluntary coordination between linguistic antagonisms and the idea of the “native speaker.” It develops from both local and global tensions between the ongoing political and material processes of how one accesses a language and script through learned orthography, on one hand, and the continual reliance on a notion of a primary, naturalized linguistic home like the “mother tongue” to support expressions of cultural belonging, on the other. (Tsu 2010, 2)

Although Tsu uses the word “governance,” she does not mean top-down or state-directed control of language changes and reforms but refers to the ways in which “linguistic alliances and literary production organize themselves around incentives of recognition and power” (Tsu 2010, 12). Thus, a clear strength of literary governance is its applicability to a range of informal or non-state individuals and groups whose connections to one or numerous centres of power are amorphous. The THHK language reforms in the early 1900s can be understood as an example of literary governance.

The THHK had adopted a Mandarin curriculum in the early 1900s way before Mandarin was declared the national language of the Republic of China. The history of how Beijing Mandarin became China’s national language is so convoluted that Mandarin is still referred to by different Chinese names in the different Chinese-speaking areas: *guoyu* (national language) in Taiwan; *putonghua* (common language) in the People’s Republic of China and *huayu* (the Chinese language) in parts of Southeast Asia. It was only in February 1913 that the Ministry of Education of the new Chinese Republic organized a “Conference on Unification of Pronunciation” with the aim of standardizing language use, especially spoken Chinese. On the subject of what sounds to adopt as the national standard, conference participants were split into two camps roughly divided between those who spoke Mandarin topolects and thus advocated using Mandarin as the standard and those who spoke a variety of Southern Chinese topolects who preferred a standardized pronunciation drawn from the South. The Conference was deadlocked on the issue but the Mandarin advocates managed to manipulate the voting system and got their way. This is not the end of the story. The Conference failed to decide which of the Mandarin topolects should constitute the standard pronunciation or what should be the standardized Mandarin pronunciation. In 1919, the Ministry of Education published a dictionary that attempted to settle the issue but it prescribed “an abstract ideal that not a single person in the country spoke as his native idiom” (Ramsey 1987, 9). At this moment, few in China could speak this standardized Mandarin. Fewer still knew how to teach it. Years later, the National Language Commission decided to take the commonsensical way out and adopted the natural speech of a single topolect – Beijing Mandarin – as the national standard. It then published the *Vocabulary of National Pronunciation for Everyday Use* in 1932. Thus, “with no fanfare and without official notification of any change, the standard language for all of China became the variety of Mandarin spoken in Peking” (Ramsey 1987, 10). Given this history, it is intriguing that the THHK had already adopted a Mandarin curriculum when it established schools in the 1900s. Even more striking

was the scale of their efforts. By 1906, well over 20 schools modelled on the THHK school in Batavia were established in Java. By 1911, 93 such schools were established all over the DEI, including Sumatra, Makassar and Pontianak (Salmon 1971, 64–65). At a time when the Chinese nation-state was virtually non-existent while Beijing Mandarin as the national language had yet to be legislated into being, it is apt to take Tsu's cue and ask why, under what conditions and with what consequences did the THHK attempt to access Mandarin in Java in the early 1900s?

### Progressing with Mandarin

Tan Kik Djoen, who was President of the THHK in Malang (East Java) was one of the first THHK leaders to provide a complete published account detailing the THHK's rationale for using Mandarin in their schools in May 1904. Tan wrote that the THHK leaders made this decision after weighing the pros and cons of teaching in Mandarin on one hand and in the regional languages of the Southern Chinese provinces of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou – the two main areas from where the majority of the Chinese in Java originated – on the other. Tan's explanation clustered around three themes, that of pedagogy, practicality and authenticity of identity. Explanations centred on all or a combination of these three themes, were frequently used by THHK leaders as reasons for promoting Mandarin instruction. Of the three themes, scholars have paid least attention to pedagogy. Yet the THHK's pedagogical rationale would reveal much about its engagement with reformist ideas emanating from displaced Chinese intellectuals and reformers. Tan argued that acquiring literacy in Chinese would be easiest if students were taught using Mandarin because “Mandarin was spoken as it was written and did not require translation, unlike in the case of the Quanzhou language” (*Kabar Peristiwa*, henceforth *KP*, 18 and 19 May 1904)<sup>2</sup>. Tan's intriguing statement was a reference to the proposition of “unification of speech and writing” (*yan wen yi zhi*), which had tremendous cachet amongst language reformers in late Qing China. Adapted from the Japanese and popularized by Chinese poet and diplomat Huang Zunxian, language reformers in China were influenced by Huang who argued that education reform in China was impeded by the long-standing separation between classical Chinese writing and everyday speech. Huang further encouraged the use of vernacular writing in the regional topolects in public education so that speech and script could be unified, which would facilitate the spread of literacy (Kaske 2008, 91–93). Tan's explanation that, unlike the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou topolects, written and spoken Mandarin was unified was somewhat misleading. However, it points to the THHK's familiarity with the work of a group of language reformers close to Liang Qichao and Wang Kangnian, who were experimenting with developing a written vernacular Mandarin that facilitated mass literacy in China. From the very beginning, these language reformers recognized the potential vernacular Mandarin had over other types of topolect-based writing to become a language of national scale in China. Privileging Mandarin, they adapted the vernacular Mandarin form conventionally used for writing novels and fiction to produce newspaper articles and textbooks aimed at popularizing new forms of knowledge. Of this group of language reformers, one by the name of Qiu Tingliang expressed arguments for language reforms that converged with those put forth by the THHK. These included doing away with classical Chinese and rote learning, hastening Chinese language acquisition through teaching vernacular Mandarin, developing clear thinking and training of young minds as well as promoting access to Confucian classics and new knowledge<sup>3</sup> (Kaske 2008, 101–114).

On the second theme of practicality, Tan pointed out that Mandarin had greater numbers of users not only in China but could be used to communicate with Chinese communities settled in Japan, America and Europe whereas usage of the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou topolects was confined to a

smaller region in China. The use of Mandarin amongst Chinese communities overseas, especially Chinese teachers and students living in Japan, was significant for Tan because the association had plans to build a tertiary institution where graduates of THHK schools could be trained as lawyers, engineers, doctors and other professions. The THHK planned to hire Chinese teachers trained in Japan who would instruct in Mandarin. It was thus imperative for Indies Chinese students to know this language. Tan further opined that proficiency in Mandarin opened more doors for THHK students to pursue further studies in China, Japan and even America. Finally, he expressed the idea that literacy in Chinese ensured cultural unity and authenticity as Indies Chinese would be able to access the writings of Confucius directly in written Chinese.

In a speech in 1905, Tan Kim San, one of the founder leaders of the THHK in Batavia stressed the themes of practicality and cultural authenticity. Tan debunked the “myth” of the superiority of European languages, reasoning that the majority of Indies Chinese had been denied Dutch language education for so long, yet Indies Chinese had thrived in the colony. The sheer numbers of those literate in the Chinese script (“600 million human beings,” according to Tan), the longevity of the script that had kept China unified for “thousands of years” as well as the potential of reading Confucius’ writings in Chinese were some of the reasons Tan Kim San listed for learning the language. Tan argued that “education is not only needed to earn a living but is necessary for the progress of a nation-race (*bangsa*)” (KP, 27 April 1905). European nations-races, Tan claimed, were keen to spread their influence through promoting education in their own languages. The English implemented education in the English language when they took over Transvaal from the Boers and the Americans had provided education in their own language in the Philippines. Cognizant that language was an intensely politicized tool for generating cultural subjugation, Tan pointed out that language created pre-dispositions to loyalty and identity: “whoever learns English will become partial to the English nation-race, to the extent of praising the English nation-race over and above one’s own ... Chinese people who throw away Chinese lessons damage the interests and lower the dignity of the Chinese nation-race” (KP, 27 April 1905). Tan used the Malay word “*bangsa*” in the original text which is often translated as “nation” in contemporary English. As Anthony Reid (2010) observes, the word “*bangsa*” could be translated equally as “race or nation” and remain an emotive word evocative of deep devotion to one’s national-racial grouping. This was evident from Tan’s speech. Reid writes that while it sounds “shocking” to translate “*bangsa*” as “race” and only “acceptably patriotic” to translate “*bangsa*” as “nation” in contemporary English, the concepts of race and nation were not distinguished in 19th-century English. They are still not distinguished to contemporary Malay language users today<sup>4</sup> (Reid 2010, 7). Clearly echoing his colleague Tan Kik Djoen, Tan Kim San was appealing to a larger, global Chinese national-racial imaginary. Tan Kim San’s speech blended practical arguments about learning Chinese with dire warnings of damaged national-racial prestige accompanying anticipated cultural loss. Tan, who was a fluent English speaker himself, made no bones about why languages are at the heart of modern nationalisms.

Tan Kim San and Tan Kik Djoen, however, were not the THHK leaders credited for originating the idea of Mandarin lessons. In THHK history, this honour was given to Phoa Keng Hek, the President of the Batavian THHK. Phoa was not a Mandarin speaker and by all accounts, probably never learned it. Educated by Dutch missionaries, Phoa hailed from a prominent Chinese family long settled in the Indies. More so than the two Tans, Phoa rallied the Indies Chinese community around a forward-looking agenda, using this clarion call to advocate for learning Mandarin. In an open letter addressed to the Batavian Chinese community in July 1900, Phoa wrote that the organization was set up for the following purposes: first, to rid the local Chinese community of burdensome beliefs and practices; second, to propagate Chinese customs, knowledge and language. The THHK planned to

achieve these goals through promoting Confucianism. Phoa justified the adoption of Confucianism on grounds of its respectability not only amongst the Chinese but also for “Europeans who were well-respected as a civilized people” (cited in Nio 1940, 201). Phoa further revealed that from its inception, the THHK had planned to establish a school to teach “the script and language of the Chinese with a *new method* used by schools in China and Japan, that is, a pedagogically efficacious method that hastened Chinese language acquisition” (cited in Nio 1940, 202, emphasis added). Sometime later in 1907, Phoa elaborated that this “new method” consisted of teaching in Mandarin whereas the “old method” used in the traditional academy, known locally as the “Gie Oh,” taught students how to read in the Hokkien topolect using an old curriculum based solely on the Confucian classics (Kwee 1969). Phoa boasted that instruction in Mandarin was the main reason for the immense popularity of THHK schools and the phenomenal revival of the Chinese language all over the Indies. Apparently, when the Batavian THHK school was first set up, the THHK had hired a teacher who instructed in Mandarin. What took four to five years with the “old method” could be taught in less than a year with the “new method.” The efficacy of the new method was witnessed by the Chinese Council<sup>5</sup> (*Kong Koan*) leaders who held a competition to test the language proficiency of students from the two schools. When THHK students won the competition, the Council shut down the *Gie Oh* and transferred all its students and financial support to the Batavian THHK school. Upon learning the result of the competition, Chinese communities elsewhere became enthusiastic about learning Mandarin. Thus, the THHK school movement spread far and wide in the Dutch colony (KP, 13 March 1907).

To sum up, for THHK leaders, Mandarin lessons mediated their access to a culturally genuine modernity. Mandarin instruction was rational, pedagogically efficient and utilitarian since they supposed it was used by a greater number of people. New Chinese intellectual and professional classes who were in particular educated overseas, were experimenting, translating, producing and disseminating new knowledge in Mandarin for the rest of the Chinese nation-race, knowledge that could then be potentially unified with Mandarin language usage. To the THHK, these were clearly signs of the progressive character of vernacular Mandarin that reflected positively on their self-identification as “kaoem moeda” (progressive youth). Phoa’s narrative of Mandarin’s triumph in the Indies was illustrative of the THHK’s single-minded belief in the language’s modernity as their faith in Mandarin was articulated through popular local discourses structured around “old-new,” “young-old” and “tradition-modernity” dichotomies. These dichotomies functioned as signposts in public debates on modernity in the Indies, in the process animating the self-conscious identity of the THHK reformers as part of a progressive force in the DEI.

William Roff offers a useful exposition of “kaoem moeda” – and its dichotomous opposite, “kaoem toea” or “kaoem koeno” (the conservative old) – amongst Malay-Muslims in the early 20th century in Malaya. Originating from the Islamic reformist movement, *kaoem moeda* and *kaoem toea* functioned as labels and could be used positively for advocacy purposes or pejoratively to caricature one’s opponents (Roff 1962). Thus, *kaoem moeda* could be used to praise or disparage those advocating change and advancement while *kaoem toea* was used to praise or disparage those who wanted the status quo maintained. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Taufik Abdullah (1971) studied the use of *kaoem moeda* and *kaoem toea* amongst the Minangkabaus in Sumatra. Abdullah writes that “moeda” (youth) was used to either symbolize “progress” in a positive sense or was used negatively to mean “rootless” whereas “toea” (old) could mean the “backward and conservative” or it could also mean “tradition” in an affirmative way. Indies Chinese use of *kaoem moeda* and *kaoem toea* kept the general meanings attached to the terms as described by Roff and Abdullah but lacked references to Islamic reformism. Be that as it may, Adam Ahmat (1995) observes that



the THHK's efforts to revive a rational and textual Confucianism shorn of "superstitious" beliefs and practices paralleled the objectives of the Islamic reformist movement.

*Kaoem moeda* and *kaoem toea* existed in a discursive force field invigorated by the meta-notion of "kemadjoean" (progress) and its multiple equivalents such as "uplifting," "development," "upbringing" and "promotion of welfare," among others. As Takashi Shiraishi puts it, this was an age where the Indies was literally "on the move"; "progress" in Malay conveyed the additional meaning of physical motion, i.e. of advancing forward literally (Shiraishi 1990, 27). Ahmat provides a concise understanding of progress in the Dutch colony, one that carried recognizable marks of the Dutch Ethical project. He writes:

[Progress] meant an elevation of one's social status [whether as an individual, a community, or a nation-race] in such important fields of life as the economic, social, cultural, and political. [Progress] was also understood to entail many other things: educational progress, enlightenment, civilization, modernization, and success in life. One had attained [progress] when one was no longer regarded as inferior, especially by a non-native. For the young intellectuals [progress] had to be pursued by Indonesians if they wished to be respected as civilized people. In order to achieve this, the Indonesians had to acquire knowledge through Western-style education. (Adam 1995, 80)

Yet, like Chatterjee's cultural nationalists, the *kaoem moeda* – Chinese and Islamic alike – were not satisfied with Dutch-authored progress but sought a culturally and religiously genuine modernity. For this reason, Japan became a favourite model of non-European modernity for both the Indies Chinese and Islamic reformers (Laffan 2003). Japan appealed to the THHK leaders because they could draw on ideas, programmes, personnel and resources from Japan. Phoa himself had specifically mentioned that the Chinese script was used widely outside China, including "Singapore, Penang and Japan" (*KP*, 13 March 1907).

The THHK's pursuit of a culturally genuine modernity assumed urgency because Chinese communities in the DEI were impacted by momentous changes as the 20th century dawned. The Indies colonized population was divided into three racialized legal groups comprising of "Europeans," "Natives" and "Foreign Orientals." Fasseur (1994) compares this racial order to the apartheid in South Africa, describing it as a "cornerstone" of the Dutch colonial state. Race was deeply embedded in Dutch legislation, judicial practice and executive policy, supporting an elaborate structure of rules and regulations. Since 1854, Indies Chinese were legally classified, along with Arabs and Japanese as "Foreign Orientals," a category equated with the "Natives." As "Foreign Orientals," the Chinese encountered differential treatment and legal inconsistency. To safeguard European business interests, "Foreign Orientals" were subjected to the European Civil and Commercial Code but not the European Criminal Code, which would have afforded them protection such as provisions against arbitrary arrest. "Foreign Orientals" were slapped with additional restrictions; they had to live within racially demarcated quarters and districts in the cities, were not permitted to travel beyond these districts without applying for passes and were legally obliged to wear their "national" costumes, i.e. they were banned from wearing "European" clothing.<sup>6</sup> Except for individual and exceptional cases, very few Indies Chinese were given "European" status. When the Japanese defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the Dutch government signed a treaty with Japan giving all Japanese nationals in the Indies "European status." The legal re-categorization of an entire comparable group irked Indies-born Chinese who saw themselves languishing in the "Foreign Oriental" category. Now that the Japanese had set a precedent, the Chinese would agitate for the next 50 years for similar collective equalization with the Europeans (Coppel 2002).

Intertwined with the issue of legal status was the massive impact of the Ethical Policy on the Indies Chinese. Promulgated in 1901 to reverse Dutch neglect of the welfare of the DEI's indigenous peoples, the government launched policies and schemes, especially in the area of education, so that indigenous society could also progress. The Ethical Policy permitted Dutch bureaucrats, journalists, writers and professionals to claim the moral high ground. In the self-righteous climate of the Ethical Policy, there was widespread condemnation of Indies Chinese as the "real exploiters" of the indigenous people. Within Dutch circles, as talk of the "welfare of the Natives" became exceedingly popular, anti-Chinese rhetoric also escalated. Contemporaneous Dutch commentators even described the anti-Chinese rhetoric in the Dutch press as a "journalistic crusade against the Chinese" (cited in Williams 1961, 38). In fact, for two whole months in March and April 1907, Phoa took to writing essays, spread over 10 instalments in the *KP*, responding vigorously to an instance of this "anti-Chinese journalistic crusade."

High on the agenda of the Ethical Policy was reform of the opium farm system which had been responsible for generating wealth and status for powerful Chinese men and their client networks. Official and public discussion on reforming Chinese opium farms was dominated by shrill discourses on colonial guilt and finger-pointing at Chinese opium farmers who were blamed for corrupting Dutch officials and indigenous society. Beginning from the late 1890s, the Dutch government began dismantling the Chinese opium farm system, thus destroying the backbone of Indies Chinese society. Eventually, the farms were replaced with a government-run Opium Regie. To protect the Opium Regie's operations, the government routed remnant influences of Chinese opium farmers and their runners by further tightening the pass and residential regulations in 1897 and 1900. In his classic study on Java's Chinese communities and the opium farm system, Rush describes the impact of this "Ethical attack" on Indies Chinese society as nothing short of "revolutionary." The changes the Chinese confronted went beyond catastrophic economic losses as "they had to fend for themselves amid a rapidly changing social and political milieu, one in which modernity had many faces and in which being Chinese became both more important and more complicated" (Rush 1990, 242).

The fall-out from the Ethical turn in Dutch colonial policy made the clamour for equalization with the Europeans for the Indies Chinese a pressing issue. These transformed circumstances as well as long-standing Chinese grievances about their nebulous position in the DEI motivated THHK leaders to articulate an understanding of culturally genuine modernity that Mandarin presumably facilitated. Unfortunately for the THHK, Mandarin could not be so easily lodged within the Babel-like environment of the DEI. The rest of this article will discuss the difficulties constraining the THHK. These difficulties exemplified the tensions of literary governance, underscoring the gaps between the tangible socio-political and material conditions under which the THHK laboured to introduce vernacular Mandarin and the THHK's reworking of Mandarin as the language of the Chinese nation-race.

### **Mandarin and the politics of languages**

The THHK was not alone in the region for championing Mandarin as part of its modernist agenda. There were close parallels and direct connections between the THHK movement and the Straits Chinese reform movement in Singapore led by the indefatigable Dr Lim Boon Keng, a Singapore-born British-trained doctor. The THHK's rationale for using Mandarin was cut from the same cloth as that proposed by Lim, although he and his supporters did not establish schools on the scale that the THHK managed to achieve. Lim's contribution to the THHK's promotion of Confucianism is

well-studied although much less is known about his extensive involvement in the THHK's endeavours in language reforms (Williams 1960; Coppel 1981). Lim assisted the Batavian THHK school in jumpstarting their programme by supplying a Mandarin teacher who was his personal Mandarin teacher in 1901. In 1906, when the THHK school in Semarang was threatened with strike action by five of its teachers, Lim sent three replacement teachers, including apparently his own father-in-law, the renowned China scholar Wang Naishang (*KP*, 6 August 1906). He made regular visits to Java where he gave public lectures stressing the importance of language, educational and social reforms for Indies Chinese. A particularly important visit took place between April and May 1906 when Lim replaced the visiting Qing envoy, Lauw Soe Kie, who was supposed to inspect THHK schools in the DEI in March 1906. Lauw, however, fell ill and Lim was invited to take Lauw's place. Between April and May 1906, Lim travelled all over Java to inspect more than 20 THHK schools, in the process providing us with an account of the THHK's educational reforms during the initial phase. Lim encouraged the movement further by visiting Chinese communities in Java that had not established a THHK school and managing to set up five more schools (*Straits Chinese Magazine*, September 1906). Lim's influence did not go unnoticed. Henri Borel, then the Dutch Adviser for Chinese Affairs, wrote about Lim's visit. Borel was surprised at Lim's ability to get the most conservative Chinese to donate generously to the THHK movement (*KP*, 1 and 7 June 1906). Lim even succeeded in getting several of Batavia's most prominent leaders to donate 100 guilders each to the Singapore Chinese Girls School at the end of this visit (*Singapore Free Press*, 23 May 1906).

In spite of Lim's influence, the resources and effort the THHK poured into Mandarin instruction, the language would not take root easily in the DEI. Shortly after Lim completed his Java-wide inspection of THHK schools and returned to Singapore, he wrote a report on the general state of the schools in Java. Lim's first-hand report gives us a rare assessment of the THHK's education reforms that had only been implemented for less than five years. Lim highlighted Chinese topolects as one main obstacle to the THHK's attempt to teach Mandarin. According to Lim, the THHK schools were "not yet perfect" because the majority hired teachers who used Chinese topolects, particularly Cantonese and Hakka but not Mandarin, as languages of instruction (*KP*, 27 July 1906). Additionally, Lim found that the syllabus and textbooks were not standardized across all schools. Schools imposing stringent rules on instructing in Mandarin had made much better progress than others that did not. Lim recommended that THHK teachers should be made to instruct purely in Mandarin without any mixing from Cantonese or Hakka. That Lim specifically singled out "the topolect problem" points to the difficulties of procuring teachers who were native or even competent speakers of Mandarin in the 1900s. In view of the THHK's boast that Mandarin instruction was pedagogically efficient, this requirement was imperative. In his memoir, Ang Yan Goan, who happened to be one of the first 40 students enrolled in the THHK school in Bandung (in West Java) when it was set up in 1905, offers another glimpse of how students were instructed in the early days of the THHK movement. Incidentally, Ang's school was inspected by Lim in April 1906. Ang's recollection attests to the accuracy of Lim's report. Ang recalled that the first teacher his school hired spoke Hakka rather than Mandarin. In 1908, three years after the school started, Ang and his classmates were finally taught by two teachers who were properly trained in a teachers' training college in China but they too did not speak Mandarin (Hong 1989). Lim's report and Ang's recollection demonstrate that the challenge posed by Chinese topolects was, in fact, two-fold: Mandarin was as alien to the Chinese children in Java as it was to the teachers hired to teach them, a consequence, undoubtedly, of using an experimental and non-existent standardized language at this point in time.

The problem of absence of a standardized instructional language on the ground would be complicated further by the politics of the *kaodem moeda-kaodem toea* split when the THHK became

embroiled in an open break with the Chinese Council. The relationship between the THHK and the Council in Batavia was incredibly intricate. Core leaders of the THHK in Batavia (and elsewhere) were invariably Chinese officers or moved in their circles, if not related by familial ties to the officers. Phoa Keng Hek, for instance, was the son of a Chinese lieutenant. Of the 20 founding members of the Batavian THHK, five were officers of the Council in Batavia (Lohanda 1996, 139). The Batavian THHK also made the top man of the Council, Major Tio Tek Ho, the patron of their organization (Nio 1940, 203). However, the relationship between the THHK and the Council was fraught with tension because of the *kaem moeda-kaem toea* divide. Although several Chinese officers became founder members of the THHK, Major Tio was “closer to the conservative Chinese” (Lohanda 1996, 144). During the years when Major Tio headed the Council, its relationship with the THHK was strained. Conservative officers were upset that the THHK leaders objected to maintaining an altar to worship Confucius since the THHK was opposed in principle to any worshipping using candles and incense (Kwee 1969). Another bone of contention was the perceived “THHK takeover” of the *Gie Oh*. While the matter of the *Gie Oh* and language of instruction appeared closed by 1902 when the Council transferred its financial support to THHK schools, this resolution turned out to be superficial. Major Tio and his faction in the Council remained ambivalent about the THHK’s promotion of Mandarin. Major Tio’s brother, also a Council Officer, supported the position that the Chinese in Java should learn Malay and Dutch before they learnt Mandarin (*KP*, 28 April 1905). In October 1905, simmering tensions morphed into open conflict. Between 23 and 25 October 1905, the *KP* published a series of editorials complaining that Major Tio had gone on leave for too long and that the work at the Council had stalled. In view of Major Tio’s dereliction of duty, the *KP* proposed that a new Major be appointed (*KP*, 23, 24 and 25 October 1905). These commentaries triggered an instantaneous firestorm in Batavia. Believing that THHK leaders instigated the *KP*’s editorials, Major Tio was so incensed he unilaterally took out advertisements in the Batavian Malay press for two consecutive days on 30 and 31 October 1905, announcing that he had stepped down as the patron of the Batavia THHK (*Bintang Betawi*, 30 and 31 October 1905). Despite private and public pleading by Phoa and other THHK leaders, Major Tio remained unmoved (*KP*, 14 and 17 November 1905; *Bintang Betawi* and *KP* 7 December 1905).

Major Tio’s shock move and the public nature of his fallout with the THHK created ripple effects as the *Gie Oh*’s closure and language of instruction re-surfaced as matters courting debate and controversy. Thirty-six Chinese ward superintendents in Batavia requested that the Council resurrect the *Gie Oh*, stating that they preferred using the Hokkien and Hakka topolects as languages of instruction. Their rationale was that “these two languages were necessary and useful in the DEI and all Chinese should know them” (*Bintang Betawi* and *KP*, 30 December 1905). Following this request, the press speculated that the Council would stop subsidizing the Batavian THHK. In the midst of the controversy, the THHK reached for a compromise – it announced in January 1906 that THHK students who had reached an advanced level of Mandarin instruction would also be given lessons in Hokkien, Cantonese and the Hakka topolects. The announcement, however, was carefully scripted. The THHK stated that classes teaching literacy in the Chinese script would continue to be conducted in Mandarin and that these additional lessons in topolects would be given outside regular classroom hours (*KP*, 11 January 1906). Two months later, the THHK followed up with another deft move. Lauw Soe Kie and Lim Boon Keng had arrived in March to inspect the THHK schools. THHK leaders arranged for them to pay Major Tio a special visit in order to persuade him to support Mandarin lessons. Lauw and Tio reportedly managed to secure Major Tio’s pro forma agreement that “[Mandarin] was the language best suited for bringing about progress for the Chinese

nation-race” and that the Major was expected to support Mandarin lessons so that “[Mandarin] would become the language of the Chinese nation-race in this Age of Progress” (KP, 9 March 1906).

As long as THHK leaders regarded Mandarin lessons as pedagogically superior, a sign of progressive Chinese ways and an element of their *kaoem moeda* identity in the Indies, they could not but see non-Mandarin Chinese topolects as backward and a sign of conservatism, that is, of being *kaoem toea*. As the THHK’s fallout with Major Tio continued to ramify in Batavia in the early months of 1906, several youths who called themselves the “Kaoem Sin Tong” (the Progressive Faction) from a certain District “S” in “B” residency declared that they sought to set up a school modelled after the THHK school in their hometown. They called their new school “Tiong Hwa Soe Hian” (Modern Chinese Academy). Interestingly, the Kaoem Sin Tong claimed that they would use the Hakka topolect and Malay as the languages of instruction. The Kaoem Sin Tong described themselves as believers of progress and advancement but they preferred a step-by-step approach with Mandarin instruction. Reasoning that their small community did not possess the resources to adopt Mandarin entirely, they planned to use Hakka aided with Malay before switching over to Mandarin instruction eventually. Here was a group that like the THHK movement styled themselves as a progressive force. Yet their proposal to use Hakka supplemented with Malay as an interim measure was criticized by the KP who complained that as the Kaoem Sin Tong used “old-fashioned” methods and especially an “old-fashioned” name such as “Soe Hian” (academy), it could not see how this school was “progressive.” The Kaoem Sin Tong was therefore exhorted to join and become a branch of the THHK movement from the outset (KP, 2 December 1905 and 9 January 1906). Clearly, in the THHK’s definition of culturally authentic progress and modernity, non-Mandarin Chinese topolects did not occupy any legitimate space.

### **Mandarin and the language of translation**

Recall that the THHK leader Tan Kik Djoen had proposed the “unification of writing and speech” as a pedagogical argument for using vernacular Mandarin as the language of instruction. There were striking differences between how the THHK movement and late Qing reformers attempted to work out this pedagogical argument. In the first place, the unification of Chinese speech and script in the THHK classroom was secured by the supplementary function of Malay. In a typical THHK classroom, there was at least a “Goeroe Besar” (Senior Teacher) who was hired to teach in Mandarin while another teacher, who was called “Goeroe Pembantoe” (Assistant teacher) or “Goeroe Hoan Ek” (Translator-Teacher), would be hired for the sole purpose of translating between Mandarin and Malay. THHK students were tested on their ability to read and write Chinese as well as on their ability to translate between Chinese and Malay. For example, they had to identify Chinese words and be able to read out and demonstrate knowledge of their meanings in Malay. Conversely, they had to write out the Chinese characters for words read out in Malay.<sup>7</sup> It would be more accurate to describe the THHK’s purported “new method” of teaching the Chinese language as encouraging not so much the ability to speak Mandarin as the acquisition of literacy in Chinese through vernacular Mandarin, albeit supported by translation between Mandarin and Malay. The all-important mediating function of Malay was also evident in an early set of language primers written by a certain Chen Fu-chen in 1906. Chen was a teacher who taught at the THHK school in Batavia in 1906 and who subsequently became the principal of other THHK schools in West Java. In his Preface in the textbook, Chen wrote that he had taken into account translatability into Malay when designing the textbook (Chen [1912] 1930). The “supplementary” function of Malay – understood in the classic Derridean sense – was unmistakable in this instance, for Malay functioned under erasure to aid Chinese

students in the DEI in acquiring literacy in Chinese. Despite its translating function, there was virtually no publicity bestowed on Malay when THHK leaders trumpeted the virtues of Mandarin in enabling the unification of (Chinese) speech and writing. This crucial yet invisible translating role of Malay made it possible for the THHK movement to believe that their re/discovery of the Chinese language was culturally genuine.

Malay did not only perform a supplementary role in the THHK classroom; it was also the language through which Java's Chinese discoursed at length about "Chineseness," or for that matter, everything else in the public sphere. Malay had long provided Java's Chinese communities with an expressive vernacular that enabled them to capture the sounds of their native Hokkien topolect. At the turn of the 20th century, the Malay-Hokkien vernacular performed an invaluable function for it became the medium through which Indies Chinese came into contact with and reconfigured novel ideas of Chineseness. Ironically, while the THHK leaders promoted Mandarin, they and the rest of Java's Chinese were vicariously transliterating, translating and disseminating novel ideas they had encountered, quite plausibly in Mandarin, into romanized Malay-Hokkien. At the turn of the 20th century, new-fangled Malay-Hokkien neologisms proliferated in newspapers read by Chinese communities in the DEI. The iconic self-reference "Tionghoa" is an important example of these efforts. "Tionghoa" is the romanized Malay-Hokkien term for its Mandarin equivalent "Zhonghua." While "Zhong" and "Hua" are Chinese words with ancient vintage, the conjunction of "Zhonghua" is more recent, probably dating back to the 1890s with the rise of Chinese nationalism in continental China. Although *Tionghoa* was invented as Indies Chinese caught wind of nationalistic ideas, the term became used in a different way from its Mandarin equivalent. To Indies Chinese, *Tionghoa* communicated a modernized sense of being Chinese with the stress on the element of modernity. In China, on the other hand, *Zhonghua* was to accomplish a different ideological function. As China historians tell us, *Zhonghua* was invented as a means of re-imagining the territorial expanse of the Manchurian empire as a Han Chinese dominated nation-state while simultaneously encompassing the inherited non-Han Chinese elements since it was "patently clear that neither the Han people nor Han culture in fact 'permeated' all of this territory" (Elliott 2001, 361). Indeed, Elliott describes *Zhonghua* as the "best solution" to the problem of reconfiguring the Manchurian empire as a Chinese nation-state because it gained "tremendous resonance in the twentieth century as a term meaning 'the Chinese people' in its broadest sense, including Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, Uigher, and so on" (Elliott 2001, 361). It merits emphasis that *Tionghoa* did not and still does not possess the same resonance as *Zhonghua* since *Tionghoa* evokes a generalized, if flattened, sense of Chinese identity without conveying any elaboration of Han and non-Han Chineseness in the Indies and in Indonesia today.

Moreover, Aguilar notes that *Tionghoa* "acquired a popular currency by the 1910s, that is, much earlier on the mainland, where *Zhonghua* apparently began to be used extensively only since the 1930s." Oriented toward a hybridized linguistic environment, *Tionghoa* jostled with alternatives such as "Tjina," "huaqiao" (overseas Chinese or "Hoakiau" in Malay-Hokkien) and even the English word "Chinese" throughout the 20th century and into the contemporary period in Indonesia. Aguilar, who provides a genealogy of the contested term from the moment of its inception right through to present times, argues that the journey of *Tionghoa* and other cognate terms in Indonesia illustrated a history of how the Chinese were gradually excluded from the imagined Indonesian nation. This troubled genealogy entitles *Tionghoa* to a "distinctly Indies/Indonesian history," which, if I may stress, was tangential to the history of the *Zhonghua* nation-state. (The discussion and quotes in this paragraph are from Aguilar [2001, 511].)

Although *Tionghoa* remained alive in the Indonesian lexicon, many of the Malay-Hokkien words newly invented during the early decades of the 20th century and carrying novel ideas have disappeared by now. It bears reminding that *Tionghoa* surfaced and acquired its early meanings from a larger semantic universe animated by the transliteration, translation and dissemination of Chinese nationalistic ideas. In the 1900s, Indies Chinese routinely used the terms “tjia-im” or “tjeng-im” (as opposed to *baihua*<sup>8</sup>) to refer to vernacular Mandarin. “Tjia-im” literally translates as “the correct tone or pronunciation.” More precisely, it alludes to the correct pronunciation of “*guanhua*”, the spoken language of officialdom in Qing China, which the Qing rulers had decreed was the Beijing version of Mandarin. While Indies Chinese use of “tjia-im” appears historically accurate, it did not necessarily invoke a reformist ring (unlike *baihua*) or a nationalistic understanding of Mandarin. However, THHK reformers and their supporters were not content with letting “tjia-im” remain as such. Language reformers were interested in reworking “tjia-im” as “*kok-gi*”, another novel Malay-Hokkien word invented for the Mandarin *guoyu*. Language reformers like this anonymous author who self-identified with the modern-sounding *Tionghoa*, used the *nom de plume* *Tiong Hoa Djien* (literally a “Modern Chinese Person”, henceforth THD) to pen an essay arguing that “*tjia-im* is the *kok-gi* of the Chinese kingdom.” THD contended that *tjia-im* was not just “language used in the royal palace;” it was the “established language of the country that was understood and used by all officers of the government, therefore all reports, letters and books released by the Chinese government are written in Mandarin.” While THD described *tjia-im* as a language of authority, he also emphasized its progressive character. THD wrote that

people sent overseas to foreign countries for higher education, the majority of them are well-versed in Mandarin and if these scholars return [to China] with new learning and knowledge useful for the progress of the nation-race, they write books in Mandarin as Mandarin is the language of instruction used in schools set up by the government. We understand that those who are most intelligent, enlightened and progressive, many write books in Mandarin ... (KP, 16 February 1905)

The rest of THD’s essay combined descriptions of Mandarin and its “progressive-ness” with arguments about its practicality. THD reported that where pursuit of knowledge was concerned, Japan had already surpassed Europe. Much useful knowledge produced by Japan was written using the Chinese script and schools in Japan catered to Chinese students studying there by employing teachers who translated between Mandarin and Japanese. THD exhorted: “it is necessary that the Chinese people when they set up schools, the schools should instruct in Mandarin since they will find it easier to obtain teachers and books for their children” (KP, 16 February 1905).

Linguists and historians tracing the development of Mandarin as China’s national language remind us that China’s use of *guoyu* before the term was inflected decisively with the Japanese idea of *kokugo* (national language) carried a slightly different meaning. Victor Maier (1994, 726) writes that the first obvious application of *guoyu* with its meaning of a “vernacular language belonging to a nation in the sense of a people who saw themselves as a separate politico-ethnic entity” was used on a non-Sinitic group people known as the Tabgatch of the Northern Wei dynasty. According to Maier, this usage of *guoyu*, almost always in reference to a non-Sinitic people, held up throughout most of China’s history until the end of the Qing dynasty. Being a non-Sinitic people, the *guoyu* of the Qing dynasty was not Mandarin but the Manchu language. Like language reformers in the Indies, their counterparts in China were also interested in promoting Mandarin as the national language of the modern Chinese nation-state. However, given the status of the Manchu language as China’s official *guoyu*, it was more challenging for language reformers in China to rework Mandarin as modern China’s national language. For the same reason, the Qing government did not declare Mandarin to

be China's *guoyu* even as it promoted the use of Mandarin after 1901 when it launched its own educational reforms (Maier 1994; Kaske 2004). And so, *tjia-im* as *kok-gi* appeared to enjoy the same appeal as *Tionghoa* when these Malay-Hokkien terms were embraced with open enthusiasm amongst Indies Chinese earlier than in Republican China.

The supplementary function of Malay in Mandarin instruction led to significant differences in the way reformers in Java and continental China executed their respective language reforms. Late Qing reformers privileged experimentation with phonetic writing which some scholars observe was “central to the language reform enterprise” (Cheng 2001). Scholars have discovered the wild proliferation of proposals for different phonetic schemes. Jing Tsu (2010, 23), for example, writes that between 1892 and the 1910s, more than 30 script schemes were proposed. Given the alien sound of Mandarin to Java's Chinese communities, it would seem sensible for THHK leaders to turn to a phonetic or romanization scheme. Yet they did not trumpet such a scheme. There were no similar discussions amongst Indies Chinese over script reform, phonetic writing or the abolition of the Chinese script, subjects that were debated heatedly by late Qing reformers and nationalists. In fact, the THHK's language reforms were directed at acquiring literacy in the Chinese script, never its abolition. Tsu suggests that more phonetic schemes or proposals of new orthography could have surfaced outside of China. One such scheme Tsu discussed was invented in 1893 by a Mok Lai Chi, a Cantonese in Hong Kong. Citing another inquiry submitted to the *Phonetic Journal* by a Lim Koon Tye in 1892, Tsu (2010) mentions a fleeting interest in phonography from Singapore. Such early interest in phonetic writing in the region seems to have petered out by century's end. There is as yet no evidence that the THHK leaders picked up on this stillborn phonetic writing or used one to teach vernacular Mandarin.

## Conclusion

China historian Rebecca Karl (2002, 53) notes that after the failure of the Hundred Day Reforms in 1898, “a considerable portion of Chinese nationalist theorizing and mobilization took place outside the territorial bounds of the Qing empire, and the first targets of mobilization were often Chinese who resided outside of these boundaries.” Karl describes this early phase of Chinese nationalism as “a properly productive global moment” of Chinese nationalism (Karl 2002, 5). Not only were China's political exiles and their quarrels displaced from China, it was during this period that the so-called “overseas Chinese” intruded into the worldview of China's nationalists. Karl is critical of ethnocentric narratives that incorporate all “overseas Chinese” – the notorious term “*huaqiao*” did most of the ideological work – into the imagined Chinese nation-state, thereby transforming them into exemplary citizens. Taking a different approach, Karl argues that the reification of Chineseness, which made it possible for the figure of the patriotic *huaqiao* to emerge was itself enabled by radical reconfiguration of global space. Karl asserts that leading nationalist thinkers such as the restless Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen confronted and recognized the significance of spatial politics to colonial expansionism in their extensive travels. It is in conjunction with the most uneven colonized spaces of the world that China's early nationalists imagined the transcendental Chinese nation-state, *huaqiao* included. Karl's refreshing approach of posing global space under colonialism as a historical problematic for Chinese nationalism also provides a different angle for understanding Chinese cultural nationalists living precisely in these colonized spaces. As this article demonstrates, Chinese cultural nationalists such as the THHK movement were actively reconsidering their position as colonized Chinese subjects in a rapidly changing world but Karl's work remains focused on China-centred nationalists and intellectuals who had done much speaking about and on behalf of Chinese



communities residing outside continental China. Demonstrating the full extent of her point on the global moment of Chinese nationalism entails de-centring the geographical preoccupation on continental China to take into account the experiences of colonized Chinese subjects themselves.

This article has shown that Indies Chinese were attuned to reformist and nationalistic ideas transmitted through networks of displaced Chinese intellectuals, students, professionals and politicians examined by Karl. In attempting a project of standardization and purification of the language situation of the Chinese in the DEI, the THHK was responding to an immediate colonial context that impacted and shaped the movement in multiple ways. It was reacting to discriminatory Dutch policies at a critical moment of change in the political economy while at the same time drawing simultaneously on Dutch-authored discourses on modernity and the vocabulary of Southeast Asian Islamic reformism. The colonial context was, above all, immanent in the hybridized language environment that constituted the lived reality of the Indies Chinese, a crucial difference between the situation confronting Indies Chinese and that faced by late Qing reformers and nationalists in China. The linguistic environment in the Indies both enabled and constrained the THHK's language reforms in ways distinct from language reforms directed at creating the Chinese nation-state. When probed, these tensions radiating from the local and global contexts of the THHK's project of literary governance bring to the fore the different guises of what appears to be one uniform Chinese national language, enabling us to better account for distinctive histories of Chinese languages and nationalisms.

In recent years, some scholars have paid more attention to how the Chinese overseas have "struck back at the mainland." This scholarship focuses on Western-trained professionals and intellectuals, who were, more often than not, colonized subjects. Arguing rightly that these intellectuals and professionals underscore the malleability of Chinese identity overseas, scholars tend to portray them as the true cosmopolitans of their day (Soon 2014; Du 2014). The critical edge of such scholarship is, nonetheless, blunted by its entrapment within an implied core-periphery model, with continental China serving as a point of reference and diasporic Chineseness serving as an allegory for a periphery now described increasingly as mobile, diffused and cosmopolitan. The scholarship remains fixated on questions such as whether and how diasporic Chinese personalities and/or communities contributed to either significant international causes, the global reinvention of Chineseness or the nation-building project in China. The core-periphery model remains intact even as it is now possible to imagine that the force of influence could be reversed from periphery to core.

The core-periphery model inhibits appreciation of the historical trajectories traversed by Chinese nationalisms fostered in and by a colonial environment and that might not be directed at the Chinese nation-state. As the case of the THHK's education reforms demonstrates, the global moment of Chinese nationalism meant that nationalist theorizing and mobilization took place in an extremely fluid manner, shaped by local languages and politics as well as exposure and sensitivity to a changing world, with multiple actors and centres existing inside as well as outside continental China. Recognizing the critical import of the "diaspora" concept, McKeown urges scholars to analyse diasporic Chinese nationalisms against the backdrop of the emergence of a world order disciplined into nation-states and borders. Such nationalistic sentiments, McKeown (1999, 322) mentions, were typically combined with a keen desire for modernity although "this modernity was manifested in a vast diversity of often conflicting signifiers, including clothing styles, wealth and power, cosmopolitan manners, professional education, individualism, and collective racial identity." This laundry list of "signifiers of modernity" would have been familiar to Indies Chinese. Colonized Chinese individuals and/or communities outside continental China became early experimenters, representatives and advocates on the possibility of becoming modernized Chinese in the emergent world order. Such

experimentation and advocacy, it must be emphasized, was coeval with nationalistic theorizing and mobilization within China itself, dovetailing with but also diverging from the latter in significant ways. This warns us against positioning the likes of the THHK as either passive recipients of Chinese nationalistic ideas or long-distance imitators of China-centred nationalism. Rather than convert to a Chinese nationalism defined by a China core, the THHK and their supporters were invested in becoming modernized Chinese in the Dutch colony. Mandarin lessons and the language of Chinese nationalism was a cradle for their aspiration.

The THHK's cultural nationalism was not remarkable. Given its obsession with achieving a culturally authentic modernity, the THHK movement could be compared with other Third World nationalisms. The THHK never succeeded in making the Indies Chinese speak or use Mandarin in any practical or meaningful way. The Dutch colonial government responded shrewdly to the blossoming of THHK schools by altering its stubborn policy of not providing the Chinese with educational facilities. From 1908 onward, the government set up racially segregated schools called the "Hollands-Chinese School" (HCS) which used Dutch as the language of instruction, thus creating new generations of Dutch-educated Chinese. While a HCS education or better yet, education in mainstream Dutch schools, was perceived as more prestigious, the desirability of a culturally authentic modernity appears not to have abated. To the contrary, the desirability of becoming modernized Chinese increased in intensity when the Indies Chinese continued to fret about becoming too modernized as the twin dangers of excessive Westernization and "cultural loss" loomed large. Mandarin remained a potent signifier of Chineseness in the colony throughout the years preceding the Second World War, a point often missed by scholars celebrating the hybridity of the Indies Chinese (Sai 2010). Indies Chinese persisted in debating the language they should ideally adopt for educating their children in schools. Historians writing on this long-standing and ultimately inconclusive debate, point out that schools instructing in Dutch remain most sought after by the Chinese elite but even the best of Dutch-educated Chinese struggled to compensate for their apparent "loss" in Chinese literacy by launching all sorts of campaigns, schemes and plans to "re-acquire" the language, provoking accusations of hypocrisy in the process (Govaars-Tjia 2005). For instance, in 1927, an organization of Dutch-educated youths drew up an ambitious plan to turn Mandarin into the daily language of all Chinese inhabitants. It declared that "all Chinese businesses, companies and other Chinese establishments would be requested to require their employees to speak Chinese after 1 January 1930" (Govaars-Tjia 2005, 197). Nothing happened until sometime in mid-1931 when the very same organization announced again that "Chinese lessons will begin soon" but wisely refrained from "making any prediction on this subject" (Govaars-Tjia 2005, 239). Such episodic campaigning for Mandarin never really went away and was often accompanied by acrimonious name-calling, furious exchanges of letters, long treatises on the state of language education as well as self-flagellating commentaries on the ills and weaknesses of Indies Chinese society. Unable to embrace or reject Western modernity completely, Mandarin and its signification of cultural authenticity continued to generate anxiety about becoming Chinese in the modern world in the Dutch East Indies.

## Notes

1. See Shelly Chan (2015) for the latest but also insightful intervention in these debates.
2. I rely extensively on the Malay newspaper *Kabar Pertiagaan (KP)* to reconstruct the discursive world of the THHK movement centred in Batavia. *KP* started publication in Batavia in 1903. Several leaders of the Batavian THHK held shares in *KP*. Batavian Chinese perceived the *KP* as a close ally of the THHK so

much so that they regarded the newspaper as the official mouthpiece of the movement and also, mistakenly, as an asset directly owned by the Batavian THHK. Indeed, *KP* covered THHK's activities extensively. For example, it devoted a section called "THHK News" which reported frequently on THHK activities in and outside of Batavia. It carried speeches and writings of THHK leaders as well as official THHK announcements released by the THHK secretariat. *KP*'s close relations with the THHK movement became a bane when Major Tio, who was the Batavian THHK's honorary patron, believed that *KP*'s editorial criticism accusing him of negligence of duty in 1905 was authorised by the THHK leadership, causing an open breach between Major Tio and the Batavian THHK. This incident will be explained later in the article. All translations from original Malay text are mine.

3. One year after Qiu published an article entitled "*Baihua* [Vernacular language] is the Root of Modernization" in August 1898, Lim Boon Keng also published a programmatic series of articles entitled "Straits Chinese Reform" which included an agenda for language and education reforms that were similar to what Qiu advocated (*Straits Chinese Magazine*, September 1899). Lim Boon Keng played an important role in the THHK's education reforms which I will address in a later section in this article.
4. I translate "bangsa" as nation-race to stay true to its original connotations in both Malay and 19th century English.
5. The "Kong Koan" refers to the tiered system of officers appointed by the Dutch to lead and manage the affairs of the Indies Chinese community. Established during the period the Dutch East India Company managed the Indies, the Dutch government further expanded and fine-tuned this system when it implemented the Cultivation System as a means of preventing Chinese merchants and traders from profiteering from enforced agricultural deliveries. By the 1850s, the system had become sophisticated. There were Chinese Councils in 33 localities in the DEI and officers of the council were given fancy military titles according to a fixed hierarchy beginning with the top man at the apex – "major," followed by "captain," "lieutenant" and finally "wardmaster." This powerful organization constituted the local Chinese elite; they were the richest and most influential men of their respective Chinese communities, enjoying direct access to the government and controlling contact between the Chinese community and the colonial authority (Rush 1990).
6. This was known as the "quarter system" (Dutch: *wijkenstelsel*) and the "pass system" (Dutch: *passenstelsel*) (Dijk 2002).
7. This examination method was used in the THHK school in Pemalang which Lim Boon Keng had praised as the most exemplary of all the schools he had inspected.
8. Late Qing reformers who influenced THHK leaders used the term *baihua*, meaning literally "clear" and "direct speech," to refer to their version of vernacular Mandarin (Kaske 2004).

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## Notes on contributor

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## Special terms

guoyu 國語

yan wen yi zhi 言文一致

Zhonghua 中華

guanhua 官話

baihua 白話