

The Chinese Holmes: Translating Detective Fiction In Colonial Indonesia

By Elizabeth CHANDRA*

It is often taken for granted that translation in the Dutch East Indies, or in colonial Asia for that matter, flowed in one direction, that is from West to East. In his influential essay on translation, Richard Jacquemond (1992) draws a parallel between literary and economic exchanges between the global North and the global South. Translation from languages of the southern hemisphere, the so-called Third World countries, accounts for only one or two percent of the book market in the northern countries. The opposite however is the case in the global South, that 98 to 99 percent of the books translated are from the northern languages. The political economy of translation, Jacquemond argues, reflects the tendencies of the global international trade; in other words, the cultural hegemony of the global North merely corroborates its economic hegemony. During the colonial period, translation work in Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) is presumed to follow this trajectory, from West to East, as the global political economic divide was referred to then. Studies of literature and translation in the Indies thus far tend to focus on the conversion from European languages into Malay, or how literary trends of Europe affected that of the Indies (Teeuw 1972, 1987; Jedamski 2005; Chandra 2011).

Nevertheless, further investigations into the large corpus of Malay literature produced by the Chinese of colonial Indonesia reveal that “South-South” (to use this term anachronistically) literary exchange was in fact no less significant. Given that a considerable production of literature in the Indies came from the diasporic Chinese community, the presumed North-South circulation can be scrutinized. In terms of sheer output, Malay translation of literary works from the Chinese language proves to be greater in number compared with those from Dutch or English. At almost any given time, Chinese literary staples like the cloak-and-dagger stories, folk legends, and historical romances constituted a sizeable portion of their literary production

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(Salmon 2010). But even in specific genres often associated with European literature such as detective and crime fictions, my inquiry shows a good number of translations from Chinese works. This essay aims to give an overview of translation into Malay in the detective genre that was produced by Chinese-owned publishers, a group which constituted the majority of independent publishers in colonial Indonesia. While a number of translations from European detective stories have been covered in existing studies, primarily by Doris Jedamski (2005, 2009), the full extent of the source texts has not been given proper accounting. As was the normative practice in literary publications of this period, source texts and original authors were rarely acknowledged. The first part of this essay exposes the broad range and eclectic variety of sources – as far away as Sweden, Germany, Poland, United States and Australia – from where translation of detective stories in the Indies was drawn. Beyond that, this essay aims to draw attention to the translation of detective stories originating from China, to problematize the assumption of Western literary hegemony in the Indies, and to challenge the frequent narrative that sees the proliferation of detective fiction in the Third World as the triumph of the rational “West” over the superstitious and inscrutable “East”.¹ The emergence of Chinese adaptations of the Sherlock Holmes detective figure in the 1920s and 1930s in my view was a deliberate effort to counter precisely European domination in the detective genre. In addition, the figure of the Chinese detective, possessing both Eastern and Western qualities, not only destabilizes the common association of Europe with scientific rationality (Miller 1988), and Asia being its opposite (Pernau 2009), but marks him as the more complete and therefore superior personality than his Western counterparts.

Early Detective Fiction in the Indies

In the Dutch East Indies the emergence of literary publications in the most important vernacular, that is in Malay, was closely connected to the development of the newspaper. Early on, the newspaper appeared in the Indies in the middle of the 19th century essentially as an extension of the government. The first newspaper *Bataviasche Nouvelles* printed government edicts, announcements of various appointments, promotions and transfers of the East Indian Company officials, and notices of auction sales related to bureaucratic relocation (Ahmat 1995). The commercial newspapers that followed subsequently sprung in major port cities like Batavia, Soerabaja and Semarang, and they catered to the merchant communities more than serving the colonial authority. In addition to various official announcements and news from overseas, commercial newspapers informed about prices of goods and agricultural products, and schedules of various shipping vessels arriving and departing the Indies. Early newspapers were all in Dutch, thus to cater to the mercantile communities of Chinese, Arab, Javanese and others who could not

read Dutch, a newspaper in Malay was launched in Soerabaja in 1856. Malay was the lingua franca in the archipelago, spoken in urban areas and was accessible by various ethnolinguistic groups in the plural colonial society. The newspaper's minimalist name is quite telling, *Soerat Kabar Bahasa Melajoe* – a “newspaper in Malay language”. Newspaper in Malay soon multiplied and the commercial ones quickly figured that *feuilleton* or serialized stories were useful to retain subscription. Thus fictional works appeared in the newspaper in serialized form, and this marked the next step in the evolution of the newspaper in the Indies, being consumed now not only as a commercial attribute but also as a source of entertainment.

In Malay language newspapers, early serialized stories were translated from Dutch or English, and it was through this channel that the popular Sherlock Holmes adventure series by Arthur Conan Doyle was introduced to the wider audience in the Indies. The newspaper *Bintang Hindia* (Star of Hindia) published a translation of *A Study in Scarlet* in 1904, or seventeen years after its English original (Jedamski 2009). Given that many newspapers and book publications from this period did not survive, it is difficult to tell when exactly a Holmes story was first translated into Malay. In order to reconstruct the arrival of Sherlock Holmes or other detective stories in the Indies, one can only rely on surviving copy of publications that were preserved in various libraries in the Netherlands, North America, and Indonesia, in addition to meticulous examination of publisher catalogs and book advertisements. For the same reason, our reconstruction of the development of detective fiction in the Indies relies more on publications in book and periodical forms, and not those serialized in the newspaper.

It appears that the “taste” for reading entertainment in the detective genre had been established by this time, or at least it did not begin with the 1904 publication of the Sherlock Holmes story. In the same year, translation of a detective story set in America, *Baroe Ketahoewan* (Finally Revealed), appeared in *Soekaboemi*. The novel is written in the conventional whodunit pattern, focusing on the figure of a clever police detective by the name of Silas Keenen, who wades through a puzzle of mistaken identity on the way to solving a murder case. In general, the centrality of the detective figure in solving an enigmatic problem is what distinguishes detective fiction from related genres like crime or mystery fiction. The translation was attributed to “P.T.H.”, which likely refers to Phoa Tjoen Hoay,² a known translator of Chinese and European novels who was also behind the translation of a selection of Holmes stories drawn from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) published in 1914. Prior to that, as Claudine Salmon notes, Tan Tjin Koei had published a translation entitled *Sherlock Holmes* in a Chinese-language journal called *Hoa Pit* between 1910 and 1911, and in 1913 Tjoe Bou San (aka Hauw San Liang) published a translation of “The Five Orange Pips” (1891).

In addition to the Holmes series, other adventure stories popular in Europe were also translated. Between 1910 and 1913 Lie Kim Hok, the Chinese pioneer in Malay

language publication, rendered 53 episodes of Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail's *Rocambole* series (Nio 1940; Tio 1958). *Rocambole* is more an adventure series than a normative detective story, despite common traits of a larger than life (anti-) hero anchoring the sequence of events narrated in the story, elements of deception and impersonation that propel the plot forward, and the knotty questions of family honor, inheritance, aristocracy and legitimacy that the protagonist must work through. The same can be said of the Polish author Józef Lubomirski's *Tatiana, or The Conspiracy* (1877), which was translated into Malay in 1917 (Tio 1917). The novel is not quite a detective story even when it features "politie resia", because the term here connotes "spy" more than "detective".

In the 1920s translation of Holmes and other detective stories multiplied. During this period, the so-called "tjerita politie resia" (*detectiveroman* in Dutch) came to be established as a literary genre in the Indies. The romance genre had always dominated the literary market – both translated and original romance novels. In the 1920s however translation in the detective genre appears to equal the number of romance novels translated into Malay. The primary reason was undoubtedly because by this time homegrown novelists had emerged, churning out equally attractive romance novels set in the Indies and therefore were more intimate and easily identifiable for the local readers. Publishers now needed not to rely as much on translation for this particular literary niche. The same could not be said of the detective genre, which in the 1920s was still gaining momentum in terms of popularity. From approximately 1924, one finds the category "tjerita politie resia" being added to subtitles to signal the book content. A perfect example is *Siapa Pemboenoenja?: Soeatoe Tjerita Politie Resia di Duitschland* (Who is the Killer?: A Detective Story Set in Germany).³ This detective story boom was further augmented by the establishment of a government subsidized publishing house that was to cater to the burgeoning "native" reading public. The "bureau for popular literature" or Balai Poestaka (Volkslectuur in Dutch) produced translations of many politically docile, moralizing but nonetheless attractive stories for the growing literate youth in the colony. In the 1920s it translated a good number of detective stories, including from the Sherlock Holmes series (Jedamski 2009).

More substantial production in the detective genre however came from the numerous independent publishers, the majority of which were owned by Indies Chinese. Their position as middlemen in the colonial economic structure – as tax and opium farmers early on and then as traders – had allowed a good number of Chinese settlers and their creolized (*peranakan*) descendants to accumulate wealth and branch out in other industries such as entertainment, journalism and publishing, resulting in the Chinese's disproportionately large share in the Malay book market in the Indies. In 1922, a Soerabaja-based Chinese publisher, Ang Sioe Tjing put out the Malay translation of "The Adventure of the Speckled Band". In 1924 three Holmes stories – "The Crooked Man", "The Priory School", and "The Singular Experience

of Mr. John Scott Eccles” – were translated and bundled together as the sixth issue of *Tjerita Pilian* (Tio 1924c), a monthly devoted to publishing detective stories from Europe and China. Other known translations of the Holmes stories include “The Hound of the Baskerville” (Nio 1924), “The Sign of Four” in *Senang* (1924), “A Scandal in Bohemia” (Lee 1928), and “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons” (Lee 1933). Most of the titles were rendered straightforwardly, except in a few cases such as “A Scandal in Bohemia”, which was given a non-equivalent title meaning “a clever woman and Sherlock Holmes”. The Malay title avoids the unfamiliar Bohemia while invoking Holmes; the clever woman refers to Irene Adler, Holmes’ romantic interest and the only woman to ever outwit him.⁴ By the 1930s Arthur Conan Doyle had become such an established name in the Indies that his other works unrelated to Sherlock Holmes were translated as well. In 1930, rising star novelist Ong Khing Han translated Conan Doyle’s “The Death Voyage”, a story set in World War I, only a year from when the original first appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. An even more established writer, Kwee Tek Hoay (1937), translated Conan Doyle’s “Through the Veil” for a compilation of stories on reincarnation.

From the 1920s the variety of translation in the detective genre greatly expanded. The overwhelming success of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series had stimulated duplicates everywhere, primarily in Europe. One such a clone was the adventure series of the private-eye Sexton Blake, which appeared only six years after the first Holmes story was published in 1887. A spin-off of the Blake saga focusing on the gentleman crook character Dirk Dolland, or the Phantom Bat (translated as “Si Bat” or “Kampret” in Malay), was published by Sin Po, a Chinese-owned publisher (Fermantsah 1921). If Sexton Blake is a detective in the style of Holmes, Dolland is initially an anti-hero; he is a sly fraudster, a master of disguise, and an escape artist before he redeems himself and becomes an ally of Blake’s. Another rogue hero by the name of Jack Salathiel, created by John David Hennessey in *The Outlaw* (1913) and set in the Australian frontier, was introduced to the Indies reading public by a Batavian publisher Tan Thian Soe (Nias 1923). In terms of character, both Dolland and Salathiel follow the mold of legendary anti-heroes, like Rocambole before them. Other popular Western anti-heroes in the Indies include A. J. Raffles, the central character of E. W. Hornung’s adventure series published between 1898 and 1909; Arsène Lupin, the gentleman thief created by Maurice Leblanc in 1905; the 1908 German clone of Raffles by the name of Lord Lister that became very popular among Dutch readers; and the sociopathic Fantômas which was created in 1911 by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre. Adventures of these fictional legends are generally presented as stories in the detective genre because they often figure as worthy opponents of the ingenious police detective, like Juve in *Fantômas*, seeking to uphold the rule of law.

These fictional characters were introduced to the Malay reading public for the most part by independent publishers, some of which were rather isolated if not

obscure. One such minor publishers was Kwee Seng Kie, which specialized in producing low-cost short novels, including many Lord Lister (Raffles) stories. The proprietor, Kwee Seng Kie, was an elder brother of the prolific writer and translator Kwee Seng Tjoan, and it appears that they worked together on many of the translations. The younger Kwee himself can be credited with the translation of a few detective stories from Chinese language, which will be discussed in a separate section below. A translator, writer, and proprietor of a printing house, Tan Kim Sen (1921), produced among others six volumes of *Fantômas*, put out through his own printer. Some of these translations were done quite early. The abovementioned character Dick Dolland was originally debuted in 1916 or four years before it appeared in Malay. Lie Kim Hok's translation of the *Rocambole* series was completed almost half a century after the original, but was still comparatively early; the first installment in the series, for instance, was rendered into Malay about a decade before it was translated into Japanese. Researching on early novels in British Malaya, William Roff (1974:464) wondered if the *Rocambole* series there, which appeared beginning in 1928, was in fact rendered from Lie's Malay edition, not from Arabic as was often assumed.

In the second decade of the 20th century, the source materials from which translations were drawn also expanded beyond the usual Anglophone and Francophone milieus. The German Raffles (Lord Lister) had a short run, but was popular enough in the Low Countries that when the original series ended in 1910, it was continued anonymously by Dutch authors who moved the setting to the Netherlands. Being a Dutch colony, Indies special connection with the Netherlands ensured that practically anything that was published in Dutch could also be accessed by Dutch-educated intellectuals in the colony. The Indies might have also benefited from the fact that the colonial ruler was not much of a cultural or literary powerhouse, the way France was, resulting in high volume of translation into Dutch from other European source languages. If *mission civilisatrice* was a manifestation of the French confidence in their culture and its presumed benefits on mankind, the Dutch did not even have the confidence to impose their language in the Indies and appear to have translated more from its neighbors than vice versa. This, ultimately, contributed to the Malay book market in the Indies being very eclectic in terms of variety.

The Chinese population in the colony also contributed to this literary cosmopolitanism. From the dawn of the 20th century, children of the Chinese settlers had the option to learn English as a second language through the self-subsidized Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan schools, or to learn Dutch at the government subsidized *Hollandsch-Chineesche School*, founded beginning in 1908. Via the former they were brought into the Anglo-Chinese cultural milieu and trajectory of knowledge circulation, by way of English acquisition and school instructors brought in from Shanghai.⁵ Some Indies Chinese writers were self-taught, like Tan Boen Kim and

Kwee Kek Beng; others acquired foreign languages from private tutors. Writers like the abovementioned Kwee Seng Tjoan, Njoo Cheong Seng, and Tio Ie Soei (whose journal *Tjerita Pilian* was notable in the development of detective fiction in the Indies, to be discussed below) were representative cases of the cosmopolitan Chinese who might be speaking Malay at home, Javanese or Sundanese to the neighbors, and Dutch at school among their peers, in addition to reading in English and/or Chinese.⁶ A very prolific novelist, Kwee's oeuvre includes translations from English, Dutch and Chinese (Chandra 2014), while Tio himself was a polyglot (Salmon 1977). Conditioned by such a cosmopolitan upbringing and milieu, they were in the best position to access foreign texts and rendered them for the larger, multi-ethnic audience in the Malay lingua franca.⁷ In addition, seen as inherently "outsiders" and therefore uninterested in local politics, the colonial government was generally less stringent in scrutinizing and censoring literary publication by the Chinese.⁸ Their disproportionately large share of ownership in the publishing industry arguably made the Chinese writers and publishers trend-setters in the Malay book market. What was popular in the Chinese literary circle would later be duplicated by other publishers in the colony.

The short-lived monthly *Tjerita Pilian* (Selected Story) attests to the diversity of detective fiction in the Indies.⁹ The first two issues, *Advocaat-detectief* (Lawyer-Detective; Tio 1924a)¹⁰ and *Tjap Resia* (Secret Zeal; Lim 1924), were drawn from the Francophone-Anglophone milieus, carrying translations of Fortuné Du Boisgobey's *Jean Coupe-en-deux* (1887) and William Le Queux's *Guilty Bonds* (1895). A predecessor of Conan Doyle, Du Boisgobey nonetheless received attention in the Indies and his work was classified as detective story, with the prying young lawyer in *Jean Coupe-en-deux* designated as "detective". Le Queux seems to have been known in the Indies by this time as his account of the eponymous French serial killer, *Landru* (1922), was rendered into Malay two years earlier by Tan Kim Sen (Numa 1922). In the translation of Le Queux's 1919 *The Secret Shame of the Kaiser*, Tan (aka Probitas) lauds Le Queux as "the master of mystery" and that his writings have graced popular magazines from Hong Kong to Buenos Aires. Le Queux's other works would appear in adaptation or translation in Medan-based *Doenia Pengalaman* and *Loekisan Poedjangga*, journals unrelated to Chinese ownership and catered mostly to non-Chinese readers (S. Djarens 1939, Rata 1940, Satyaputra 1940). These translations might very well indicate the influence of the Chinese publishers in setting a parameter of source materials in the Malay book market. With a print run of 5000 copies, *Tjerita Pilian* was comparatively well circulated.

After the first two issues, the variety of sources for *Tjerita Pilian* expanded. The third and tenth issues featured the adventures of private detective Leo Carring, created by the Swedish writer Samuel August Duse (aka Sam Sellén), who was hailed as "Sweden's own Conan Doyle". *Ingenieur Lettman* (Thio 1924) was

translated from the second story of the Leo Carring series, *Det Nattliga Äventyret* (1914), and appeared only two years after the German edition. Most libraries date the Dutch edition to 1924, which if true indicates that the Malay version might have been rendered from German instead of Dutch.¹¹ *Resia Kartoe* (Secret Card; Thio 1925) was the Malay rendition of the 1915 *Spader Kung*, whose German edition appeared in 1920 and Dutch edition in 1924.

Under the leadership of the well-connected and distinguished writer Tio Ie Soei, *Tjerita Pilian* also introduced detective stories of lesser-known writers. The fourth issue, *Kawa-kawa Item* (Black Spider, Kwee 1924), for instance features the detective duo Henry Crampton and Dr. Eduard van Buuren created by Dutch author Harm (Herman) Middendorp, and appears to have been translated from *De Verdwenen Documenten* (1923). Another work by Middendorp, *De Juweelen van Lombok* (1927), was translated for the monthly *Goedang Tjerita* (Lee 1930) and features the Amsterdam-based private detective Bram Korff instead of the Crampton-Van Buuren duet. A novel by Amsterdamer C. J. Brensa, *Graaf zu Bolck Wattke* (Count Bolck Wattke, Tio 1924b), featuring the Flemish sleuth Maurice Marcel, was translated for the eighth issue. Here, too, the Malay version appeared only two years after the Dutch original, *De Machtige Tegenstander* (1922). Unlike the Swedish Duse, Middendorp and Brensa did not appear to have been known outside the Dutch language sphere. An even more obscure Dutch novel featuring a private detective named Van Darp was translated for the seventh issue, *Brilliant jang Tertjoeri* (The Stolen Diamond, Lauw 1924). The paucity of information on the fictional character Van Darp suggests that the novel might not be very popular even in its home country. There is also a possibility that the journal *Tjerita Pilian* altered the character names or even the storyline – usually shortening it to conform to the approximate regular length of 70 pages. As discussion in the subsequent section will show, this journal was not bound to providing faithful translation.

The Case of the Chinese Detectives

Around this time, the most internationally prominent Chinese character in this genre arguably was Sax Rohmer's master criminal, Dr. Fu Manchu, which was created in 1911 and became so popular that it became a prototype of fictional villains. As an antagonist, however, Fu Manchu is more a European projection of its "Other", not a hero to inspire identification and emulation, the way Holmes was. The figure of Dr. Fu Manchu is an evil genius who takes on the appearance of an oriental man and is responsible for a series of assassinations in Europe. In essence, he is an abstraction of what at different times were regarded as menace in Europe – the yellow peril, nihilism, and communism. This character, too, came to Malay readers through translation (Tan 1925, Salmon 1981:165),¹² but unlike in Europe, this antagonistic cultural representation of Chinaman was met with opposites in the

Indies. If in Europe the detective hero was almost always a white-man figure, in the 1920s Indies there already emerged fictional Chinese detective heroes in the mold of Sherlock Holmes – a phenomenon quite remarkable, to which our discussion now turn.

A little known journal called *Tjerita Baroe* (New Story) based in the old town Pare, East Java, deserves recognition in this regard. The short-lived tri-monthly was dedicated to publishing translation of Chinese stories, which are not conventional detective stories but generally present some form of puzzle, mystery, or element of marvel. Few copies of *Tjerita Baroe* survived, but the fourth issue (5 March 1924) features a story in the conventional detective plot, anchored by a likewise normative Chinese detective figure. *Toelisan Atas Tangan* (Handwriting) follows Lauw Kim Ho, a prominent police investigator in Shanghai, solving an inexplicable murder through deductive work and keen observations, particularly of the longhands by the victim and his forger. This particular story was translated pseudonymously by “Hantoe Sr.” (*hantoe*, Malay for “ghost”), who contributed two other stories to the same journal, *Dalem Toempoekan Kotoran* (Under a Mountain of Rubbish) and *Toesoek Konde Perak* (The Silver Hairpin), both involving puzzling incidences that ultimately lead to discovery of criminal acts. In the latter cases however the mystery is solved not by a detective, but by respectively an inquisitive father who lost his son in an unsolved homicide and a shrewd district chief (*tikoan*) seeking to uphold justice in his jurisdiction.

The more polished (and better circulated) *Tjerita Pilian* was also instrumental in the emergence of the Chinese detective figure. And here, the issue of source text becomes tricky. In the same year, for the August 1924 issue it features *Souw Lian Eng*, which despite claim of Chinese origin was in fact an adaptation of Samuel Duse’s *Cobra-mysteriet* (1919). The story presents a case of mysterious snake poisoning that swells into a family intrigue over inheritance, scandalous affairs and extortion, before concluding with a happy reunion of lost lovers. In *Souw Lian Eng*, only the storyline is retained; everything else is altered. Instead of Stockholm, the story now takes place in Shanghai and all the characters are Chinese, including the sleuth Ho Biauw Tjay and his sidekick Tan Tong Twie – respectively an American educated private investigator and a newspaper editor. There is another, more faithful Malay version of *Cobra-mysteriet*, rendered by Han Bin Tjoe, and it only obscures the identity of the protagonist, replacing the Swedish detective Leo Carring with the British William Frenzen, and the sidekick journalist Georg Thorne with Edward Jansen. If *Souw Lian Eng* feels more like an adaptation, Han’s version *Tangan Beratjoen* (Poisonous Hand) was more properly a translation.

As Tio Ie Soei, the editor of *Tjerita Pilian*, was already familiar with Duse, it seems unlikely that he was unaware that *Souw Lian Eng* was not a genuine “detective story set in China” as the subtitle declares, but an adaptation of Duse’s work. But if Duse’s work could be adapted, why not Middendorp’s or Brensa’s?

And why was it adapted to a Shanghai setting, not the Indies? Was it translated from a Chinese adaptation of *Cobra-mysteriet*?¹³ In its first issue, the monthly *Tjerita Pilian* pledged to present “fascinating stories” translated from Europe, America, and China, and as much as possible concerning detectives. The name Ch. P. Chen, to whom the story/translation of *Souw Lian Eng* was credited,¹⁴ is written in the style of westernized Chinese, suggesting that the work is genuinely foreign, conceivably taking place in Shanghai even when it is originally set in Sweden. For comparison, the other two novels by Duse published by *Tjerita Pilian* were translated by Thio Boen Hoei. In either case – whether this was a direct adaptation or a translation of a Chinese adaptation – there seems to be preference for the figure of “Chinese detective”. And this “counterfeit” Chinese detective was soon followed by many other fictional Chinese detectives – from translations or adaptations of Chinese texts, and later original works. Translation of Western detective stories continued (see Tan 1927; Wun 1928; Kwouk 1930; Oeij 1935),¹⁵ but appears to be outnumbered by those from China.

Prior to this, translation works from Chinese had been plentiful, but they were more or less restricted to specific genres like folk legends, Confucian morality tales, historical romances, and the cloak-and-dagger stories (*cerita silat*) (Salmon 2013, 2010). These translations include the multiple editions of the romance of the three kingdoms (Sam Kok), legends of the butterfly lovers (Sampek Engtay), the white snake, Judge Bao, General Sie Jin Kwie, Empress Wu (Wu Zetian), Emperor Qianlong, and Admiral Zheng He and his expedition to the South Seas. These stories were generally set in imperial China or, like many folk tales, in a mythical “once upon a time in China” (*tjerita dahoeloe kala di negri Tjina*). During the detective story boom, not only Chinese detective stories were translated, but old staples like *cerita silat* and Confucian morality tales were structured like a whodunit.¹⁶ Tales of the noble bureaucrat (*ambtenaar jang bidjaksana*) upholding justice and restoring order after some turmoil in the realm were ubiquitous among the Chinese classics, but in the 1920s they were increasingly presented as mysteries whose resolution rests on the intervention of a shrewd and just official. In such stories the bureaucrat takes on the role of the detective, but without the support system of a modern security state in which the latter is embedded. Lacking the specialization of a modern law enforcement institution, the bureaucrat in the story is responsible for almost everything, from investigation to presiding over the court trial, and is aided only by a staff of counselors and serfs.¹⁷ The abovementioned *Toesoek Konde Perak* and *Tjerita Mait jang Bertoekar* (The Story of Swapped Corpses; Liang 1924) are examples of such tales in which the societal harmony and order rests on a single person. Here, a treacherous wife and a covetous suitor are brought to justice thanks to the inquisitive bureaucrat in each story. It is unclear if these stories were tailored (restructured) to follow a whodunit pattern by the translator, or if the conversion into Malay was strictly linguistic.

Many more Chinese detective stories however carry the contemporary qualities found in the European counterparts. They take place in “modern” calendrical time, like republican China, and feature modern law enforcement apparatus such as a highly specialized police force, detectives, and spies. One such Chinese detective story is credited to the abovementioned Kwee Seng Tjoan, whose work *Sesoedanja Berdjas Baroe di Poengoet Mantoe* (Accepted as Son-in-law after Proving Merit) commemorates “the late Dr. Sun Yat Sen” and his role in the founding of the Chinese republic. The novel is set in Shanghai and Nanking and tells about young love birds Tan Heng Bie and Moaij Chin, whose struggle for romantic union is closely intertwined with China’s enormous effort to shake off the Qing dynasty and its feudalistic mores. Moaij Chin’s conservative father is opposed to their relationship and arranges for her to marry an elderly but wealthy man. The father is also governor general in Nanking, thus an officer of the imperial government, while Heng Bie is a student journalist working in support of Dr. Sun’s movement. The fall of the Qing dynasty would not only usher in the republic, but also quash the principal barrier to the youths’ union. Relying on wits, Heng Bie kills four birds with one stone: expediting the fall of the Qing dynasty, aiding the movement that gives birth to the republic, rescuing Moaij Chin’s father from a revolutionary mob, and finally winning his approval to marry her.

The young couple in the story are not detectives in the manner of Holmes, they only play ones. They carry out activities which, at least in the Indies detective fiction genre, are associated with sleuthing, such as impersonation, going undercover, forging document or handwriting, forcible entry, lockpicking, utilizing sophisticated technological devices (e.g. the telephone), and ultimately outsmarting their opponents. Kwee’s description of the two protagonists as detectives (*politie resia*) is an exaggeration, perhaps an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of detective fiction in the 1920s. Kwee himself was a very prolific author, who appears to be behind the translation of many Lord Lister stories published by his elder brother’s company. In addition to rendering *Sesoedanja Berdjas*, he also translated adventure novels set in Britain (Kwee 1917, 1928). *Sesoedanja Berdjas* is a one-off adventure story, not a series showcasing various exploits of a superhuman central character, like the Holmes series. In this sense, despite Kwee’s designation of the protagonists as “detectives”, the novel is more a romance than a detective story.

Another novel featuring an unexplained murder is set in the cities of Leng Po, Hang Tjioe, and Shanghai, and in the first year of the Chinese republic. But unlike Kwee’s *Sesoedanja Berdjas*, the pseudonymously published *Pemboenoe jang Adjaib* (The Phantom Killer, 1932, by “N.N.”) does not quite relate to the revolutionizing China or to the former’s mood of modern rationality. It echoes the former only in thematic representation of feudal government officials as essentially corrupt – a trope that also has a long tradition in Chinese literature. The story is narrated in the first person voice by the protagonist, Kiat Yong, who has fallen on a

hard time after the death of his parents. Homeless and penniless in search of an uncle, Kiat Yong takes shelter in an abandoned shrine and by accident stumbles upon a headless corpse. It will be revealed later, close to the end of the story, that the killer is a lowly martial arts instructor Ma Beng Liang, who slew the man for violating Ma's sister. At his trial, Ma reveals that he has reported the rape incident and sought justice through the appropriate channel, but because he could not bribe the district official (*tikoan*), his case was neglected. Unlike in the tales of wise officials, the *tikoan* here is denounced as *tikoes* (rat). The story closes with Ma freeing himself from the shackles, snatching a machete and slashing off the *tikoan*'s head before vanishing from sight. Though pervaded by an inexplicable murder, the story is nevertheless not a conventional whodunit in that the search for the killer does not structure the sequence of events. Rather, the narrator Kiat Yong gets acquainted with the killer Ma only by coincidence, and only inadvertently the progression of events links back to the initial murder, through Ma's voluntary confession. There is no sleuthing or standard detective work, only several overlapping assassination schemes and characters assuming false identities in order to execute these plots and evade the law.

There were more conventional Chinese detective stories taking place in "modern" time and space. Njonja The Tiang Ek's translation *Huang Jing Hoa* (1925) takes place in New York City among the Chinese immigrant community, but the Chinese figure is the sidekick journalist, while the professional detective is British. Cyrus's *Tientsin-Express* (1934) does not have a detective figure, but centers on the mystery of a jewelry theft in the city of Tientsin. On the other hand, *Boenga Mawar Poeti* (White Rose, 1927) features a more conventional Chinese detective protagonist, that is the young sleuth Hsiong Mouw and his associate Hay Siong. The latter is described as confidant and assistant to the former, the Watson to Hsiong Mouw's Holmes. As in Holmes stories, *Boenga Mawar Poeti* is narrated by the sidekick, through whose eyes the reader "sees" events unfolding. The story's opening recalls Holmes episode "A Scandal in Bohemia", where the sleuth and his assistant receive a man of importance seeking his help privately to avoid scandal. There has been a burglary at the man's house which took away a particularly prized bracelet. Tek Som, the man, does not report it to the police because he suspects his younger brother Tek Biauw, a drunkard and gambling addict, had something to do with the theft, disaffected by the allotment of their inheritance. The real thief turns out to be a servant in Tek Som's household who has been deceived into joining a secret society called "White Rose". In this story, the resourceful private investigator (*detective partikoeleir*) Hsiong Mouw is positioned as antidote to the arrogant and incompetent police investigator (*detective gouvernement*). Rendered into Malay by "O.S.L.", the story is given a nationalistic bend. The translator's foreword holds that the story "demonstrates how intelligence, courage, confidence and patience can overcome everything", and as a detective, Hsiong Mouw "has all these qualities". It

goes on, “if only half of Chinese people were comparable to this detective, China and Chinese people would not have to suffer the humiliation and contempt they do today”.

Another Chinese detective story, published in the following year, is presented in the same nationalistic nuance by the translator, Albert Chen (1928) of Slawi. *Satoe Pemboenoean jang Kedjem* (A Savage Murder) tells of a successful businessman of good standing in Harbin who is found savagely slaughtered in his home, his corpse without his head, alongside a note from an unidentified sender suggesting extortion attempt. The clever police inspector of Harbin, Mr. Ko Chen, pieces together clues that eventually reveal that Mr. Che Shoan, the businessman, has designed his own “murder” and the headless corpse belongs instead to the mysterious person who has tried to blackmail Che. Che Shoan vanished along with his victim’s head to avoid identification and to throw off the police investigation, a savagery that is finally met with justice “thanks to the shrewdness of the Chinese detective”. The novel’s foreword stresses that “not only Europe and America, but China, too, has competent detectives”.

The Chinese detective that came close to Holmes in terms of fame in the Indies was Huo Sang, the fictional character created by Shanghai-based author, Cheng Xiaoqing. Born in 1893 in the Old City of Shanghai, Cheng was an avid writer of detective stories as well as Chinese translator of the Sherlock Holmes series, which he began to do in the middle of the 1910s. He was responsible for the 1917 launching of a journal devoted to martial arts and detective stories, *Zhengtan Shijie* (The Detective World). It is not too difficult to imagine that Tio Ie Soei might have gotten the inspiration for *Tjerita Pilian* from this journal. In 1919 Cheng published a book-length story featuring the private detective Huo Sang, *Jiangnan Yan* (The South-China Swallow). He had actually written a Huo Sang story back in 1914, but with fewer details on this character and with lesser success. *Jiangnan Yan* became tremendously popular, was made into a film, and a decade later was translated into Malay. Cheng produced many stories chronicling Huo Sang’s exploits, styling his detective hero after Holmes, as “a courageous and high-minded private detective who solved crimes mostly through intellectual prowess” (Wong 2007:209), but with fewer character flaws. In his many adventures, Huo Sang is aided by a partner named Bao Lang, “the Watson of the East”, who narrates their experiences. The Huo Sang series was popular in the 1920s and the 1930s, gracing various journals in Shanghai, while Cheng’s translation works extended beyond the Holmes series. Cheng himself went on to produce more than 30 original detective stories.

Of the many Huo Sang episodes, it is not clear how many were translated into Malay. Other than *Jiangnan Yan* (Ong 1929), there is a two-part novel *Orang Tida Berboedi* (The Ungrateful Person; Kade 1936), relating the mysterious death of a professor. In it, Cheng was praised as a famous detective stories writer, and at the end of the novel’s first part, readers were invited to answer the riddle – Who killed

Professor Khouw? – and to submit their inference by mail. About another riddle, the editor gleefully announces that 70% of readers' submission had the correct answer. Another Huo Sang story was rendered by Haj Teng Djin, *Soeara Menggonggongnya Andjing: Tjerita Detective Tionghoa* (The Sound of Dog Barking: A Chinese Detective Story), published by a journal devoted to Chinese martial arts stories in Tasikmalaja. The popularity of Huo Sang stories continued into 1950, as indicated by K. Ch. Chen's translations, *Belati Item* (The Black Dagger) and *Rumah Setan* (Haunted House). The name of detective Huo Sang varies in Malay translation as Wat Song (a play on Watson's name), Ho Song, and Hok Song. His assistant Bao Lang was sometimes Pauw Lang; while the creator Cheng Xiaoqing was invariably written as Cheng Siao-ts'ing or Thia Siauw Tjeng, depending on the translator's Chinese dialect.

Indies Chinese Holmes

The appearance of the Chinese Holmes could not but stimulate the emergence of other Chinese detectives from translation as well as original works. Elsewhere I have written in greater details about a pioneer detective fiction writer, Njoo Cheong Seng, whose adventure series *Gagaklodra* was arguably the most popular and the longest running among the many original series in the genre in the Indies (Chandra 2011a). Njoo himself was the most prolific author during the colonial period and produced original works in the detective genre since the 1920s. His Lupin-esque fictional hero, Gagaklodra, created in 1930 and enjoyed an extensive run of 23 years (interrupted only during the Japanese occupation), is not a mere duplicate of Sherlock Holmes or even Huo Sang, but a Chinese-Javanese hero skilled in martial arts and new sciences.

In many ways, the wonderfully hybrid Gagaklodra adventure series – a mixture of the Chinese and Javanese classical knight-errant tales and turn of the 20th century detective fiction – befitting the audience in the Netherlands Indies. As a rogue hero, Gagaklodra lives outside the law and makes a mockery of the colonial authority; a professional Chinese detective in the Dutch colony would be too far fetched an adaptation. In the highly stratified colonial society, the higher echelon of the police institution was staffed by Europeans or Indies "natives" legally recognized as equals of Europeans. The profession of private detective was likewise nonexistent.¹⁸ In his original whodunit *Boeaja Soerabaja* (The Scoundrels of Soerabaja, 1926), Njoo deferred the figure of the detective to a Dutch police investigator Van Kol, not to a Chinese or a Javanese character. One imagines Ch. P. Chen adapting the Swedish Leo Canning to a Shanghai detective, not to an Indies Chinese detective, for the same reason. While Huo Sang had many fans in the Indies, a more local adaptation was challenging to produce.

It must be noted however, that despite the incongruity of a Chinese private

detective in the Indies, the themes regularly featured in detective stories had resonance among this diasporic group, which might explain the genre's exceptional reception. Issues concerning family dispute over inheritance, family reputation, legitimacy (of an heir), authenticity (of pedigree), even secret societies threatening to destabilize order, are habitually presented in detective stories as problems that necessitate the service of a competent (private) investigator. In European detective stories, it is often the aristocrats who seek out private help in order to protect their reputation, such as when sorting out conflicting claims over inheritance. The Chinese in the Indies were not aristocratic, but the condition of being uprooted, a history of intermarriage, and in some cases polygamous family structure, had made the questions of pedigree and legitimacy relatively familiar. Family squabble and lengthy litigation over inheritance were well known among Indies Chinese that they became object of ridicule in the press (*Liberty* 66, 1933:23). Needless to say, it would take a significant historical rupture to make an Indies Chinese detective plausible.

That rupture came in the form of decolonization. The original, homegrown Chinese detectives appeared during war of independence and shortly after. The first of these is Detective Tjoa, created by Gan San Hok (1948) and published in the journal *Detective Roman*, which as the name suggests was devoted to publishing detective stories. But while its predecessor *Tjerita Pilian* only lasted for almost a year, the Soerabaja-based *Detective Roman* appears to enjoy even shorter life. While *Tjerita Pilian*, which focused on publishing stories from overseas, struggled to meet the monthly deadline, at one point combining the December 1924 and January 1925 issues together, it might have been even harder for *Detective Roman* to churn out original detective stories on monthly basis, at a time when the country was at war, to say the least. The first issue of *Detective Roman* carries Gan's *Detective Tjoa dan Wanita jang Gagah* (Detective Tjoa and a Brave Woman) as the featured story, supplemented with a short piece by Liem Poen Kie, "Fantasie Djaman Pantjaroba: Inspecteur Goei" (Fantasy in Time of Turmoil: Inspector Goei).

Detective Tjoa is set in Singapore and is packed with action. The eponymous private detective is on a mission to rescue a woman who has been taken hostage by a criminal organization headed by a villain named Hin Liang, a smuggler from Java. Detective Tjoa infiltrates their hideaway but is quickly trapped inside. A stranger woman appears out of nowhere and assists him; she turns out to be May Hoa, the estranged wife of Hin Liang. Hin Liang eventually executes her for aiding Tjoa, but himself gets killed falling off the stairs. The police force seems dubious in the story, being complicit in part in the criminal activity. Unlike Holmes who solves cases using his wits more than his muscle, Detective Tjoa must overcome various hazards and physical strains in order to accomplish his mission. In this regard he is more a hard-boiled action hero than a consulting or armchair detective like Holmes.¹⁹

The main character in Liem Poen Kie's fantasy story is even more intriguing.

Inspector Goei is not a detective, but a shady and lustful police officer in an unnamed city. His full name is Goei Gong-gong or “lunatic Goei”. He arrests criminals, mostly smugglers, but goes on to bed their wives while they are in prison. In performing his shady work, Goei is assisted by an informant (*spion*) named Hai Lang; his victims are Chinese. One is tempted to read Liem’s story as an allegory of a time of extreme uncertainty referenced in the title, a period when Indonesia was at war against the returning Dutch (and its allies), seeking to reconstitute its colony after Japan capitulated. Those years of turmoil are here described using the metaphor for seasonal change *pantjaroba*, a time when political gusts can swiftly reverse direction and upend things from their normative position. In this topsy-turvy world, one might infer, a Chinese police inspector might not seem so out of place. Against the background of massive killings and displacement of the Chinese population in the Indies – for a long time perceived as cohorts of the Dutch colonizers due to their role as mediator in the economy – a highly immoral and opportunistic Chinese officer was even more jarring. It was as dissonant as a detective story, in those days, splashed with sexual innuendos. One wonders, was Liem’s fantasy a veiled critique of the rampant abuse committed against ethnic Chinese in the absence of the law?

The novel *Detective Chiu* (Amorinda 1950) sets the Chinese detective in then newly independent Indonesia, in the city of Semarang. It features the aloof detective Chiu, with his assistant Sin-hock, and complemented with another Chinese officer, Inspector Lim, and a non-Chinese (“Indonesian”) Ibrahim as Chief Investigator. Despite this unconventional cast, the plot follows a conventional pattern of whodunit. It begins with the discovery of a murder victim, Mrs. Lian, in her opulent residence, and follows with a circle of suspects that includes her paramour Kim Hien. The plot thickens when Kim Hien also dies mysteriously, adding to the puzzle that there is no sign of injury on Mrs. Lian’s remains. The killer turns out to be her younger brother, who begrudges her wealth, using extremely venomous little snakes that left no visible mark on her body. In the story that recalls Holmes “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”, the Chinese detective (and inspector) is once again placed in an alternative universe where persons of Chinese ethnicity are not only part of the law enforcement system, but are essential to it. In this fantasy world, the Chinese and “Indonesian” officers work hand in hand to solve crimes in Semarang. Its positive, straightforward presentation of the detectives as the “good guys” positions the story (and the fantasy it tenders) in a hopeful, rather than cynical, light. In the new and free Indonesia, Chinese detectives might finally become possible.

Conclusions

It is often assumed that global translation flows in one-direction, from the

global North to the global South, or in the colonial period from West to East, and that the global literary exchange simply echoes the cultural hegemony of the North/West. The Netherlands Indies being a European colony makes it seem that here, too, these assumptions were true. With regards to the rise and spread of detective fiction, the domination of the Anglophone and the Francophone works was for a while uncontested, culminating in the larger than life figure of Sherlock Holmes. In the decades following their appearance, the Sherlock Holmes stories were translated into numerous languages, including Malay, and inspired innumerable adaptations primarily in Europe. The first of the Holmes series, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), was translated into Malay as early as 1904, followed by other Holmes stories throughout the 1910s. In the 1920s, even derivative works of the Sherlock Holmes figure were translated into Malay from various languages, including from Chinese. It is here that the assumption of a unilinear (West to East, North to South) exchange is being challenged.

In terms of sheer quantity, Chinese literary staples such as the cloak-and-dagger stories and historical romances alone far outweighed any other genres when it comes to translation into Malay during the colonial period. This fact alone disproves certain assumptions about the power dimension of translation, that a dominated culture translates far more of the hegemonic culture than vice versa (Jacquemond 1992; Robinson 1997).²⁰ For the Chinese in the Indies, translation of the Chinese classics was more about “self-discovery” and keeping in touch with an imagined homeland through myths and other symbols. Thus translation here reflects cultural proximity more than a relation of cultural domination.

Add to that, from the 1920s, was the translation of modern Chinese romance and detective stories, many of which originated in Shanghai. The appearance of the Chinese detective figure was significant, especially because pre-existing literary varieties were easily adaptable into the detective genre, creating a broad range of Chinese-Malay whodunits – from the Shanghai private detective Huo Sang to the homegrown rogue hero Gagaklendra. Huo Sang, the so-called “Chinese Holmes” created by Cheng Xiaoqing in 1914, was perhaps the closest imitation of Holmes and was translated into Malay as early as the 1920s and as late as in 1950.

The appearance of Huo Sang and other Chinese detectives on the literary scene in the Indies, though seems to corroborate European cultural hegemony in that they are derivatives of Holmes, was in fact an attempt for counter-hegemony, or at least was imagined and presented as such. In the Malay translation, they were given a nationalistic framing, “Not only Europe and America, but China, too, has brilliant detectives”. One translator frames the Chinese detective as an exemplary figure that might just be the cure for the Chinese wounded pride, the panacea for ongoing humiliation by other nations. As Jeffrey Kinkley (2000:190,184) points out, Huo Sang is not a mere replica of Holmes; he is more Western than Holmes himself. Unlike Holmes, Huo Sang is without certain character flaws like cocaine addiction

or vulnerability to worthy female adversary – the way Irene Adler is to Holmes. He is also notably Chinese, an interesting combination with his Western qualities that renders problematic a simple “East-West” or “traditional-modern” binary characterization. The superiority of the Chinese Holmes, one might infer, is precisely because he possesses the best qualities of both East and West. It is this supposedly more complete figure of the Chinese detective that arguably inspired local adaptations, such as the popular Gagaklodra adventure series by Njoo Cheong Seng, featuring a Chinese-Javanese rogue hero.

Furthermore, the popularity of the detective genre in the Indies did not inspire mere translation and other Western derivative works. Rather, it engendered highly hybrid ones; the European effects added colors to an already vibrant literary mélange. The aforementioned Gagaklodra is not a mere replica of Holmes or even the gentleman thief Lupin, but a mixture of these literary archetypes with the more familiar figure of the knight-errant in both Javanese and Chinese traditions (Chandra 2011). The postcolonial Chinese detectives also varied, including a hardboiled action hero and a womanizer inspector in a world turned upside-down by the war of independence. Far from being tokens of translation, their fantasy qualities were highly contextual; they speak of the contemporary social and political landscape in Indonesia, when Chinese detectives might finally become a reality.

NOTES

1. Margrit Pernau (2009) aptly observes that the detective figure as an embodiment of the middle-class values, and of Western morality and rationality in the imperial context, has been foundational for many recent interpretations of detective fiction.
2. Both “P.T.H.” and Phoa Tjoen Hoay were said to reside in Bogor, and both prefaced their translated texts with an apology for the translator’s (*penjalin*) inadequacies, a feature common in the Malay oral tradition. Claudine Salmon (1981:291-292) notes that Phoa Tjoen Hoay also went by the penname T.H. Phoa Jr. to distinguish himself from his brother who was also a journalist and writer, Phoa Tjoen Hoat or T.H. Phoa Sr. They were sons of the Chinese civil official (*kapitan*) of Buitenzorg, thus their privileged education that made them pioneers in journalism and translation works.
3. Because the phrase “tjerita politie resia” is converted from “detectiveroman”, I decided to translate this and other subtitles like it into “a detective story set in [X]” and not “a story of detective in [X]”. This particular novel is published anonymously, undated, and appears to have been produced by a small publisher Kwee Khe Soei in Batavia. The story itself is quite typical – brainy detective Ruber solves the enigmatic death of a baron. His investigation leads him to a set of discovery of secrets of prominent aristocrats, extortion attempt, and a

nobleman trying to protect his wife's reputation.

4. Salmon (1981:241) notes that a Holmes translation by Liem Khing Hoo, "Di Tebing Kekwatiran", appeared in the monthly *Liberty*, December 1930; the title suggests that it might have been drawn from *The Valley of Fear*, one of the four novels on Sherlock Holmes.
5. For the emergence of the Anglo-Chinese, that is the cultural hybridization of Southeast Asian Chinese under the British and later American hegemony, see Caroline S. Hau (2012).
6. This is a picture one comes away with from reading considerable number of Chinese-Malay novels. For a more specific study on the Chinese in Java and their multilingual existence, see Ellen Rafferty (1984).
7. The translators in this period were not like what Lawrence Venuti (2012) imagines, as poorly paid "invisible" people. They were a very exclusive group of individuals, generally from privileged social background, which allowed them to acquire foreign languages and literature.
8. Until the commencement of the Sino-Japanese conflict in the 1930s, the main target of colonial censorship was publications related to the communist and the nationalist movements; see Yamamoto (2011).
9. In her article on the Sumatran appropriation of the Sherlock Holmes figure, Jedamski (2009) makes reference to translations published in *Tjerita Pilhan* [sic], and in another article (2005) footnotes the list of titles in the series. In both instances, the source texts of these translations were not identified (except for the one on Sherlock Holmes). It took some amount of "detective work" to identify the sources referenced here.
10. *Advocaat-detectief* was published without attribution to the translator, but a later issue credited it to Tio Ie Soei, the editor of *Tjerita Pilhan* and proprietor of its publisher Tio & Co. There is a possibility that *Advocaat-detectief* was translated from its English version, *Death or Dishonor* (1887).
11. This is an issue unexplored or neglected in Jacquemond's thesis about the North-South literary flow, that is the North-North exchange. As Harry Aveling (2010:11) points out, if the European languages are the most popular source languages, then the European countries are also the ones undertaking most of the translation. The same goes with trends and tropes in literature. As much as readers in Asia loved and replicated Sherlock Holmes, the majority of derivative Holmes are still to be found in Europe.
12. In her bibliography of Sino-Malay literature, Claudine Salmon notes that "Cyrus" translated at least five stories of Dr. Fu Manchu, published in the magazine *Liberty* in 1935. Curiously, the name here is altered to "Fuhrman Chu".
13. Claudine Salmon (1979) has drawn attention to an anonymous novel, *Lawah-*

lawah Merah (Red Spider, 1875), that purports to be “a story from China” but is in fact translated from a French text, *L’Araignée Rouge* (1873). While the story is indeed set in China, these layers of elements, compounded by the lack of notification regarding source texts, underscore the need for collaborative work with scholars studying detective fiction in Shanghai and Chinese literature in general to gain a fuller understanding of literary exchanges.

14. As was the case with most publications from this period, when the conventions of copyright were not yet established, authorship was a hazy concept and not distinguished from translation. Attribution to an “author”, signaled by the word “oleh” (by), might in fact signify a number of agencies from source account (*ditjeritakan*), original composition (*dikarang*), translation (*disalin*), adaptation (*disadoer*), and collection/transcription (*dikoempoelkan*) – each of which was only occasionally specified.
15. An anonymous mystery novel, *Mata Setan* (Evil Eye), appeared in the *Penghiboer Virgin* series, which circulated in the 1930s and translated many *silat* and mystery stories. The mystery in *Mata Setan* however is more mystical than scientific. The Holmes-Watson duo in it is substituted with Dr. Dale and his assistant Owen. But unlike Holmes who relies on science and deductive reasoning, Dr. Dale cures a genetically inherited affliction of the evil eye using magical force. The fact that the original (likely English) text is difficult to trace suggests that it was not as popular as the other translations discussed in this essay.
16. For instance, *Tiga Djago Silat* (Three Warriors, 1930) translated by Kwo Lay Yen; unlike an ordinary *cerita silat*, it begins with a grisly discovery of the mangled body of daughter of a high official in Shanghai. The victim’s cousins, the titular “warriors”, pledge to find the killer and avenge her death. Using a mixture of investigation and skills in martial arts, they succeed in the mission. But the story does not end here; the second half concerns the ensuing clash of two martial arts schools – the Siao Liem Sie and the Boe Tong San – as students of the latter seek revenge for the killing of their brother, the initial perpetrator. Though commencing quite promisingly like a proper crime/detective story, *Tiga Djago Silat* in the end stays true to its form as a *cerita silat*.
17. In addition to low level police officers (*oppas*), an exception perhaps is the forensic expert, which is described in *Tjerita Mait jang Bertoekar* as “corpse examiner” (*toekang preksa mait*). Contrast, for instance, with *Auto Setan* (The Devil’s Car, 1935), translated by Adonis Sr. (pseudonym of Soe Lie Piet) and is set in contemporary San Francisco. It is a detective story inspired by a factual homicide case involving the city’s public defender in 1932. All the names and process of investigation were cited truthfully, including the various ranks, divisions, and specializations in the police force such as “criminologist” (*criminologist, achli dalem hal kadjahatan*), forensic expert (*dokter specialist politie*), and head of the homicide division (*pemimpin kepala dari dienst penjelidikan boeat perkara pemboenoehan*), and public defender (*advocaat*

oemoem).

18. Privately funded groups of armed guards (e.g. *tjakroek*) existed, but not private detectives for hire. In her book on the police institution in the Dutch East Indies, Marieke Bloembergen (2011:136) mentions a “detective system”, which consisted of an indigenous staff led by one or two Europeans, appointed by the government but funded by plantation/business owners. Their tasks included penetration into rural areas in order to measure the general sentiment of the population and to report back to the government. The “detectives” in this system operated like informants by observing persons deemed suspicious and apprehending them if necessary.
19. The so-called “armchair detective” was epitomized by Baroness Orczy’s character “the old man in the corner” who solves mysteries without ever leaving his seat.
20. For a useful critique of Jacquemond’s theses, see Aveling (2010). Aveling finds that in India, too, the majority of translations are done among the languages in India such as Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and Tamil. They are internal South-South exchanges, and do not reflect a political or economic domination.

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